

New Schools, New Knowledge, New Teachers: Creating the Citizen School in Porto Alegre, Brazil

By Luis Armando Gandin & Michael W. Apple

Introduction

In a previous article, one of us examined the current politics of teaching and teacher education, focussing on numerous proposals to “reform” teacher education in the past decade (Apple, 2001b). It was argued that while many of these proposed reforms have been quite thoughtful, a considerable amount of the discussion has taken place in something of a social and ideological vacuum. It has not been reflective enough about the major changes that have been taking place in curriculum, teaching, and evaluation in schools in many nations. Yet, these transformations are already having a profound effect on the ways teaching is done, on who controls it, and on what schools themselves are for. Without a serious examination of these transformations we will be unable to prepare our current and future teachers for a world in which the rules have changed. That article dealt with the forces of what has been called “conservative modernization.” This refers to the ongoing process of building a new, largely Rightist, hegemonic alliance, a process through which what schools are for, how they are

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funded and controlled, and whom they are to serve are very much moving in specific directions. Conservative modernization is the result of a tense and sometimes contradictory blend of four kinds of reforms in teacher education and in educational policy and practice in general — neo-liberal market-based reforms, neo-conservative reforms involving strong central cultural authority, authoritarian populist religious conservative proposals to bring schools and universities more in line with “God’s word,” and new middle- class emphases on technical and managerial solutions to moral and political problems (Apple, 2001a; Apple, 2003).

In this article, we want to turn to the other side. We examine the possibility, and reality, of counter-hegemonic policies and practices. These policies and practices call forth a very different vision of the place of the school in society and of curricula, teaching, and evaluation. They also present a serious challenge to teacher education, since they require the education of a “new” kind of teacher, someone who is deeply committed to a process of social transformation and to working cooperatively with oppressed groups in ways that develop very different skills than the ones now advocated in the reform proposals of conservative modernization. Yet, these counter-hegemonic policies and practices go further. They also challenge progressive teacher educators to “put their money where their mouth is” so to speak, in ways that extend proposals for socially reflective teacher education even further than before (see for example, Liston & Zeichner, 1990).

Learning from Beyond Our Borders

We are living in a period of crisis that has affected all of our economic, political, and cultural institutions. But one of the institutions that has been at the center of the crisis and struggles to overcome it is the school. We are told by neo-liberals that only by turning our schools, teachers, and children over to the competitive market will we find a solution. We are told by neo-conservatives that the only way out is to return to “real knowledge.” Popular knowledge, knowledge that is connected to and organized around the lives of the most disadvantaged members of our communities, is not legitimate. But are the neo-liberal and neo-conservative positions the only alternatives? We do not think so.

The great Brazilian educator Paulo Freire constantly stressed that education must begin in critical dialogue. Both of these last two words were crucial to him. Educators must hold our dominant institutions in education and the larger society up to rigorous questioning, and at the same time this questioning must deeply involve those who benefit least from the ways these institutions now function. Both conditions are necessary, since the first without the second is simply insufficient to the task of creating a critically democratic education.

Of course, many committed educators already know that the transformation of educational policies and practices — or the defense of democratic gains in our schools and communities — is inherently political. Indeed, this is constantly made visible by

the fact that neo-liberal and neo-conservative movements have made teaching and curricula the targets of concerted attacks for years. One of the claims of these rightist forces is that schools, teachers, and teacher education institutions are out of touch with parents and communities and the “public” in general. While these criticisms are not totally wrong, we need to find ways of connecting our educational efforts to local communities, especially to those members of these communities with less power, that are more truly democratic than the ideas of “thin” democracy envisioned by the Right. If we do not do this, neo-liberal definitions of democracy — ones based on possessive individualism and where citizenship is reduced to simply consumption practices — will prevail (Apple, 1999, 2000, 2001a; Gandin, 1999).

Educators in a number of nations have had to cope with these transformations of ideology, policy, and practice. For us, it is important to learn two things from the experiences of other educators who are struggling against the forces of inequality. First, we can learn about the actual effects of neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies and practices in education. Second, and even more important, we can learn how to interrupt neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies and practices and how to build more fully democratic educational alternatives (Apple, 2001a, Apple, 2003). One of the best examples of working against the forces of inequality can currently be found in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The policies being put in place by the Workers Party, such as “participatory budgeting” and the “Citizen School,” are helping to build support for more progressive and democratic policies there in the face of the growing power of neo-liberal movements at a national level. The Workers Party has been able to increase its majority even among people who had previously voted in favor of parties with much more conservative educational and social programs because it has been committed to enabling even the poorest of its citizens to participate in deliberations over the policies themselves and over where and how money should be spent. By paying attention to more substantive forms of collective participation and, just as importantly, by devoting resources to encourage such participation, Porto Alegre has demonstrated that it is possible to have a “thicker” democracy, even in times of both economic crisis and ideological attack from neo-liberal parties and from the conservative press. Programs such as the Citizen School and the sharing of real power with those who live in favelas (shantytowns), as well as with the working and middle classes, professionals, and others, provide ample evidence that thick democracy offers realistic alternatives to the eviscerated version of thin democracy found under neo-liberalism (Porto Alegre City Secretariat of Education, 1999). In many ways, the policies and practices now being built there extend in powerful and systemic ways a number of similar reforms that are being built in other countries (Apple & Beane, 1995).

Yet, just as important is the pedagogic function of these programs in Porto Alegre. They develop the collective capacities among people to enable them to continue to engage in the democratic administration and control of their lives. This is time consuming; but time spent in such things now has proven to pay off dramatically later on.

In this article, we describe and analyze the policies of the “Popular Administration” in Porto Alegre. The proposals for the formation of a Citizen School are explicitly designed to radically change both the municipal schools and the relationship between communities, the state, and education. This set of policies and the accompanying processes of implementation are constitutive parts of a clear and explicit project aimed at constructing not only a better school for the excluded, but also a larger project of radical democracy. While the reforms being built in Porto Alegre are still in formation, what is being built there may be crucial not “only” for Brazil, but for all of us in so many nations who are struggling in classrooms and schools to create an education that serves all of our children and communities. The implications for teacher education are also profound.

In order to understand the limits and possibilities of such attempts during a time of “conservative modernization,” we will need to closely examine a number of things: how the proposal for the Citizen School connects to the larger project of the Popular Administration; the major normative goals and institutional design created by this ongoing project; and the possibilities and problems in generating the new realities the Workers Party committed itself to create. We will briefly situate the experience of Porto Alegre in the larger political and educational context of Brazil. Then, we present the normative goals of the Citizen School and examine the mechanisms that helped to forge these goals. Thirdly, we describe and explain a number of crucial elements of the institutional design of the Citizen School. After that, we examine the consistency between the normative goals and the institutional design constructed to implement those goals and evaluate potential problems of the project. Finally, we offer some considerations about the future of the project and its potential contribution for the enhancement of democratic relationships inside and outside of education and suggest some implications for a more socially conscious model of teacher education.

Porto Alegre and the “Popular Administration”

Porto Alegre is a city of 1.3 million people, situated in the southern region of Brazil. It is the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and the largest city of the region. Since 1989, it has been governed by a coalition of leftist parties, under the general leadership of the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores — PT, formed in 1979 by a coalition of unions and social movements). PT has been reelected two consecutive times, thus giving it and its policies even greater legitimacy.

According to one of the former mayors of Porto Alegre (a nationally respected member of the Worker’s Party), the purpose of the government is to “recuperate the utopian energies,” to “create a movement which contains, as a real social process, the origins of a new way of life, constructing a ‘new moral life’ (Gramsci) and a new articulation between state and society (...) that could lead social activity and citizenship consciousness to a new order” (Silva, 1999b, p. 9).

The municipal administration is self-entitled the Popular Administration and indeed it has brought significant material improvements to the most impoverished citizens of the city. To give just an example, as Santos (1998) points out, "as regards basic sanitation (water and sewage), in 1989, only 49% of the population was covered. By the end of 1996, 98% of the households had water and 85% were served by the sewage system" (Santos, 1998, p. 485). In terms of education, the number of schools more than doubled since the Popular Administration took office.

One particular measure adopted by the Popular Administration — Participatory Budgeting (Orçamento Participativo or "OP") — is credited with the re-allocation of resources to the impoverished neighborhoods. The OP is a mechanism that guarantees active popular participation and deliberation in the decision-making process for the allocation of resources for investment in the city. In Santos (1998) words:

The participatory budget promoted by the Prefeitura of Porto Alegre is a form of public government that tries to break away from the authoritarian and patrimonialist tradition of public policies, resorting to the direct participation of the population in the different phases of budget preparation and implementation, with special concern for the definition of priorities for the distribution of investment resources. (p. 467)

Santos' points are important. Politics in Brazil have been historically characterized by patrimonialism and clientelism. The government of the Popular Administration was able to break with this tradition; and active popular participation in the construction of policy and allocation of resources has been part of its success. The OP is at the core of the project of transforming the city of Porto Alegre and incorporating an historically excluded impoverished population into the processes of decision-making. Just as importantly, as a number of researchers have shown (Abbers, 1998; Avritzer, 1999; Baiocchi, 1999; Santos, 1998), not only have the material conditions of the impoverished population changed, but also the OP has generated an educative process that has forged new organizations and associations in the neighborhoods. The citizenry of the city has been engaged in an extensive pedagogic project involving their own empowerment. There has been a process of political learning through the construction of organizations that enable full participation in the OP. In essence, the OP can be considered a "school of democracy." The learning acquired within the OP is transferred to other spheres of social life (Baiocchi, 1999; Bowles & Gintis, 1986). Yet, there may be an even more significant educational aspect in the OP. The government agencies themselves are engaged in being "re-educated." Popular participation "teaches" the state to better serve the population. This is a crucial point that is often forgotten in our discussions of the role of democracy in state policy formation and in bureaucratic institutions. Working in tandem with the OP, there is another more specifically educational project for the city, the Citizen School, implemented by the Municipal Secretariat of Education (Secretaria Municipal de Educação or "SMED"). The Citizen School is pushing in the same direction and aims to initiate a "thick" version of education

for citizenship very early in the formal education process. Like Participatory Budgeting, through clear normative goals and innovative institutional design, the Citizen School project has been transforming formal education in Porto Alegre.

Creating the “Citizen School”

Public education in Brazil is governed in a complex manner. It is simultaneously a responsibility of federal, state, and municipal governments. The federal government is responsible basically for post-secondary education (universities). Recently a national education law was passed giving responsibility for elementary education to the municipalities, and secondary education to the states. Thus, the city of Porto Alegre is responsible for elementary schools.

In terms of control, education in Brazil has a tradition of centralization. In the immense majority of states and cities there are no elections for the city or state council of education (traditionally a bureaucratic structure with members appointed by the executive). The curriculum is usually defined by the secretariats of education of the cities and states. Since the resources are administered in the centralized state agencies, schools usually have very little or no autonomy.

Although recently Brazil has achieved a very high level of initial access to schools (close to 95%), the indexes of failures and dropouts are frightening. Brazilian data have consistently shown over many years that less than 50% of the students in the first grade passed to the second grade in their first attempt. Hence, although initial access is granted, the chance of a poor child passing to the second grade is very low. Furthermore, the dropout rate is extremely high, close to 20% in the fourth grade. These data show the existence of a terrible reality of exclusion being reproduced in the Brazilian educational system.

This brief description represents a sharp contrast with the Citizen School project of the “Popular Administration.” As we noted, through OP the Popular Administration wishes to engage in the transformation of the relationship of the state with civil society. The field of education has become central to its project of constructing new relations between the state, schools, and communities. The Citizen School is organically linked to and considered part of the larger process of transforming the whole city.

The municipal schools of Porto Alegre are all situated in the most impoverished neighborhoods of the city. This is because the expansion of the system occurred recently (since the Popular Administration took office in 1989) and the schools were built in the zones where there was a deficit of educational offering. In fact, some of the schools were constructed as a concrete result of the OP, because some regions of the city prioritized education and, specifically, establishing a school in their assemblies.

Dealing with the excluded of Brazilian society, the Citizen School has a clear and explicit project of transformation. It “institutes the possibility for citizens to

recognize themselves as bearers of dignity, to rebel against the 'commodification' of life (...). In the Citizen School, the conformist and alienated pedagogy that sustain the idea that history is a movement rigorously pre-organized of realization of capital needs is denied" (Silva, 1999a, p. 10 [our translation]).

The grounding of the SMED proposals can be seen in the words of one of the most recent secretaries of education in Porto Alegre:

The Citizen School is not a product of a group of enlightened administrators that had formulated and executed a "new proposal." It is not, as well, a spontaneous construction, without intentionality. Perhaps its novelty lays exactly in the articulative and totalizing action of different sources, in the integration of different theoretic-practical experiences.... The Citizen School nourished itself from and was inspired by theoretic-practical contributions of academic progressive educators, by contributors in the public schools, and by the experiences and of democratic and transformative struggle of social movements. Many of the builders of the Citizen School were actors of the movements in unions, communities, and in the popular trenches of the struggle for redemocratization of the country. (Silva, 1999a, pp. 12-13 [our translation])

This political origin of the coordinators of the Citizen School is an important factor in the democratic component of the proposal. It constitutes one of the reasons that there is a clear political will for constructing participatory and democratic alternatives. In fact, although the SMED plays an essential role in coordinating the actions of the schools and pushing a democratic agenda, the principles that officially guide the SMED's actions were created collectively, with active participation of teachers, school administrators and staff, students, and parents in institutionalized forums of democratic decision-making. A quote from one of the documents of the SMED illuminates this idea of democracy:

To the Popular Administration, to democratize is to construct, with participation, a project of education that has social quality, is liberating and transformative, where the school is a laboratory of practice, exercise and achievement of rights, of formation of autonomous, critic and creative historic subjects, full citizens, identified with ethical values, willing to construct a social project that has as a center of attention the practice of justice, of freedom, of respect and fraternal relationship among men and women and a harmonic relationship with nature. (SMED 1999b [our translation])

In order to construct the principles that would guide the actions of the Citizen School, a democratic, deliberative and participatory forum was created — the Constituent Congress of Education. Through a long process of mobilization of the school communities (using the invaluable lessons learned in the mobilization for the OP) a Congress was constructed whose objective was to constitute the organizing principles that would guide the policy for schools in Porto Alegre. The whole process took 18 months and involved the following phases: 1. creating thematic groups in the schools; 2. holding regional meetings; 3. building the Constituent

Congress of Education; 4. elaborating the internal regulations for the schools. Forming the thematic axes was seen as crucial. The four broad thematic axes that were discussed were management of the school, curriculum, principles for living together, and evaluation.

The first phase was conducted at the local level with participants of every segment of the school. The second phase had the schools gathered by regions of the city. In this instance, each region formulated proposals to be submitted to the Congress. In the third phase, the Constituent Congress, the regions presented their proposals and through a process of participatory democratic deliberation, 700 delegates (the members of the SMED were not allowed to vote) constructed 98 principles (Silva, 1999a). These principles constituted the educational guidelines that were to be implemented in the practical life of the schools. The fourth phase constituted the creation (or recreation) of the schools' processes of internal regulation. It went on in a highly participatory way. This phase represented the materialization of the principles created in the Constituent Congress in the regulation of daily life in the schools.

The interconnections among these phases in the Citizen School means that there is no serious separation between the determination of the goals and the creation of the mechanisms to implement these goals. The process itself of generating the practical goals represents an innovative mechanism that has been able to produce transformations in the relationship of the schools with the community. The normative goals that guide practice in the schools are collectively created through a participatory process. Here, a government that creates channels for the determination of collective-constructed normative goals replaces the traditional relationship of distant government officials managing schools that they know little about.

From the Constituent Congress, the main normative goal for education was defined as a radical democratization in the municipal schools along three dimensions: democratization of management, democratization of access to the school, and democratization of access to knowledge.

For the Popular Administration, democratization of management is not simply a "technical" issue, but a political and ethical one as well. It involves the democratization of the relationships inside the schools, between the school and the community and between the school and the central administration (SMED, 1993, 1998). It requires the creation both of mechanisms that enable the full participation of teachers, staff, parents, and administrators in the construction of democratic decisions about education in Porto Alegre, and of a system of monitoring that guarantees that the collectively constructed decisions are being implemented. It is also grounded in a recognition of the centrality of the culture of the community as part of the educational and administrative spheres of the school and school system. In this sense the democratization of management involves a clear educational process, because both the state agencies and the communities learn together to construct new mechanisms that represent the will of the communities.

The decision-making and monitoring processes in education occur at various levels: the establishment of a larger policy for education in the city and a constant evaluation of it; deliberations about how to invest the money allocated by the central administration to the school; and decisions about creating mechanisms of inclusion that are overtly linked to the ongoing struggle against a society that marginalizes impoverished students and denies knowledge to them.

The task that the SMED had to engage in, hence, was complex, but the basic question was simple: "How [do we] develop a transformative and democratic project inside a state apparatus that has a logic that goes in the opposite direction of democracy and transformation?" (Azevedo, 1998, p. 309 [our translation]). In order to implement the principle of democratization of management in the educational system of Porto Alegre, the SMED and the Popular Administration created several mechanisms designed to achieve this goal. The following section examines these mechanisms.

The Institutional Configuration of the Project

As we mentioned in the introduction, the Citizen School is an ongoing project, with a complex institutional structure, one that is constantly being evaluated. In this section, we describe three major mechanisms that provide the essence of the Citizen School. These mechanisms are the ones that guarantee empowered community involvement, participatory deliberation, and democratic decision-making. The three mechanisms are the Municipal Congress of Education, the Educational Configuration of the Schools, and the School Council. In the end of this section, we present two other measures that were designed to enhance the participation of teachers in the Citizen School.

The Municipal Congress of Education

Congress of Education was developed by the Popular Administration to guarantee that even the centralized action that originates in the SMED is itself based on democratic decision-making. One of the central aims of the SMED is to guarantee that the decentralized local School Councils operate to achieve the larger goals for the education of the city, but with due recognition that these larger goals were themselves forged through a democratic process. The Popular Administration wants to avoid a common practice in Brazil, where power is devolved to local units but these are held accountable by criteria not based on democratic decisions. The Congress of Education guarantees that the centralized state agency acts in conformity and implements the collective will of the city in terms of education.

The Congress of Education is a relatively new mechanism. The first one was held in 1995. The second one took place in December of 1999. The selection and composition of the delegates is highly democratic, with individual representatives of every segment of the school, members of the School Councils, members of the

Municipal Council of Education, and representatives of educational institutions and unions related with education.

For the Second Congress of Education, three theses were created in the democratic preparatory meetings, with full participation of the school communities. These theses reflect the three priorities for education in Porto Alegre we described above: democratization of management, democratization of access to the school, and democratization of access to knowledge. In the theses, the achievements of the Citizen School are listed and a list of new proposals to enhance the project is presented. In the Congress these theses are discussed and voted on. The final decision represents the policy for the municipal schools for the next four years.

The New School Configuration

The first transformation involved one of the most pressing issues facing schooling throughout Brazil — the terrible exclusion of students. It was aimed at abolishing the existing yearly-long grade structure. Instead, it established schools that had 3 “cycles.” In the municipal elementary schools of Porto Alegre, there are three cycles, each one 3 years long, and thus totaling 9 years of education. The establishment of such cycles is a conscious attempt to eliminate the mechanisms in schools that perpetuate exclusion, failure, and dropouts. In the cycle plan, students progress from one year to another within one cycle; the notion of “failure” is eliminated. In the traditional school, the very idea of failure creates a situation where the student is the one to blame for her or his problems. The responsibilities of the school itself are marginalized in such policies. Yet the SMED understood that the elimination of mechanisms of exclusion was not enough. Because of this, the Citizen School created several mechanisms that guaranteed the inclusion of students. It established “progression groups” where students who come from other school systems (the state, for example) and have experienced multiple failures are given more close attention so that they are ultimately integrated in the cycle. The policies include a learning laboratory, a space where students with special needs are helped, but also a place where teachers conduct research in order to improve the quality of the regular classes. Each of these has proven crucial to the Citizen Schools’ success and each has engendered a different and more active vision of the teacher. But among all of the changes, it is the integration within the Citizen School of a new conception of knowledge that is perhaps the most important, since cycles must teach something that does not itself cause exclusion.

Transforming “Official” Knowledge

Curriculum transformation is a crucial part of Porto Alegre’s project to build “thick democracy.” It is important to say that this dimension is not limited to access to traditional knowledge. What is being constructed is a new epistemological understanding about what counts as knowledge as well. It is not based on a mere

incorporation of new knowledge within the margins of an intact “core of humankind’s wisdom,” but a radical transformation. It is a conception of education that challenges what Peter McLaren (1995) calls “conservative multiculturalism” and “left-liberal multiculturalism.” Conservative multiculturalism “uses the term ‘diversity’ to cover up the ideology of assimilation that undergirds its position” (McLaren, 1995, p. 49). Such a view basically adds some “flavor” of oppressed cultures to the intact core of knowledge, a core that is naturalized. Although it criticizes this conservative view, left-liberal multiculturalism has a “tendency to ignore difference as a social and historical construction that is constitutive of the power to represent meanings” (McLaren, 1995, p. 52). In opposition to both of these positions, the Citizen School project goes beyond the mere episodic mentioning of race, class, gender, and sexual oppression. It includes these themes as an essential part of the process of construction of knowledge.

In the Citizen School, the notion of “core” and “periphery” in knowledge is made problematic. The starting point for the construction of curricular knowledge is the culture(s) of the communities themselves, not only in terms of content but in perspective as well. The whole educational process is aimed at inverting previous priorities and instead serving the historically oppressed and excluded groups. Education is not about what Paulo Freire called “banking,” about filling students with the traditional content of the school, especially since it is clear that what traditionally counted as “official knowledge” (Apple, 2000) largely functioned to reinforce the idea of inferiority of the culture of these oppressed communities.

The starting point for this new process of knowledge construction is the idea of “thematic complexes.” Through action research (that the teachers do in the communities where they work, involving students, parents, and the whole community), the main themes from the specific community are listed. Then the most significant ones are constructed in the thematic complex that will guide the action of the classroom, in an interdisciplinary form, during a period of time. The traditional rigid disciplinary structure is broken and general interdisciplinary areas are created. These areas of study are given the names of social expression, biological, chemical and physical sciences, socio-historic, and logic-mathematical.

To give a concrete example of how this works, one of the schools organized its thematic complex in the socio-historic area in order to examine questions directly linked to the interests and problems of the community. At the center of the complex was the issue of the community’s standard of living. Three sub-themes were listed: rural exodus, social organization, and property. In the rural exodus sub-themes, the issues reflected the origin of the community — living now in a favela, but originally from the rural areas. This is a common story in the favelas where people who had nothing in the rural areas came to the cities only to find more exclusion. In these sub-themes, the issues discussed were migration movements, overpopulation of the cities, an “unqualified” working force, and marginalization. In the sub-theme social organization, the issues are distributed in terms of temporal, political, spatial and

socio-cultural relations. The issues, again, represent important questions in the organization of the community: the excessive and uncritical pragmatism of some in the associations, the connections with the neighborhood associations and the OP, and cultural issues such as religiosity, body expression, African origins, dance groups, and “samba schools.” In the third sub-theme — property — the issues were literally linked to the situation of the families in the favela, living in illegal lots with no title, having to cope with the lack of infrastructure, and at the same time fighting for their rights as citizens.

This example shows the real transformation that is occurring in the curriculum of the schools in Porto Alegre. The students are not studying history or social and cultural studies through books that never address the real problems and interests they have. Through the thematic complexes, the students learn history by beginning with the historical experience of their families. They study important social and cultural content by focusing on and valorizing their own cultural manifestations. A real shift is occurring because the focus is not on the “core/official” knowledge organized around dominant class and race visions of the world, but on the real problems and interests of the students and the community. It is important to note that these students will ultimately still learn the history of Brazil and the world, “high” culture, etc., but this will be seen through different lenses. Their culture will not be forgotten in order for them to learn high-status culture. Rather, by understanding their situation and their culture and valuing it, these students will be able to simultaneously learn and will have the chance to transform their situation of exclusion. By studying the problems (rural exodus, living in illegal lots, etc.) and not stopping there, but studying the strengths of self-organization (in the OP, in neighborhood associations, in cultural activities and groups), the Citizen School helps to construct alternatives for the communities living in terrible conditions.

We also can see in this example that the historic silence about race in Brazil is being challenged. Bringing the African origins of the music (Samba), and the religion (Candomblé), and openly discussing racist practices in Brazil, in the process of constructing critical knowledge teachers and students are learning that the silences about oppression only help the reproduction of exclusion and racism. Thus, the Citizen School has embarked on a dual path. It has recognized the necessity of creating empowered channels where people can speak openly, but it also knows that at the same time one must unveil the meanings behind these voices, question their hidden presuppositions, and construct new knowledge. Beginning from the insights of the community, it is necessary not to stop there, but rather to construct knowledge that fights discrimination, racism, and exclusion. This experience overcomes the limited forms of multiculturalism we discussed above. Not only does it incorporate elements of “ethnic information,” but it also aims at constructing a new form of knowledge by shifting the center of discussion.

This shift of what is considered the core or the center of knowledge should affect not only the pedagogical conception that guides the daily life in the

classrooms. It should also transform how the school itself functions as a whole. One of the major achievements of the Citizen School is the fact that this conception of knowledge now is spreading throughout the entire school system. The project not only serves the “excluded” by generating a different formal education to students, but also by creating an innovative structure that makes it possible for the community of those who have historically been excluded to regain their dignity (both material and symbolic). In the following section, we examine another central instance of these mechanisms — the School Council — that complements the Constituent Congress and the Congress of Education.

School Councils

School Councils are the most central part of the democratization of the decision-making process in education in Porto Alegre and are the product of the political will of the Popular Administration and of a number of social movements involved with education in the city. They are composed of teachers, school staff, parents, students, and one member of the administration.

Each School Council has 50% of the seats for teachers and staff and 50% for parents and students. One seat is guaranteed to the administration of the school, usually the principal (who is elected by all members of the school), something to which we shall return shortly.

The rules concerning parents and students are strikingly democratic. Students who are 12 years old or more and parents or legal guardians of students who are less than 16 years old can vote and be elected. When the number of parents or students cannot be reached, because of these legal conditions, more students or parents (depending on the specific case) are added until the percentage of 50% for the parents/students segment is reached.

The task of the School Councils is to deliberate about the global projects for the school, the basic principles of administration, and the allocation of economic resources, and also to monitor the implementation of these decisions. The principal and her/his team are responsible for the implementation of the policies defined by the School Council.

In terms of resources, it is important to say that, before the Popular Administration took office, there was a practice (common throughout in Brazil) of centralized budgeting. Every expense (even small daily ones) had to be sent to the central administration before it was approved and then the money was sent to the school, or a central agency would purchase the necessary product or service. With such a structure, School Councils had their hands tied and possessed no autonomy at all. The SMED changed this structure and established a new policy of making the resources allocated to each school available every three months. This measure instituted financial autonomy for the schools, and allowed schools to manage their expenditures according to the goals and priorities established by the School Council. At the same time, such autonomy gives parents, students, teachers, and

staff present in the council a notion of social responsibility in administering public money. It also teaches them to prioritize their spending with solidarity in mind (SMED, 1999b).

Decisions about the curriculum are also part of the council's deliberations. The inclusion of parents, students, support staff, and teachers in this process is one of the most innovative aspects of the model. Because the school has relative autonomy (decisions of the Congress of Education must be implemented in the schools, but these are general guidelines that are not content-specific), this opens up the boundaries for "thick" democracy.

It is important to realize that participation in the School Council demands a certain level of technical knowledge. Because of this, in order to enhance the participation of parents the SMED has been promoting Municipal Meetings of the School Councils (six, so far). This is a space where parents, students, teachers and staff acquire the tools and construct the necessary knowledge to administer the schools. It also generates an arena where the individual councils meet and share their knowledge and their doubts, allowing for a larger perspective beyond a corporatist or a "localist" view. Furthermore, the SMED has a permanent program of "formation" (continuing education of all the participants) inside the schools. This provides an additional space for the education of the councilors. Finally, in order to make participation truly substantive, the SMED has been stimulating the connections between councils and local associations or unions. This gives the councilors more representativeness. In short, the process of education is not only happening inside the classrooms of the schools, but in every instance of the school that involves democratic participation.

Although the School Council is a remarkably democratic institution, there is another structure that guarantees representativeness. In the schools of Porto Alegre, the whole school community elects the principal by direct vote. Thus, the one responsible for the implementation of the decisions of the School Council is her/himself elected, based on the program that she or he articulates. This enhances administrative legitimacy in the community. The principal, hence, is not someone who represents the interests of the central administration inside the School Councils, but someone with a majority of supporters inside that particular educational community. But the responsibility of the community does not stop with the election; through the School Council, the school community also monitors the activities of the principal and holds her/him accountable.

The process of direct election of principals by the whole educational community seems to produce a considerable level of mobilization. In the 1998 elections for principals, data from the Popular Administration indicate that almost 30,000 people voted. Once again, this provides an important part of the democratic learning of the communities, especially because the very process provokes a good deal of debate about the varying proposals for managing the school. The direct election of the one responsible to implement the directives created by the School Council, and a School

Council that is elected directly by the school community, together represent a pedagogic mechanism that aims at both generating and teaching the principles of democratic management at the local level of the school.

Enhancing Teachers' Participation

So far we have discussed the democratization of school governance and the processes by which community members learn to govern their institutions. Yet, in such changed circumstances, teachers themselves may need to learn new roles, dispositions, and skills as well. In order to ensure that the teachers could participate knowledgeably in the project, the Popular Administration and the SMED also implemented a process of ongoing education on the job. At the same time, if it was asking teachers to engage in such educational activities, it also knew that it had to institute a policy of better salaries. Without the latter, the former would fail since in many ways teachers have become part of the "new poor" in Brazil as the buying power of public salaries has declined along with working conditions.

In terms of ongoing teacher education, every year the SMED promotes two seminars dealing with themes closely linked with the problems of the schools. During these seminars, all classes are suspended to encourage the teachers to participate. One of the seminars occurs in March, and involves Brazilian researchers, and the other is held in July and has an international character. The idea is to bring in the best progressive researchers in education to discuss important issues with the teachers. The International Seminar was held for the sixth time this past year. The measure of its quality is that it not only attracted large numbers of teachers from the municipal schools (municipal teachers have guaranteed places), but also teachers from the private and state systems, and professors and researchers from various regions of the country. Such success has led the SMED to hold the seminars twice — back to back. Even with such a plan, which doubled the seminars' capacity, they still cannot accommodate all the people interested in attending them. These seminars allow municipal teachers to have contact with national and international "state-of-the-art" progressive and politically engaged educational research, something that is not common at all in Brazil. To counter this, continuous education of the teachers in terms of educational theory and research is part of the policy in Porto Alegre. Besides the seminars, as part of this strategy the SMED continually promotes educational meetings, 10 per year, in every school, so teachers have a space to learn from their mistakes and successes and to discuss pedagogical issues connected to the reality of the school.

As we mentioned above, another aspect that enhances the willingness of teachers to engage in such educational activity is the new salary policy. Teachers in public schools in Brazil have been suffering a tremendous diminution of their salary. In the state schools, teachers beginning their career earn less than \$150 (U.S.) per month. The Popular Administration knew that this was a crucial point.

If teachers are literally struggling to survive, and if their economic situation is not taken seriously, how can they be involved in a process of participation and transformation that demands more from them as professionals and promotes discussions of injustice in their classrooms? Today the salary in the municipal schools is much higher than state teachers but still lower than private school teachers. The initial monthly salary for a teacher with a degree is approximately \$325 (U.S.). This is certainly still very low, but it is at least two times what a state teacher earns. While the teachers union is engaged in a constant and active movement to reach better agreements, and although there has been hesitancy among some teachers to embrace all of the aspects of the SMED's project, there can be no doubt that both the salary and educational initiatives taken by the SMED have led to a good deal of support of its programs. Without these two measures as pre-conditions, the overall effectiveness of the mechanisms described in this section would be seriously compromised.

Judging Success

Up to this point, our focus has been on the processes and mechanisms that have been put in place in Porto Alegre. Yet, a final question remains. Are the mechanisms created capable of realizing the goals? Here we can only offer some tentative conclusions, since the reforms in Porto Alegre are ongoing and still "in formation." Obviously, we have already offered some elements of an evaluation throughout this article. The Citizen School, through the collective creation of goals and mechanisms that generate active involvement of the communities, so far seems to be a genuinely transformative experience. The Citizen School has broken with the separation between the ones who "know" and will "educate" (the administration) and the ones who "don't know" and need to be "educated." A new form of thinking not only about education, but also about the whole society, seems to be in gestation. Here the project reflects Freire's (himself a member of the Workers Party) dictum that "the Workers' Party cannot be the educator that already knows everything, that already has an unquestionable truth, in relation with an incompetent popular mass needing to be rescued and saved" (Freire, 1988, p. 17).

The epistemological rupture that plays such a major role in the experiment also allows for optimism. The challenge to what counts as knowledge, to what counts as core and periphery, represents the essence of the educational proposal. Instead of creating isolated multicultural programs or content that have little efficacy in the context of a largely dominant whole structure, the Popular Administration has been creating a structure, with popular participation, where the question of diversity of cultures has space to flourish. The Citizen School created spaces where multicultural practices are organically integrated, not only added artificially to a bureaucratically determined structure that is averse to "difference." To construct a powerful and democratic set of multicultural experiences, the whole institutional structure had to

be changed. An important example is the fact that the SMED has been acting to create a context where the problems of racism can not only surface but can be treated seriously. At the same time, the SMED is acting proactively by establishing advisory boards that can quickly discuss with the community and incorporate new agendas in the curriculum and in the relationship of the school with the community. This is enhanced by the establishment of and participation by popular organizations that are organized around the powerful issues of race, gender, and sexuality. "Popular" knowledge is valorized and considered essential to the educational and democratic quality of the project.

This vision of "thick" democracy is crucial. As we argued earlier, the project of the Citizen School has also radically challenged the roles of the traditional school. In these transformed schools, all the segments of the educational community collectively construct the principles that guide their daily action. But the project not only constructs this as a goal; it also consciously takes up the task of creating concrete participatory mechanisms to implement these goals. In the process, a new conception of respect for the diversity of cultures is generated. Challenging the elitist belief that impoverished people from poor neighborhoods or slums cannot participate because they are "ignorant," the Citizen School inverts this logic, placing the ones who live the problems at the center as the people in a privileged position to construct alternatives.

In this sense, the Citizen School advances in relation to the "mainstream" notion of multiculturalism. In fact, "multiculturalism is too easily depoliticized" (Pagenhart, 1994, p. 178). It is exactly this depoliticization that the Popular Administration wants to avoid. The project seems to perfectly fit what Henry Giroux (1995) calls an "insurgent multiculturalism," one where "all participants play a formative role in crucial decisions about what is taught, who is hired, and how the school can become a laboratory for learning that nurtures critical citizenship and civic courage" (pp. 340-341).

A major difference here is the fact that the objectives are not simply the formulations of a team of experts in the SMED, rather, they are a democratic and collective construction, with the participation of all the segments involved in education (including especially those people historically excluded from nearly all of the processes). The very fact that what is being evaluated are normative goals that were not created by bureaucrats, but ones that are the fruit of participatory collective creation, means that the expectations are already high in terms of participation and democracy. As we showed, taken in their entirety, the participatory mechanisms created as part of the whole design for reform by the Popular Administration are powerful ways of implementing the goal of democratization of decision-making and of implementing and monitoring processes in the schools and in the educational life of the city.

For example, the Congress of Education is aimed at guaranteeing that even the centralized action that originates in the SMED is itself based on democratic

decision-making. The SMED clearly wants the decentralized local School Councils to achieve the larger goals for the education of the city; but these larger goals were themselves forged through a democratic process. In this sense, what the Popular Administration is avoiding is a common practice in Brazil and in many other countries where power is devolved to local units but these are held accountable by criteria not based on democratic decisions. The Congress of Education just as clearly tries to ensure that the centralized state agency will act in conformity to the collective will of the citizenry in terms of education. It also guarantees that when the centralized agents assess schools, they do it based on collectively constructed criteria.

It is important, though, to emphasize that the SMED is conscious that “participation does not occur magically” (Silva, 1999a). In this sense, they seem to have recognized Claus Offe’s (1995) observation that the functional superiority of a new model of participation does not by itself solve all the problems involved in major democratic reforms (pp. 125-126). Accordingly, the SMED understood that participation is a process that had to be constructed. Therefore, it consciously launched a program of providing advice and education so that people could participate knowledgeably in the OP, in the School Councils, and elsewhere. Thus, the transfer of technical knowledge has been an important part of the process. But perhaps the most significant element in the education of the formerly excluded participants has been the very openness of the process that permits constant evaluation and transformation of the mechanisms themselves. This environment of deliberation transforms the participants into co-constructors of the mechanisms and the rules. It re-constitutes them as subjects, as historical actors. Participants are not only implementing rules, they are part of an historical experiment of reconstructing the structure of the municipal state.

This can be seen in the fact that the school community gets to decide the allocation of economic resources. The schools are granted autonomy in the management of their share. This has had a significant impact on the reality of the schools themselves. Of just as much import, unlike many other parts of Brazil where decentralization has actually meant a decline in real resources, the decentralization that has occurred in Porto Alegre has not been accompanied by an allocation of fewer resources. This process has produced a real empowerment of the School Councils and not — as in the majority of the cases in the rest of the country — a mere formal transfer of responsibility from the centralized agencies to the local units, a transfer whose ultimate effect has all too often simply meant that local units have been forced to cut needed programs. Such decentralization is usually merely part of the legitimacy strategies of the regional or national state as the state exports the fiscal crisis downward (Apple, 1995, 2000).

We still need to ask, however, whether such participatory processes and the changed curricula have had real and substantial effects on issues such as exclusion in schools. While data are limited, they do seem to show significant improvement in terms of quality. Since it took office in 1989, the Popular Administration has

increased the number of schools by more than 220%. The number of students enrolled has risen from 24,332 in 1989 to more than 50,000 in 1999. But without any doubt, the success of the Citizen School can be measured by the sharp decrease in the number of student dropouts. In 1989, when it took office, the percentage of dropouts (and remember that we are talking about elementary schools) was a frightening figure of nearly 10%. The consequences of this for already disadvantaged and excluded children were truly horrible. Through the Citizen School's emphasis on parental and student involvement, curriculum transformation, teacher education, and other similar mechanisms, the SMED reduced this dropout rate to 0.97% in 1998. This is clearly one of the most important educational achievements of the project. If the children stay in school, then clearly the new curricular proposals can actually affect them (SMED, 1999a).

Another telling fact is the virtual nonexistence of vandalism against the majority of the municipal schools. School vandalism used to be a serious problem in public schools (and still is in the state schools). The fact that the community actively participates in the governance of the schools and uses them as a space for the community (for sports, cultural activities, etc.) creates a sense of responsibility and enhances the notion that public goods are the property of all. That many of the new schools are fruits of the OP makes the school theirs as well.

Potential Problems

While we have been very positive in our evaluation of the project here, we do not want to be romantic. Although the mechanisms and the curriculum constructed by the Citizen School have a good deal of potential to construct an education that helps to include the historically excluded, there are a number of potential problems that need to be carefully examined.

One potential issue is the possibility of a recreation of hierarchies within the cycles. The cycles represent a very thoughtful innovation. They allow students to stay in school, thereby combating the serious problem of dropouts. The overall structure also allows a more integrated construction of knowledge, which valorizes the knowledge that the students bring from their community. Yet we need to step back and ask whether parts of this structure could ultimately lead to the production of new hierarchies of students within the cycle. Even though they are seen as temporary, the progression groups have the risk of creating a "second class" group of students.

Another potential problem of the Citizen School project is related to the issue of multiculturalism. A critical multicultural perspective that considers race, gender and sexuality, along with class, while generative, could also potentially produce some tensions. The Workers Party has historically had its roots in a Marxist understanding of the primacy of class. Parts of the Marxist tradition have been accused (correctly, we think, in many cases) of choosing class as not just the central, but often only, category of analysis, thus subordinating other forms of oppression

to class (See Apple 1988; Apple, 2003; Apple & Weis, 1983). A conception based on steps, where fighting class oppression is the most important step and the other oppressions are to be fought “later on,” can be problematic, since in the real world in very many instances there is no way of fighting one set of oppressive relations without fighting them all. Thus, in the material produced by the Popular Administration, there are several explicit references to class oppression — and rightly so; but there are fewer references to racial oppression, a major element within Brazilian society, for example. Because of the documents’ relative silence on race, this could signal that even progressive oriented state agencies can still be dominated by those who believe that successfully struggling around class issues alone will solve all the problems of oppression. This ignores the specificities of racial oppression, ones that are not totally reducible to class (see Dyer, 1997; Fine, Weis, Powell & Wong, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1994).

This is made more important due to the racial specificities of this city and this region. In this ‘whitest’ of Brazil’s regions, the “whiteness” of school practices has to be discussed and challenged if transformation is to happen. Although the documents analyzed seem to show that this process is one that is being slowly constructed in the schools of Porto Alegre, further research, preferably ethnographic, about the politics of whiteness (Apple, 2001a; Dyer, 1997) would be necessary to evaluate this construction.

Furthermore, in terms of gender and sexuality, in a region of Brazil where male virility and specific forms of masculinity are stressed because of their association with the traditional “gaúcho” (the Brazilian “cowboy”), the consequences to issues of traditional male/female roles and sexual orientation should be obvious (see Connell, 1995). Again there is not enough evidence in the material examined to evaluate the project in this area.

It is to the SMED’s credit that these potential problems are not unrecognized. As we demonstrated, there is some evidence that the practical experiments of the Citizen School are incorporating race issues into their thematic complexes. In addition, the various mechanisms of continuous education of teachers in the Citizen Schools do provide sites where explicit discussions of race, gender, and sexuality are brought up, thereby creating theoretical spaces for the construction of new practices that challenge the silences about these themes. These movements represent positive signs, in the sense that the members of the school communities are using the open channels to problematize the issues of daily life, issues which certainly include moments of prejudice and racism. It is also true that the Popular Administration has several advisory boards (with both budget and structure, and the power to act) that have the explicit task of bringing up the themes of gender, race, sexuality, and religiosity.

Hence, although the potential problems should not be ruled out, there are reasons to believe that there are open spaces for popular organizations, such as the growing activist movement among Afro-Brazilians, women’s social movements,

and gay and lesbian organizations to operate and demand from the state agencies the inclusion of issues that we believe should be part of the agenda of every citizen who fights oppression.

Of equal significance, however, is another possible problem for the project. This is the possibility that participants who have historically had more power will dominate the School Councils and the other mechanisms of popular participation. This is a serious issue that should not be pushed into the background, given the experiences of such experiments elsewhere. However, we think that the case of Porto Alegre has some specific attributes that can lessen the probability that this will occur. First, the municipal schools are all situated in the most impoverished areas of Porto Alegre, usually in shantytowns. Therefore, the classical cases of middle-class people dominating the discussions (see McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999) are avoided because, as a rule, there are no middle-class people in the regions where the schools are situated. Two recent studies of the OP in Porto Alegre offer some indirect evidence (Abbers, 1998; Santos, 1998) and one study offers direct empirical evidence (Baioocchi, 1999) that shows that there is no domination of powerful groups in the deliberative processes. In the OP, there is gender parity among the participants of the meetings and the proportion of "less educated" people corresponds to the city average (Baioocchi, 1999, p. 7). While it is true that there are more men and educated people speaking at the meetings, the research has also shown that the main factor is the number of years of participation. There is a learning curve that encourages people with more years of participation to speak. In fact "participation over time seems to increase participation parity" (Baioocchi, 1999, p. 10). This is a very encouraging conclusion, which leads us to be optimistic about the process, especially given its conscious pedagogic aims.

This said, no data about the composition of the various mechanisms of the Citizen School itself are yet available and therefore we cannot evaluate whether this potential problem has surfaced in the specifically school-related parts of the experiment of Porto Alegre. There are no data about the race of the participants, or whether teachers — because of their more technical "insiders' knowledge" — play more dominant roles in the various forums and councils. This clearly is worth further research.

One final issue needs to be mentioned. The very fact that the entire project is based on an active engagement of the citizenry could have serious consequences in terms of sustainability. Because the city administration is using citizen participation in all sites where a process of policy decision-making is necessary, the requirement for active engagement of the members of the communities is multiplying. There are dozens of sites where an active and involved citizen or activist is asked to contribute with her/his perspective. This could generate an "overload" for those who are already integrated into other sites of deliberation. How many hours can a working-class person, with two or three jobs necessary to feed her/his family, allocate to deliberative instances? Can the levels of active engagement with the participatory

institutions be maintained over the time? Our own involvement in political/educational work of this type, and the intense time commitments this requires, leads us to worry about whether such involvement can be maintained.

Yet, once again, our worries are lessened by the fact that the SMED seems to be trying to deal with these potential problems proactively. We are witnessing an increase, not a decrease, in participation in the democratic mechanisms that have been put in place by the Popular Administration. The community agents of the city administration are constantly stimulating the involvement of individuals and neighborhood associations. Because the idea of participation is not isolated in the action of one secretariat, but is something incorporated in the daily practices of the city administration as a whole, we can see an integrated effort to generate active involvement of the communities in the definitions of the directions that the city will chose to go. If it is true that this could demand too much from communities accustomed to being the recipients of policies, and could overload activists already involved in the existing sites of decision making, it is also true that the city administration has an aggressive policy of actively involving and educating new participants. This policy has been more than a little successful so far. The visible results of participation — translated in the extremely lower dropout rate and better education for communities' children, as in the case of School Councils — are the best guarantees both of maintainability and of the creation of new generations of participants.

Finally, as an ongoing project, the Citizen School is being constantly evaluated in order to construct new mechanisms and revise the existing ones to create a democratic structure of decision-making, implementation, and monitoring for education in Porto Alegre. There are reasons to believe that the SMED and the organized communities are learning from their mistakes and successes. The constant evaluation of the reforms and their improvement are signs that this learning process is having effects on daily policy and practice.

Yet, this should not make us overly sanguine. It is important to point out that because of the electoral success of the Popular Administration — currently in its fourth term — the previously hegemonic conservative forces have responded with renewed vigor. There has been a major reorganization of the Center-Right forces in the city to challenge the policies of the Workers Party. So far, these attempts have been unsuccessful. Up to this point, the Left government of Porto Alegre has been able to stimulate independent social movements and to create real channels for these movements to operate. The fact that in 1986 Porto Alegre had 180 neighborhood associations and in 1998 this number had increased to 540 suggests that it will not be easy for conservative forces to regain their dominance (Baicocchi, 1999). Nevertheless, one should not minimize the strength of the possible Center-Right coalitions that are being formed to defeat the Popular Administration and its comprehensive program of reforms. As we have seen repeatedly in other contexts, Rightist movements have been able to successfully mobilize around issues of racial

backlash, economic worries, and anti-government sentiment (Apple, 1996, 2001a). It remains to be seen whether such mobilizations will have any marked effect in Porto Alegre.

Conclusion

In this article, we have sought to situate the processes of educational policy and reform into their larger socio-political context. We have described the ways in which a set of policies has had what seem to be extensive and long lasting effects because they are coherently linked to larger dynamics of social transformation and to a coherent set of policies and practices that aim to change the mechanisms of the state and the rules of participation in the formation of state policies. All of this has crucial implications for how we might think about the politics of education policy and its dialectical role in social transformation (see Apple, 2003).

The Citizen School has been important not only as a way of giving an impoverished population a quality education that will enable them to have better chances in the paid labor market and at the same time operate as empowered citizens, but also because it has generated structured forms of “educating” the communities both for organizing around and discussing their problems and for acting on their own behalf through the channels of participation and deliberation. In the process, it has “educated” the state agencies as well. The OP, the Municipal Congress of Education, the New Educational Configuration of the Schools, and the School Councils have — together — helped to create the beginnings of a new reality for the excluded. They have forged new leadership, brought about the active engagement of the communities with their own situations, and led to much more active participation in the construction of solutions to these problems.

The Citizen School is a process that seems to sustain itself. Parents — many of whom have begun to develop new abilities from their engagement with the OP — are encouraged to participate and acquire the skills and values necessary to be active members of these decision-making structures by seeing concrete results. Students, by being involved in these new deliberative institutions and by being formed in a different educational environment that stimulates an active subject with a sense of collective interests — in contrast with the traditional model that stimulated “the best” individuals to overcome their poverty and succeed by themselves — will be much better prepared participants in the deliberative structures in the future.

The Citizen School project not only transforms the interior of classrooms, constructing a new epistemology oriented to the excluded groups, but also promotes — in its concrete practices — a new notion of the state that fulfills its public obligation of serving all citizens. It builds democratic and open channels that enable empowered participation and consequential deliberation of all the segments of the school community. Wisely, these channels are kept open by the active monitoring

of the citizenry. This can potentially create spaces where respect for difference is combined with the right to equality, a balance that is difficult but important to achieve. In spite of the potential problems we discussed above, we are optimistic about the lasting impact of the project's democratizing initiatives and its construction of a more diverse and inclusive education.

There obviously are many implications of what we have said here for the education of teachers for schools that are deeply committed to social justice. It is clear that a different set of values, dispositions, and skills are necessary and are being produced here. Among these are commitments to a critical understanding of who benefits from the ways our societies are organized now, to communities (and especially to oppressed ones), to negotiation, to using popular knowledge both as a stepping stone to something else but also important in its own right, walking the fine line between developing curricula locally while at the same time taking seriously the democratically arrived at goals of the larger system, and having a willingness to have one's practice subjected to critical scrutiny by the community. All of these and more require a process of ongoing and substantive reflection and constant teaching of and by teachers.

By itself, the Citizen School has been very successful in including an entire population that, if it were not for this project, would be out of the schools and even further excluded in an already actively excluding society. But the larger educative aspect of the Citizen School — empowering impoverished communities where they are situated and transforming both the schools and what counts as "official knowledge" there — is also of considerable importance. Together with the OP (with its own cumulative effects), they represent new alternatives in the creation of an active citizenry — one that learns from its own experiences and culture — not just for now, but also for future generations. For these very reasons, we believe that the experiences of Porto Alegre have considerable import not only for Brazil, but for all of us who are deeply concerned about the effects of the neo-liberal and neo-conservative restructuring of education and of the public sphere in general. There is much to learn from the successful struggles there.

Note

A longer version of this article appears in Michael W. Apple (2003). *The State and the Politics of Knowledge*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

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