

INTRODUCTION

Taking up the concept of meritocracy advanced by Michael Young in 1958, M. Sandel (*The Tyranny of Merit*, 2020) states that graduates and highly qualified professionals in the USA today attempt to take such advantage of education for their children that meritocracy has been converted into hereditary aristocracy. More than an egalitarian ideal and a remedy for inequalities, based on the effort, talent and dedication of each student, the meritocratic ideology ends up justifying and legitimate those inequalities, its essence being restricted mobility and not equality.

Very present in the school model, the appealing idea of merit, which is supposedly accessible to all those who make an effort and work, tends to hide the existing social and cultural inequality among students, taking them all as a standard or a norm (middle class, autochthonous, good academic and cultural family capital, ...) and considering any deviation from this norm as a deficit, either on the part of the family or on the part of the student. This social construction of concepts of normality and family deficit leads to a refusal to look at each child and each student per se, with attention and care, transforming poverty and inequality into lack of family support and lack of commitment to studies.

The subordination of schools to mandates of standardisation, performativity, competitiveness, selectivity and individualism serves this ideology, reinforces and crystallises social inequalities and contributes to a serious anthropological and axiological reductionism of school education, moving it away from the capacities and emancipation of each and every child and from the ideals of democracy and social justice, thereby reinforcing the "tyranny of merit".

Besides school justice understood as the redistribution of educational goods, several perspectives have stressed the relevance of justice as recognition, in a framework of cultural respect for personal identities, agency and promotion of civic and political participation.

The educational paradigm of care, already widely worked on by Noddings, for example, has been proposed as a more ecological and alternative educational model, based on attention, equity, respect and promotion of each child and student, not in an individualistic perspective, but in a framework of co-responsibility and social solidarity and construction of relationships that "humanize the human". Thinking about education between meritocracy, fairness and care has emerged as a timely and pertinent field of analysis and as a challenge to the presentation of studies, mainly theoretical and/or empirical.

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