

DEMOCRATIZATION AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: TWO CASES IN LATIN AMERICA

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Review Article

ABSTRACT

This paper's aim is to study the cultural perceptions of citizenship present in Brazil and Argentina by looking at the succession of democratic educational reforms that took place in both countries since the return of democracy and the first decades of the XXI century. In addition, the study tests the insights proposed Guillermo O'Donnell, who perceived that while Argentines had an egalitarian perception of citizenship that sometimes resulted in anomic social relations, Brazilians had a more hierarchical conception that excluded significant majorities from the polity. The study is based on the analysis of the models of school governance proposed in official documents (laws, decrees and ministerial resolutions), showing that there are various kinds of asymmetry with varying degrees of legitimacy in the two countries. This reveals different perceptions of citizenship in Brazil and Argentina and leads to a nuanced confirmation of O'Donnell's hypothesis.

Keywords: Democracy; education; citizenship; egalitarianism.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper's aim is to study the cultural perceptions of citizenship present in Brazil and Argentina by looking at the succession of democratic educational reforms that took place in both countries since the return of democracy and the first decades of the XXI century. The analysis of this sequence of reforms is relevant to the purpose of this paper because their principal aim was to form 'new citizens'; therefore, they bring out the different perceptions of citizenship present in each society. I have chosen the Argentinean and Brazilian cases since, as other studies on democratization processes show, the contrast between these two cases has an heuristic value, as it is useful to understand the evolution of democratic reforms in other countries in Latin America (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz, 2002).

The study is based on the analysis of official documents, like laws, decrees and ministerial resolutions. While I will contextualize recent reforms in the sequence that took place since the restoration of democracy in both countries, the focus is set on the first decades of the 21st century. This is a key period, because in this lapse there is a deepening of the democratic content of the reforms, with a growing differentiation between Argentina and Brazil. Among other things, there is a contrast in the forms of school governance proposed in both countries. This is a substantive difference, since the promotion of participatory forms of school governance was one of the cornerstones of the democratic educational reforms that took place in those years.

My analysis of the cultural perceptions of citizenship that underlie in these reforms is based on two seminal

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contributions. On the one hand, following Jelin (2003), I consider cultural citizenship as the set of explicit and implicit beliefs underlying the system of rights and obligations that define membership into the polity in a given time and place.¹ According to Jelin, current research has identified two prevailing cultural models of citizenship. One of these models is based on an 'ethic of equality', where emphasis lies in a strict correspondence between rights and duties, regardless of the particular situation of social subjects. The other model is based on an ethic of responsibility, where the emphasis lies on the concern of each member of the polity for the fate and wellbeing of others. Thus, in this perception, rights and their correspondent duties must be adapted to the particular situation of specific social actors in order for them to reach this wellbeing. Parting from this standpoint, I show how the contrasts between the forms of school governance proposed in Argentina and Brazil respond to these different perceptions of citizenship.

On the other hand, the comparison between Argentinean and Brazilian perceptions of citizenship is based on the observations made by Guillermo O'Donnell (1984) at the beginning of the democratic transition of both countries. O'Donnell noted that while Argentinean cultural perceptions of citizenship were characterized by a form of egalitarianism that tended to challenge social hierarchies even when they were based on legitimate norms, Brazilians accepted hierarchical differences even when the prerogatives demanded by those occupying the highest ranks transcended what the normative order consecrated as legitimate.² Based on these observations, O'Donnell's hypothesis was that while the democratization of Argentinean society required to establish respect for social hierarchies when they were based on a legitimate order, in the case of Brazil democratization required the reduction of the arbitrary asymmetries that excluded significant majorities from the polity. The analysis of school reforms that I will develop in the next pages will aim at contrasting O'Donnell's hypothesis with empirical evidence, looking at how the hierarchical or egalitarian dispositions in Brazil and Argentina connect to the underlying perceptions of citizenship in each country.

¹ *Cultural citizenship and the system of rights and duties that results from it, is not conceived as static or unhistorical, but is the temporary product of the continuing dispute precisely of the rights and duties that define citizenship (Van Gusteren, 1978; Lefort 1987:40).*

² *O'Donnell does not define egalitarianism in abstract or conceptual terms, for him it is mainly an attitude that may be discerned in specific day to day situations. It consists, essentially, in a predisposition to ignore social hierarchies or prerogatives to access certain resources or rights, even when they may be based in legal and legitimate social norms. In opposition, in Brazil, social hierarchies are culturally accepted, thus they prevail even when they are not based in legal principles.*

In order to achieve this goal, in the next section I provide a background of the educational reforms implemented, since the restoration of democracy, in Argentina and Brazil and I describe the forms of school governance instrumented during the first decades of the 21st century. Next, I look at how these reforms express different conceptions of hierarchy and egalitarianism and if these conceptions confirm or disprove O'Donnell's hypothesis. Finally, in the closing section, I consider how these forms of hierarchy or egalitarianism relate to the cultural models of citizenship presented by Jelin, and their connection to the way democratic educational reforms took place in both countries.

2. POLICIES OF EDUCATIONAL DEMOCRATIZATION IN ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL

Both in Argentina and Brazil, educational policies aimed to form 'new citizens' and promote democracy have usually included the implementation of collegiate forms of school government, like School Councils (Martinic, 2001; Lopez, 2007; Gorostiaga and Veira, 2012). In general terms, School Councils were conceived as collegiate bodies composed by principals, teachers, students, parents and other members of the local communities—especially leaders of neighborhood community organizations. School Councils had the primary function of intervening in administrative matters, strengthening the links between school and the local community and to make suggestions on the educational project of each school. By allowing members of the school community to participate in all these matters, School Councils were thought as instances where, at the same time, all members of the educational communities could exercise their right to participate and, through this practice, 'experience and learn' their role as citizens.

Although the implementation of collegiate forms of school government had antecedents in Brazil and Argentina,³ the promotion of School Councils became more systematic with the democratization policies applied as off the 1980s and 1990s and until initial decades of the 21st century. Along the years, the policies to promote collegiate forms of school government experienced variations on which we cannot dwell here.⁴ However, it is possible to

³ *For example, in Brazil an early experience were the programs for 'participatory governance' of schools in the state of Sao Paulo during the late 1970s (Cunha, 1988: 112) and in Argentina there had been proposals to create School Councils already in the foundational moments of the educational system in the early 20th century (Bertoni, 2001).*

⁴ *In Brazil, a foundational milestone in this process was the recognition of the principle of democratic management of public*

recognize an important turning point in the policies aimed to reform the models of school governance and the internal norms of conduct in school, which Argentina progressively applied as off the end of the 1990s and through the initial decades of the 21st century. As I will show, these changes, which implied a redefinition of the name, composition and function of School Councils (turning them into Convivial Councils), are particularly revealing of the different cultural perceptions of citizenship and hierarchy present in Argentina and Brazil.

Resolutions 41/95 and 62/97 sanctioned by the Argentinean Federal Council of Education (FCE) by the end of the 1990s introduced changes in the model of school government and internal rules that regulated intergenerational relations at school. Although these initiatives were not fully implemented at that time, they gained momentum and were deepened by the National Education Law enacted in 2006 and the subsequent resolutions sanctioned by the FCE (in particular Resolution 93/09). Instead of School Councils, these resolutions progressively introduced the concept of Convivial Councils.

In contrast to School Councils, which traditionally were integrated by teachers, principals, students, parents and other members of the local community, Convivial Councils were integrated only by principals, and a representative set of teachers and students elected by their peers. Differences extended also to the functions attributed to these models of school government. As mentioned, School Councils had the purpose of intervening in administrative

education in the Constitution of 1988, which was then incorporated into several state constitutions (Paro, 1996). A new democratization initiative was the Law of Guidelines and Bases for National Education in 1996 (Espinola, 2002; Lopez, 2005: 10), which was reinforced in 2004 with the National Program for Strengthening School Councils. Further initiatives to promote collegiate forms of school government were present in the National Education Plan of 2010 (Act 8053) and the National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education promoted in 2013. In Argentina, School Councils were initially promoted by the General Regulations for High Schools of 1989 and Resolution N° 4182 and the Promotional Materials to Create School Councils (a series of booklets called 'Let's Open the School') sanctioned by the State of Buenos Aires in 1988 (Gorostiaga, 2007: 8 --however, these initiatives were never fully implemented or thoroughly assumed by educational communities, see: Misuraca and Vazquez, 1989; Tiramonti, 1993). During the early 1990s policies promoting collegiate forms of school government lost momentum, and priority was given to decentralization programs oriented to improve administrative efficiency (Caballero Prieto, 1999; Lopez, 2005: 6; Gorostiaga, 2011), although certain initiatives promoting participatory forms of school governance subsisted in resolutions taken by the FCE at the end of the 1990s on which we comment later. During the first decades of the 21st century, and especially since the National Law of Education was sanctioned in 2006, there were very active policies promoting the participation of students in school government through student unions and Convivial Councils.

matters and the educational plans of each school. Instead, Convivial Councils' main function was to regulate student-teacher relations by establishing a School Convivial Agreement (a set of rules that laid down the rights and obligations for all members of the school community: students, teachers and principals alike) and then intervene in its application.

According to official documents, Convivial Councils should ensure a negotiated and flexible application of the norms contained in the School Convivial Agreement, adapting them to the situations and characteristics of the students to which they were applied. School Convivial Councils and the Convivial Agreements they had to sanction were meant to replace the traditional school order, which was considered too rigid as it was based on a strict discipline and exclusively governed by adults. The new way of managing internal school norms should promote the formation of new citizens, turn the school into a more 'inclusive' institution, avoiding dropouts and favoring students' involvement in the educational process, thus increasing academic achievement.

The mutation from School Councils to Convivial Councils revealed a concern that, strictly speaking, was present from the beginning of the process of educational democratization (Aguerrondo and Tadei, 1987), but that became more prominent as democratic institutions gained more stability and educational reforms were more thoroughly implemented. This responded to the perception that one of the main obstacles to the civic education of students lived in traditional disciplinary systems based in a 'culture of command and obedience' (Gvirtz and Palamidessi, 1998). This culture resulted in an imperative and autocratic exercise of adult rule. For those who designed the democratic educational reforms, this form of teacher-student relationship and the everyday management of school routines it implied expressed and reproduced an authoritarian order that did not result in the formation of new citizens, it also alienated students from the educational process and tended to exclude many students from the educational system producing a high number of dropouts. Convivial Councils were intended to change the way of defining and managing social relations in the school community and the way to establish school routines. The main purpose of these changes was to make participation in daily management of school norms conducive to the formation of new citizens that would understand themselves as bearers of rights and duties and not as mere subjects of adult rule. This redefinition of internal norms and the ways they were managed were thought to promote greater inclusion of students in the educational process and reduce the rate of dropouts.

Researches on the effects of these policies indicate that, at their inception, the implementation of Convivial Councils was affected by the persistence of traditional forms of institutional culture. For example, some case studies show how, many times, the old mechanisms of school governance subsisted in the concrete ways in which Convivial Councils functioned, where the will of principals and teachers prevailed with no real participation of students and their parents (Astiz, 2006 ; Gorostiaga, 2007: 9). In other cases, research revealed that School Convivial Agreements consisted, essentially, in a list of prohibitions and obligations for students and sanctions involving their breach, which resembled the traditional codes of school discipline (Dussel, 2005; Litichever, 2012).

However, with the gradual implementation of Convivial Councils these initial problems were superseded, but it became increasingly evident that the attempts to implement school rules in flexible and negotiated ways faced other types of problems. In many cases, teachers' efforts to implement school rules and their authority in a negotiated and consensual manner resulted in a breakdown of their role as the incarnation of the institutional norm (Sús, 2005; Mayer, 2013). Thus, their authority among students became less dependent on their institutional role and more contingent to their personal ability to negotiate their position among students. In many cases, teachers faced difficulties in maintaining the centrality of learning activities in the classroom (Miguez, 2015). This resulted in lesser levels of academic achievements, with no substantive reduction of school dropouts (UNICEF, 2011; Rivas, 2015). Therefore, the flexible form of authority and negotiated implementation of norms that was part of the Convivial Councils' policy hindered the fulfillment of another aspect of educational democratization that was also part of these policies. This was, namely, the access of students to quality education through their deeper involvement in the educational process and the reduction of school dropouts.

Different to Argentinean Convivial Councils' policy, educational democratization in Brazil gave priority to the involvement of the school community in the management of institutional resources and general educational programs, and did not emphasize their intervention in the implementation of internal norms and student-teacher relations. In this sense, the forms of school government implemented in Brazil did not promote egalitarian relationships between teachers and students or a flexible model of teacher authority embodied in a normative system based on consensus, negotiation and dialogue. Instead, reforms in Brazil focused on formalizing the existence of School

Councils, giving priority to the participation of parents and teachers in managing the school budget and personnel and to intervene in planning social, educational and pedagogical projects (Xavier, 1994; Aguiar 2009: 9). Thus, the essential role of School Councils in Brazil was to allow the intervention of different actors of the school community in institutional matters. The council's functions included the possibility to choose the school principal, in this way replacing a previous mechanism where they were appointed by the local political power which favored patronage systems that were especially prominent under military rule (Mendonca, 2001; Almeida, 2004: 120; Borges , 2004).

Some early cases where these reforms were more or less systematically applied were Porto Alegre, Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. In the latter case, a 1992 resolution gave the school community the right to select school principals through a process of assessment of their technical ability and aptitude for leadership. In addition, school communities were granted financial autonomy and the capacity to design their own educational programs (Gorostiaga, 2001; Lopez, 2005: 11). Similarly, the states of Porto Alegre and Sao Paulo implemented School Councils including principals, teachers and members of the school community such as parents and students. Some studies suggest that the implementation of School Councils had beneficial effects on the participation of the educational community in school governance. For example, in some cases, the implementation of School Councils led to a greater willingness of principals to meet the positions and claims of teachers, students and parents; among other things, accepting the existence of student unions and playing a mediating role in teacher strikes (Paro, 1996; see also Gvirtz and Minivelle, 2009). In other cases, the increased availability of resources driven by these policies allowed the strengthening of School Councils (Gandin and Apple, 2003).

However, other inquiries reveal certain difficulties. For example, some studies show that the proposed administrative decentralization could not be carried out given the poor conditions that affected many educational institutions (Guedes et al., 1997; Zibas, 1997; Gadotti, 1998). Other researches reveal that principals and teachers tended to dominate School Councils, while parents and students had little interest in becoming involved (Borges, 2004; Jaimovich, 2009; Gorostiaga, 2011). In this regard, School Councils many times did not go beyond a mere formal existence, since they did not turn into real participatory arenas (Burgos, 2014). Another difficulty was that School Councils tended to take on a managerial role. This restricted their functions to the

promotion of an efficient expenditure of institutional resources, with no real roles in the design of educational programs —a trend that was not fully overcome even with the policies aimed to strengthen School Councils implemented since 2004 (Dourado, 2007: 69; Aguiar, 2008, Paro, 2010). Finally, with regards to the election of school principals, this in itself did not seem to guarantee democratization since traditional practices continued to be present in the new institutional settings (Almeida, 2004: 121).

In sum, in Brazil, the new forms of school government were meant to involve the school community in the management of strategic institutional and economic resources. In this process, the biggest problem did not arise from an 'excessive' egalitarianism as in Argentina, but resulted from the survival of cultural traditions that promote asymmetries beyond what is established in formal rules. These trends suggest contrasts with the Argentine case which imply a nuanced confirmation of O'Donnell's hypothesis.

3. DISCUSSION: O'DONNELL'S HYPOTHESIS REVISITED

The analysis of democratic educational reforms in Argentina and Brazil shows that these reforms resulted in differing models of school government: School Councils in Brazil and Convivial Councils in Argentina. Although both models of school governance fostered the participation of the school community, they did not emphasize the same type of participation, nor had equivalent purposes.

In Brazil, participatory forms of school government were aimed towards institutional matters (resource management, educational projects, the election of principals, etc.). In this case, reforms focused primarily on balancing asymmetries between parents, teachers, principals and the provincial authorities of the educational system by attributing them equivalent power in assigning strategic institutional resources. The attempts to promote these forms of school government faced difficulties. Although democratic educational policies aimed to favor the participation in the school's administrative design by the school community, most of the time decisions were made exclusively by principals and teachers and the participation of students and parents often remained as 'dead letter'. Therefore, educational democratization reforms that prompted greater participation of the whole school community faced obstacles from the survival of cultural traditions that fostered the persistence of internal asymmetries.

In Argentina, collegiate forms of school governance were aimed to regulate internal norms and social

relations through a flexible exercise of authority and a negotiated and consensual implementation of rules. This form of authority and flexible implementation of norms had the purpose of promoting a balanced relationship between students, teachers and principals. The main goal was to make participation in daily management of school norms instrumental in the formation of new citizens that would understand themselves as bearers of rights and duties and turn the school into a more inclusive institution. However, these forms of school government did not give a prominent space to parents and other members of the school community in the management of strategic resources, such as the design of the school budget or the appointment and evaluation of teachers and principals. As in the case of Brazil's School Councils, Argentine Convivial Councils also faced problems although of a different nature. Initially, the survival of a traditional institutional culture impeded these reforms from turning into concrete practices. However, this obstacle appears to have been temporary. The regulations enacted after 2006 resulted in the predominant instrumentation of Convivial Councils as the way to regulate internal norms and social ties in school communities, especially in teacher-student relations. Nevertheless, its implementation showed the complexities arising from a form of school government that evened social relations between students and teachers to the point of transforming them almost into a relationship of 'equals'. The challenge to hierarchical differences between students and teachers promoted by these policies affected the traditional teacher's role as the incarnation of the institutional rule, hindering their capacity to implement educational activities in the classroom. Thus, the type of school governance implemented in Argentina lead to conflicts in the educational process by reducing the asymmetry in a type of social tie that requires of a certain degree of hierarchy in order to function effectively.

The previous exploration of educational policies in Brazil and Argentina suggests the plausibility and also some nuances regarding the comparative hypotheses proposed by O'Donnell. In the case of Argentina, the form of school government that resulted from educational reforms promoted a more egalitarian relationship between teachers and students. This, at the same time, democratized the student-teacher social relations in school, but tended to produce problems associated with an excessive egalitarianism. However, unlike Brazil, this egalitarianism did not reach the point of giving students and parents participation in the administration of school resources or personnel management. The exercise of civil rights was restricted to everyday forms of social relationship, but did not reach the administration of

resources with a decisive impact on institutional design. In the case of Brazil, the implemented model of school government did not promote the leveling of hierarchical ties between teachers and students. Instead, reforms fostered the participation of the educational community in the management of economic and human resources. As mentioned, the persistence of social asymmetries even after the implementation of these reforms shows they faced limitations in transcending a mere formal existence.

In sum, contrasts between these forms of school government indicate that more than Argentina having a more egalitarian perception of citizenship and Brazil a more hierarchical one, there may be various kinds of asymmetry with varying degrees of legitimacy in the two countries. In the case of Brazil, relations are balanced at the institutional level, but asymmetries tend to subsist beyond institutional norms because of the hierarchical traditions that are still part of its civic culture. In Argentina, emphasis is made in leveling hierarchies in everyday interactions expressing a tradition of social equality with two kinds of side effects. On the one hand, emphasis in avoiding hierarchy in everyday social ties tends to lead to anomic settings; on the other, leveling of social asymmetries seems not to occur at the institutional level. As we will try to argue next, the differing levels of legitimacy that different forms of hierarchy had in each country and the obstacles faced by the policies aimed at balancing some of these hierarchies may be seen as inherent to the cultural perceptions of citizenship that prevail in them. In turn, this may partially explain the different types of democratization that have taken place in Argentina and Brazil.

4. CONCLUSIONS: CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

The reforms that promoted collegiate forms of school governance in Argentina and Brazil were, in both cases, designed to favor the participation of the school community in a system of rights and obligations that leveled the hierarchies between its members. However, within this general trend there were different emphases between countries that reveal different conceptions of hierarchy and citizenship.

The model proposed in Argentina as of 2006 emphasized the importance of leveling the relationship between teachers and students in order to ensure the latter's permanence in the educational system and a sense 'being a part' of the school community. Even if, in this case, relationships were still ruled by a system of rights and obligations, the exercise of these rights and obligations appeared subordinate to the purpose of guaranteeing the fate and welfare of students. Thus, the model of cultural

citizenship underlying this form of school governance seems closer to an ethic of responsibility, since it stresses the importance of the students' wellbeing over the strict rule of rights and duties. Notably, the cultural perception of citizenship that fosters this type of school governance seems to enclose inherent tensions, since as O'Donnell noted with regards to Argentinean egalitarianism, this may conduce to anomic social relations that may finally not result in a fair distribution of rights.

In this regard, it is important to note that the implementation of Convivial Councils in Argentina gradually resulted in a lack of concern for models of school government, like School Councils, that in comparison with Convivial Councils fostered greater participation of the school community in institutional matters. But, more importantly, the emphasis on a model of democratization which subordinates the exercise of rights and obligations to the maintenance of satisfactory interpersonal relationship between students and teachers introduced a degree of anomy in student-teacher relations that did not lead to lesser dropout rates or quality education for all students. Thus, although the purpose of these reforms was, ultimately, to improve democracy by offering equal educational chances for all citizens, the tensions inherent to the egalitarian perception of citizenship in Argentina represented, to an extent, an obstacle to this same purpose.

In the case of Brazil, rather than interpersonal relationships and empathy towards students, the model of school government promoted equivalent powers between all adult members of the educational community to decide over institutional resources. This design seems more akin to a model that prioritizes an institutionalized set of rights and obligations over personal relations. Thus, compared to the Argentine case, the cultural model of citizenship in Brazil seems more founded on an ethic of equality than on an ethic of responsibility. In the case of Brazil, the emphasis on institutional regulations appears not to allow for a sufficient level of trust and integration among members of the educational community in order for formerly excluded members to feel 'genuinely' convoked to occupy the spaces that new norms opened for them. Thus, the main difficulty in this case was that asymmetries persisted in practice, although the institutional design sought to overcome them.

In this way, the comparison between the different models of school government in Argentina and Brazil suggests that rather than a contrast between more egalitarian and more hierarchical perceptions of citizenship, the various levels of legitimacy of the various types of hierarchy that are manifested in those

models are part and parcel of the cultural conceptions of citizenship that are expressed in them. In Brazil, closer to an 'ethic of equality' cultural citizenship seems to be based on a formal set of rights and duties that regulate institutional participation, although the effective exercise of these rights and duties seems challenged by informal dimension of civic culture that promotes asymmetries in everyday social relationships. In Argentina, closer to an ethic of responsibility, the cultural conception of citizenship promotes the leveling of everyday social ties even beyond the formal system of obligations producing a certain degree of anomie. Therefore, while in Argentina, emphasis on social relationships and communal wellbeing tend to privilege equality in everyday or face to face social relationships, it downplays the relevance of institutionalized regulations and tends to anomic social ties. By contrast, in Brazil, a cultural model of citizenship which emphasizes an ethic of equality, gives greater relevance to institutional norms, and tends to lead to the persistence of informal forms of social hierarchy in everyday social relations that limit the access to formal rights.

Although what happens in the educational system cannot be easily extrapolated to other aspects of the civic culture, what the evolution of educational reforms reveals in this matter is similar to what has been found in other studies on the subject (see for example, Latinobarómetro, 2013). While Brazilian democracy seems to have consolidated more its institutional system (through more stable party system and more independent judicial and legislative powers), it still faces important challenges that stem from the persistence of profound asymmetries in the social structure. In Argentina, while differences in the social structure seem less prominent (although important contrasts still subsist), its political system seems less stable and the judiciary and legislative powers less independent from government.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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