

# Public education: the challenge of quality

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## Introduction

QUALITY of teaching has been the focus of intense discussion, especially in public education. Educators, political leaders, media and, recently, economists, entrepreneurs, business consultants and planning technicians have taken up a good part of educators' space, presenting recipes, technical solutions and, not rarely, suggesting the incompetence of educators to produce solutions that grapple with teaching qualification. This invasion of professionals who are not identified or involved with activities in the educational field deserves attention. We are not here considering recommending a monopoly for educators in the discussion about education, but of registering the intense ideological penetration of the analyses of the procedures and technocratic recipes for education.

During the 1990s, the ideological dispute in world decision-making centers sharpened in favor of implanting neo-liberal reforms. The advances of these reforms became more visible with the "adjustments" in the functioning of the economy determined by the implementation of macro-economic policies subordinated to the needs of the marketplace empire. These policies were gaining political ground and elevating themselves in other sectors of public activities. Gradually resistance was broken, its critics lost space or adapted themselves to the new circumstances. In the case of Brazil, a co-opting of many sectors, until then still identified as having a leftist point of view, helped to legitimize neo-liberal politics, consolidating its hegemony and naturalizing its practices. The justification for the shift in the political field has been sustained by the idea of an absence of alternatives, suggesting the imposition of marketing logic as unavoidable, the only possible road.

Assured victory on the political plane, guaranteed hegemony in the ideological debate, political and administrative decisions are driven to operate the implementation of the procedures and actions pertinent to the content and objectives of policies oriented to the marketplace. The tone of these discussions and modernizing procedures is concentrated on competition, on making work relations more flexible, on legal rights, on an opening-up of the market,

on reduction of public expenditures, on fiscal adjustments, privatizations, and among other recommendations, on reducing the role of the state. On the administrative plane so-called “management shock” and the evaluation of products and of performance are presented as the key to the search for efficiency, quality and solutions to the problems, including those in the social area. The emergence of a new global economic agenda generates political derivations that aim to reorganize social life from a standpoint of economic and entrepreneurial rationality (Lima & Afonso, 2002), in the search for competitive advantage in accord with the criteria of productivity, effectiveness and efficiency, determined by market relations. From this perspective, educational policies have the intent of constituting themselves as tools for social change “supposedly capable of promoting adaptation of the individual to the new needs expressed by the economic agenda and by the challenges of the so-called knowledge society” (ibid, p.7). By consensus these new demands have become inevitable.

It is in this context that specific concepts and educational measures are written that affirm the search for quality in public education. In the field of neo-liberal reforms, the concept of quality is always tied to quantitative methods of evaluation, affirming a meritocracy as the basis for competitiveness. The company is defined as an organizational model for the school, where quantitative results are gauged, measured and controlled. Centralizing political definitions that are, many times, presented as objectives and consensual goals, technical imperatives, determinations based on economic rationality, whose execution is available to the exercise of individual freedom in the realm of market environment dynamics. In other words, the centralized decisions correspond to a decentralization of operative tasks.

Along the same lines, whoever makes the decisions defines the criteria and the instruments. Therefore external evaluation practices, with evaluation systems in which the subjects that act in the daily life of institutions are transformed into passive objects, with work processes being ignored, for specifications from unknown contexts. The validity of work is the final product, nearly always gauged quantitatively terms, concentrated on results, evaluated from the outside in.

According to considerations of Licínio Lima (2002, p.28),

A technical type of mono-rationality and a utilitarian-management (neo-taylorian) is called for, that decomposes and fragments the evaluation process, quantifying, measuring, formalizing; a mechanistic vision of school organization is adopted, centered on technical operations, on efficacy and on efficiency.

A technocratic, quantitative evaluation, centered on the evaluation of products, ignores the process, treats knowledge as an object, quantifies, with the intention of measuring, standardizing, comparing it on a competitive

scale. The investigation of the final product identifies the centrality of the problems of management, inducing the competency of the “incapables,” the training and breaking-in by means of pre-established, standardized programs, tied to determined competencies and abilities. Quantitative evaluation articulates itself to results through the logic of training, and since it ignores or does not value the complexity of the processes of educational actions, equivalently does not recognize in its developmental dimension aside from the training of skills educational updating as an intrinsic element in knowledge construction. From this perspective bad results of an evaluation are resolved by “management shock,” qualification and with periodic measurement of the results, also assuring the control of the decentralized application of centralized political decisions.

This type of decentralization is presented as synonymous with democracy, but, in many instances, it is a means of transferring responsibilities of the state to the communities or the transformation of a right to merchandise, made available in the market. From this perspective, if the results are negative, production and performance indicators are upheld by improving control by efficiency and efficacy of management, training and qualifying the “incapables.” What is essential is to identify possibilities of future gains, because losses become unrecoverable. In the case of education, non-learning is transformed into failure and abandonment, flunkies by the exclusion. As to the process and why it is not valued, the remedy for recovering future indices in the search for satisfactory results is in making the objectives compatible with the available resources.

In Brazil, in the last decade, this pragmatic, technician’s vision appears in educational reform proposals, expressing more or less identically, preferences for *management* policy to be implemented in instances of control by the state structure: “it is a progressive monopolizing by neo-liberal ideology of the discussion and the dynamics of reform” (Laval, 2004, p.10). It alleges that singling out by birth, pertaining to traditional elites, can now be substituted for merit, for competency, qualities that can result from educational reform. It creates the sensation in the public opinion that social problems can be solved by education. Structural unemployment, concentration of wealth, are questions that can be overturned by an education that makes the lower class “merit-crats,” competitive and competent. It is an affirmation of the old liberal principles of equal opportunity for the underprivileged.

In this vision there is already implicit the justification of the triumph of the best, those who will take advantage of opportunities. Certainly, “the new elite produced by competent education” will not spring up from the millions of indigents and poor who constitute the specter of the excluded appropriating the wealth in Brazilian society. School, to be sure, will continue to legitimize the social situation of those being educated.

We are considering here the adequacy of the school for a project that “designates this school model which considers education as an essentially private asset and whose value is prior to everything, economic” (ibid, p.11). Therefore the solutions that foresee formation of centers of excellence, of financial prizes to institutions that present the best performance and best evaluation of their products, in this manner, placing, education in accord with the standards of business production. This logic allows and justifies the practice of an absolutely reductive assessment conception in terms of the complexity and diversity of the educational function, when it is understood as a process.

With this understanding, evaluations are instituted that ignore real educational scenarios, are disconnected from the peculiarities and specific needs tied to local and regional diversity. Knowledge is reduced to its cognitive dimension, translated into quantitative accumulation, measurable as if it were possible to separate it from the rich and complex relations between teacher/student, untying it from the laces interweaving the institution of school with the ethical and cultural values that comprise the educational contexts. Not even infancy is free of standardized tests, of the rule of measurement, of the cost/ benefit reference. It is worth saying that the boundaries between education and the marketplace are increasingly being diluted. Even considering public systems, everything indicates that state regulation is channeling itself to give the sense of school becoming an instance of the market.

As Gimeno Sacristán (2007, p.30) suggests:

Neo-liberal policies [...] projected economic techniques in which they base themselves upon the criteria by which quality of education is understood. It displaces educational policies from the state to the realm of private decisions to devalue the educational system as a factor in social integration and inclusion in favor of private initiative, of the ideology that looks for the best way for the school system to go [...] to the worker labor system and to the needs of economic productiveness, leaning on and accentuating social inequalities.

In spite of the strength and intensity of this process of mercantilization, the liberating roots of the republican school continue to produce space wherein social contradictions are expressed, circulate in different educational formulations, organize themselves into alternatives of resistance, emerging within the contradictions impelled by the nucleus of critics that practices alternative experiments for preserving liberating principles. This resistance movement dialectically constitutes an opposing pole to the reconversion of the public school into a school completely oriented to the values and ideological principles determined by market relations. In this opposition is seated the virtuosity and the potentialities of educational visions that dialogue with inclusion and with the founding values of a democratic society.

## **Cultural reconversion of the traditional public school**

Criticizing the process of globalization does not mean denying it. On the contrary, recognition of globalization as an historical process is implied, developed at different stages with contradictory characteristics. At the same time that civilization was impelled forward, it disseminated oppression, domination and destruction of people and cultures. The present process has been accompanied by world-wide spread of the economy, of establishing a market hegemony as a determining factor for the present phase of capitalist accumulation. Education cannot stay safe and sound in this context. The public school, shod in republican ideals emanating from the pages of the French Revolution, was passive in its adaptations and meanings in different countries where it was embodied in its conversion to the parameters and to the needs the Industrial Revolution implied, mainly in the United States, considering school in the light of industrial organization. Thus, according to Silva (1999), the first theoretical elaborations about curricula were to establish a practical nexus between school education and industrial production. As the author points out, Bobbitt's *The Curriculum*, published in the United States in 1918, whose ideas were consolidated by Tyler (1974),<sup>1</sup> is a work which had great influence even in Brazil. Bobbitt's work became a landmark in the emergence of studies and theories of curriculum. In Bobbitt's vision the school should organize its objectives and establish methods to measure results as in companies. Efficiency of teaching is tied to the learning skills necessary for working in the industrial system. However, children should be trained to acquire these required abilities in order to exercise professional occupations in adult life.

As it is constituted the Brazilian public school has the influences of American technical approach and republican humanism. It amalgamates Taylor organizational models with humanistic principles. In Brazil, the industrial model translated much more into the design of a work organization in the school institution, with very little connection to the teaching of skills for the system of production. Until this vision encountered objective limits in the context of later industrialization. However, although it was unconnected with industrial production, the Brazilian educational system developed within itself practices of the Taylor-Ford curriculum model, reproducing a culture imitative of a functioning factory.

But what the traditional Brazilian public school gives a sense of is its humanistic core; a contradictory, non-consensual humanism. On one side, there is an ingenuous humanism, philosophically idealistic, believing in education as the possibility of developing an ideal human being for an ideal society. On the other, a transforming humanism, critical, dialectic, tied to progressive proposals and liberating visions. This picture is impacted and destabilized by the modernization imposed by the hegemony of the marketplace. As a result, according to Azevedo (2007) two new education

movements are generated. The traditional school, *lato sensu* humanistic, metamorphoses itself in two directions, going through a process of cultural reconversion. The two senses develop themselves in opposite and contradictory positions. In the first, the school adapts itself to the principles and values of the market economy, forming client citizens, producers and consumers, identified with the ideology of the marketplace. It is the transformation of the school into a market culture educator institution, a *marketschool*. In the second, it develops a movement with the intent of rescuing humanistic principles, offering new significance in the face of the context of globalization, constructing a core formed by concepts and values committed to the humanization of the human being, with a moral, ethical and political order committed to ideals of liberation, the citizen's school also known as citizen's education.

### **Reconverting for the market: marketschool**

The cultural reconversion of the traditional school subordinates itself to the present phase of development and accumulation of capital, in which education has a developmental role to fulfill. It is the task of the school to assimilate, create and diffuse cultural values pertinent to the parameters of the mercantile growth of social, political and cultural relations of the world-based economy. Within this logic it is necessary to reconvert the cultural content of the school, align it with the conjunction of values that guarantee development essential for market objectives: *the marketschool*. In the *marketschool* the education reconverted for the marketplace takes on a double role. In its "use value"<sup>2</sup> it accomplishes the cultural and developmental dimension, impelling competitive values, the essential concept of market society. And, as for the substance of its movement, transforms itself dialectically into a commodity, exchange value, constituting itself as capital. The formula "sell in order to buy" and "buy in order to sell" takes place within the realm of education.<sup>3</sup> With substantive development based on the essential values and concepts with market primacy, such as furnishing minimum abilities for a specific conjunction of technological development, aiming toward formation of a labor market with individuals identified with market thinking. And pragmatically, the education-commodity – self-inclusionary, is integrated into the general circulation of capital formation as an exchange value, commodity, product to be bought and sold and as social workforce production.

In the reconversion of the traditional school into a *marketschool* is the conversion of education into a commodity and its reconversion into capital. Going back to Marx (2002) is the accomplishment, in the educational realm, of the simultaneous conditions of production and reproduction. The school produces development, the contents of which are concepts, values, attitudes, behavior integrants of the "hard core" of the market ideology. This is the

reason why it acts in opposition to all humanistic principle that can create discomfort within the market universe. The reconversion develops within the context of ideas and culture, supervening in the formation and diffusion of the value system that justifies the productive system. It is the logic that considers society and the world as a company, enabling the commoditized form to irresistibly invade the realm of culture and spirituality. The individual is transformed into a *homo economicus*:

When even love and sexuality, not only in science, but also in daily life, are increasingly thought of as economic categories and esteemed according to economic criteria, “commercialization of the soul seems irresistible.” There is nothing more, it is reasonable to think, no emotional, cultural or community oasis beyond the economic grasps: a computation oriented by abstract profit and the policy of entrepreneurial costs, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, touching the whole realm of existence. (Kurz, 2001, p.14-5)

In the educational system the culture of the marketing makes itself apparent in the attempt to introduce in the school entrepreneurial values and language. Productivity, total quality, comparative advantages, centers of excellence, as well as other basic terms from the vocabulary of the marketplace. Developing citizen-clients and consumers, bearers of the market culture, comes to be the primordial task of the *marketschool*. In the case of the Basic School, the predominant variable is not an interest in privatizing the service of education, but, in producing and diffusing the ideology of the private. The official policies appropriated common terms from the democratic movements of education. Decentralization, participation, citizenship acquired another sense. They went on to be understood as dispensing with the state and transferring of educational financing to the communities; projects of a type such as “volunteer work,” aiming at disintegrating the idea of collective participation, of cooperation, of community life, dismissing the political sense of community action in favor of the idea that everything can be resolved directly by an isolated individual. It is the attempt to dichotomize individual and cultural context, eliminate the collective subject and replace it by an egoistic individual, driven to predatory competition by the market dynamic. These are the substantive characteristics of the *marketschool*, the school of the marketplace. The *marketschool* signifies a *new meaning* for the public school. Discussion of efficiency and managerial control corresponds to the idea of the education-commodity, as a product to be bought and sold in the market, taking from the school its role as a public space.

In concrete political terms, it is a neo-liberal adjustment in education, solidified by the attempt to impose another culture, the objective of which is to break down the old consensus and the legitimacy of victories by the public school in the processes of democratic struggles “for another

consensus and another legitimacy that incorporates, as symbolic values more ample than the economic, the values and knowledge of the company and of the free market: as to competitiveness, productivity, efficiency, measurability and quality” (Suarez, 1995, p.119). Official policies seek to expurgate all and any humanistic “chimera,” with the objective of “blanking from the social imagination the idea of the public school as a social right and as a democratic victory associated with the struggles in the social process of the conquest of citizenship” (ibid, p.120). It has to do with reconvertng the humanistic conceptions that the public school inherited from the republican ideals of the French Revolution and the contemporary struggles in search of social quality.

In Brazil, making the economy world-wide coincides with enlarging enrollment in basic school. For the present demands of reproducing and accumulation of capital, a school that develops the entire individual for the market is required; with all the dimensions of the human being revering to an exchange value. Alienating the workforce in terms of capital is little. In addition to this, a school is required that teaches people to also be alienated from their willpower, the determination of their own needs and desires. An ideal client and consumer, a competitor, a “winner,” as a unilateral development, but that intends being free, even being tangential to the borders of exclusion.

### **Reconversion for emancipation: citizen school**

The citizen school identifies a conjunction of educational proposals practiced in public education in some states and municipalities. The focus of these projects is to educate for citizenship. Citizenship taken not in the formal rhetorical sense, of the limits of the judicial plan, in which rights are abstractly postulated and legal equality does not legitimize the rights of the unequal, but citizenship appropriated as an historic right, dynamic, whose concrete results are constructed starting from the correlation of established forces by social subjects constituted as political forces in movement.

In capital’s destructive and uncontrollable reality, education for citizenship seeks the construction of a new aesthetic and a new universal ethic, integrating social needs with consideration of the limits of survival of nature, also taking the human species as nature itself. For besides the criticism and the denial of the socio-economic system, with its relationship of oppression and domination, the citizen-education in its developmental action absorbs the profound questioning of the disagreeable byproducts produced by the logic of the accumulation of capital, such as: the daily naturalized behavior of violence in traffic; all types of violence and discrimination against people, environmental aggression; the production and handling of waste produced by unlimited consumption; the commitment of biodiversity, of water resources and the genetic inheritance of traditional botanical sources that nature made available for sharing with humans.

The reconversion of the traditional school into a citizen school as a rule has absorbed these questions, transforming them into raw curricular material, living content, not from a school for life, but in life. However, knowledge constructed in real social existence in the search for generation of a new common sense, capable of positive recreation and renewal of a social life, driven to conformity committed to unconditional defense of life. It is a quantitative proposition in relation to the set of liberation themes, committed and materialized in a counter-hegemonic curriculum. As such, it is situated in a plan of *necessity* and, dialectically, is a qualitative whole, considering its utopian dimension, positioned on the level of liberty, or in other words, the challenge of overcoming the relations of domination that impede subjects from having the right to win citizenship fully positioned on the plane of freedom.

In the vision of Ágnes Heller (1986), the plan of needs translates itself into a search for immediate satisfaction for survival of the individual in the economic dimension and in the material elements and symbols situated at the limits of the society of classes with all the conventions and demands of the system. The freedom plan posits itself as a utopian objective in its own process of overcoming immediate needs, aiming at the needs of qualitative fulfillment of the human being, impossible to solidify within the boundaries of the capital system. The system of qualitative needs – or the plan (realm) of freedom –, although it can't be integrated as a possible element in the capitalist system, develops, in contradiction, within its interior.

Finally, it is necessary to reaffirm some ideas/values that are the cultural essence of the citizen school. In its developmental nature, the idea of liberty transforms itself into an essential value. Freedom is the space of intellectual elaboration, of political action, of criticism, of organization and of utopian navigation. In free space, creativity stimulates sensibility, humanization, development of an aesthetic of forms and contents of the adventure of life.

The idea of human development as consciousness of the changing frontiers in the dialectic of social life, of spaces and times of appropriation of the real by individuals at different moments of their cultural, social and biological existence. Interaction as the synergistic process of exchange, of reciprocal strengthening, when each individual teaches and learns, favoring the “other” as a source, receiving the benefits of integrated experiences. The constitution of collectivity as social organic force, the unity of the differences, the integration of the disperse universal in each individual and the creation of subjective conditions for transformative action. The construction of a social subject, recognizing his individuality in the collective, that in spite of his universality, is not produced as an amorphous mass, but is given will, singularities and qualities that are dialectically related to the context of his experiences. The construction of public space as a collective conquest, as a place of social control, makes possible change and endowment that serves the construction of objectives and liberating

actions. The participation as a *means* of fulfilling collective conquests and as end of the fundamental practice of learning citizenship, of the collective consciousness, of the idea of the *res publica* and of activity living together. Autonomy as the practice of use of the capacity for action and creation in the space of freedom, but always within the outline of interdependency and collective responsibility, without stumbling on the field of individual sovereignty that characterizes individualism. The recognition of the subject who has rights, which has ethical, political and judicial legitimacy of access to the symbolic, spiritual and material inheritance, produced socially by humanity, including knowledge and information.

The presupposition of the subject who has rights is also a social responsibility along with preservation, amplification and the practice of those rights. The ethic of the defense of life as a bedrock element of the citizen school, in other words, what configures authentic practice, the effective behavior of the liberating values, the commitment announced by the praxis, which reveals the coherence of the discourse in the acts of daily life of the institutions, of the collective and of the individual.

The conjunctions of elements we are treating here integrate themselves into the constitution of democracy, the essential principal of the citizen school. Democracy taken as the coherence of the principle of popular sovereignty, in its plebian dimension,<sup>4</sup> by which new spaces are created for deliberation and new forms of popular representation that surpass the formal mechanisms of classical liberal representational democracy. Another important element to highlight is the appropriateness of the conception of a citizen school to a global political project of state management.

Only management that assumes these principles, in conjunction with public policies, can make viable an educational vision with these objectives.

### **Citizen school: A social quality experiment**

In 1989, a new political process was begun in Porto Alegre, characterized by democracy radicalized by means of participation, aiming at unprivatizing the state and the construction of a public sphere of decision. Spaces where citizens could exercise state co-management and social control. Participation decentralized decisions. The planning came to be participative, and the state techno-bureaucracy had to mediate and orient their competencies consonant with collective deliberations.

To execute this process participation and decision spaces were created configured within the formation of a non-state public sphere, in which citizens, in cooperation or in conflict with governmental entities, deliberate, elaborate and induce public policies, as well as accompanying, inspecting and evaluating their application (Azevedo, 2004). The principal instruments of participation constructed, developed and perfected in sixteen years of experiments of Popular Administration (AP) were: the Participative Budget

(OP), City Congress and the Participative Budget of the Municipal School System (OP-RME).<sup>5</sup>

The political pedagogical project of the Municipal Secretary of Education (SMED) is the expression, in education, of the de-privatizing process, of state democratization and of the non-state creation of the public sphere, by means of new spaces for participation, making possible social school control. Since education is part of the state apparatus, it can reflect and practice in the process of human development the values and practices which exclude with reference to the culture of dominant interests as in the conceptions and visions of the world oriented to sustainability of human progress, to emancipation, to the combating of all types of discrimination, of oppression, and of violence.

For the transformation of these presuppositions in new referential marks of values, it is necessary also to transform the so-called “public school” – that rigorously, in its essence, has been a state school with private content – into a true public school. That is, into a de-privatized and democratized school through participation, the content of which expresses the needs of the majority.

Referenced to the city’s participative dynamic, the school communities initiated in 1994 a School Constitution, when a discussion process was organized about: *the school we have and the school we want*. After eighteen months of debates, the diagnostics and the proposals were systematized by the Constituent Congress and transformed in principles and guidelines.

In the diagnosis was verified that the schools were producing a 30% failure rate and drop-out rate of around 6%. This figure was until then not well known or was considered “normal” by educators and by the dominant school culture.

It was made clear in the debate that non-learning expressed as student failure constituted a powerful instrument of social exclusion, turning the school into a means of confirming the discrimination of those already marked by exclusion who would come to it. These elements selected in the debate motivated the communities to discuss the school in all its aspects. Curriculum, knowledge, management, evaluation and principles of acquaintance were the axes by which the guidelines and principles were democratically deliberated in the Constituent Congress. This conjunction of decisions was delivered to the Municipal Board of Education as directives for the unraveling of educational policy.

The main points of the Congressional document indicated, according to SMED (1995): the need for participation in school decisions of those being educated, non-teaching workers, teachers and community leaders, with the democratization of management and with the creation of spaces for this participation; the construction of knowledge starting from experiences and questions pertinent to the life of the communities; an emancipatory evaluation,

oriented toward disclosing the problems of the teaching/learning dialectic, looking for the success of the learning student, suspending evaluation as a classificatory and selective judgment's; application of a policy of integration for those with special educational needs; organization of an adult literacy movement and a pedagogical proposal distinguished by education of adults in the Basic School; suppression of the expulsion and suspension in the school bylaws of children and adolescents, considered exclusionary and a way to restrict the rights of those being educated, and the collective construction of disciplinary norms oriented to the principles of living together and to a culture of peace and non-violence. These are some of the points that we highlight.

The citizen school positions itself in the other direction to the hegemonic project represented by the *marketschool*. Its task is as much to supersede the traditional school as to be a counterpoint to the *marketschool*. The structural redesign of the school (SMED, 1998), in a participative context, at times tense and with conflict, redimensioned its times and spaces. The school was reorganized starting from a new vision: the responsibility for the learning of everyone, non-learning being a collective problem of the subjects involved and the duty of the school to guarantee making effective the commitment of this public service as everyone's right to a quality public education.

The citizen school expresses, as we have seen, a conjunction of structural and conceptual changes. These changes generated processes its quality to fruition. The design of the project was managed starting from the principles and guidelines agreed to in the School Constitution, with the following points at the center: direct elections for directors and vice-directors, elected by segments of the school community, parents, students, workers and teachers; election by the student community of the School Council, highest entity with administrative power of deliberation of pedagogical and financial matters; organization of OP/RME with the participation of the student community for planning and deliberating about the financial educational resources; salary policy with bi-monthly readjustments; ongoing development for the educators; 37.5% hours/activity; equal hours and access to development for all Fundamental School teachers; curriculum organization in Cycles of Development, observing the three cycles of life, infancy, pre-adolescence and adolescence; structuring of the collectives of the cycles and the collective of the school for planning and execution in consonance with educational tasks, creation of the function of an Itinerant Teacher, one additional teacher for every three classes to reinforce the possibilities of collectives; creation of the Progression Teams, transitory in nature, for students with inadequate age/learning relationship; creation of the Learning Laboratory to investigate and search for alternatives to non-learning; creation of Rooms of Integration and Resources (SIR) to assist in the integration of bearers of deficiencies; introduction of computers, foreign language, art

education, physical education, from beginning years with specialized teachers; and creation of a learning environment connected to the internet, available to students and to the community, implemented in all schools by the year 2000.

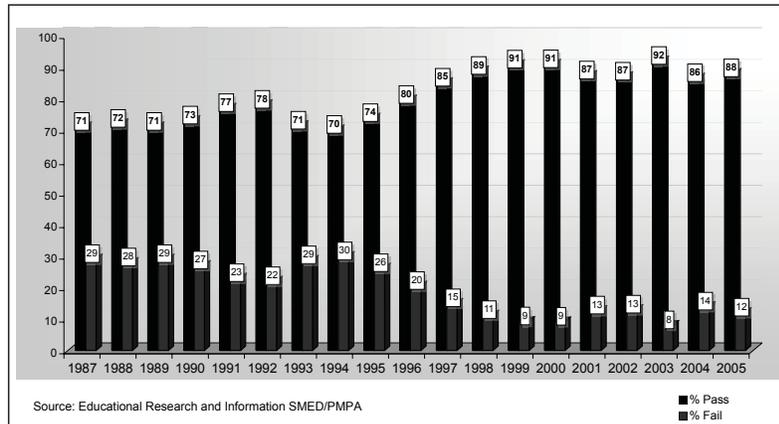
Besides the structural questions, teaching by Cycles of Formation produced a series of didactic pedagogic innovations, resulting in the practice of the educators, from theoretical reflection on real experience, or adapted from other experiences, such as: socio-anthropological studies for organizing the school by means of the Thematic Complex or the Theme Generator;<sup>6</sup> formative assessment (daily), (summary (periodic), and specialized, when necessary; for progression of students categorized as simple, with a supportive didactic plan and/or specialized assistance; creation of the individual's student folder, where evaluation of learning processes is descriptively recorded; each school has a teacher with the function of cultural coordinator with duties involving articulating cultural questions within the dimension of pedagogical and cultural relations with the community and the city. To guarantee the viability of these proposals, a core of interdisciplinary Action (NAIS) was organized, one per region, functioning as a permanent consultancy for the schools.

The Formative Cycles were gradually implemented in the period between 1995/2000, with deliberation by each student community, having made possible a process of objective inclusion, according to data which follows.<sup>7</sup>

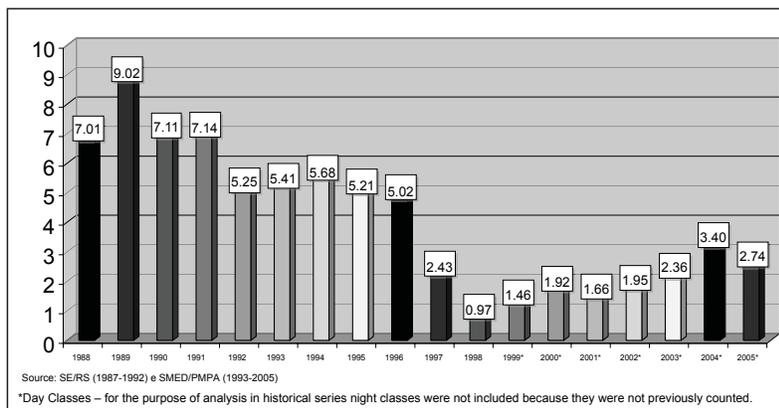
Graph 1 shows the numbers for pass/fail, including 1987/1988, the two last years of management preceding the Popular Administration. As can be seen, the high indices of failure persist in the first management of AP and only begun to decline starting within the second half of the 1995/1996 management period of the Student Constitution, when the more substantive changes began. In the third period, the impact of the changes are much more significant, expressing a constant decline of failure, which corresponds to the great mobilization of the Municipal System, aiming to guarantee that the changes would generate qualitative effects in relation to learning and retention of the students.

As to dropouts, we can observe in Graph 2 that the great impact of implementing Cycles of Formation and the guidelines of the Constitution begins to solidify starting in 1997, beginning with the third period of the AP, continuing elevated levels of retention until 2001. In the fourth period, last of the AP, we have some discontinuities in the project, determined to have been caused by internal political injunctions of the AP's sustaining policy enforcement. In 2004, a coalition of the conservative spectrum won the municipal election which based its campaign on denouncing cycles as a project that failed to make learning viable, presenting in the free electoral television propaganda space, students either illiterate or with reading and writing difficulties, appointed to be examples of the failure of Cycles of Formation.

However, the new government, in attempting to dismantle the project, ran into resistance from educators and the school communities. Educators having undergone the process of elaboration and implementation as subjects, resisted, considering Cycles a conquest and their dismantling a retreat.



Graph 1  
 Passing Percentage – Fundamental School.  
 Municipal School System of Porto Alegre, 1987-2005.



Graph 2  
 The RME Fundamental School Dropout rate (%) – 1987-2005.

## Conclusion

The experience of Porto Alegre represents, within its limits, the potential of an education committed to “social quality,” where the greatest challenge is to respond to the diversity and complexity of the new conditions required by a democratic, inclusive and emancipatory education. It is a project with conceptions that are a counterpart to the competing proposals of “centers of excellence,” to *ranking* among institutions, and to financial compensations such as prizes for the successful in learning. In place of

degrading and mercantalizing relations between educator and students, the citizen school considers the development of the subject in his singularity, in its identity, in its relevance to a context and to a conjunction of life experiences.

This conception of school organization and the new conceptions that produce it generated a new conjunction of practices and attitudes that continue making up the daily didactic-pedagogical acts. In spite of the different levels of advance, of contradictory development, of conflicted intermingling between new and old, the appearance of a school culture based on educator's collective work, on the practice of participation and the integration of knowledge that potentialized the possibilities of learning as everyone's right is undeniable.

The participative, democratic, public school poses the question of homogenization, standardization of the traditional school and the *marketschool*. The success of the human being who learns to transcend pre-established cognitive parameters in the traditional school and in the *marketschool*. The opening of the school to citizenship implies the defeat of the *cultural walls* that isolate it within the community, signifying also an epistemological change that presupposes knowledge as a construction from the experience and wisdom of the communities. In other words, consideration of the student as a real, concrete, historic subject, bearer of culture and of wisdoms that can't be artificially abstracted in the process of knowledge construction. This implies the overcoming of the conception of knowledge as a thing, ready, finished, disdained to the cultural context, in the life of the student subject, that can be transferred from those who know to those who don't know.

Instead of replacing the pedagogical reading by an administrative reading that reduces educational problems to management and to quantitative evaluation of the final product, a citizen school searched for a social root, integrating the experience of participation, cultural contexts with knowledge construction. The intense development in service by the educators produced the conditions for the development of a distinguishing common sense that translated into consensus of the right of all to access to learning. For this it was necessary that the educators dive into the complexity of the teaching/learning processes, going back to the instruments that the diverse fields of science make available to education. As one educator explained: "in the last ten years we created a study culture in the System. This pointed us to roads that would not give up on any student. When they begin to miss classes, we go to get them at home, because here in the school we consider the needs of each one a theoretical and practical challenge" (oral comment).<sup>8</sup>

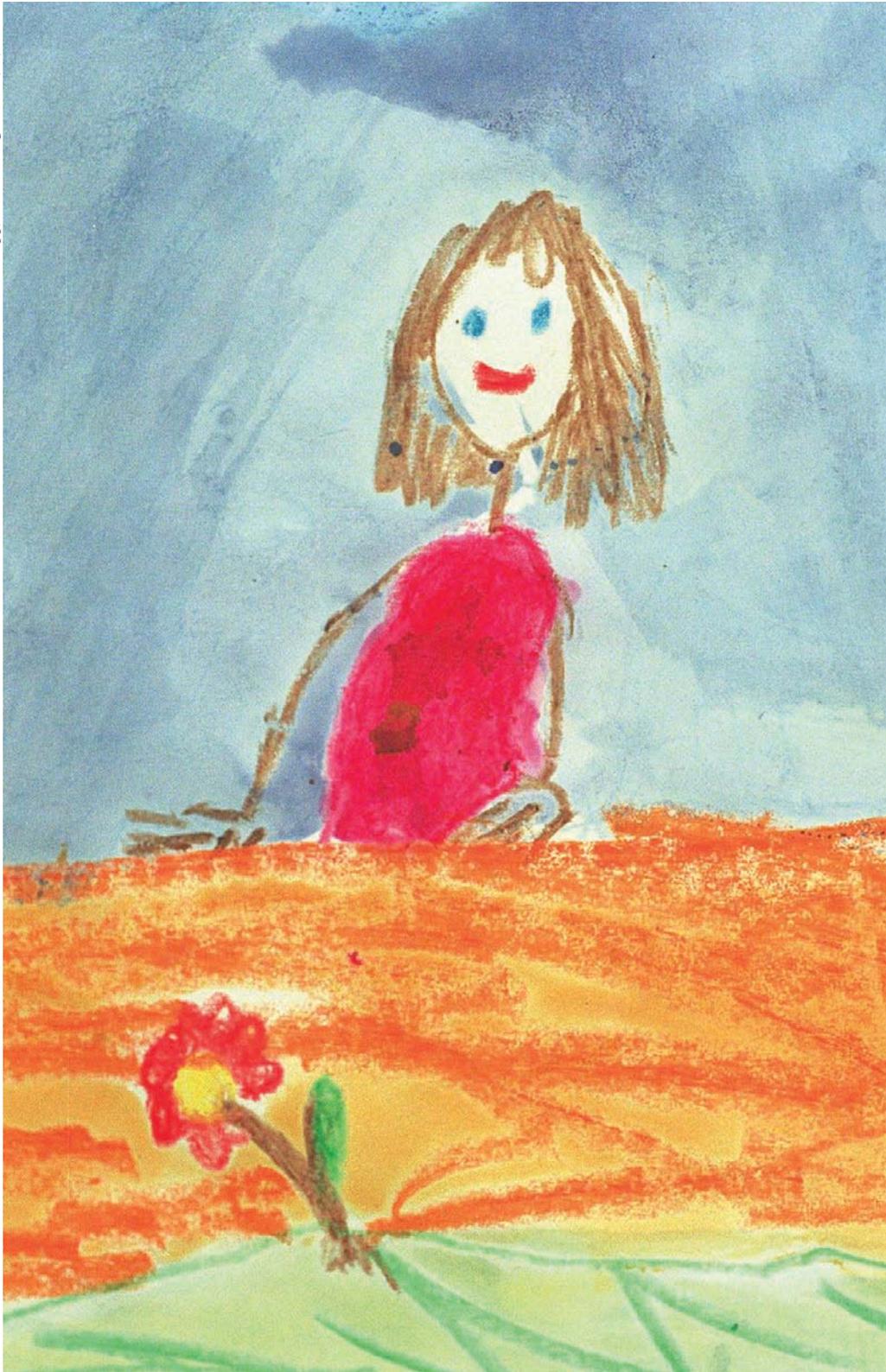
In the pedagogical work spaces, in development and reflection, in the practice of daily doing/thinking, educators of the citizen school project produced innovative formulations to identify what are known as sources of

school knowledge. The philosophical, socio-anthropological, source socio-pedagogical and epistemological.

The philosophical source is related to the sense of education, as the inquiry about what type of human being and society that we want to build and with what values? The responses to these questions translate into pedagogical practices and critical educative attitudes, producers of references that do not conform to the simple reproduction of a legitimated school culture. The socio-anthropological source makes it possible to know the universe of those who are being educated: the social conditions in which they live, the characteristics of their imagination, their experiences of making and living daily. The socio-psycho-pedagogical source considers the processes of construction of the intelligence of the child, of the adolescence, and of adults. Who is the student subject? What are the biological and psychosocial contexts? The reactions to these questions open roads for the teaching to be organized starting from the concrete subject, overcoming homogenized pedagogical readings and practices. The other source is epistemological, in which is found the knowledge produced by humanity in all fields. The epistemological source is integrated with the others, for besides the lists of sequential content, of disciplines, of series, or pre-requisites, of predetermined times and spaces. It is with a sense of educational action, of the identity of the student subject that the educators pursue significant knowledge as it pertinence to the experience of the student.

To make these conceptions viable, another school structure was constructed and concretized in the organization of Cycles of Formation. With other times and spaces, distinct from the predetermined times and spaces, of a civil year, of two-month periods, of disciplines, of isolated work and the logic of grades, fragmented, reproducer of the Taylorist-Ford industry, given a culture to which classification and selection is naturalized. The consideration of each student in his singularity required a school structure that could dialogue with the different phases of human development, which makes possible pedagogical intervention in the tempos and rhythms of the student subject's learning.

In making evident a conjunction of conceptions, practices and innovative structures, the experience of the citizen school points up possibilities of an education with social quality, non reductive to the mercantile dynamic. The development of a participative culture, of a pedagogy restless with non-learning, in search of theoretical anchors in the science of education, legitimizes the idea that non-learning is a dysfunction of the school and that failure and dropout are mechanisms of exclusion of those social sectors most in need of the public school. This raises the conviction of the need to reinvent the school, redesign it according to new conceptions. The advances in development in service give evidence to the educators that the conventional structure of the school is directed to transmission, for training and repetition, tending to neutralize the new pedagogical propositions, at most transforming



*Drawing made by a student in a Fundamental Teaching school*

them into short-lived fashions. For this, while essential, methodological changes are not enough, new theories, the adherence to the principles of an inclusive, democratic school with evaluative practices based on student success, is indispensable even for overcoming the taylorist-fordist structure, redefining spaces, times and models of student work.

## Notes

- 1 The curriculum, as specific object of study, appears at the beginning of the last century in the United States. Tomaz Tadeu Silva used Callahan (1962) for his commentaries about Bobbitt. Locating the origin of the association of the curriculum with scientific industrial administrative rationality, in accord with the principles of Taylor (1957).
- 2 In the value of use there is, in general, a partial or illusory accomplishment. Illusory because it has the mirage of individual success as the inheritance of the individual can acquire with scholarship. Studying is equal to a good job, success on the entrance exam and other possibilities. In truth, to the schooled individual are not posed the real possibility of trading his development for a life of dignity. That is, an operative marxian conception of use value. The normal course is to put his development in the market as an exchange value, transfigured into money, quantified by relations imposed by the work market. For this the development of the marketschool reconverted its own symbolic universe, its cultural values in elements aggregated to commodities. About the metamorphosis of commodity, see Marx (2002, v.1 e 2, cap.III, p.105).
- 3 The process of reconverting commodity into money and money into capital is demonstrated by Marx in the following formula:  $M(\text{Commodity}) - D(\text{Money}) - M(\text{Commodity})$ , conversion of commodity into money and reconversion of money into commodity, selling to buy. The other process is the conversion of money into commodity and re-conversion of commodity into money, buying to sell, expressed in the formula  $D(\text{Money}) - M(\text{Commodity}) - D(\text{Money})$ . In this type of circulation, the money in movement is transformed into capital. "The circle  $M(\text{Commodity}) - D(\text{Money}) - M(\text{Commodity})$  has as a point of departure a commodity and for an end point another commodity that leaves circulation and enters the sphere of consumption. Its final objective, however, is consumption, satisfaction of needs, in a word, use value. The circuit  $D(\text{money}) - M(\text{Commodity}) - D(\text{Money})$ , on the contrary, has from a point of departure money and returns to the same point. For this, what impels is the value of change itself, the objective which determines it" (Marx, 2002, v.1, cap.IV, p.168-9).
- 4 Plebian democracy is a concept used by Sérgio Baierle, political scientist, researcher at the center of Research and Urban Assistance –City (Centro de Pesquisa e Assessoria Urbana – Cidade). Characterizes the participation of peripheral urban populations in the governmental political deliberations, by means of direct participation using mechanisms such as the Participative Budget in Porto Alegre and other experiments. The concept of plebian democracy goes beyond traditional and classical forms of representative democracy, thus making a clear distinction between direct participation of the citizen and a possible representation of society

- by means of non-governmental organizations. About plebian democracy, see Baierle (2002).
- 5 The Participative Budget (OP) had its construction induced by the municipal government, but constituted itself as a public participatory and co-management space, self-regulating, with decision-making power over budgetary resources and participation in the construction and inspection of the application of public policies (Santos, 2002). The OP characterizes itself as a non-state public sphere, of state control by citizenship. This concept is not confused with the concept of non-organic and non-decision making public sphere of Habermas (2003) or with other concepts that consider the public sphere a so-called third sector.
  - 6 The schools organize the teaching by starting with community vocalizing and from observed phenomena. The vocalizing is called socio-anthropological research. With this real-life data a Thematic Complex is organized, characterized by the construction of a system of catalogued concepts starting from those vocalizations, or by the option the Theme Generator.
  - 7 In 2006, the Municipal Educational System of Porto Alegre registered 59,157 enrollments, according to the Sector of Educational Information, SMED /PMPA.
  - 8 Interview from the ongoing survey about participative processes and inclusion.

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*ABSTRACT* – This study aims to examine teaching quality in public schools, taking as reference the experience in Porto Alegre from 1989 to 2006. It analyses the concept of quality considering the points of view of two antagonistic movements for changing the paths of the traditional public school: re-conversion to the market, market-school, introducing the logic of a company to schools, centered on competition, productivity, efficiency and efficacy values in selective and classificatory evaluation based on measurement, quantification and the final product; and the re-conversion to citizenship, the citizen school, emphasizing solidarity, cooperation, moral and intellectual autonomy, defense of life, emancipation, humanization and evaluation with emphasis on the processes, timing and the rhythm in relation to the learner.

*KEYWORDS* – Market-School, Citizen School, Quality, Evaluation, Participation, Emancipation.

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