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Opinion – Sou Ciência: Brazil loses Lisete Arelaro, one of its greatest teachers

It is impossible to put together in a few words the enormous legacy that teacher Lisete Arelaro left for the education and training of educators in the country. A tireless woman in the struggle of a lifetime for public, popular and quality education. Among the many prominent positions he held – and made a difference – it is possible to mention his participation in Paulo Freire's team at the São Paulo Municipal Secretary of Education (1989-1992), his management as Diadema Municipal Secretary of Education twice (1993-1992). 1996 and 2001-2002), his leadership at the head of the Direction of the Faculty of Education at USP (2010-2014) and his production of high-voltage studies and research and national reference on Brazilian education.

Wherever she went, Lisete was always very generous, intellectual, affective and political. At the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp), between 2013 and 2021, he contributed at different times to the formulation of institutional proposals and projects, sharing what best characterized him: his astute analyzes of educational policies, the formation of teachers and education funding. In one of those moments at Unifesp, still in 2013, her talk left deep and lasting marks on the team of the new management that began that year.

Lisete argued that among the fundamental elements for the democratization of quality public Higher Education were policies to expand access and student permanence in universities, considering the significant increase in the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of students and their specific needs, so that had guaranteed the right to a solid academic trajectory, to good use and to the conclusion of their courses. In short, a huge benefit for the population across the country.

Lisete's thinking and actions were particularly striking when we had a great expansion of higher education in our country between 2005 and 2014, with the expansion of the federal public system – both universities and research institutes.

This process, however, has not been compared to the resounding increase in private higher education. Therefore, Lisete's concern fell in particular on the characteristics of the expansion that had been taking place in private higher education, heavily concentrated in a few for-profit educational groups, with an increase in the offer of vacancies and distance courses, with low workload, with precarious academic activities and which, however, should be the basis for good professional training.

A type of low-quality and even predatory expansion that was being largely stimulated by public resources, via Fies and ProUni, and which gave rise to strong pressure from the private sector with regard to the flexibilization of regulatory standards and the functioning of educational institutions. higher. Mercantile expansion that weakens the public, collective and citizen dimension of higher education and also weakens the power of public universities.

If, in 2013, enrollment in distance courses in private institutions represented less than a fifth (18.6%) of the total, in 2020 they started to represent almost half of enrollments in private institutions (44.0%), in courses that, in general, obtain results below expectations in the National Student Exam (Enade), of the MEC, as shown in this study of SoU_Science. A precarious training that will reach society and the world of work with strong limitations of performance and understanding of the world.

Despite the expansion of higher education, we are still far short of what young Brazilians aged between 18 and 24 need and the goal number 12 of the National Education Plan (PNE), especially when it comes to public places. Apparently, the PNE, as a policy, is stagnant and higher education enrollments have been taking other directions with the increase in private Distance Learning (DE).

The pandemic, the lack of resources for public institutions, the lack of incentives and more student permanence programs, in addition to the impoverishment of families, have reversed the objectives and make a distance education degree that costs R$ 50 per month seem better than none at all. . The social and development cost of the country, yet to be elucidated, could be devastating. So there is no time to waste and there will be no room for regret. This situation needs to be reversed now.

As Lisete Arelaro taught us well, let us have our studies and diagnoses in hand, but let us also be engaged in everything that can signify or re-signify the present. Even though there is still no accurate balance of the dismantling that took place in the last period and its consequences, it is necessary to resume and guarantee the growth of quality education so that young Brazilians can envision possibilities beyond quick courses made by machines and pasteurized videos, whose methodology is far from ensuring meaningful teaching and learning.

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In this sense, the paths taken by Lisete, and generously shared with many Brazilian educators, must continue to illuminate the course of Brazilian education, as a guarantee of our future, now.

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