

THE REFORM OF MASS SCHOOLING IN PORTUGAL (1974-1991)

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Abstract - *This article discusses the crisis of mass schooling in a semiperipheral country. It draws on a theoretical framework that highlights and analyses the field of educational rhetoric in order to reveal the specific characteristics of the reforms of the Portuguese educational system in the 70s and in the 80s. The article concludes by arguing that the analysis of Mediterranean educational systems needs to be placed in a more suitable theoretical context, one built upon comparative studies.*

Introduction

Changes in policies in Portugal over the past twenty years have tended to follow - with a time lag - the direction and trends pursued by advanced capitalist countries. However, Portugal has its own specificity, one determined by its semiperipheral position in the world system (Wallerstein 1984; Santos 1990). The status of semiperipherality positions the Portuguese State centrally, endowing it with the corresponding monopoly of power but not with legitimation. In such a context, policies adopted in the social arena - and especially in the field of education - play a crucial part in reproducing and managing the permanent contradiction between accumulation and legitimation. As a consequence of this, the State is obliged to spend above its resources in order to win consensus.

The Portuguese State has maintained a monopoly over some domains of social production and reproduction. Several arguments have been suggested in order to explain this State's central position. Some authors (Santos 1986; Stoer and Araújo 1992) suggest that this is the consequence of the disarticulation between on the one hand the modernisation of the juridical-institutional framing of social production and reproduction relationships, and actual social practices on the other. This leads to a situation where delayed capitalist relations coexist - at the same time and in the same social field - with advanced consumption and social rights patterns similar to those prevailing in countries belonging to the capitalist centre.

Semiperipheric countries and the State

The assumption underpinning this article is that it is the State that promotes the separation between politics and the economy in semiperipheral countries. Here, the demands for resources accompanying the acquisition of new social rights are not in synchrony with the limits imposed by capitalist accumulation. State provision is based on the compatibility between economic growth and social policies, and between

accumulation and legitimation. Such legitimation is the result of the externalisation of politics towards the economic arena. Hence, the social right to education, once created and expanded by the entrenchment of democratic processes, gives rise to new social aspirations and leads to the acquisition of new rights. This amplifying effect configures the inherent toughness of rights: in this context, one will find it very difficult to justify a diminution of investment in education, for instance, even when there is an economic downturn. This is precisely why the 'rhetoric of rationality' thrives when the system expands demographically and when the State intensifies its delivery of resources, and 'normative rhetoric' surfaces when the economy falters, and when students, with their optimistic expectations and aspirations, keep on flooding the educational system.

It is when the latter happens that the smooth and harmonious running of the system is jeopardised, given the contradiction between, on the one hand, an instrumental logic - which tries to respond to economic needs with productive and socially effective policies - and the context of social legitimation on the other - which promotes the same opportunities for all. The first rationality could be said to be guided by a logic of pragmatism and social hierarchy, while the second privileges contractual and politically equitable solutions.

With the political and social changes that occurred when the dictatorial regime was overthrown in 1974, the Portuguese educational system was subjected to two kinds of pressures. One consisted of a movement in favour of a greater technical rationality in the fields of education and welfare. In other words, proponents of this view considered that the efficacy of the accumulation process could only be obtained if these two fields were more tightly and intimately connected to the requirements of a modernising economy. It is the market and the economy which defines the field, irrespective of the real social and political contexts and aspirations that define those same fields. Here, a technocratic policy that considers the student as a producer fails to politicise production relations, being insensitive to their particularistic character.

A second pressure on education favours the maximisation of equality in 'access and success', and considers the student as a citizen. Such pressure was expressed through the medium of the State. The latter's need for legitimation led, between 1974 and 1986, to the granting of new social rights, including the right to democratic access to education. Given the general and abstract character of this right, the financial burden of education has tended to increase during periods of economic crisis. Increasing youth unemployment, for instance, has forced the education system to become more flexible, and has delayed the operationalisation of selection mechanisms in order to enable students to stay on at school beyond the compulsory school-attending age. This means that for the Portuguese State, the need for social policies is greater as the resources to fulfill them diminish.

The growth in democracy and the acquisition of new rights led to an increase in demand for education. However, the fact that tardy expansion of mass schooling took place in a historical conjuncture marked by crisis meant that the State increasingly found it difficult to maintain social harmony and to legitimise itself. It also had to

adopt a strong internal role, given that the delay in the fulfillment of cultural and social rights similar to those enjoyed in developed countries in the capitalist centre was accompanied by a delay in the process of accumulation. However, a strong State presence does not necessarily signify society's support for its educational policies. It is precisely when such legitimization deficits cannot be avoided that the State tries to compensate for them by intensifying rhetorical measures that attempt to justify planned policies.

The historical evolution of mass schooling in Portugal has indeed been dominated by what Soysal and Strang (1989) refer to as the 'rhetorical construction of education'. It has been characterised by the early formulation of the principle of compulsory, universal and free school (1820), and by the tardiness of this accomplishment. Indeed, the Portuguese State has always been able to talk about - rather than to actually bring about - educational reform. In this way, the State tries to compensate for the decrease of goods, services and resources by expanding symbolic goods that allow it to control social expectations and aspirations. For this reason, it is crucial to analyse Portuguese educational policies through the legitimating discourse employed by the State, for this is nothing but a study of a technology that redistributes power. This discourse in fact, rather than describing prescribes and, while it is a symptom of the reality it is embedded in, it is also a way to make reality come about.

The crisis of mass schooling

During the last two decades the educational system in Portugal has been marked by a number of important changes. These have altered the context of stability that had hitherto prevailed on account of the State's monopoly in the educational field and due to the somewhat ingenuous belief that the educational system is characterised by a continuity rather than a rupture with the past. But over the past twenty years, educational policies in Portugal had to deal with a double crisis: growing and aging. The growth/expansion crisis led to a legitimacy crisis, and the aging crisis gave rise to a crisis of hegemony.

We can speak of an expansion crisis because, as has already been mentioned, and in contrast with other European countries, the extension of compulsory schooling to nine years as well as the increase in schooling rates happened only recently in Portugal. It was only in 1990 that Portugal achieved 99% access in the first cycle, 70 % in the second cycle, and 55% in the third cycle. As late as 1987, Portugal had the lowest schooling rate among European countries.

Similarly, it was only in the late 80s that a policy of investments in building and educational resources ensured that the minimal requirements ensuring the regular functioning of schools were in place. Such developments were only possible thanks to funding from the European Union, and the distribution of, and access to resources was in any case marked by regional asymmetries.

The massification of schooling at all levels - what is being referred to here as the

expansion crisis - obviously required increasing investment in education. But if one had to consider the GNP average and the percentage of State budget allocation to education, one becomes aware of the extent to which Portugal's investment in education remains the lowest in Europe (4.1% in 1985 and 4.8% in 1990; 10.9% in 1985 and 11.3% in 1990). That is, while the Portuguese educational system requires an economic context of distributive expansion, it finds itself constrained by crisis and depression in investments. And this is why the crisis in expansion keeps delaying the fulfilment of the promise of equal opportunities for access. That also explains why there is a legitimisation crisis preventing the school from being consensually accepted.

What we have termed the aging crisis is characterised by the obsolescence of ways of accessing knowledge and skills. This crisis has been based on two opposed points of view. On the one hand, the school curriculum and the organisation of pedagogic work are seen to be subtle, differentiating mechanisms. Among the most important of such mechanisms are those that, through processes of hidden and symbolic violence, impose codes and attitudes that undervalue the culture of the new social groups that now have access to the school.

On the other hand, there is a modernising discourse, which imputes the crisis to low levels of education and outdated curricula that fail to respond to the challenges imposed by the end of modernity. As a consequence of this view, it is suggested that education should be modernised and diversified to produce the knowledge and skills demanded by modern economies (OECD 1985). In this context, the creation of a techno-professional branch and the opening of professional schools reveals the extent to which the State finds it impossible to respond to the contradiction between canonical knowledge and functional knowledge within the ambit of a unified education structure. Concepts like 'efficiency', 'optimisation' and 'school quality' are bandied about as the idea of transforming the school into a business is increasingly seen as the one best way to catch up with Europe and the rest of the world, in both political and social terms. No alternatives are considered viable to this strategy, and hence autonomous political decision-making withers away given that choices from among options are already determined by the rational-scientific directives given by specialists from international agencies.

In this way, the wave of reform that marked education policy-making in the 80s was based on a rhetoric of modernisation and social efficiency, and was a powerful means of social selection despite the declared goal of equalisation of opportunities. Given that the State is unable to fulfil contradictory functions, the school becomes subject to a crisis of hegemony, leading the State itself and some social groups to investigate other means and routes to attain their goals. The fight against comprehensive education is but one aspect of this crisis.

Furthermore, the consolidation of mass schooling in Portugal has, due to its specific history and characteristics, given rise to a whole set of consequences which are explored below.

In the first place, democratisation of education has generated a mismatch between

people's expectations - fanned as these have been by increased opportunities for access - and the ability of the social and school system to respond to these expectations. This mismatch has generated a legitimisation crisis, so that the school ends up promising more than it can in fact deliver (Shapiro 1984), and raises aspirations while at the same time dashing them through its selection mechanisms (Grácio 1986).

In the second place, increasing opportunities for access lead to increasing social and educational heterogeneity. This in turn gives rise to processes of differentiation in areas as diverse as curriculum, pedagogy, organisational set-ups and nature of the professional corps. It is true to say that neither the State nor teachers were prepared for such developments, with the result that schools found themselves experiencing an efficiency crisis. There was a decrease in the professional level of teachers, accompanied by a lowering of requirements for those who wanted to train to become teachers, and hence making the job more accessible to larger numbers of applicants.

In the third place, the massification of the school system highlighted the bifurcation between the penchant of modernisation for a liberal economic view of education - one, that is, which considers education as a producer of human resources and social status - and another view which justifies and legitimises the school in purely educational terms. The confrontation between the different expectations of the two camps - and the inability of the school to respond effectively to such expectations - is an important element in the constitution of the crisis of mass schooling.

In the fourth place, open access to education leads the school into a headlong confrontation with the paradox of a pedagogic society (Beillerot 1982). The latter values formation as a factor contributing to production, but devalues and fails to appreciate the extent to which the school provides an effective context for socialisation. Rather, alternative socialisation mechanisms are considered to compensate for the inadequacy of the school in this regard, as well as for its imputed inability to maintain a productive relationship with the world of work, and for its failure to fulfil the aspirations of an individual for status, obtained on the basis of meritocratic endeavour rather than inheritance or ascription.

In short, one could argue that the crisis of mass schooling is based on four types of contradictions:

- the social contradiction between the democratic function of schooling in its attempts to promote equal opportunities for all, and the stratification function that ensures the uneven appropriation of the educational system by those social groups better placed in the logic of capitalist accumulation.
- the structural contradiction between, on the one hand, the State's bureaucratic rationality - which is distributive, based on laws, and on the norms and formal rules that aim to assure the State's strength and legitimacy, and, on the other hand, an industrial and market rationality which is productive, outcomes oriented, and which aims to devolve the legitimisation process by distributing the responsibility for results onto the local actors.
- the institutional contradiction that arises from the need of the school to

establish homogeneity so that it can legitimise its credentialling function, and from the need to promote differentiation in order to cater for the various social and cultural segments of the school population and to legitimise the educational functions of the institution. This contradiction is played out in the progressive curricular and institutional separation between canonical knowledge and functional, technical knowledge.

- the organisational contradiction between the search for types of organic solidarity that expresses new cultural attitudes towards the State and the maintenance of forms of mechanical solidarity based upon the dynamics of the State. This contradiction leads the State into a confrontation within itself, where rational and normative models of management of educational systems are presented in a contradictory way. Thus, the former model tries to respond to questions related to rationalisation and resource optimisation; the latter tries to respond to consent, mobilisation and involvement of the educational actors' perspectives and problems.

From a centralised to a dé-centralised instrumental rationality

The dynamics of these contradictions have created a specific set of conditions, to which the State has responded in two main directions, changing the nature of its policy. It has first of all progressively replaced its distributive or allocative policies by productive policies (Offe 1975, 1985). Through this, the State intended to reduce its public expenditure. However, the opposite happened since *"when the State adopts a more active role, this provokes an enormous expansion of the bureaucracy, and renders the rationality criteria that had dominated the State's performance until then obsolete"* (Santos 1990:199).

The model adopted for the production and diffusion of reforms and changes in the Portuguese educational system seems to follow this pattern. There is first a recognition of the obsolescence of the old criteria of rationality, together with a tendency to homogenise practices inside the system from the inputs (rules, norms, and so on). Proposals for reforms come next, and these are informed by an instrumental rationality that puts a premium on prediction, and on decentralised control of the heterogeneities relating to outcomes (results, fulfilment of targeted goals, and so on). Consequently, technical instrumentality is displaced from the macro-structural space of the State to the local space of the decentralised structures of the administration and the social - organisational contexts of the schools. As a result of this, an instrumental spiral develops in which the promise of technical solutions increases the search for the State's services. In its turn, the State finds itself increasingly pressed to generate rational consent, and in order to achieve this adds new administrative controls (Ewert 1991:367).

A second way in which the State tries to respond to the contradictions enunciated earlier is by compensating for the reduction of goods, services and resources through the expansion of symbolic goods. One example of this type of symbolic production,

established in the Portuguese educational reforms, concerns the rhetoric which, on the one hand, assigns teachers the role of privileged agents of change, and on the other grants local actors and communities such as parents, local authorities and enterprises the role of 'electors' with the right to determine the educational projects of the school.

The first case deals with an arrangement, what we can refer to as 'State professionalism'. In this case, and contrary to other forms of professionalism, it is the State apparatus itself which promotes a direct connection between reform specialists and reform executives. The State, appealing to a sense of professional collegialism but avoiding interaction with autonomous professional organisations of teachers, attempts to secure loyalty. Here, the teachers are called to take part in the reform implementation phase when most of the decisions have already been made.

In the second case, the rhetoric of local community participation reflects an attempt to sustain educational consent through centrifugal negotiation strategies. The State is confronted with a financial crisis that constrains it to modify its investment in educational and social policies. But at the same time, the same crisis renders it impossible for the State to make radical cuts in its budget. In this situation, the State attempts to manage the educational service on the principles of the market, trying to turn the school into a business, as education Minister Roberto Carneiro avowed. Finding itself incapable of fulfilling its promise of provision of equal opportunities to all, the State seeks new ways of negotiating with its delegates (teachers) and its clients (parents, students), preferring centripetal models to political mechanisms of participation.

In this context, it could be argued that the need for decentralisation and autonomous policy-making is greater as the possibilities for participation in school decision-making actually conceded to the different interest groups are smaller. The organising principle is the one that states: in order for anyone to earn resources and power, they must first lose them.

The State's excess of strength weakens the mechanisms of integration, and thus the legitimacy pole is undermined by the strengthening of the centralisation pole. One pragmatic solution that appeals to the State confronted by such a problem is to systematically decentralise the educational system and to grant autonomy to the schools. But the State finds it difficult to achieve this at a national level, and hence it delegates the responsibility for this shift to the local level, hoping that domestic arrangements and unions can find a compromise. The State therefore looks for the strengthening of the legitimacy pole by dint of the centralisation pole.

Up to the middle of the 80s, the discourse employed by the State emphasised that democratisation involved the levelling of differences between schools, since these were considered to be differentiating mechanisms producing inequalities. Only a centralised State was thought to be capable of ensuring equality of opportunities. The civic logic was therefore clearly dominant.

Today, given the shift in context, the idea that democratisation is achieved through the integration of the school into a local and differentiated educational market is

gaining ground. The State, pointing to the urgent need to make the Portuguese educational system flexible, argues that there should be a compromise between the goal of equal opportunity for access on the one hand, and the demands of economic modernisation on the other. In this manner, the State proposes a new educational pact, what we can refer to as the civic-industrial agreement

The phases of the State's educational discourse: establishing a typology

It is in the portrayal of this tense and contradictory context that four 'orientation logics' to mass schooling in Portugal suggest themselves. These are the civic logic, the domestic logic, the industrial logic and the market logic. These four logics can be verified in the analysis of educational and political discourse employed in Portugal over the last twenty years.

In the *civic logic*, justice is defined by conformity to the general interest. Reflecting the principle adopted by the State, the school becomes a public service and the denial of personal and local bonds is considered as a pre-condition for equality. The territorial right defines a space from one vertical administrative hierarchy, where the school appears as extraterritorial.

In the *domestic logic* there is a return to the nostalgic village and to its cultural past. Contrary to the civic logic, the domestic logic privileges face-to-face personal relationships and goes back to the management techniques and styles of the family and of primary groups. Here, the community principle takes precedence, and emphasis is placed on decentralisation and the development of a participative community. The citizen's status of formal equality is confronted with the demand for substantive equality. Furthermore, what is being referred to here as 'domestic logic' coincides historically with the idea of the school community which, in the Portuguese tradition means, above all, the mobilisation of a convergence of points of view and the consolidation of horizontal political obligations between citizens.

In the *industrial logic*, performance and efficiency are accorded top priority. Here, the school system is directed to mirror economic and employment structures, and this request is justified on the basis of the world-wide demand for higher levels of competence, and the requirements of local and national development. The shift in the orientation logic to mass schooling is sustained by geographic centralisation, with inter-connections established between diverse institutions, and with discursive practices highlighting the integration of the educational project with the general interest.

Finally, the market logic proposes that, given the context of scarcity of resources, schools should become enveloped in the new 'liberal competition' model. The proposal is based on the theory of free choice in an educational market, where each school is invited to demonstrate its effectiveness in achieving outcomes so that it can compete with rival institutions in a contest that, on the surface of it, is not subject to State intervention. But the decrease in State regulation is, in fact, only apparent. What

has changed is the rationality of distributive politics, which has been replaced by a productive rationality that decentralises investments, which must now be shared with local communities.

These four logics are the expression of the modernising project adopted in Portugal, and they permeate the educational field, regulating the practices and discourses of educational actors. In order for that regulatory role to be exercised successfully in the context of the transformation of a society to modernity, three fundamental principles are appealed to, namely the State principle, the community principle and the market principle.

First phase (1974-1976): the educator State in an open school - 'education for citizenship, for all'

The metaphor which structures this first phase is the organic metaphor, one that considers the school as a body, an organism or a living system. There is here a recognition that the school exists in an environment, on which it depends for the fulfilment of its different needs. There is also an understanding that the quality of interaction with that environment can make a difference to the effective functioning of the school, helping it manage the crisis in demographic growth. Community involvement transforms the learning institution from a fortress to an open school, a change that is facilitated by the pressure of social movements and citizens' expectations in relation to education.

The metaphor of the school as an organism also acknowledges that teachers and pupils are human beings with complex needs, and that school concerns cannot be dealt with as if they were mere technical issues. Rather, it is important for the formal organisation to be aware of, and responsive to, the needs of members of the 'body'.

The organic metaphor does not, however, fully acknowledge the existence of an informal organisation that parallels the formal educational system. Rather, faithful to orthodox functionalist theories, the approach which considers the school as an organism sets out to achieve a functional harmony of the educational system, which is here considered as a functional unit. Successive education ministers between 1974 and 1976 employed the rhetoric of the 'absence of a true educational system' in order to justify a politics of reconstruction. Such a discourse had the underlying belief that unity and homeostasis of social organisms is both possible and desirable, and as a consequence disorganisation, disagreements, and group interest conflicts that mark normal school life should be frowned upon. In this discourse, the school should be a 'genuine system'.

It is this perennial desire of going beyond teacher individualism, beyond classroom isolation, and beyond the fragmentation between systems of knowledge that has tended to justify the production of a group of rules, norms and principles, which give coherence to the anarchy that soon marked the educational institution. The route out of chaos, brought about by division and fragmentation, is here considered to be

compliance with collective obligations. The school should therefore have common aims, a collective personality, protected from individual initiatives.

Individuals will be perennially tempted to particularism, and therefore members of the collective have to constantly make reference to the (mythical) collective civil universe, as they seek to actualise its very existence. The dispositions and the organs constituted in the process of bringing this collectivity into life must be forcefully visible to the school. Such visibility is possible if and when the collectivity is circumscribed in space, marked by frontiers and rituals that proclaim its very existence.

Second phase (1977-1979): the regulating State in a community school - education in the pedagogical society

The community metaphor dominates political discourse between 1977 and 1979. During this period, the school acquired a public image of a conservative character, as if its 'open school' qualities were diminishing.

Organically, the schools work in divorced, disjointed units. In such a situation, the school is condemned to look for the construction of a collective unit at the structural level as much as at the symbolic one. It is here that the community metaphor comes into its own, enhancing the notions of good will, affection, conviviality and comfort, ensuring the regulation of staff in the meanwhile.

Third phase (1980-1986): the (de)regulating State in a modern and effective school: education and the economy

The enterprise metaphor - where the school becomes a business and business becomes a school - associates education with enterprise in order to either compare or contrast the outcomes-based nature that, in this view, should characterise learning institutions. The rhetoric of autonomy that follows from this metaphor has two implications for the governance of schools. The most visible one has been the demand for effectiveness which should, as far as possible, be measured and controlled via harmonised output indicators.

The other consequence has been the greater influence that techno-professional courses have achieved in the configuration of the educational system. In the tradition of the secondary school, the pupils are future citizens that need a non-specialised, general and global formation. But a new task is added to this ethos: the school should also educate in such a way as to be responsive both to the needs of the labour market as well as to the expectations of those pupils who are not prepared to pursue post-compulsory studies. Students are therefore considered not only as future citizens, but also as future productive units.

The demand for greater efficiency has an organisational impact, given the utilisation of performance indicators. These indicators were established by central

administration and planning offices, and referred to such items as the stability of a teaching body in a school, teachers' qualifications, transition rates per year and per cycle, and so on.

School administration now measured its performance using a new battery of tools: lists of indicators, inventories, evaluation grids, charts, schemes, 'organigrams' and inquests. These instruments signal the dominating influence of a technical rationality, where the effective school is, by definition, in the grips of the 'scientific method'.

The enterprise metaphor therefore stresses the operative and instrumental knowledge mode of technical rationality. Such an approach to knowledge implicitly denounces the tradition of the secondary school. Clearly too, the enterprise metaphor complements the discourse of modernisation: the transformation of the school is defined in terms of its ability to integrate more techno-professional courses in its curricular menu. Over and above these considerations, education policy-makers consider the adoption of technical rationality - with all that this implies - as a major criteria in providing funds and resources for schools. In the industrial conception of the education enterprise, the school should take the initiative, develop projects, run risks.

Finally, the enterprise metaphor is thought to be useful to help discriminate between what is functional, effective and professional on the one hand, and what is ineffective, infertile or unadaptable on the other. The users of the metaphor consider the organisation of a system in such a way that each individual has his or her function, his or her position, in a technically predictable universe. In this universe, dysfunction caused by unadaptable individuals is eliminated by the introduction of a system of meritocratic compensations for members of the teaching profession.

Fourth phase (1987-1991): the (de)regulating State and the competitive school: the educational market.

The image of the school as part of an education market has been reinforced by the move towards granting educational establishments autonomy and by decentralising systems of funding. However, the State's focus on the 'local' raises new questions. In the first instance, deregulatory measures accentuate hierarchies between schools, further emphasising differences between, for instance, rich and poor schools, or between academic and vocational schools. Secondly, deregulatory measures lead to a situation where it is the school itself that is directly responsible for producing inequalities in the field of education.

The school now has to market its own image, and this image and opinions about the school's performance become mutually dependent. But it is precisely this interdependent character that renders opinions about schools fragile and easily censurable. The construction of a school image cannot remain dependent on a small number of people, who constantly interact within the same group. In the educational market, the school has to choose a target public in order to project its image and to

mobilise that target in its favour. The school has to cast its advertising net wider, in order to inform, to make known, to attract attention, in sum, to sell a product.

In the mercantile metaphor there is always a reciprocity principle that celebrates good relationships. But these exceed by far the limits that mark the reserved, almost secretive traditional relationships with parents. It becomes therefore necessary for the school to amplify its voice. If the school wants to achieve the state of greatness it craves for so much, it has to renounce its reserved, private character. It is obliged to extend its field of influence and to use new enticements in order to appeal to and attract other clients. The school therefore becomes an enterprise that puts a price on its resources. Such a cost-benefit logic projects the view that schools with better resources offer better learning contexts, and that these better resources are a public sign of the school's success, since they both reflect and generate customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

The discourse of educational policy-making in Portugal after the installation of democracy in 1974 had to achieve two objectives. First of all, the discourse had to promote schools as a vehicle for the enhancement of an egalitarian and democratic society. Secondly, the discourse required schools to contribute to the production of a stratified workforce for an hierarchical occupational structure. The contradictory demands for equality and stratification are not particular to the Portuguese case, and indeed advanced capitalist countries made similar demands on their own education systems in the period under consideration. However, in the Portuguese instance, the absence of structural autonomy gives specificity to the legitimating discourse employed by the state. In a semiperipheral country where the second wave of human rights is significantly backward in relation to the rest of Europe, the legitimization of the system - crucial if consensus is to be achieved - depends on a rhetoric that privileges citizenship rights and equality of opportunity, and on a discourse that is capable of incorporating the escalation in social expectations. In this case, tensions and strains in the systems of legitimation are producing new demands on schooling.

The integration and relation of questions of power and their effects on school reform in the 70s and in the 80s makes conceptually visible the rules by which certain types of phenomena and social relations are made into objects of reform. In this way, school reforms are considered to be the result not only of changing ideas regarding organisational practices or of a shift in political rhetoric, but rather more as the result of the unacknowledged values and interests that are embedded in the everyday 'speech' of schooling. The focus on the structured relations that pattern the events of schooling directs attention to the changing relations in educational governance, where macro and micro problems of the state come together. In this paper emphasis has been placed on the constructive role of language, posed in a broader conceptualisation of the problems of state management at the macro level, and with reference to specific issues at the micro level. Discourse, that is the rules and patterns of communication by means of

which the state governs in the name of social welfare, was analysed. We have seen how during the 70s and 80s the State adopted decentralising modes of governance, but at the same time employed centralising discourses and strategies in the educational field. In an ambivalent relation of this sort, there is no clear demarcation between state and civil institutions. The gains in power and resources on the part of the local state, local business people and local corporative interests are at the expense of teachers and the autonomy of the school. The multiple levels at which the educational agenda can be negotiated intend to produce an aura of equality in decision-making outside or alongside the civic mechanisms of participation.

A commonsensical approach to the similarities between Mediterranean countries would, on the basis of statistical indicators and traditional analytic categories employed in the social sciences, proclaim countries such as Portugal, Spain and Greece 'backward'. Within this view, the gap between central and peripheral countries could be closed through processes of modernisation. But these processes are defined in terms of the direction of reforms adopted in central countries, which must be imitated in order to overcome a state of 'backwardness' and to become more 'advanced'. In this sense, to be within Europe is to rank on the same statistical indicators of Europe.

The absence of comparative studies between semiperipheral countries contribute to the eccentricisation and exoticisation of their specificities, as well as to the misuse of theoretical perspectives generated within - and suitable to - central societies. Consequently, analyses of education systems in semiperipheral countries often adopt a deficit approach, where the unquestioned referent, namely schooling in advanced capitalist countries, assumes the status of the 'ideal'. For these and other reasons, analyses of the semiperiphery require an innovative theoretical approach. This implies structural investigation, particularly if we are to understand the central role of State action on the social construction of legitimate knowledge. A second direction of research is connected with the analysis of the discourse employed by actors at different levels, especially when this is viewed as the outcome of a complex interplay of competing ways of seeing and interpreting the world and the education.

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