

Student assistance in the educational process: possibilities of performance*

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Abstract

Student assistance was constituted as support for students to remain in public higher education institutions, due to the financial difficulties of young people who usually moved from their hometowns to study elsewhere. Nowadays, however, new attributions have been delegated to student assistance to contribute to the educational process from an omnilateral perspective. This article aims to raise the possibilities of performance of student assistance professionals of formal education in contemporary society. To do so, bibliographic, and documental research was used as a strategy for data survey. We have identified that the possibilities of performance of student assistance run through two basic models: the first one is based on a selective policy, with a financial nature only, which reflects on a non-emancipating education; and the second one, of a universal nature which assists the student in several aspects: economic, social, academic, and human development. We understand this latter model because of the growing demands of today's society and the consequent rise of other demands which impact academic performance and interfere with the permanence of students from different levels of education. Therefore, new roles can be attributed to student assistance to ensure the success of the educational process from an omnilateral perspective.

Keywords

Multidimensional education – Student assistance – Permanence – Citizenship formation.

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Introduction

As an educational environment and a space for human formation, the school plays an important social function, which can represent a place of reproduction of power relations and class domination or a place of emancipation and disruption. For Borges (2017), if the school is not committed to human enrichment in the sense of humanization, it contributes the most to the logic of capitalism, which is revealed in the alienation of the working class.

The school is recognized as an expression of society, whose students belonging to the working class or subjects coming from the popular classes historically present greater difficulties of access and permanence, and it is necessary to overcome such difficulties through actions that enable the democratization of both access and permanence in the school academic routine. It is in this search for mechanisms of social equalization, in the face of inequalities arising from the capitalist mode of production, that the student assistance was conceived as a support activity of the educational process (NASCIMENTO, 2014).

From this perspective, Decree No. 7234 of July 19, 2010, which deals with the National Program of Student Assistance (Pnaes), appears as an element that aims to contribute to the educational processes, focused initially on the financial difficulties that affect student permanence and success, for “it is known that students with low socioeconomic status end up dropping out of the course due to insufficient financial resources for their maintenance”. (FONAPRACE, 2012, p. 109).

On the other hand, as we recognize that dropout and retention have other determinants besides financial issues, which may vary according to the level of education, in which the work of the student assistance technical team may have a promising role to collaborate with school success, we ask: what are the possibilities of performance of the student assistance team in this context?

With the purpose of answering this question, without claiming completeness, this study aims to discuss the possibilities of performance of the student assistance team for the educational process in the sense of an omnilateral subject formation.

Methodological procedures

This is an integrative literature review study focused on student assistance, educational processes, and omnilateral formation, which gathers precursor and contemporary authors of such themes, as well as documents and regulations regarding student assistance programs in Brazil, with a qualitative approach and exploratory typology.

We conducted research in renowned books and other peer-reviewed academic publications available on the Scientific Electronic Library Online and Google Scholar search platforms. The search for these articles was based on the descriptors: student assistance; educational process; student assistance and educational process; school dropout; permanence; and success.

In order to list possibilities of performance of student assistance professionals, especially in Federal Institutes (IF), we analyzed Decree N. 7.234/2010, which regulates the

Student Assistance Program in Brazil, the Law No. 9.394, which establishes the Guidelines and Bases of National Education (BRASIL, 1996), and, finally, to have an overview of the regional reality, we sought the institutional policies that regulate student assistance in the seven IF of the Northern region, namely: Acre, Consu/Ifac Resolution No. 035/2018 (IFAC, 2018); Amapá, Resolution No. 31/2019/Consup/Ifap (IFAP, 2019); Amazonas, Resolution No. 13/2011-Consup/Ifam (IFAM, 2011); Pará, Resolution No. 07/2020-Consup (IFAP, 2020); Rondônia, Resolution No. 23/2018/Reit - Consup/Ifro (IFRO, 2018); Roraima, Resolution No. 486/2020 - Superior Council (IFRR, 2020); and Tocantins, Resolution No. 22/2014/Consup/IFTO (IFTO, 2014).

The formal education process in contemporary society

The education process must be understood broadly, considering that it encompasses all the processes of discovery of the world and the construction of the cognitive and affective base from the first creating nucleus of everyone: the family. Later, it goes through educational institutions, the job market, religious environments, unions, among others (MAGALHÃES, 2004).

According to Magalhães (2004), the distinction between the education process and formal education process lies in the environment, and the latter takes place in formal education institutions, the spaces built precisely for this purpose, and which are responsible for this formation. We understand that there is a movement of interrelation between people and areas of knowledge in these places: “students, teachers, employees, parents, and administrators, with their knowledge, ethics, emotions, and political and pedagogical commitments that constitute the school”. (BOCK *et al.*, 2016, p. 230).

With the expansion of schooling, it is observed that, besides being instructed by teachers, people need to be educated by educators, “understanding that all those who have a permanent presence in the school environment, in contact with students, are educators, regardless of their role” (BRASIL, 2004, p. 16) and, therefore, can develop proposals for the improvement of education. This understanding collaborates to the perception of the pedagogical feature intrinsic to the roles of the non-teaching worker, resizing his importance and his educational performance in social and professional terms (BEZERRA *et al.*, 2010; BRASIL, 2004).

Each member of the school community has his role in the educational process since education also occurs from social relationships and learning involves the acquisition of socially relevant information, skills, and values. In a complementary way to the teacher’s performance in the classroom, important educational processes take place in the other environments of the school. The exchange of experiences and the collective experience highlight the work of non-teaching educators, called school staff (BRASIL, 2004). In universities and federal institutes, they correspond to administrative technicians in education, but we believe that other outsourced employees, such as for cleaning, security, janitorial, reception services, and trainees who frequently deal with students are also co-responsible for important educational processes.

This new way of understanding the formal education process aims to broaden the concept of education, as it considers the diversity in the school context between both

educators and students, as well as the particularities of each student. For Zabala (1998, p. 28), “[...] to educate means to form citizens, who are not compartmentalized, into isolated capacities”. Hence, learning depends on the specific characteristics of each learner, according to the experiences they have had since birth. The way and pace of learning vary according to each person’s abilities, incentives, and interests, that is, they are the result of unique and personal processes (ZABALA, 1998).

According to Morin (2011, p. 35), on the principles of relevant knowledge, society and the human being are multidimensional, since the latter is “[...] at the same time biological, psychic, social, affective, and rational, while society comprises the historical, economic, sociological, religious dimensions [...]”. Knowledge must consider all these aspects, as they are intrinsically interconnected and cannot isolate one part from the other, both in the individual human relationship and in society. Education must promote an intelligence that considers this multidimensionality within a complex, contextual, and global perspective, since there is a direct interrelationship between individual-society-species, in which each entity simultaneously means and ends, that is, “[...] culture and society ensure the individuals’ fulfillment and the interactions between individuals allow the perpetuation of culture and the self-organization of society” (MORIN, 2011, p. 49).

Thus, the interconnection of individual development with social relations is verified, the context in which the school is inserted, being constantly challenged to meet these individual specificities in a broad social context. Libâneo (2012) emphasizes the search for a type of school that has spaces and time to meet the basic needs of learning, focusing on human development. It is a school that, while promoting the mastery of systematized knowledge and the development of intellectual capabilities, ensuring the right to equality, considers that this function is intended for different subjects, considering that the difference is an explicit condition of the human being and, consequently, of educational situations.

In contemporary society, much has been discussed about the concept of a citizen education that moves away from standardized and excluding pedagogical models, in favor of a collaborative and interactive learning environment that considers all school members as protagonists of the educational process. Understanding this concept implies reflecting on the new social role of the school and, consequently, on the new pedagogical role of its professionals (BRASIL, 2004).

In this regard, we point out Marx’s understanding of omnilateralism, which presupposes a critical integral formation that meets all the needs of the human being, in which the individual is not just an assimilator and reproducer of information but develops knowledge and skills to become the author of his history and a critical and participatory subject in society (COSTA; COUTINHO, 2018).

However, although there is a certain agreement among educators on the importance of their role and the recognition of a social function credited to the school, paradoxically the different interpretations about the learning and training processes are configured as a challenge in everyday education. It is necessary to reflect on the professional practice in the education process considering its complexity and the difficulties in measuring the factors of such process, such as the “institutional and organizational parameters, methodological

traditions, teachers' real possibilities, the existing means, and physical conditions" (ZABALA, 1998, p. 16). Thus, the educational practice is presented as something fluid, difficult to limit with basic concepts, because there is the expression of various factors and established pedagogical habits that are difficult to break (ZABALA, 1998).

The role assigned to teaching has prioritized the cognitive skills that are considered most relevant and that correspond to the learning of traditional disciplines or subjects, still with a meritocratic nature. For Zabala (1998), if we consider that it is the school's responsibility to attend to the development of the other capacities of the subject and to promote the students' integral formation, it is necessary to urgently define a general principle that answers to what should be understood as autonomy and personal balance, and what is meant by performance or social insertion.

When questioning this function of the school and explaining the need to define a general principle and parameters for this new way of teaching, Zabala (1998) brings to light some problems that appear in an unequal society, since, despite several theories and studies on knowledge and the importance of integral formation of the human being, school environments are still elaborated in the perspective of reproduction of hegemonic patterns. Brazilian society is still in its infancy when it comes to forming critical individuals whose thoughts are driven by themselves (MAGALHÃES, 2004).

Bock *et al.* (2016, p. 241) stress this point:

Although some young people refer to the school as the basis of their learning, this is not associated with a critical appropriation of knowledge, but rather with basic instrumental knowledge for insertion into the world of work and consumption and governed by parameters of market nature.

On the other hand, according to these authors, although school is still a place of reproduction of social inequality, it is also a promising space to undertake actions focused on overcoming differences. It is from this perspective that we defend the actions of student assistance professionals, although we recognize that the initial attention of student assistance is centered, mainly, on financial actions, disregarding actions that consider the diverse social factors in which students are inserted, demanding more comprehensive actions.

Student assistance and educational process

In Brazil, in 1931, during the Vargas government, measures were proposed to benefit university students recognized as poor, who would receive scholarships for food and housing. Therefore, student assistance originated as a type of social assistance implemented in higher education institutions, with the aim of ensuring support to students in need to enable them to stay in the course (NASCIMENTO, 2014; TAUFICK, 2014).

Since then, there have been many student struggles for the maintenance and expansion of this program and several reformulations until Decree No. 7.234, of July 19, 2010, which regulates the National Program for Student Assistance in Federal Institutions of Higher Education (NASCIMENTO, 2014). Below, we list the main reformulations that have occurred in student assistance in Brazil since the first actions in 1931.

Table 1 - Timeline of Student Assistance Policies in Brazil

| Decree or Law | Characteristic | Target group |
|--|---|--|
| Decree No.19.851 (BRASIL, 1931) | It provided scholarships and medical and hospital services to the students. | All students |
| Constitution of the Republic of the United States of Brazil (BRASIL, 1934) | It established that the Union, the states, and the Federal District should set aside part of their territorial assets to create funds for education and that part of it should be applied in aid, by providing school materials, scholarships, food, dental and medical assistance, and transportation. | Students in need |
| Constitution of the United States of Brazil (BRASIL, 1946) | It regulated that each school system would have, mandatorily, educational assistance services that would assure school efficiency conditions for students in need. | Students in need |
| Law of Directives and Bases of National Education No. 4.024 (BRASIL, 1961) | It provided social, medical, dental, and nursing assistance to the students. | All students |
| Law of Directives and Bases of National Education No. 5.692 (BRASIL, 1971) | It provided educational assistance to ensure students' school efficiency. It included aid for school supplies, transportation, clothing, food, medical and dental treatment, and other forms of family assistance. | Students in need |
| Decree No.69.927 (BRASIL, 1972) | It instituted the Work Scholarship Program with the objective of providing students from all levels of education with opportunities for professional practice in public or private agencies or entities. | Students in need of financial resources |
| Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (BRASIL, 1988) | It establishes, as a duty of the State, the guarantee of assistance to the student, in all stages of basic education, through supplementary programs of school supplies and educational material, transportation, food, and health assistance. | All students |
| Law of Directives and Bases of National Education No. 9.394 (BRASIL, 1996) | It brings the same text of the Federal Constitution in relation to the State's duty to guarantee the attendance of the student to supplementary programs of educational material and school supplies, transportation, food, and health assistance. | All students |
| Regulation of the Ministry of Education No. 39 (BRASIL, 2007) | It instituted the National Program for Student Assistance (Pnaes). | Students in on-site undergraduate courses and selected by socioeconomic analysis |
| Decree No. 7.234 (BRASIL, 2010) | Provides for the National Program of Student Assistance. It states that student assistance actions should enable equal opportunities, contribute to improving academic performance, and act preventively in situations of retention and dropout resulting from insufficient financial conditions. | Young people in federal public higher education primarily from public schools and with per capita family income of up to one and a half minimum wages. Includes the federal institutes and their specificities. |
| Chamber of Deputies Bill No. 1.270 (BRASIL, [2015]) | Provides on the National Student Assistance Program. Turns the previous decree into law. (Still pending in the Brazilian Congress). | Brings small differences in relation to the text of the decree, among them the inclusion of assistance to graduate students. It extends priority to quota students, black students, indigenous people, women, and part of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transvestite, Transexual and Transgender) community. |

Source: Adapted from Antunes (2018).

We have observed that, over time, the range of student assistance actions to be offered to students has expanded, since the previous regulations focused on health, school supplies, food, and housing, while, as of 2007, the list of assistance actions was expanded to nine categories, including culture and sports.

Decree No. 7.234/2010 regulates ten possibilities of performance in the areas of food, student housing, transportation, health care, digital inclusion, culture, sports, daycare, pedagogical support, and access, as well as participation and learning of students with disabilities, global developmental disorders, high abilities and giftedness (BRASIL, 2010). To this end, the federal government allocates each year specific resources to fund these actions in the IFES.

Despite the prerogative of meeting demands, especially those of a financial nature highlighted in Article 4 of the decree, which states that student assistance actions should “consider the need to enable equal opportunities, contribute to the improvement of academic performance and act preventively in situations of retention and dropout resulting from poor financial conditions” (BRASIL, 2010). From a critical perspective of reality, there are other aspects that also affect academic performance and can cause dropout, among them the difficulty in understanding the content of the school disciplines, the use or abuse of alcohol and other drugs, unplanned pregnancy, in addition to family and urban violence (TAUFICK, 2014).

As other factors that can cause dropout, Figueiredo and Salles (2017), and Silva and Nogueira (2016) also point out the lack of identification with the course, difficulties in succeeding in assessments, family influence, the conflict between work and study, poor previous academic preparation, assessment practices that are sometimes classifying and excluding, weakened or conflicting interpersonal relationships in the educational environment, friends’ influence, issues related to school structure and policies, opportunities, and institutional and/or governmental disinterest.

Nevertheless, regarding the factors that may contribute to permanence, Silva and Nogueira (2016) highlight the personal experiences prior to admission, to what is projected as future life, “greater advancement in the academic path, receipt of scholarships, good grades, participation in academic leveling program” (SILVA; NOGUEIRA, 2016, p. 122), that is, permanence involves material and symbolic factors that may correspond to student’s interests and desires, relationships established in the school environment, personal and/or family situations, and socioeconomic and cultural factors related to those students in vulnerable economic condition.

We can also emphasize other needs presented by the students addressed by Andrade (2017), such as developing conditions to think about their personal and professional identity, imagine and plan their future, allowing them to establish plans equivalent to their reality, to overcome the condition of vulnerability. Then, Taufick (2014) suggests that student assistance should be discussed considering its multiple functions: social, pedagogical, and psychological.

Andrade (2017) understands students’ psychosocial development as an important indicator of personal recognition and social participation since the aggregated vision of the function of oneself and others in society makes it possible to act on this reality based

on the knowledge acquired. From the moment the individual values himself/herself and defines goals for participation and social change, this can be a factor for social inclusion. Thus, psychosocial development is an aspect that should be considered in an inclusion policy, such as the one regulated by Decree No. 7.234/2010.

On this perspective, in 2012, the National Forum of Pro-rectors of Community and Student Affairs (Fonaprace), which has been working on the construction and improvement of the Student Assistance Program since the 1980s, pointed out some challenges to be considered in the elaboration of the strategic planning of the National Association of Directors of Federal Higher Education Institutions (Andifes), among them:

- 1) Composition and recomposition of the professional teams to operationalize the Student Assistance Policy actions in the *IFES*², increasing the number of social assistants, pedagogues, psychologists, educational technicians, and administrative technicians, for example;
- 2) Strengthening of student assistance based on the relevance of the Pro-rectorates of Student and Community Affairs, with a view to creating specific Pro-rectorates uniformly in all the *IFES* in what concerns the administrative structure;
- 3) Implementation and expansion of policies for the promotion and comprehensive health care of students. To include, on an emergency and priority basis, prevention and harm reduction programs for alcohol and other drugs abuse, to provide quality of life and integral health to university students [...] (FONAPRACE, 2012, p. 71).

There is a focus on strengthening the teams that operationalize the program and on expanding actions to address issues related to student health. Currently, to manage and execute the Student Assistance Program, the *IFES* have multi-professional technical teams, composed mainly of social workers, psychologists, pedagogues, nurses, nutritionists, among other professionals related to student assistance, according to the policy of each institution. The composition of the technical team is described in the National Plan for Student Assistance elaborated by Fonaprace in 2007.

Social workers and psychologists are daily challenged to make the link between students, families, teachers, and other subjects belonging to the educational context, given the technical specificities observed in the codes of ethics of these professionals. The fundamental principles of the code of ethics of social workers emphasize:

- I. Recognition of freedom as a central ethical value and of the political demands inherent to it - autonomy, emancipation, and full development of social individuals; [...]
- III. Expansion and consolidation of citizenship [...];
- V. Positioning in favor of equity and social justice, ensuring universal access to goods and services related to social programs and policies [...];
- VI. Commitment to the elimination of all forms of prejudice, encouraging respect for diversity, the participation of socially discriminated groups, and the discussion of differences;
- VII. Guarantee of pluralism, through respect for existing democratic professional currents and their theoretical expressions [...]. (CFESS, 2011, p. 23-24).

2- *IFES* corresponds to the abbreviation in Portuguese of Federal Institutions of Higher Education.

The connection between the social work profession and the social function of the school in contemporary society is noticeable. Libâneo (2012), when discussing autonomy, emancipation, full development of social individuals, and consolidation of citizenship, refers us to the concepts of human development, broad socio-educational actions, care of individual and social differences, social integration, harmony among different people, and sharing of cultures as conditions that should be considered in a new type of school.

The psychologists' code of ethics also presents several prerogatives consistent with the new type of school described by Libâneo, Morin, and other authors discussed here. They stand out:

- I. The psychologist shall base his/her work on the respect and promotion of freedom, dignity, equality, and integrity of the human being, supported by the values that underlie the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- II. The psychologist shall work towards promoting the health and quality of life of individuals and groups and shall contribute to the elimination of any form of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression.
- III. The psychologist shall act with social responsibility, critically and historically analyzing the political, economic, social, and cultural reality. (CFP, 2005, p. 7).

Regarding Brazilian student assistance, a recent achievement was the approval of Law No. 13.935 of December 11, 2019, which provides for psychology and social work services in the public networks of basic education (BRASIL, 2019), and it has much to contribute to Brazilian education. It is worth noting that the law was vetoed by the President of Brazil and was later enacted by the Brazilian Congress after the presidential veto was overridden, which reinforces the need to transform the current Pnaes into a state policy instead of a government policy.

Possibilities of performance for student assistance professionals

The process of building up the Student Assistance Program was based on several conceptions. The different sociopolitical contexts and social segments in which the discussions around the theme were developed have favored the emergence of these multiple conceptualizations and make it impossible to reach a consensus in establishing the notion of student assistance (DUTRA; SANTOS, 2017).

According to Dutra and Santos (2017), there is a dispute in the field between narrower or more selective conceptions of student assistance, with a target audience focused only on students in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability, as opposed to more comprehensive conceptions, in a more universal perspective. In a broad panorama, the program should not be limited to the elaboration and execution of mechanisms aimed only at the low-income population but should also pay attention to principles of universal assistance, considering that social, personal, relational, and academic factors

influence the permanence in the course, the academic performance, and the psychosocial development of university students (ANDRADE, 2017; FIGUEIREDO; SALLES, 2017; SILVA; NOGUEIRA, 2016).

According to Taufick (2014), in the constitution of Pnaes (Decree No. 7.234/2010), there is an intention to constitute complementary actions to the pedagogical activities that broaden the individual's education by offering actions focused on health, culture, sports, and digital inclusion. Article 1 of the decree discusses the purpose of the program to expand the conditions for young people to stay in federal public higher education (in the case of the institutes, it starts from the basic level up to the graduate level), which would contemplate the various possibilities of performance aimed at this purpose. Still, according to Pnaes, the following objectives are stated in Article 2:

- I – democratize the conditions for young people to remain in federal public higher education;
- II – *minimize the effects of social and regional inequalities in the permanence and conclusion of higher education*; III – reduce retention and dropout rates; and IV – *contribute to the promotion of social inclusion through education*. (BRASIL, 2010, italics added).

The program's objectives ratify the possibilities of performance focused on areas beyond the economic one. Article 3 states that these actions should be articulated with teaching, research, and extension activities. It is important to consider the interdependence between the areas of action of Pnaes, as they present needs that must be met simultaneously. While meeting housing-related needs, for example, one cannot ignore the need for food. Any uncovered area may coincide with student dropout (RECKTENVALD et al., 2018).

Although Pnaes is a national program, each higher education institution has autonomy in managing the policy and using the resources according to their needs and local particularities, considering the areas set out in the decree.

In 2014, Taufick published a study on the student assistance policies of thirty federal institutes in Brazil and analyzed some key points of the documents. Regarding the goals of the policies analyzed, we observed that they are linked to social rights and students' comprehensive care, contemplating social, academic, health, cultural, and citizenship education aspects. "Many institutions dare to credit to student assistance the role of provider of a range of benefits that promote from formation for citizenship, to participation in the academic and political life of the institution" (TAUFICK, 2014, p. 198).

Complementing Taufick's (2014) studies, we analyzed the documents that regulate student assistance in the Federal Institutes (IF) of the Northern region (Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima, Tocantins), focusing on the composition of the assistance teams and the responsibilities described.

We observed that all the institutes have regulations for student assistance approved by the Superior Council, five of them dating from 2018 to 2020. Of the seven IF analyzed, only one presents in its regulation a policy focused essentially on financial aid, while in four of them, programs with a universal assistance axis are evidenced, that is, with services designed beyond financial aid. In two other IF, although it is not explicitly described, it is

clear that their focus is directed beyond the actions related to economic issues, comprising programs of attention and health promotion, psychological and pedagogical support.

Regarding the composition of the team, six IF include a multidisciplinary team in their policies, composed of a social worker, psychologist, pedagogue, and/or educational technician. Besides these professionals, doctors, nurses, nutritionists, dentists, and others in related areas are also listed in two institutes. Only in one Federal Institute there is no description of the team that will work in the institutional student assistance policy.

It is worth mentioning that it was not observed in the policy of two IF the description of the actions of the team involved in student assistance. In addition, in five other policies we identified actions to be developed that relate to the universal perspective and, consequently, enables the omnilateral educational development, as follows:

- Actions for social promotion and citizenship education of students.
- Actions that aim to integrate the three pillars of the educational process: student, school, and family.
 - Educational campaigns and lectures that contribute to the intellectual, social, political, and cultural empowerment of students.
 - Assistance to students and/or guardians, in specific situations.
 - Training and prevention actions related to the use and abuse of psychoactive substances, vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases, chronic diseases, teenage pregnancy, and paternity, among other themes.
 - Educational psychological service seeks human development, with a focus on the student's quality of life.
 - Technical-pedagogical service: it assesses the institutional issues intervening in the students' learning and promotes diversified activities to contribute to the development of multiple intelligences.
 - Social support service stimulates the experience and learning of the democratic process in the institution, promotes the strengthening of citizenship, encourages the integration and participation of the student's families in the academic context.
 - Basic health care services: individual care, educational lectures, workshops, campaigns, among other actions.
 - Health care actions and biopsychosocial support.
 - Actions oriented to the assistance of students with poor academic performance, special educational needs, or in socioeconomic vulnerability situation, aiming at the conclusion of the course; and
 - Education for diversity.

It is worth reaffirming that many of the technical professionals who make up the student assistance team have laws of professional regulation or codes of ethics, which indicate competencies and responsibilities in a generic way and have a direct link to the work conducted in the educational environment.

Final considerations

The discussions about the integral formation that consider all aspects of the individual; the understanding that all professionals in the school environment have an important role in the formal educational process; the prerogatives of the decree that govern the Student Assistance Program in federal institutes and universities; and the specificities of the professionals who make up the management and execution teams of the program allow us to recognize the importance of student assistance and the possibilities of a diversified performance in the educational process.

We observed the concurrence of basically two conceptions about the role of student assistance, one of a selective nature, therefore restrictive, of a mere financial assistance nature, which, without failing to recognize its importance, may reflect in educational processes that reproduce the status quo of class society. The other, with a universalizing conception, which we believe can collaborate with the emancipation process, since it aims to assist the student in all his multidimensionality (economic, social, academic, human development, among others).

By analyzing the student assistance regulations of the Federal Institutes located in the North region, the intention to develop complementary actions to education that contribute to the students' citizenship formation beyond financial support is clear. However, we wonder if these actions are really being implemented. If they are so, are they being effective in their purposes?

In view of the constant changes that occur on a social and political level, this study does not intend to solve the questions about the possibilities of performance of student assistance in the educational process, which implies the need for new studies that can contribute with guidelines for the work of educators working in this area.

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