

# Educating citizens for participatory democracy: a case study of local government education policy in Pelotas, Brazil.

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## Abstract

*A case study was undertaken of Pelotas, a large town in southern Brazil, where a recent government of the Workers' Party (PT) implemented a range of social policy reforms. The study draws on interviews with key members of the Municipal Secretariat of Education and policy documents, analyzing them in relation to theoretical literature on citizenship and education. The Pelotas approach is seen to be distinctive for its emphasis on active political participation as a citizen's right and as a means to social justice for all. The local government also places a higher value on critical and autonomous attitudes towards the authorities than on cultivating allegiance to the municipality or nation-state.*

## Introduction

Citizenship has in recent years become a central concern of academics and policy makers. Despite the near global consensus on the importance of human rights that developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social exclusion is still prevalent in both rich and poor nations. While *formal* citizenship may be granted to all, many individuals and groups remain excluded from exercising *effective* citizenship, especially in countries with high levels of inequality. The post-modern, globalized world has also presented challenges to the integrity and viability of the polity and forced a reconsideration of traditional notions of the 'citizen'. Education is seen by most to have a key role in addressing these issues, although the nature of that response is strongly contested.

Citizenship (or 'civics') education has long been present in schools around the world, and some countries, such as Mexico and the UK, have recently introduced (or *re-introduced*) it as part of national curricula (Levinson 2000; McLaughlin 2000). Yet there are widely divergent views on the content of these courses and the conceptions of citizenship on which they are based. In order to make citizenship effective, is it necessary to develop civic virtues, or only to inform people of their rights? Is it possible to encourage critical, autonomous attitudes in school and still form a viable, cohesive polity? Is school the best institution in which to develop citizenship, and if so should citizenship education be a separate curricular subject?

Two models of citizenship are dominant in the current literature on the subject: liberal rights and civic republicanism (Heater, 1999; Kymlicka, 2002). The first is based on a conception of universal rights, and sees citizenship as the State's guarantee to protect the liberties of individuals and promote their welfare. T. H. Marshall's (1998) landmark paper of 1949 argued

in this way for the necessity of social rights (through the welfare state) in addition to the civic and political rights which emerged in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. Citizens according to this conception must respect the laws of the State and the rights of fellow citizens. Political participation, however, while valued, is not obligatory and ultimately depends on individual inclination.

The second model, civic republicanism, has its origins in the ancient Greek states, but has had a revival in response to the dominance of the liberal conceptions of rights outlined above. In contrast to liberal theory, this model emphasizes duties over rights, and sees political participation as an essential feature of belonging to a State. Thus, the virtues and skills of public service and political activity are promoted, as is the strong shared identity which makes this type of citizenship possible. This position is explored by Oldfield (1990) drawing on the work of Machiavelli, Rousseau, Tocqueville and Hegel, and can be seen to some degree in the work of Bernard Crick (1999; 2000) which has influenced the introduction of citizenship as a curricular subject in the UK.

Within this second model there are both right and left-wing streams. The resurgence of civic republicanism is partly due to the dissatisfaction of conservatives, nationalists and communitarians with a perceived over-emphasis on rights and neglect of duties (Etzioni, 1996), as well as images of disintegrating States and threats to majority ethnic groups by growing immigration. These right-wing models of the civic republican position emphasize the need for social cohesion, patriotism and assimilation of minority groups. Robert Putnam's (1993) study on local government in Italy, and his theory of social capital, have been influential in this renewed interest in civic virtue as a determinant of good governance.

Alternative views of civic republicanism have their inspiration in the participatory democracy of Rousseau (1968) and more recent formulations of Pateman (1970), Macpherson (1977) and Barber (1984), in which citizens do not choose representatives but participate personally in decision-making processes as far as is possible. The current interest in this model has risen in response to the increasing marginalization of certain groups from power, and in opposition to neo-liberal conceptions of the citizen as consumer, positing participation as choice in the market rather than influence on decision-making. Kymlicka (2002) describes these approaches that see participation as an intrinsic good as *Aristotelian* republicanism, and distinguishes them from *instrumental* republicanism, in which participation is seen as a necessary burden for maintaining democratic institutions.

The divide between the liberal and civic republican positions, therefore, does not signify a simple political divide. There are also right and left versions of the liberal approach, depending on whether only very minimal rights are upheld (such as property rights in the case of libertarians) or the substantial rights required for social justice (in the case of egalitarian liberals). While the difference between 'right' and 'left' relates to the importance given to equality, the difference between liberal and civic republican approaches to citizenship relates to the importance given to political participation. Kymlicka (1999: 82) states that, "there will always be a portion of the population who have little or no desire to be politically active" and that "a liberal democracy...should not compel people to adopt a conception of the good life which privileges political participation as the source of meaning or satisfaction". Civic republicans, however, unlike liberals, consider it essential that individuals have an active participation in politics and civil society, both for the effective functioning of a democratic society and for the wellbeing of the individual.

Both the liberal and civic republican approaches, however, make certain fundamental assumptions about the nature of the polity. They assume it to be a unified (and usually mono-ethnic) State with equality between individuals. This is not to say that the proponents of these

positions are blind to intra-societal differences: they do, all the same, see these differences as insignificant in comparison to the fundamental sameness of citizens. Yet these ‘universalist’ positions have been challenged from a number of angles. Citizenship, as part of the framework of modernity, has been undermined by post-modernist critiques, which question its rationalist universal underpinnings. New political and social movements of feminism, gay rights and anti-racism, among others, have questioned the sufficiency of traditional conceptions of citizenship, which may be unable to respond to the demands for justice of certain social groups, and try to repress difference. As Unterhalter (1999) states:

These [feminist writings on the State and education policy] highlight how governments, through an appeal to an abstract concept of the citizen, stripped of all qualities save subjective rationality and morality, have been able to maintain and perpetuate social divisions based on gender, race ethnicity, sexuality and disability. (Unterhalter, 1999: 102-103)

Conceptions of citizenship are still strongly linked to the nation-state, yet in terms of identity and allegiance there has been a significant shift in recent years. Changes in social and economic relations, advances in technology and political intentions have brought increased prominence to the global level, and with these processes of globalization has emerged the possibility of global citizenship. Some writers argue that society, and schools in particular, should actively promote global citizenship as a means to world peace and social justice (Held and McGrew 2003; Osler and Vincent 2002; Delanty 2000). In addition, with the weakening of the nation-state as a source of identity, the *local* has in many cases gained importance.

These changes have also provided an opening for challenges to nationalistic modes of citizenship education, which were the norm in the period of the construction of the nation-states from the 18th to the 20th century. These initiatives were founded on a conception of citizenship as conformity to existing State structures, educating people to contribute to the effective functioning of the nation. Other approaches, however, have emerged emphasizing the potential of schools to promote the *conscientization* of learners, enabling them to be fully participating, critical members of society. The resolution of these competing aims of social cohesion and critical autonomy presents a significant challenge to policy-makers and teachers (McCowan 2004; 2005).

Four major tensions in the literature can therefore be identified between:

1. Emphasis on the rights and the duties of citizens
2. Universal conceptions and those allowing for difference
3. Focus on the local, national and global levels
4. Promotion of loyalty to the State and developing critical attitudes

This paper will explore these questions in a real context, that of the local government of Pelotas, a large town in southern Brazil. The study documents the approach of the municipal government, charting the introduction of educational initiatives based on participatory democracy in the 2001-2004 administration<sup>1</sup>. It is intended firstly that the empirical study will show how these theoretical discussions, generally conducted at a high level of abstraction, are materialized in the construction of education policy, and cast light on how tensions are addressed and resolved in practice. Secondly, it is hoped that the innovative approach to citizenship and education adopted by Pelotas will make its own contribution to the theoretical debate.

There are two main sources of data in the study: interviews with key figures in the Municipal Secretariat of Education (MSE) and the official documents of the Secretariat. The latter

provide information on the municipal policies, their construction and implementation, and the philosophical framework underlying them. They present the orientation and discourse of the institution as a whole<sup>2</sup> (although in practice they may be primarily the work of a few individuals). The interviews, on the other hand, provide a more personal account of the understandings and conceptualizations of individuals (while also reflecting institutional views). They allowed the researcher to seek clarification of items in the documents, to probe for greater detail in relation to particular aspects and to enable respondents to make further contributions of their own. The interviews were conducted in April 2004, involving the following respondents: the Secretary; heads of department of the MSE; staff of MSE departments; the head teacher of a primary school; representatives of the municipal teachers' union; representative of the Municipal Education Council.

The data collected on Pelotas will be analysed in relation to the four categories identified above. The research aimed to establish the policy *approach* developed by the municipal government, and its political and philosophical orientations, so did not focus on aspects such as the passage of policies from the Secretariat to the classroom, the effectiveness of their implementation, and their outcomes. These are important questions, but ones that can only be addressed with further research.

## The challenge of building democratic education in Pelotas

Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world<sup>3</sup>. After the colonial period, it was the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery (in 1888), and saw only intermittent democracy in the twentieth century, with dictatorships from 1937-1945 and 1964-1985. As a result of this history and the enduring injustices, citizenship has only a formal significance for the majority of Brazilians. While a compact upper-middle class monopolizes opportunities and power, most are excluded from the nation's wealth and from its political processes.

Education is both a cause and a reflection of this inequality. While primary net enrolment is now 96.5% (UNESCO, 2004), there are high levels of repetition and drop-out among the poor, who attend schools of an almost universally unsatisfactory quality. Few have the chance to progress to upper secondary and university level, and thus to secure the employment that would allow their children a better educational future.

Formal education in Brazil developed more slowly than in the other colonies of the Americas. For most of the colonial period the elites sent their children to be educated in Europe, and access for the majority was extended only to a small degree with independence: in 1869, there were as many as 541 children of school age for every existing classroom, not including the significant slave population (Havighurst and Moreira 1965: 76). The establishment of the Republic in 1889 brought increasing faith in the potential of education for bringing technological progress and demands for a universal secular public education system, yet change was slow and by 1920 the labour force was still 80% illiterate (Havighurst and Moreira 1965: 80).

In the first half of the 20th century, a new movement known as the *Escola Nova* (New School) emerged, influenced by progressive education in Europe and the USA (particularly the ideas of John Dewey). Thinkers such as Anísio Teixeira had a significant influence on education in Brazil, leading to moves away from a rigid traditionalist focus on content and towards an emphasis on experience, expression and problem-solving. However, these concerns with quality did little to address the acute problems of lack of adequate schooling for the majority of the population (Louro 1986). The pragmatism of the *Escola Nova*, and its faith in methods and scientific progress, prepared the ground for the later technicist approaches that

characterized the military dictatorship of 1964-1985. This period of military rule led to a suppression of the democratic and progressive elements of the *Escola Nova* and emphasized economic development along with a conservative patriotism, shown by the introduction of Moral and Civic Education as a compulsory subject<sup>4</sup> (Louro 1986). Quantitative improvements, however, were made during this period, with enrolments increasing at all levels. The expansion of the system continued under the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, 1994-2002, which, following World Bank proposals, favoured primary education over other levels. However, despite achieving near universal access, educational inequalities remain acute. Ongoing reforms, little changed by the current Lula government, have promoted decentralization, privatization and the harnessing of education for primarily macro-economic ends.

Possibilities of change, however, have been brought about by popular mobilizations emerging since the end of the military dictatorship, which have campaigned for (and at times actively constructed) more equal and democratic relations in the field of education and the wider political sphere (Gentili & McCowan, 2003). Within the educational movement, influenced particularly by the work of Paulo Freire (1972; 1976), a significant development is the *Citizen School*<sup>5</sup>, developed during the PT administration in Porto Alegre from 1988-2004 (Porto Alegre, 2003). The aim of the Citizen School is to provide an education for active citizenship that is responsive to the local reality of the school, avoiding external technical interventions and giving community councils influence over the school budget and pedagogical orientations (Gadotti, 2000; Gadotti & Romão, 1997; Padilha, 2001). The implementation of this framework in Porto Alegre brought about significant quantitative gains – reducing drop-out, repetition and vandalism rates, and increasing teacher salaries – as well as the qualitative gains of incorporating local and minority ethnic knowledge, and strengthening democratic structures and community participation (Azevedo 2002; Gandin and Apple 2002). In contrast to dominant technicist approaches to education, the Citizen School and similar initiatives acknowledge the essentially political nature of education, both in terms of policy and the practice of teaching.

Other municipalities have also implemented innovative education policies: Belo Horizonte adopted a new grade structure known as *education cycles* (*ciclos de formação*) to address the chronic problems associated with repetition and drop-out in the early stages of primary school. In addition to local governments, there are social movements, national education forums and adult literacy organizations in Brazil that have all been engaged in the construction of alternative frameworks of education since the 1980s (Figueirêdo, 2000; Gentili & McCowan, 2003; Ghanem, 1998; Stromquist, 1997). The network of schools run by the Landless People's Movement (MST), for example, shows a number of these features of democratization of management and curricular content (Caldart, 1997; McCowan, 2003).

The PT government in Pelotas, in power from 2001-2004, shares a number of the ideals of this movement of participatory democracy. The town is situated in Rio Grande do Sul (RS), the southernmost state of Brazil, and one that is distinct in many ways from the other regions of the country. Being at the southern frontier, and sharing to some degree the history and culture of the surrounding Spanish-speaking countries, it has long had a separatist spirit and engaged in a series of uprisings in the 19th century. Its inhabitants are known as *gaúchos*, a name derived from the traditional cowboys of the region, whose cultural traditions are still strong. At the end of the 19th century, French positivism became the dominant intellectual current in the region, leading ultimately to an increasingly authoritarian style of government, but more recently, the state has become an important site for new political movements in Brazil. RS was fundamental for the development of the MST, the largest and most influential social movement in Latin America, and the best-known of the Workers' Party (PT) local governments was in the capital, Porto Alegre, where, in addition to the Citizen School,

pioneering social policies such as the *participatory budget* were introduced. The city also gained international recognition through the hosting of the World Social Forums. Yet these progressive political movements have emerged in what is for the most part a highly conservative culture, in which racist and sexist attitudes are firmly entrenched. In addition to these ideological conflicts, the state shows the material inequalities characteristic of all regions of Brazil, and growing urban violence.

Pelotas, the third largest city in RS with 350,000 inhabitants, is situated near the Uruguayan border by the large saltwater lagoon, Lago dos Patos. It was officially founded in 1835 (it had been settled fifty years previously) and became wealthy due to production of dried beef known as *charque*. After an economic decline in the 20th century, with few modern industries to complement the traditional agricultural base, the town is no longer prosperous, although like most of the South and South-East of Brazil it has lower rates of poverty than the national average. The confectionery industry is successful, but there are few new sources of employment.

The southern regions of Brazil are distinct in having had mainly European settlement (after the expulsion of most of the indigenous peoples), including large numbers of Italians and Germans. However, Pelotas has the highest proportion of African descendents of any town in RS, on account of the slaves brought to the area in the 19th century to work in the dried beef industry. With financial and bureaucratic power held by a small middle-class, the majority of the population in the suburban and rural areas have poor standards of living and low levels of political participation, and among this population there are disproportionate numbers of the black community. The city elected its first PT government to office in 2000, after four years of PDT (Partido Democrático Trabalhista) control, with expectations of reform in relation to poverty and social exclusion.

Education in Pelotas is administered by a variety of bodies. Most important of these is the Municipal Secretariat of Education (MSE), which has executive powers for the network of municipal schools. Alongside the MSE, the state government has considerable responsibilities for education, and runs its own schools: this study, however, limits itself to the education policy of the municipal network. As can be seen from the following table, the municipality has responsibility principally for pre-school and primary education:

School enrolment in Pelotas, 2002

	Pre-school	Primary <sup>6</sup>	Upper Secondary
Federal	0	0	2,248
State	1,115	25,245	11,688
Municipal	3,185	23,137	1,485
Private	1,404	6,186	1,913
<i>Total</i>	<i>5,704</i>	<i>54,568</i>	<i>17,334</i>

Source: INEP (2002)

Initial access to primary school is not the most pressing issue for Pelotas: the town had achieved 98.3% net lower primary enrolment as far back as 1988 (Dall'Igna, 1992). The illiteracy rate, at 6.3%, is also lower than the national average of 13.6% (INEP 2005). However, as in other parts of Brazil, there are high rates of repetition (26.6%) and drop-out (7.2%)<sup>7</sup>, as well as concerns about quality. The current government set out to improve these elements, aiming to guarantee full access and ensure a high quality of schooling for all its students<sup>8</sup> (Pelotas, 2004).

Yet the most distinctive aspect is the government's attempt to address the low levels of citizen participation in and democratic control of education. While Brazil is now a fully functioning democracy, the legacy of its anti-democratic past is evident. The country was until recently “a case study in elections without democracy” (Bethell 2000), illustrated by the fact that illiterates were for a long time denied the vote, meaning disenfranchisement of more than half the adult population as late as 1946. In the two periods of authoritarian rule in the 20th century, direct elections were suspended altogether, and a truly democratic culture is still far from being established. Clientelism, vote-buying and fraud are common, particularly in the remote areas of the country, and many municipalities are still run by the *coronéis* (literally, colonels), heads of powerful family dynasties. This anti-democratic culture and the political disempowerment stemming from material deprivation is a context in which the Pelotas municipal government's efforts to implement participatory policies must be understood. As Bethell (2000) states, “Brazil is a democracy of voters, not yet a democracy of citizens”.

## Approaches to education and citizenship in Pelotas

### 1. Participation as a right

Even though many initiatives have the development of citizenship as a central aim, there is no curriculum subject or separate initiative by the name of ‘citizenship education’ in Pelotas (as there was during the dictatorships). The following statement by the Secretary explains this feature:

Some schools now have sociology, philosophy, which provide the possibility of discussing this theme [citizenship] more deeply. But we do not determine that the theme should be dealt with in any specific place. Because dealing with it in one place means in practice understanding that citizenship in the real world also occupies one specific place. We understand that, above all, citizenship is an attitude towards life, a way of relating to the world, with other people, with power.... So we construct the exercising of citizenship within the curriculum but also within the life of the school.... (Interview with Secretary, 12 April 2004<sup>9</sup>)

Yet what is the nature of this citizenship that pervades the curriculum and the life of the school? Firstly, there is a strong element of rights:

Citizenship is, fundamentally, the right to have rights.... A full citizen can exercise the set of rights, that is, the fundamental rights to life, participation in society’s governance and participation in the collective wealth. (Del Pino, 2003:23)

The document continues:

The struggle for the strengthening of citizenship depends on the strengthening of the school. In Brazil, great obstacles stop all people having access to the systematized knowledge that schools should offer. The lack of places, the difficulty of access to school, repetition, drop-out and truancy impede pupils staying in schools and gravely harm their learning. (Del Pino, 2003: 1)

Education itself is therefore a right, but it is also a means of having access to and defending other rights:

The administrative structure responsible for education policy is linked directly to the principle right, which can be understood as the gate of access to the rest: namely, the right to education. Without access to education, it is difficult to have knowledge of the other rights and discover the legal paths for fulfilling them. (Del Pino, 2003: 1)

In contrast, references to duties in the data were few and far between. None of the respondents conceived citizenship principally in terms of duties, nor spoke of forming 'good' citizens who would fulfil their duties to the community, country or State. This distinguishes Pelotas from many citizenship education programmes which emphasize civic duties such as respecting laws, as complementary to – and often at the expense of – awareness of rights (Wringe, 1992).

Conceptions of citizenship, however, are not confined to individual rights. Another significant aspect in Pelotas was the emphasis on the collective. The *Working Philosophy*, a statement of the underlying principles of the MSE, states that, "Citizenship is a social construction and a space of common values, actions and institutions that bring individuals together" (MSE, 2004b). Later it speaks of an "ethic of solidarity" as one of the building blocks of public education.

This is related to what is perhaps the defining element of the MSE as a whole, namely, the value it gives to collective participation.

Yes, in our case specifically, citizenship is centred on the participation of the person in the discussion and deliberation of the policies that affect him or her directly. Our country has had prolonged periods of authoritarianism. Democracy in this country was exercised in very short periods. .... (Interview with Secretary, 5 April 2004)

Lack of participation is explained not by apathy or lack of civic virtue, but by a long-standing process of exclusion. In MSE (2002: 2) this theme is developed:

The Brazilian state, in all its spheres, confirmed itself historically under the mark of authoritarianism, establishing an abyss between the daily aspirations of the majority of citizens and the public administration. From this pattern, two behavioural aberrations arise. First, the centralization of decisions over the destinies of the majority in the hands of "executives"; and second, a complete alienation and docility of the citizen when faced with the decisions of the "State".

One way in which this emphasis on participation materializes is in the attempt to develop policy with the involvement of all members of the school communities. (The *school community* here refers to the collective of teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils and parents.) Instead of beginning the mandate with a set of new policies, the MSE set in motion in April 2001 a process called the Movement of Construction of Education Policy of the Municipal Public Network, with the aim of achieving the widest possible consultation. The process had three stages: firstly a diagnosis of requirements by each school community, followed by a municipal conference where representatives debated their findings, and finally a systematization of the information and formulation of policies.

The leaflet from the conference describes the objectives of the event:

The MSE, aiming to construct democratic relations, proposes an undertaking of valuing the school as a space of social quality and citizen practice. For this end, your participation, as a subject of this collective process of reflection, discussion and construction, is essential. The bringing about of significant changes in the



municipal education network requires the construction of a dialectical and fraternal space that can galvanize the relations between the MSE and the school community.... (MSE, 2001: 4)

As evidence of the democratic nature of the process, the Secretary described in interview a number of instances where the preferred policies of the MSE were rejected by the school communities, and consequently not implemented: an example of this is the proposal for the equal voting powers of mothers and fathers, which the communities rejected in favour of a single vote for the two parents.

Participation in the classroom and in the construction of education policies is strongly promoted, therefore, but education is also a means to having greater ability to participate in other spheres. According to Del Pino (2003: 5) public schooling must offer:

[A]n education that strengthens [pupils'] citizenship, making possible their active participation and the acquisition of socially significant knowledge and skills, in order to construct a fairer society....

Participation is therefore seen as having both instrumental and intrinsic value, being a means by which people engage in personal development, by which policies are constructed and schooling carried out effectively, as well as being a good in itself.

Another initiative of the MSE directed at greater community participation involves the decentralization of financial resources, aiming to give schools greater pedagogical and administrative autonomy. The document outlining this initiative states:

The social control of public policy is the first condition of the exercising of citizenship. Experience of participatory democracy builds in each person the values of solidarity and justice, of respect for differences and admiration/inclination for dialogue. (MSE, 2004a: 4)

The Secretary was keen to distinguish this initiative from decentralization policies inspired by neo-liberal economics, the latter being seen essentially as a means for the State to abdicate responsibility for the funding and provision of education, and not an effort to enable real local participation.

Pelotas since 2001 has had its own *participatory budget*, modelled on that of Porto Alegre, in which local communities vote directly on public spending in their area. While it is not a policy implemented by the MSE itself (being run by special secretariat) it does have important overlaps with education, since improvements in school infrastructure are a common destination of resources. The act of participation in these assemblies is seen as an educative experience, and an opportunity for the development of effective citizenship.

A head teacher of a school in a poor neighbourhood of Pelotas, (which had previously been on the equivalent of 'special measures' but had now achieved considerable improvement) explained how these educational opportunities had been noticed by her school, and that one of her teachers had consequently organized a mock participatory budget with her second year students. While they had started by arguing for issues of personal interest, the students soon developed understanding of the need for collective solutions, deliberation and a search for the common interest. At the end of the process they took their demands to the government headquarters and were received by the Mayor and the Secretary of Education. This is an instance of active citizenship being fostered through the creation of a space for participation and by developing confidence in the possibility of political change through local action.

Political participation (i.e. ongoing active involvement, rather than simply periodic voting) is in many conceptions seen principally as a *duty*, a civic responsibility which is time-consuming, and which may not be to everybody's enjoyment, but which ultimately is essential for the polity. This is the conception Kymlicka (2002) calls *instrumental* republicanism. Yet in the understanding of the MSE, this type of participation is seen as a *right*, and one which, having been historically denied in the region, must be recovered.

The Pelotas position, therefore, appears to fit most closely with the 'left' civic republicanism positions based on participatory democracy (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1970). While it places a strong emphasis on rights, it cannot be called a liberal position, firstly, as it sees participation as an essential part of being a citizen, rather than an option among many conceptions of the good life (although they do not go so far as to make participation obligatory), and, secondly, because it places emphasis on the collective rather than the individual in many instances. This conception of participation is one in which community members have a genuine influence on decision making, both in terms of the functioning of the local school, and of municipal education policy as a whole, as seen in the Movement of Construction of Education Policy. This leads to a different relationship between citizens and the laws of the State, as explained in MSE (2002: 3):

Each person who, as well as living in a democracy, participates personally in its construction and transformation, recognizes him or herself as a subject<sup>10</sup>. Thereby, he or she respects the laws not because they are just, or because they guarantee individual rights, but because he or she feels him or herself a constructor of this process, a co-creator of these laws.

Much of the literature on citizenship education proposes the encouragement of civic attitudes and virtues as an essential part, arguing that a democracy cannot function on the basis of institutions alone without an actively supportive population, and implying that many people are lacking these necessary attitudes (Callan, 1997; Kymlicka, 1999; White, 1996). This approach is conspicuously absent in the data from Pelotas. While active participation is considered of paramount importance, its absence is attributed to exclusionary societal structures rather than lack of individual virtues, and its resolution attributed to the establishment of new participative structures. Nevertheless, it was recognized by the respondents that there was more to participation than the *opportunity* for participation, and that people who were unaccustomed to being involved in political processes needed to learn new skills. This was the basis of the *participatory budget* experiment in the school referred to above, corresponding to the development of the 'deliberative character' explored by Gutmann (1999) and by Enslin, Pendlebury and Tjiattas (2001). It can also be argued that initiatives such as the Movement for Construction of Education Policy provide a space for community members to learn the skills of political participation through practice, as proposed by J. S. Mill (1991).

## 2. Universality and difference

The tension between universal conceptions of citizenship and those accommodating some form of difference, brought to prominence by social movements for the rights of minority and oppressed groups, is a key aspect of the citizenship debates (Unterhalter, 1999). Pelotas education policy does reflect the demands of these movements, both in its rhetoric and in the projects undertaken. MSE (2002: 2) refers to an "affirmation of citizenship, which respects the

rights of minority positions, which adopts the notion of plurality of political subjects, which promotes diversity”.

Firstly, in relation to disability, there are a number of new initiatives relating to learners with special needs, particularly the deaf, and some respondents stressed the importance of these changes in the orientation of the new government, leading to a new paradigm of inclusion. The co-ordinators of special education also spoke at length on the need to reconstruct society’s understanding of disability and normality:

Within the school, there is the right to equality, the rights of all, and you have to be careful not to homogenize.... So when you start this work of citizenship... everyone has the right to participation and so forth, but in this participation we can decharacterize differences.... We have to safeguard the differences of different groups and this is very difficult. (Interview with MSE co-ordinator, 7 April 2004)

While discussion of gender was surprisingly absent in the data, race appeared an important issue. Countering the assertions of previous local and national governments that it was not an issue worthy of policy initiatives, the MSE started the new Quilombo<sup>11</sup> project to promote African Brazilian art and identity in schools, as well as addressing debates on ethnicity in teacher education. The issue was raised a number of times by the respondents, not in relation to direct racism or overt discrimination, but to the subtle exclusion resulting from the devaluing of the African roots of the black community and the economic exclusion enduring since the abolition of slavery. A black member of staff at the MSE told me of her surprise, on arriving for her first day of work, at the number of other black employees: a rare thing in the public or business sectors of Pelotas.

The importance of identity in general terms was emphasized by a co-ordinator of primary education:

He [sic., the citizen] needs to situate who he is in all this...[to know] which is his door, whose child he is, what his parents’ story is, to be aware the world didn’t start now, how it evolved, what path it is taking, and what role we have in the story.... He’s not just someone with rights, but someone with a role to play. (Interview with MSE co-ordinator, 8 April 2004)

This statement is significant in distinguishing the Pelotas approach from one based purely on formal rights, which Unterhalter calls an “appeal to an abstract concept of the citizen” (1999: 102). One MSE co-ordinator said:

The question of citizenship is the question of being. It’s about being a person, not about being over 18, with all the rights and duties. From the moment you start to construct your life story you start coming up against issues of citizenship. So I can’t understand that from a particular moment you start to be a citizen. (Interview with MSE co-ordinator, 8 April 2004)

However, the approach of Pelotas does at times have a universalist vein, favouring statements of equal rights for all. Use of the word “community” by many of the respondents and in the official literature often implies a united undifferentiated group, with attention not drawn to imbalances of power among sub-groups. The following statement on equality shows an implicit conception of homogeneous citizenship:

And we realized that through a democratic policy in schools you can create the possibility of bringing to life in the schools relations of democratic citizenship, so

people can come to see each other as equals.... (Interview with Secretary, 5 April 2004)

Many of those interviewed acknowledged the importance of difference, but did not have it at the forefront of their vision. This might be explained by the importance of the *collective*. The MSE as a whole saw solidarity as essential to transforming society and resisting the dehumanizing influence of capitalism, and viewed collective planning, implementation and evaluation as the best form of social organization. I had the chance to observe this collective planning both in the Secretariat and in local schools. Yet this emphasis on the collective can lead to a neglect of difference, intra-group discrimination and imbalances of power. While there are efforts to value the identity of all and to address discrimination against certain groups, therefore, individual identity can be subordinated to the collective.

### 3. The local, the national and the global

Communitarians and conservatives often see school as a means of promoting or reinforcing national or ethnic culture, glorifying the history of the group and inspiring the young citizen to become an upstanding member of that community and further its glory. This approach has characterized citizenship education in Europe in past centuries, whether conceived as a separate subject or as an element running through the whole curriculum. According to Green (1990), the development of education systems in the 19th century was essential for constructing political and administrative apparatuses, and forming ideology for legitimizing the state: it was “a powerful instrument for promoting political loyalty amongst the people and for creating a cohesive national culture after the image of the ruling class” (p.79). Public education systems are still fundamental for building national identity.

One significant aspect of the data from Pelotas is the absence of any reference to the nation as a site of allegiance, or to promoting Brazilian national identity, patriotic feeling or national history. There appeared to be no element of national citizenship. One might have expected this to be replaced with *global* citizenship, based on the benefits of a greater identification with the whole of humanity at the global scale. Yet the issue of globalization was rarely raised by the respondents. When asked about the notion, there was a fair amount of scepticism, given the imbalances of power between nations, although there was recognition of the importance of the international sphere. A supervisor of subject areas said:

[Global citizenship] might be possible. But in our case, being a Third World country, in our present condition as a country, it's pretty difficult to be a global citizen.... Our country is in a subordinate position to the First World, to the USA.... (Interview with MSE co-ordinator, 8 April 2004)

On the other hand, there are repeated references in the data to the *local* and to the need for the individual to ground his or her identity in a sound knowledge of the history and geography of the local area. As the above-mentioned supervisor stated, “I think you have to start with the local first, to be a citizen of the world.” Another supervisor of subject areas said:

In History, Geography and Art we have a project about the city of Pelotas. So this brings us to the question of citizenship.... How are you going to value something that you don't know? (Interview with MSE co-ordinator, 8 April 2004)

There was an emphasis on the benefits of encouraging the local economy rather than depending on the uncertain global market, as seen in the Environmental School Meals project. This initiative, begun in 2001, involves the introduction in schools of a new menu with high

nutritional value, comprised of organic foods purchased in the local region. It provides an important boost for the local economy, giving a guaranteed market to 240 small producers in the municipality.

There were also efforts to value local knowledge and not to bury different understandings of the world under a universal academic culture. In relation to the *progressive classes* initiative, aimed at reducing repetition in the early years of primary school, it is stated:

These spaces have been a locus of exchanging experiences, lived realities and studies that support the day-to-day practical life of the pedagogical teams, as well as the collective construction of a plan of action that does not isolate or discriminate against failing children, thus creating an atmosphere where they can confront and integrate the knowledge constructed out of school with the version elaborated in the school environment. (Del Pino 2003: 62)

To some extent the emphasis on the local may be explained by the fact that the government in question is a municipal one, with its interests primarily in the local sphere. Yet I believe this to be a superficial reading. What emerges in place of global, national and even municipal allegiance was a relation to *society* and the *public sphere*. The word ‘public’ was used frequently by the respondents to denote a highly positive quality, but one that was at threat, or in need of rescue. A head teacher spoke on two occasions about the importance of recuperating the public space:

So...we had to start by making the community understand that what is public is theirs, and those around the school, the surrounding community, had to understand that the school is theirs.... With this perspective, we began to implement some policies of coming closer to the family and the community. So we started to bring the family into the school.... (Interview with Head Teacher, 9 April 2004)

The distinction between “State” and “public” is explored in the following statement in MSE (2002: 2)

The permanent objective of the democratic and popular government is the construction of an alternative power, based on an engagement with promoting social equality and oriented towards the radical search for liberty. A power that makes democracy not simply a discourse legitimizing formal and alienated practices of political pseudo-participation, but an engagement which stimulates the creation of new non-State public spheres of political participation and affirmation of citizenship.... A power which takes on the challenge of public control over the sphere of the State.

In all these formulations, a discourse of society/public/citizen is articulated rather than one of nation/fatherland/Brazilian. The public is a shared space rather than an exclusive, excluding one, not constructed in opposition to other identities, as national citizenship often is. In practical terms, the residents of Pelotas are all citizens of Brazil, but it is the *people* that are emphasized, and not the abstract or transcendent idea of the nation, or any other politico-geographical entity, which must be promoted and defended. It might be said that the citizen is here conceived of as belonging to a *people-state* rather than a nation-state.

#### 4. The questioning of authority

A final distinctive aspect of the Pelotas approach to citizenship education is the emphasis on critical attitudes towards the authorities. This was found both among the individual members of staff and in the official literature. The *Working Philosophy* states:

Citizenship is ... a political practice based on values like ... disobedience towards any authoritarian power.... Education for citizenship requires the possibility of creating educative spaces in which the social subjects may be able to question, think, adopt and critique the values, norms and moral rights belonging to individuals, groups and communities, including their own rights. (MSE, 2004b)

There appear to be two parts to this passage. The second asserts the importance of individual *autonomy*, and as such is compatible with many liberal conceptions of education. The first is a stronger political statement. When questioned on the meaning of “disobedience towards any authoritarian power”, the Secretary said:

Our country has come through long periods of dictatorship which created in people a culture of obedience, where the Secretary of Education orders and the heads obey, the head orders and the teachers obey, the teacher orders in the classroom and the pupils obey. So if you want to turn this logic around, and construct a new pedagogical practice, where the teacher doesn't command, he/she reflects with the children, where the teacher constructs knowledge ... as well as questioning all the authoritarian aspects of the culture of the teachers and even that of the children – they already arrive with that culture of obedience, with the posture of the student, with all the symbolism of how they should behave. So we want people to rebel against authoritarian power, against any form of command which is not something shared, whether it is the PT or not, as a means of maintaining this orientation. We didn't want to implement a democratic plan in an authoritarian manner – unfortunately, some democratic administrations do exactly this: “you will participate!” And the people might participate during that administration, but when the mayor changes it all goes to pot. So you have to create a culture of citizenship, where people have to disobey and confront even our government. (Interview with Secretary, 5 April 2004)

A head of department in the MSE agreed:

Education for citizenship might produce someone who doesn't question...so he or she might be a 'decent' citizen conforming to whatever policies are implemented. I would say this is a form of adaptation. People can just pass through life or they can make history. The citizen in my conception is he or she who makes history, who doesn't accept injustice, who doesn't accept mediocrity, who always wants better conditions, who always has a dream.... (Interview with Head of Department, 5 April 2004)

This emphasis on critical attitudes towards the authorities is consistent with the advocacy of allegiance to the people rather than the nation- or city-state. All liberal democracies require from their citizens both respect for the laws of the State and autonomy to choose their representatives wisely. However, the importance given to each of these varies. National governments have historically tended to emphasize the first, being the “safer” option and a way of avoiding civil unrest, particularly in the context of widespread injustice and socio-economic inequality. Promoting unquestioning support (often under the banner of patriotism) has been a means for leaders to maintain their own positions of power. Promoting a questioning attitude, as in the case of Pelotas, is a riskier approach since it can lead to self-destruction. It is, however, essential to a genuine democratic process. The fact that the MSE

allowed itself to be defeated on some issues of policy by community votes is an indication of its commitment to continuing democratic and autonomous participation.

The *Working Philosophy*, however, proposes not only autonomy and critical thinking, but also “disobedience towards any authoritarian power”. The extent of “disobedience” allowed in this conception is not clear. The Secretary’s phrase “we want people to rebel against authoritarian power, against any form of command which is not something shared” implies more than simply waiting until the next election to vote the party out, but should not be understood as armed rebellion, which would not be consistent with the rest of the MSE philosophy. Direct political mobilization, and in extreme cases non-violent civil disobedience, would, however, be justified.

There is a potential contradiction here, one which did in fact emerge in the time I spent in Pelotas, when the municipal teachers’ union began a strike for salary demands. The MSE and its staff were caught between their support for union action (and in many cases their personal history in the union) and their own survival as a government. The strike was lifted before long, but the incident did expose the complications of a government supporting critical thinking and direct action.

## Conclusion

The approach of the Pelotas Secretariat of Education to citizenship can be characterized by the following features:

- Extensive social as well as political and civil rights
- Active participation
- Collective organization
- Universal values with some space for difference
- Critical attitudes towards authorities
- Allegiance to the people rather than the nation/city

Pelotas education policy is distinctive and at the same time part of a framework with theoretical and practical antecedents. The perspectives presented by the respondents are in sharp contrast to the powerful discourse of education worldwide characterized by neo-liberal free-market structures, managerialism and commercialization. In fact, the policy approach is responding both to consumerist individualism and to the contrasting process of authoritarian subordination of the individual to national ends seen in previous periods of Brazilian history. Like other educational movements in the country, in particular those influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire, it aims to address the country's authoritarian history and the continuing political exclusion of large parts of the population. Yet while Pelotas government policy is responding to a specific context and history, it can also contribute to the wider debates on citizenship education.

In what ways, then, do education and citizenship relate in the views of the respondents? Firstly, education is seen as a right that must be guaranteed to all citizens, and therefore, is *part* of citizenship. Secondly, education is seen to help people to exercise their citizenship more effectively: a *means* to citizenship. The third conception is one in which citizenship is seen as a form of education, with participation in political life an important process of learning. On the whole education is seen as inseparable from, and essential for, citizenship.

The role of education in providing employment skills cannot be ignored by the MSE, but these are seen as part of the life of a citizen. A good example of this is the Youth and Adult Education Project (PEJA), in which students who had previously dropped out of primary education learn basic literacy and numeracy skills and undertake vocational courses, but only in the context of their political condition as citizens. This is a fundamental difference of perspective from an approach to education which views the student primarily as consumer and employee in the market, with political skills a secondary aim. Education is also for intrinsic human ends – the emotional, artistic and spiritual development of individuals – but this too is not separate from citizenship.

In accordance with this conception, the education policy of the municipality has been constructed so as to provide the education to which all citizens have a right (including the fundamental task of achieving universal enrolment), to reflect the principle of participatory democracy in the planning and development of policy, and to empower citizens to better uphold their rights and participate in the polity. This is a positive framework of citizenship education in that it makes a genuine attempt to form democratic relations and to empower citizens, in contrast to those programmes whose real aim is to create a submissive and conformist population. Another positive element is that it acknowledges historical and political context and does not orient itself around a foundationless notion of “effectiveness”. However, it must be stressed that this study has documented the municipality’s *approach*, and not the practical results of its policies (this important research remains to be undertaken). In addition, it is not claimed that all elements of the approach are unambiguously positive: criticisms may for example be made of its universalizing tendencies, its neglect of gender and so forth.

This study has aimed to explore the ideas found in the literature on citizenship and education, principally Anglo-American political philosophy, in a real context of educational policy-making. There are three main areas in which the approach assessed here can be seen to challenge the debates presented in this literature. First, lack of political participation is often seen as being due to lack of interest, or to apathy or cynicism towards politicians. In Pelotas, however, participation is seen as a question of rights, with people having been historically denied the opportunity to participate and with a resolution of that exclusion being achieved through a change in structures rather than encouragement of working-class people towards greater responsibility. This is not to say that structures are seen to be a *sufficient* condition for participation: it is also necessary that people have the relevant education and experience to participate effectively.

Second, citizenship is conventionally seen in terms of allegiance to a geographical or ethnic area, whether the city-states of the ancient and early modern world, or the nation-states of the modern period. Globalization and the resurgence of interest in the ‘local’ have challenged this model worldwide. Yet Pelotas does not appeal primarily to either the global or the local (in a narrow cultural sense), but instead to the community of people, where those people are defined as the society one is living in, rather than a specific ethnic or geographical group. This is significant, in that a good citizen is no longer someone who works for the glory of the nation or the city, but someone who defends rights and upholds justice for all in society.

Thirdly, as a direct consequence of the second point, unquestioning allegiance is no longer a requirement of good citizenship. Since there is no over-arching goal in the form of the glory of the ‘fatherland’, there is no need for education to promote conformity to policies designed to promote that end. Instead, the government has an interest in all people having a sense of justice and critical judgement, so that society and its institutions are able to uphold these principles of justice.



The last important element of the Pelotas approach to citizenship education is that it has no concept of citizenship education as such. All education is education for citizens and for effective citizenship. If there is a specific curriculum element called ‘citizenship education’ – as there is in many other places – it implies that the rest of the curriculum has other ends, a proposal that would not be acceptable in the Pelotas approach. As the Secretary says:

But we do not determine that the theme should be dealt with in any specific place. Because dealing with it in one place means in practice understanding that citizenship in the real world also occupies one specific place. (Interview with Secretary, 12 April 2004)

The approach of Pelotas to citizenship education, therefore, is distinctive in that it is not a rescue operation – salvaging some legitimacy for existing democratic structures – but an attempt to create a new society based on full active citizenship for all, and one integrated into the whole of education policy and school life.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> At the time the research was undertaken, the Workers' Party (PT) was still in power. They subsequently lost the elections of October 2004, and were replaced by a coalition headed by Bernardo de Souza of the Popular Socialist Party.
- <sup>2</sup> The documents are the authorship of the MSE as a whole, with the exception of Del Pino 2003, which is authored solely by the Secretary.
- <sup>3</sup> It is eighth of all countries in the UNDP's Gini index of inequality, and the highest outside Africa (UNDP, 2004).
- <sup>4</sup> The subject had previously been made compulsory in the earlier period of authoritarian rule of Getúlio Vargas, 1937-1945.
- <sup>5</sup> The Citizen School was not the creation of the PT, but had its origins as a theoretical framework in the Paulo Freire Institute in São Paulo, and developed through the writings of a number of Brazilian educationists, including Freire himself in the 1990s.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ensino Fundamental*, which I have translated as "primary", is eight years in duration (ages 6-14) so in fact encompasses lower secondary as well.
- <sup>7</sup> Figures are for 2002 (INEP 2005).
- <sup>8</sup> The government of the PMDB (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro) elected in 1982 had previously undertaken some significant reforms in education, including guarantees of minimum investment in education, election of head teachers, introduction of night courses and so forth, some of which were continued or revived by the present government.
- <sup>9</sup> Interviews and documents have been translated from the original Portuguese by the author.
- <sup>10</sup> The word 'subject' as it appears here is used in the sense of 'agent', i.e. the opposite of 'object'.
- <sup>11</sup> This was the term given to the republics formed by runaway slaves during the colonial period, and as such is a symbol of black resistance against oppression.

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