



Education 4: The Search for Quality Institutional Problems in Public Education

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We face a difficult task. Public education in Brazil and other Latin American countries is backward owing to low public investment in the development of the human capital of populations that grew and urbanized quickly in the 20th Century. Coherence in the institutions that govern and deliver education is lacking. This backwardness is dramatic when compared with the wealthier countries of Europe and North America that provided free universal public education about a century before it became a vigorously pursued goal in Latin America. In the agrarian Brazil of the 1930s, access to education was the privilege of a few. In 1930, only two in ten children attended school. Of those who studied; the majority completed at most the fourth grade of elementary school. Only large cities had schools that

included the 5th to 8th grades. Sixty% of the adult population was illiterate.

Brazil has had to do everything at the same time. We have been getting everyone into primary school, at the same time as expanding high school and university education. Between 1994 and 2005, university enrollments doubled. High school education grew at rates of 8% to 12% a year. In 1970, average schooling among Brazilians over the age of 10 was still only 2.4 years, according to PNAD, the national household

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survey. By 2005, this had grown to 6.8 years, while the average for developed nations was 12 years. Dropout rates and repetition of grades as a result of academic failure fell until the end of the 1990s, but stopped improving after that. Overage students (older than normal for the grade in which they study) still represent a large share of enrollments. The main problem is the lack of quality education. All national and international evaluations show unacceptable results. We still have a long way to go.

There is no alternative to improving the quality of our education. Otherwise, despite its great potential, Brazil will be left behind in the world economy. Without better public education, our institutions will remain weak and inefficient. Democracy will be endangered, while our political class profits from the corruption and paralysis that plague our legislature and judiciary, as well as federal, state and municipal governments. Without better public education, we shall be less able to make rational use of our rich natural resources. Our economy will be less able to create wealth and will continue to export mainly primary commodities with little value added, in exchange for more innovative products and services from advanced countries.

Today many pupils finish 4th grade without knowing how to read or write. School systems need surgical interventions to improve their performance. These systems must support teaching and learning more effectively. We must do everything needed to assure that children learn. We must improve the way schools are run. Many public schools today lack stable and organized basic routines. They are in permanent turmoil, burdened by problems of violence, frequent absenteeism of teachers and pupils,

internal disorganization and lack of staff. There is no adequate instructional supervision. There is no pedagogical support. Brazilian public education is at a crossroads.

Challenges

The big challenge to achieving quality education is one of scale. Brazil today has about 55 million pupils in all types of primary and secondary education. If enrollments in trade schools and universities are included, the number exceeds 60 million, or nearly one third of the country's total population. However, despite widening access, with 34 million pupils in primary schools, Brazil's educational system remains exclusive. This is because only a small part of each age group manages to finish primary and secondary education, including high school. Even fewer reach university.

Although high school education used to be for a privileged few, enrollments jumped from roughly one million pupils to almost three million between 1971 and 1980. This was a growth of 151%, but still included only 14% of the population between 15 and 17 years old. This growth slowed in the 1980s, only reaching the four million mark in the early 1990s. Until then, high school was in truth a rite of passage for the few planning to attend universities. With the labor market demanding more education, growth in secondary enrollments has accelerated, both in regular schools and in adult education. Thus, half of those born in 1982 finished high school in 2000. This is impressive when compared with the mere one-quarter of those born in 1970 who completed secondary school at the end of the 1980s.

The fast growth of enrollments in the 1970s and 1990s contrasted with the stagnation of the 1980s at all levels of education. The military regime (1964-85) built many schools, but there was no evaluation of teaching and learning. Many

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Illiteracy in Schools

João Batista de Araújo Oliveira

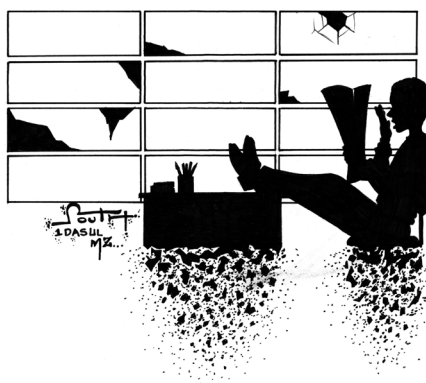
Illiteracy in schools continues to be Brazilian education's number one problem. All national and international evidence points to this failure. It is commonplace to say that many students entering high school can neither read nor write correctly. Effective literacy is a necessary but not sufficient condition for future success in school. Until this problem is solved, all other investments in education will be inefficient, if not a total loss.

Evidence of school illiteracy is abundant. Total enrollments in the first two grades of primary school — almost 10 million pupils — is equivalent to 150% of these population cohorts. It is in these beginning grades that teachers flunk most students. The national SAEB tests (Basic Education Evaluation System) indicate that 4th grade students with less than 175 points are practically illiterate. This is half of the total school population and more than 80% in some states.

The causes of school illiteracy fall into two groups. First is the institutional problem. Deficiencies in Brazilian school systems are such that we can expect widespread failure in literacy. Lacking is a robust system to attract, train and retain good teachers. We also lack literacy teaching programs. There is no school autonomy. Principals lack authority and responsibility for results. So there is no mystery in understanding the causes of

the school failure, which already are clear in teaching children to read in the early grades.

The second group of causes of failure consists of specific literacy policies that Brazil has adopted over the past 30 years. The main problem springs from a faulty definition of literacy. For specialists throughout the rest of the world, literacy means mastery of the alphabetical code. Literacy is understanding that



letters represent the sounds of speech, and understanding the effect these letters have in various positions within words. It means extracting the sound of words and transcribing them. It means reading longer texts fluently.

In Brazil literacy is confused with other things. Brazilian educators use the vague term “lettering” [letramento], which is never defined and is used in different ways by different authors, which is especially perverse in confusing rather than illuminating. Consensus is possible as to what a literate

pupil is, but it is impossible to say what a “lettered” pupil is, or when he starts or finishes this process.

The best techniques for literacy training have been defined over more than a century of research and controversies, known in the 1960s as the “reading wars.” The reading wars became ideological confrontations over “progressive” or “constructionist” theories that for some decades had much influence in American and Brazilian teachers’ colleges and normal schools, preaching that children can learn through their personal experience and at their own rate, associating entire words with drawings, without first needing instruction in the letters of the alphabet. This army in the reading wars believes that learning to read is as natural as learning verbal language, so long as it occurs in meaningful contexts for the child. The other side of this debate urges phonic methods, insisting that children need to learn letters before learning words. For this other side, learning to read consists essentially of acquiring the abilities to decode letters, as the first step in the long process of reading to learn. In other words, the reading wars are controversies between a “top down” approach, emphasizing contexts over the learning of letters, and a “bottom up” approach, sustaining that command of letters is

an indispensable first step in learning to read.

Fifty years later, and especially since the 1990s, this debate has been decided by the scientific evidence, frankly in favor of phonic methods. Empirical studies reveal two important conclusions. First, any method of teaching literacy works, if well applied. But this does not mean that all methods are equally efficient. Second, phonic methods are consistently superior to all others. Among the phonic methods, the most effective are those that systematically and explicitly demonstrate the relationships between sounds and symbols. These methods produce important differences in student performance. Also, there is strong evidence of the most effective types of material and texts to teach literacy and develop reading fluency. There is no secret or mystery to this. Reading research findings are recorded, published and used in countries where education works.

The question then becomes, to know what it is that empowers Brazilian authorities and the academic community to ignore this evidence and its implications, in a country where there are profound gaps in teachers' training and where most students learn nothing.

Reading is a complex process that demands the development of diverse abilities. To understand the imbroglio surrounding child literacy, we need to look back in history. The question of literacy in Brazil has never been free of ideological associations.

For example, in Paulo Freire's methods, teaching literacy to adults is seen much more as an instrument of "awakening awareness" than of literacy, a theme elevated to the level of paroxysms by the present-day pedagogy of the landless peasants' movements. There is no evidence of effectiveness for these programs, especially in mass literacy education for adults. In the 1980s, literacy teaching in Brazil came under the influence of what officials later would call the "dominant paradigm", based on social-constructivism, on the specious theory of the psychogenesis of written language, and on linguistic theories of the 1970s that affirm that learning to read and to write are something natural — as with Rousseau's noble savage. These theories have long been refuted elsewhere but, like jabuticaba (a fruit unique to Brazil), they still thrive in Brazil, where they remain the dominant paradigm.

The most recent measure of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) - introducing a literacy test — might be a positive sign in suggesting, if only shyly, that the pupil must be literate by the end of the 2nd grade of his nine-year primary schooling. This may be real progress, but it is difficult to believe that this new test will have an impact different than that of the SAEB. The SAEB national test was given seven times, without any noticeable improvement of education quality. It would be foolish to expect that things will change with yet another

test. Test results only affect school systems when they are associated with other measures that produce consequences. Their success in promoting change also depends on a regulatory framework embracing teaching programs, teacher training and didactic materials. Market signals do not change education, since education does not operate as a market. Education is a captive of the regulations and policies of MEC and the individual school systems, and also adequate operating resources.

Overcoming the literacy impasse requires an act of courage. Our present Education Minister is aware of the situation, but gives no sign that he is ready to overcome corporatism and inertia, as officials had to do in other countries. Unhappily, local education authorities are mesmerized by Brasília, for better or worse. An effective shortcut would be to observe, copy and adapt what works in the countries where education and literacy are successful, including, among others, the OECD countries. None of them adopt the literacy concepts, policies or methods sanctioned in Brazil. On the contrary, they adopt policies and methods validated by scientific evidence. Until this is changed, we will remain bound to outdated theories and practices, continuing to produce school-induced illiteracy.

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people say that the public schools were good in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. This was because they were still schools for the elite. In the 1970s, an erosion of teachers' salaries accompanied the rapid expansion, when many new teachers were hired. The criteria for hiring teachers were lax because there was a shortage of trained teachers. In the 1990s, a lack of teachers again impaired the quality of the second wave of fast growth. We had to hire people and then train them. In large measure, the absence of evaluation policies aggravated the quality problems that we see in high school and in the 5th through 8th grades today. Only now is Brazil beginning to develop a culture of scientific evaluation to improve public education, comparing schools with others and with their own past performance, measuring value-added in students' learning.

Since 2001, the dropout rate has increased. The proportion of people finishing primary and high school is diminishing. The trend of increasing numbers of pupils being included at the correct age, indicated by PNAD household surveys between 1992 and 2001, shows signs of exhaustion, and is in fact reverting. How can we explain this trend? Only education enjoys universal access. According to the 2005 PNAD, 97% of children between 7 and 14 years of age were enrolled in primary schools, but only 41% of 15 year olds had finished the 8th grade. Of 10 year olds, 34% had fallen behind at least one school year, rising to 55% among 14 year olds. Falling behind and repeating school years starts early and increases with age, leading to some pupils abandoning their education even before finishing primary school. The 2005 PNAD brought terrible news: 18% of young people between 15 and 17 years of age are out of school, without having finished primary school. Only 70% of young people make it through the 8th grade.

If we did not have so much grade repetition and so many overage students, Brazilian primary and secondary education would have 25% more money per student than today. These extra resources could fund pay increases for teachers, improved operating conditions in our schools, and programs to encourage older adolescents to stay in school.

Solutions

In several countries over the last two decades, there have been waves of educational reforms. The agenda for reform is the same, or at least similar, in these countries, although at different levels of development. They all incorporate external



evaluation systems. However, the real change occurs only when the school uses the results of evaluation to improve its performance and when society cares about and supervises the quality of education. For this to happen, there must be ambitious goals and standards, good working conditions for teachers and students, high quality information, intensive communication with society at large and accountability of schools for their results. Gradual improvement in the quality of education must be pursued along four strategic axes:

a) Investing more in education with clear priorities.

b) Restructuring career paths, training and incentives for teachers.

c) Reorganization of systems, with emphasis on school management and learning.

d) Development of a standard curriculum, with clear learning goals, evaluation procedures and emphasis on literacy.

School reform is a difficult and complex undertaking. Brazil is not alone in facing these issues. Many countries –the United States, Britain, Germany, Greece, Russia, Japan, Chile, Peru, Mexico, to name a few — are engaged in debates over failures in public education. A typical statement came from an 18-month study of California's failing schools by a commission at Stanford University: "The structural problems are so deep-seated that more funding and small, incremental interventions are unlikely to make a difference unless matched with commitment to wholesale reform."

These difficult tasks can be accomplished only through a stable political consensus, preventing discontinuities bred by changes of government. Commitment to long-range action should be guided by evidence from classroom evaluations and national and international research. We shall go on to examine each policy axis individually.

a) Investing more in education with clear priorities.

The federal constitution of 1988 increased the autonomy of municipalities, allowing them to organize their own school systems, independent of state or federal supervision. However, there were no legal criteria for division of responsibilities in education. The financing of the school system became chaotic. The new constitution made it mandatory to invest 25% of state and municipal revenues and 18% of

federal receipts in education. In the following years, compliance with these requirements was sporadic. The law guaranteed the resources, but provided no mechanisms for effective inspection and control. State and local governments have used ruses to include other expenses in the education budget. Amid great regional contrasts, the capacity of state and local governments to invest in education in the poorer regions of Brazil is considerably less than in richer regions.

Cities and states are responsible for the bulk of preschool, primary and secondary school enrollments, while the federal government operates a large system of universities, absorbing 75% of the Education Ministry's budget. Basic operational problems persist: lack of school maintenance; classrooms with poor lighting, ventilation and acoustics; insufficient teachers and other employees; very little educational material to support teachers and classrooms too overcrowded for teaching literacy in the initial primary grades.

The most serious problem is that children spend insufficient time in school, on average four hours. Many school systems must operate four shifts per day. Countries with more effective education systems average six-hour school days. The national examination, SAEB (System for Evaluation of Basic Education), shows that time spent in school is directly related to student achievement. The priority today is to assure at least five hours daily for all students, which will require more money for education. Another challenge is preschool education for children up to the age of six. We need more classrooms for this age group in order to prepare children for learning in primary school, as research and the SAEB results have demonstrated. New strategies and partnerships with the private sector can expand attendance in day-care

centers and gradually make pre-school universally available.

The Primary and Secondary Education Maintenance and Development Fund (FUNDEB), recently made into law, is an important instrument for planning spending on different levels and modes of primary and secondary education, from pre-school through high school. However, to achieve its goals, FUNDEB needs permanent oversight and evaluation to prevent distortions and deviation from priorities. Federal funds are distributed according to the number of pupils counted in the national school census. Permanent external controls are needed to prevent fraud and the spread of bad quality, which are both happening now within adult education.

We need new incentives and innovations for effective teaching.

We need to reorganize secondary education, extending the duration of the day shift. We need to improve conditions in science and computer laboratories, crucial for better preparation of our young people. Change are also needed in the curricula. The system must be diversified to accommodate different ambitions and vocations. Many pupils want daytime secondary education, but for many vacancies are available only at night. In many schools, there is no space for extracurricular activities or for physical education.

b) Restructuring career paths, training and incentives for teachers.

Any improvement in the quality of education needs well-qualified and

motivated teachers. The only way to attract and retain good teachers is to increase incomes and to link career progress to performance and results obtained with pupils. These improvements would help to avoid teaching being seen as a second-rate career. Today one of the biggest problems in our public school systems is teacher absenteeism, including too many medical leaves, related to the lack of career incentives. With so many absences and leaves, it is hard for schools to ensure that every classroom has a teacher, even where the underlying student-teacher ratio is adequate by international standards.

Nowadays most teachers are university-trained, thanks to changes introduced by the federal government over the past decade. Until 1995, the number of lay teachers, without university training, was 132,000, or 9% of the total, mostly in the poor north and northeast of Brazil. Today they are only 1%. Primary schools, where only 41% of teachers held a full bachelor's degree in 1995, now count almost 70%. In secondary education, more than 85% of teachers hold college degrees and many have done post-graduate studies.

Despite progress, shortages persist. The National Education Council estimates a deficit of 280,000 science and mathematics teachers. In addition to teacher shortages in some areas, all evaluations point out deficiencies in the training of teachers. Public examinations in some cities and states show that many candidates with university degrees fail the tests. Pay for teachers is low when compared with other professions with similar levels of education. Salaries of Brazilian teachers are lower than for teachers in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Colombia and Mexico for the same responsibilities and hours worked.

Brazil's public employees enjoy job stability, regardless of the quality of



their performance. Retirement with full-salary pensions after 25 years of service compensates for low teachers' salaries. Moreover, dedicated teachers receive no performance incentives. Committed teachers earn the same as negligent colleagues. There is no incentive to remain in the career or to improve performance. Often, they opt out for better-paid jobs, outside education.

International studies point to important innovations in teaching careers. Initiatives in different countries tie performance to career incentives. In the United States, several states and localities are establishing evaluation systems and teacher certification to create salaries and incentives graded by performance. In Mexico and England, teachers with good performance ratings receive bonuses. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) analyzed teaching careers in 25 countries, showing important changes in policies for promotion and recruitment of teachers. The most important measures adopted by more than 20 countries in the European Community include incentives for teachers who work in high-risk areas, support and transportation assistance for those who work in distant areas, differentiated tax payments, social benefits such as housing and a special health plan. Those demonstrating best performance receive priority in access to these benefits. New York

City recently announced that it will build low-cost housing facilities for teachers.

In Brazil, payroll absorbs on average 80% of city and state education budgets, in many cases more than 90%. Since Brazilian states and municipalities employ more than 2.5 million primary and secondary school teachers, there is little room for salary increases. The only way to raise teachers' salaries is to link them to performance. The ideal solution would be to establish evaluation systems that tie teachers to the results obtained in the schools, as is being done in Minas Gerais State.

c) Reorganizing systems, with emphasis on school management and learning.

In a federal system like Brazil's, with 190 million people spread over a continental territory embracing different ecological zones, management of public education is very complex. The federal government cannot reach into the 200,000 public schools in the country, but has important roles in the functioning of the system. State school systems, several of them very large, are burdened by serious management difficulties that affect the daily lives of schools. Municipal school systems suffer from even greater technical difficulties and a lack of qualified staff. Metropolitan areas, with more than half of Brazil's student body, face the most difficult

management problems, aggravated by urban violence.

For primary and secondary education, the federal government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), complements the role of states and municipalities, and is of great importance. The ministry has several missions for reducing internal social and economic inequalities and promoting quality education for all: (1) coordinating national education policies; (2) producing information and evaluations to support and improve implementation of these policies; (3) correcting distortions within the system; and (4) offering technical and financial support to states and municipalities. Perhaps MEC's most important role is to bring about change and to establish an ongoing dialog between members of the federation and society at large about goals and objectives. MEC should not enter into conflict with or impose itself upon other levels of government that operate school systems directly.

States and municipalities do not co-operate well in setting priorities and integrating action. Municipalities concentrate on pre-school and the lower primary grades. States are responsible for 5th through 8th grade and secondary school. But often state and municipal schools compete for pupils and resources. Primary schooling, divided between states and municipalities, lacks a coherent structure, both operationally

and organizationally. Integrated action could prevent overcrowded classrooms, foster better use of space, and reduce dropouts in some schools. The lack of a common curriculum among state and municipal schools often harms students who attend the first grades in municipal schools and then face difficulties when they move into the higher grades in state schools.

Pressure from politicians aggravates the absence of professional management, involving school systems in patronage and creating damaging interference in the day-to-day functioning of schools. Education is the public sector's largest employer. Political appointees are unqualified to manage complex organizations and huge budgets. They fail in managing human resources and the scale of the administrative machinery. Improvisations to deal with teacher absenteeism and problems of maintenance and disorder govern the daily lives of state and municipal secretaries of education, within a rigid framework of statutes, regulations and customs that prevents flexible responses to emergencies. Central bureaucracies are weak and remote from the operation of schools, with high staff turnover and little technical capacity or institutional memory. These departments lack competent technical expertise in the central and regional offices. Investment in the school systems' institutional capacity is needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Schools are poorly staffed and equipped. Internal organization is weak. Many schools have no administrative secretary or watchman and suffer from poor maintenance. Teachers are often absent for one reason or another. Principals lack the qualifications to lead the learning process. Supervision systems do not work well, lacking enough

personnel and training. Supervision is bureaucracy-oriented and neglects teaching and learning, concentrating mainly on private schools. There is no certification system for supervisors and pedagogical coordinators. Coordinators should concentrate on classroom practice, supporting the work of teachers, a practice opposed by teachers' unions. The only way to improve is to work from evaluation results. Professional evaluations must guide learning expectations and instructional support at each school. We need to identify and support the schools in most difficulty.

Schools need more autonomy. According to international scholarly research, schools with greater administrative and financial autonomy are more efficient. Central bureaucracies should define general lines of policy and action, guarantee observance of basic school routines, monitor and supervise the system's functioning, and evaluate and insist upon results. For this to happen, goals and expectations for learning must be clear, founded upon a commonly shared curricular base and national policy that will guide the monitoring and evaluation of results. In this way, failing schools can be identified and supported. Good results must be stimulated, recognized and rewarded.

National examinations, such as SAEB and *Prova Brasil*, produce data on teaching and learning, traced to every municipality and every school. These tests show that schools with stable teams and good principals perform better. Teachers must commit themselves to the goals and the results or learning. For this to happen, school staffing must be more stable. Schools must have the autonomy and power to select their own staff and to demand results in accordance with the goals defined by the leadership of education departments. Many state and municipal systems suffer from rapid

turnover among school teachers and principals. Conversely, some uncommitted principals remain too long at their jobs, indifferent to results. We must establish rules and standards that define the obligations of school managers and teachers, with consequences for both good and poor performance. Some states in Brazil, such as Tocantins, Acre, Minas Gerais and Pernambuco, have made significant management innovations, giving more autonomy to schools. The SAEB exam of 2005 showed advances made by these states in learning results for primary and secondary education. Expected results are included in management contracts and goals are set for each school, with permanent external evaluation and integrated systems of supervision.

We must end political interference in appointments of principals and middle managers in state and local education departments. Today about 60% of school principals in Brazil are chosen according to political patronage criteria. On the other hand, a purely bureaucratic choice of the principal, following rigid criteria based on civil service examinations and prescribed careers, currently stimulates high turnover and fails to recognize the most dedicated and committed principals. In an education system with high turnover of teachers and principals, it becomes practically impossible to plan for development of quality education. Rapid turnover also makes it difficult to build cohesive bonds and a shared identity among the members of the school team.

We need more resources for education, but the problem is not only one of money. With resources now available, we can do better. We must restructure incentives for schools, principals, teachers and supervisors. Presently, laws, regulations and customs make it difficult to improve management of

systems, schools and classrooms. The cascading effect of inefficiencies is very great, because it affects everyone within the current career structure. If principals' salaries increase in a system like this, it affects 5,400 principals in Sao Paulo State, for example, and extends to all retired principals. A salary increase for principals generates inexorable demand for pay increases for all the 250,000 teachers in Sao Paulo, carrying an obligation to increase pensions of all retired teachers, an additional 150,000 people, also on the state education payroll.

Teachers' unions complain of many things. In many of these things, they are right. However, they use very conservative models and ideologies that seek to increase state control or ownership. By their standards, everyone should be equal in pay and career progression, independent of the quality of his or her performance. Unions have a strong ideological commitment to the Uniform Administrative Law (*Regime Jurídico Único*), a system that governs the entire Brazilian public sector, strictly limiting possibilities to reward good performance controlled through a system of professional evaluation. The fact that education is public and free does not mean that we cannot have legislation that motivates those teachers and schools that present better performance. The system must change. This calls for the courage to engage in debate and to find alternatives.

Participation of families and partnerships with the private sector or non-governmental organizations are important for good school management and improvement of learning. Many studies emphasize parental participation and involvement in the school life of their children as an essential condition for engagement and motivation of students. Partnerships with NGOs

and foundations in innovative projects have helped to improve school performance. We need to analyze the results of promising projects in the areas of management training, accelerated learning, talent identification, volunteer work, reading circles, youth leadership and after-school activities. We need partnerships with the private sector for the management of schools, as exemplified by the full-time high schools being operated by the Procentro movement in 20 municipalities in Pernambuco State, and by EMBRAER, an airplane manufacturer, in Sao Jose dos Campos in Sao Paulo State. We must deepen our understanding of these initiatives and their impact on school performance.

More than 70% of people trained as teachers work outside the schools.

d) Development of a standard curriculum, with clear learning goals, evaluation procedures and emphasis on literacy.

Since 2006, the duration of compulsory primary and secondary education in Brazil increased from eight to nine years, targeting pupils from six to 14 years of age. However, the great problem persists: how to foster effective literacy among children in the early primary grades so that they can continue successfully through the next phases of primary and secondary education. So far, our schools are unable to get children to learn to read, to write, to count, to add, to multiply, to divide, and to acquire basic notions of the sciences.

The quality of teachers' teaching and classroom management is more important than any other factor in promoting learning. In Brazil, there is another unresolved basic problem: what and how to teach. A good pedagogical project must demonstrate what and how to teach. Thus, every school should include in its management plan:

1) The basic values that pupils must develop, such as sociability, respect for differences, ethics, solidarity and teamwork.

2) The cognitive competencies that everyone must acquire and theories of teaching and learning. There is no single pedagogy.

3) Basic school routines: use of school time; monitoring of learning; and use of evaluation results to improve the performance of all students.

As is customary in federal structures, Brazil does not possess a single curriculum. There are interesting cases in some federalist countries. Australia, for example, established "standards of learning" to be observed by all states while respecting the autonomy of the lower levels of government. In Brazil, one of the great impediments to improvement of quality is the lack of a common curriculum in the different state and municipal education systems. These units of the federation need to position themselves based on national minimal standards or learning expectations for each grade or learning cycle. The National Curricular Parameters (PCNs) are an important indicator, but they do not indicate what curricular content and learning strategies should underpin classroom work at each stage of the process. Nor was this the purpose of the PCNs. We are left with serious problems of content in public education. Fernando Haddad, our Minister of Education, spoke recently of ideological dogmatism

and the continuing lack of qualified teachers, noting that it took some 30 years for countries like Korea and Ireland to raise the performance of their school systems to the level of advanced nations:

One obvious problem is the dogmatism that reaches into our classrooms, excluding schools from diversity of ideas and restricting them to the worldview of the Old Left. Visiting schools throughout Brazil in recent months, I observed that the main events of the 20th Century, such as the two world wars and the fall of the Berlin wall, are absent from textbooks and classroom discussion. This clearly lowers the level of teaching. I must stress that education in Brazil suffers from something more basic, which is the training of teachers. We have a deficit of people capable of teaching children.

Thus, weakness of content combines with the lack of qualified teachers. According to the Education Ministry, more than 70% of people trained as teachers work outside the schools. "People don't want to work in places that have failed," says Maria do Pilar Lacerda Almeida e Silva, the ministry's Secretary for Basic Education. The most critical problem is in the early primary grades. The fact is that schools do not know how

to teach literacy. The teachers are not qualified and the materials are poor.

To overcome these difficulties, we must improve training and supervision of teachers and enrich content. Standards, goals, expectations and basic curricular content must be clearly defined so that the teacher knows what needs to be taught and learned in each stage of the process. Curriculum is important because it guides and organizes the work of the school. It provides direction. Today the curriculum is embodied in the textbook, which is fundamental material for the teacher and will continue to be so. However, we know that the curriculum in textbooks is not closely followed and is undermined by improvisation and negligence. Curriculum guides, such as we are preparing in Sao Paulo, should help the teacher in the classroom. They do not replace the textbook. What we want are curriculum guidelines that says, "the pupil by the end of 2nd grade has to have learned this, this and this", independent of the textbook, independent of the pedagogical approach. The pupil will be evaluated on specific accomplishments at the end of the 4th grade. We are looking for a basic core of learning - content, competencies and abilities - that every child has to learn.

In Sao Paulo, we are reducing instruction cycles from four to two

years. We continue to use the four-year cycle, but we are creating a halfway mark to help in the student evaluation process, to be conducted by teachers themselves. Today there is inadequate monitoring of automatic grade promotion. So we have many problems. The most important priority is to focus on the child in the early school grades. We should not allow a child who has not learned to read and to write to continue accumulating problems along their school career.

Evaluations contribute much to our objective understanding of what is going on in our schools. Brazil has not yet defined its expectations or the basic standards of knowledge that pupils must attain by the end of each learning cycle. To adopt a common basic curriculum and to define learning expectations for each grade or cycle must be a priority for all education systems, with emphasis on literacy - reading, writing and basic concepts of mathematics. All children of eight years of age must be becoming literate, so that they may continue to learn.

Some important initiatives have begun to fill this need. In Minas Gerais, a new system of evaluation is measuring the literacy of children eight years of age, identifying their difficulties in order to establish the intervention strategies needed to strengthen learning. In Sao Paulo, a



reading and writing program in the lower grades, with assistant teachers and specific instructional material, seeks to assure effective literacy.

To improve the quality of education, the school must know and understand the pedagogical meaning of evaluations so as to use the results to improve classroom work and guarantee learning. Departmental workgroups should analyze the tests used in national and state evaluations. All teachers should know what the evaluations are measuring and what the ratings of students' learning level mean. There is no point in investing in evaluations if the school and its teachers do not know what to do with the results. We must invest in training teachers and pedagogical coordinators to use learning evaluation productively. Unhappily, few teacher-training programs in universities include the use of evaluation. Graduating teachers learn little or nothing of important standard tests such as SAEB, ENEM (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio - National Secondary School Test) and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment of the OECD), which are widely publicized.

No less important is reporting to society. Parents and the wider community, as well as teachers, need to understand the instruments and results of external evaluations better so that they can hold their children's schools to account and demand more. Parents need information that is clear, precise and easy to understand. Avoidance of publication of external evaluation results is no longer acceptable in countries with strong education systems. In the information age, dissemination of results is critical to the process of improving quality. It is democratic and healthy to publish all the data, thus guaranteeing transparency and accounting to society. It is also democratic, and everyone's right, to learn what content is being taught

and what skills and competencies are expected of pupils. Higher standards of education will lead to higher standards of living.

The São Paulo reforms

School reforms always are controversial. They are institutional reforms, so they disturb people and organizations committed to

Coverage of the population from ages 15 to 17 is nearly 90%, which is at the levels of developed countries. However, the share of students kept back in all grades showed a growth trend starting in 2000. In national evaluations, according to SAEB 2005, Sao Paulo state schools are on average below the expected standard in Portuguese and mathematics. In secondary schools, performance has declined in both Portuguese and



established institutions. The test of their survival lies in their efficacy. The school reforms of recent decades that survived their initial controversies, as in England and New York, produced widely accepted results. School reform in Sao Paulo is at an early stage. It has not yet bred controversy because it is in an initial phase and because of wide dissatisfaction with the quality of public education — among parents, students, teachers and civic leaders — that generates a political consensus regarding the need for improvement.

Roughly 99% of children from ages seven to 14 are in school.

mathematics to below the regional average for the Southeast.

We are establishing ambitious goals for quality improvement by 2010. These goals include:

1. All children literate by age eight.
2. Reduce failure rates in the eighth grade by 50%.
3. Reduce secondary school failure rates by 50%.
4. Implant remedial programs in the final grades of primary, middle and secondary schools.
5. Increase by 10% the performance of primary and secondary students in state and national examinations.



6. Meet 100% of demand by adolescents and adults for secondary education, with a diversified professional curriculum.

7. Increase the duration of primary schooling from eight to nine years in collaboration with municipalities. A priority will be the transfer of operation of schools from the state government to municipalities from the first to fourth grades.

8. Use information technology to establish programs of continuous training of teachers, coordinators, supervisors, principals and regional administrators throughout the system's 5,300 schools.

9. A program for construction, expansion and renovation of schools.

Difficult, but not impossible. The size and complexity of the task we face inspires humility. The need for accomplishing these tasks increases our determination. To achieve these goals, we will carry out the following actions.

1. Implementing the Reading and Writing Project (Ler e Escrever). University scholarship students will support the work of classroom teachers in the initial years of literacy instruction. Teachers will receive continuing in-school training,

supported by teaching materials for pupils and teachers. We will evaluate the progress of pupils every two months. In 2008, this project will engage 600,000 students in all the state schools of Greater Sao Paulo and some 8,000 university scholarship students in helping.

2. Incentives for Good School Management. The policy of improving the quality of teaching will be anchored in a management system focused on increasing the value of work in the schools. The statistical base for incentives will be composed of failure rates and the results of SARESP 2005 (the biannual statewide standard test) in reading, writing and mathematics, apart from considering efficiency indicators such as teachers' absences and the stability of school staff. The goals for each school will serve as the baseline for measuring progress. Teachers, parents and students will be able to keep track of the progress of each school. Since results may vary widely, special incentives will be set for schools in unfavorable situations, such as those in areas of social vulnerability, so as to promote more equity. The system will reward the success of each school in reaching or surpassing the proposed goals. Pay incentives will go to the whole

school team that succeeds in the improvement of learning. We will implement this policy of improving the quality of teaching and of promoting equity by these initiatives:

- Creation of the position of teaching coordinator (TC). Selection of teachers to fill these 12,000 positions. The TCs will provide pedagogical support to introduce the curriculum and develop the projects in this plan of action.

- Competitive examinations for 300 new positions of teaching supervisor, with new responsibilities for monitoring the action plan in state schools.

- Strengthening the role of school principals in leading the process of introducing the management system and incentives for improvement of learning.

- Legislative reforms to reduce turnover of school staff.

- Creation of a system of on going communication with parents to stimulate participation in the life of schools with demands for improvement.

3. Restructuring of learning cycles. Shortened cycles of two years in the early primary grades will allow for more specific and timely evaluation

and supervision for overcoming learning difficulties. Parents are now receiving a printed report card.

4. Curriculum. With consultation and participation of the education system's principals and teachers, proposals for curriculum revision have been distributed through the Knowledge Network, consisting of all 90 regional administrations. The curriculum will cover learning goals for all pupils in each discipline, grade and cycle of primary and secondary education. Beginning in 2008, new teaching resource materials will guide classroom teachers in curriculum management.

5. Remedial learning. Based on the results of SARESP 2005, intensive work will begin early in 2008 at all grade levels to bring lagging students up to grade level in Portuguese and mathematics. The program will concentrate in the first two months on learning the fundamentals of mathematics and of reading and writing, supported by structured teaching materials to support the work of teachers and pupils.

6. Diversifying the secondary school curriculum. A new secondary school curriculum will cover diversified learning paths, departing from a common base with emphasis on mastery of Portuguese, scientific, artistic and computational language and a modern foreign language. The curriculum diversification will include modes of vocational training. In 2008 we will offer an "administrative technician" course in secondary education for 50,000 students. In 2009 we will offer a vocational course in information technology for another 50,000 students. Beyond this, for students in the second semester of their final year of secondary school, we will include an intensive period of revision and consolidation to prepare students for university and other entrance

examinations, in partnership with the State Department of Higher Education. We will establish partnerships with the private sector to grant certifications in computer competence and in English and Spanish.

7. Municipalization. Primary education will be extended from eight to nine years in cooperation with municipalities. Initially, the first four grades will shift from state to municipal administration, with quality control and supervision by the Department of Education. Today barely 30% of public enrollments from the first to fourth grade are under state management, but the final years of primary school are a state responsibility, as are the

Everyone wins with improvements in public education.

87% of secondary enrollments. Our goal is to complete the municipalization of the first four grades, begun in 1997.

Collaboration of the state government with the municipalities is crucial for assuring improvement of quality. Progress in this is crucial for improving the organization of public education, for establishing specific actions to meet common goals, for developing the role of municipalities in pre-school and primary education and for progressive concentration of the state system on the last four years of primary school and on secondary education. This sharing of responsibilities between the state and its municipalities for goals and projects will benefit the 4.8 million

students in state schools and the 2.7 million in municipal primary schools.

8. Outside evaluation and inspection will be compulsory for state schools and voluntary for municipal schools, with methodology and criteria permitting comparisons with results of SARESP 2005 and the national examinations, SAEB and Prova Brasil. The results of these evaluations will be used throughout the school system beginning in 2008, following publication of the results of SARESP 2007, which are to be distributed to parents and pupils. Teachers will be trained to use the results of SARESP 2007 for planning their teaching strategy for 2008.

9. Managing for results and incentives policy. The results of SARESP 2005 and promotion rates for 2006 will serve as the baseline in setting goals for each school and will guide evaluations at the start of the 2008 school year. Schools with below-average performance will receive special pedagogical support and incentives to improve their performance.

10. School construction and renovation. Replacement of 207 deteriorating or hazardous school buildings. Remodeling 492 other schools to accommodate full-time instruction, including cafeterias, lavatories, computer laboratories and the roofing of sports areas. Construction of new buildings and expansion of existing ones would eliminate the remaining third day shift in regions where the three-shift system survives.

We are initiating dialogues with teachers, principals, parents, pupils, unions and civic leaders on implementing the program of improving public schools. We all will gain from these improvements.■

Translation by Charles B. Neilson

The three previous issues of Braudel Papers on education are “Backwardness in Education” (Maria Luiza Marcilio, 2001), “A Classroom Diary” (Sandra da Luz Silva, 2002) and “Managing Public Education in Sao Paulo” (Jane Wreford, 2003). en.braudel.org.br

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