

Reproduction of educational inequalities in the ‘above-age’ phenomenon in Brazil

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Abstract

Brazil's school system has a high above-age rate, that is, a high percentage (over 60%) of students whose age is above the school age expected for the school year they are enrolled in. In this article we look into the mechanisms responsible for above-age from a sociological perspective, and inquire whether its causes are found both in the way social actions are structured and in the norms that make up the social structure. Our hypothesis is that the major cause for above-age is found in the cultural gap between the school system and the students' disadvantaged social and financial background, especially those with African descent. However, another cause observed derives from individual decisions. Certainly, individuals with this social background decide to take up again the subjects they have not yet passed, but their academic results and their expectations for the future suffer from the difficulties awaiting along their schooling. Class and ethnic slant seem to aggravate due to students' differing perceptions on the advantages and disadvantages in continuing with their studies. Our analysis, therefore, shows these circumstances considering social actions and structural conditions (cf. el modelo de Boudon, 1983; Goldthorpe, 1996).

Keywords

Educational inequality – Ethnicity – Above-age.

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Brazil's educational levels are still lower than international standards. In spite of a 12.8% growth of its net national product per capita and an increase in its population's average schooling, both in population rate and in years attended, during the 1990's its social structure continued to reproduce, and even to aggravate, educational inequalities among social classes, regions and ethnic-racial groups.

Along with the arrival of democracy in Brazil, another important advancement was universal access to education. In 2005, nearly 37 million students were enrolled in compulsory education nationwide, 90% of them at public schools, and there were 8,2 million students in secondary education. However, the progress reached in the number of school places has brought new challenges along. Besides a residual percentage of children and youth out of school, there is also a group of enrolled students who progress very slowly or do not learn, who must do their school year over and end up dropping out of school. Out of every 100 students enrolling in the first year of compulsory education, only 59 graduate from this eight-grade cycle, taking on average 10,2 years to conclude it. In secondary education, completion rates fall down to 53%, with nearly 77% of the students above the expected graduation age.

It is undeniable that the country has greatly progressed in its schooling coverage; however, there is still a long path ahead to ensure that all those enrolled will reach the end of compulsory education cycles. The challenge is even greater to broaden higher education coverage, since only 11% of the population aged 18 to 24 is currently attending university.

The expansion model of Brazilian educational system also stands out for its excluding and unequal nature. The conservative modernizing project that started in the 1930's has indeed contributed, if not caused, such social, regional and ethnic-racial divisions. Its prevalence compromises social justice and democracy in the country, since such huge

slants weaken the power of excluded populations, whose political representation stumbles upon huge obstacles to convey their needs and their demands. Such unequal division of associative and political power erodes the possibilities of the democratic system, mainly to promote distributive public policies. All the above reasons induce a large portion of youth to seek alternatives in delinquency, such as dealing weapons and illegal substances. Such practices, in turn, threaten both popular autonomous organization in poor communities and the very sovereignty of the Brazilian government, powerless to control its vast national borders and its large urban areas.

Our research starting point is situated in this scenario of persisting educational inequality and unfairness that is, in some aspects, exacerbated amidst an expansive economy and a growing schooling offer. We assume that education is an invaluable resource to improve living conditions and to consolidate democracy, a system that is very necessary and hardly dispensable in Brazil, but we will avoid the excessive self-confidence of those who make it the only path. For this reason, we will divide our analysis in ethnic-racial, social-financial dimensions that will allow us to better study the factors of this set of social vulnerability factors embodied simultaneously in different domains.

In this article we shall present the first conclusions of such analysis, outlining its concepts, summarizing the general evidence of educational inequality in Brazil, and pointing out some signs of the effect of individual strategies. Quantitative research techniques have been adopted, mainly descriptive statistics and linear regressions. Our data have been drawn from the National Research per Home Sampling (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostragem Domiciliar), from the Demographic Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística), and from the Basic Education Evaluation

System and the School Census of the Brazilian Department of Education (Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica e Censo Escolar de Ministério da Educação).

Theoretical framework

Our research is inspired in sociology of education's anti-racist approach, in which ethnic inequalities cannot be isolated from other social divisions (Gillborn, 1990; Troyna, 1993; Bonal, 1998). In order to make this approach more detailed, we have looked into Charles Tilly's concept of causal mechanisms for long-lasting inequalities. The conclusions of this study will reveal that opportunity hoarding and emulation are key mechanisms in this field.

We therefore understand that the slanted distribution of specific resources among social classes and among ethnic groups is the result of a series of causal mechanisms (Tilly, 1998). Of all mechanisms, opportunity hoarding and emulation shape educational inequalities. The monopoly of opportunities held by a single group is very visible in a country lacking universal access to schooling. In Brazil, the universalization of the right to education declared in the 1988 constitution, along with the 1990's educational expansion, have moderated the influence of this mechanism. Nevertheless, the acute school segregation that divides schools according to the students' social background is an important evidence of opportunity hoarding. International studies show that this segregation affects the academic performance of disadvantaged students through the 'effect of equals', which is devastating in public schools in low-income areas where homes are very precarious and where there is a lack of infrastructure and public services.

Besides opportunity hoarding, emulation also has a very strong effect. This phenomenon consists in applying socially prestigious norms of behaviour to individuals lacking the attributes favored by such social prestige.

Sociology has studied many of its manifestations, such as the boasting consumption described by Thorstein Veblen, the social construction of the poor according to Georg Simmel, the reference groups by Robert Merton, the dynamics between established and excluded populations by Norbert Elias, or the distinction by Pierre Bourdieu.

To this intellectual tradition, Tilly has added two ideas that are essential in our analysis. Firstly, the proposal of a very broad definition of emulation – as an extension of social rules within a hierarchy –, which leaves space to consider that public policies may expressly induce emulation. This would include, for instance, the policies directed to the poor if such policies are, as Simmel pointed out, simply an expression of the collective consensus on the social minimum. The consensus regarding which living conditions are considered decent for low-income people places them before a truly disciplinary mechanism of educational and conditional norms, which impose a range of obligations on what they must do in order to deserve social assistance.

Secondly, emulation also occurs in the comparisons among social classes, producing hyper-correction among middle class populations that have recently arrived in the world of high culture, or causing a reflection of high culture in many people belonging to the working class, as pointed out by Bourdieu in his classical study on cultural consumption. Furthermore, public policies generate specific manifestations of emulation, setting up certain social norms that induce comparison between more and less favored groups. In fact, these hierarchical comparisons can be perceived through social insertion contracts, through conditioned money transfers, through compensatory education centered on schooling deficit, or through the activation programs for people who have gone through a long period of unemployment.

Low-income classes and ethnic

minorities suffer the ravaging effects of emulation in different ways. Several researchers have brought to attention a series of political legitimization strategies that make the country's impoverished masses mirror themselves in cultural norms supposedly superior to theirs and absolutely removed from their daily realities. It is an example of intentioned emulation that operates through the naturalization and the neutralization of inequalities. Naturalization, according to Reis (2000; 2005) is the situation in which the upper class recognizes the existence of poverty while denying any responsibility for it, attributing it to the government's imperfect management. In the same line, Kowaricz (2005) argues that the evidence of inequality is neutralized by the presentation of the phenomenon in statistics and in the media as a separate reality. In both cases, therefore, not only do they omit several well documented factors of social fracture (e.g, migrations due to agriculture crises, informal employment, regressive taxing system), but they also place the key to the problem in the inappropriate behaviour of the poor, and eventually of social workers.

Under such conditions, failure at school and difficulties to study during adulthood may become still another stigma used to blame the victims themselves. The data reveal that, despite the increase in school places and the proliferation of night courses aimed at students who gave up school in previous years, a large percentage of students have not benefited much from these opportunities, especially students who classify themselves as Blacks. But among these omissions and possible self-justifying reproaches, emulation is clearly observed as deeply rooted in everyday educational practices. Goldthorpe (1996) allows us to distinguish two effects of this emulation practice still present in the context of an expansive, though fractured, educational system.

A primary effect of practical emulation resides in the cultural distance between family

education and school education. Bourdieu and Passeron (1971), Bourdieu (1993) and Bernstein (1990; 1996; 1999) have proved that this explains to a large extent educational inequalities – or at least, to a greater extent than organizational and budget needs, or pedagogical guidelines. These sociologists have observed that cultural continuity between the school and middle class families is a main pillar for their offspring's success; however, this discontinuity becomes an obstacle for girls and, even more, for boys from worker and rural classes or belonging to indigenous or migrating ethnic minorities. This disadvantage prevails beyond management models and pedagogies, since their cultural distance becomes evident in their contact with educators and in the alienation they experience at school.

Many studies have brought to evidence the secondary effect emerging from students' decision to carry on with their studies (Boudon, 1973; Willis, 1977; Aggleton; Whitty, 1985; Gambetta, 1996; Haywood; Mac an Ghail, 1996; Erikson et al, 2005). In general traits, this effect is observed in the greater tendency of disadvantaged students to give up studying, either because they value other social attributes more (e.g. a job, fashion, or a male prejudice that associates studying with weakness) or because a lot of job offers seem appealing to youngsters who, at school, feel "like a fish out of water" (Bonal et al., 2004). This fact unveils an important institutional mediation of the secondary effect, since the drop-out rate of low-income and minority students is substantially lower in educational systems in which comprehensive education comes before child education, in which secondary education branches later into different technical and academic career options, and where scholarships are given to continue studying after compulsory education (Jonsson; Erikson, 2000; Willms; Sommers, 2001; OECD; UNESCO/UIS, 2003; Breen; Jonsson, 2005). In this sense, several empirical interactions seem to occur between the intended emulation deriving from

certain decisions, or political non-decisions, and the practical emulation that operates in everyday life in the disadvantaged groups.

As for 'above-age', an indirect influence of the primary effect can be perceived, since educational inequalities are reproduced in Brazil from one generation to the next in the vast majority of educational indicators. However, the driving force of above-age seems to be the secondary effect, both with regard to individual decisions and to their institutional mediation. Above-age is clearly the product of conscious decisions taken by those who insist in obtaining educational credentials even after the officially expected age. At the same time, it is interesting to estimate the extent to which institutional characteristics can influence their strategies. In a first approximation, to detect the incidence of these environmental constrictions, we shall briefly analyze regional differences, above-age distribution among several social categories and the modulations of educational aspirations.

First signs: education, inequality and ethnicity in Brazil

This section contains a description of educational inequalities in Brazil with emphasis on the distribution slants dividing the 'White' social and political majority from the 'Black' minority. Some of them provide the first signs of the previously mentioned primary and secondary effects.

Demographic overview

In 2004 the population in Brazil was approximately 182 million inhabitants, of which 51,4% identified themselves as 'White', 48% as 'Black', 0,4% as 'Yellow' and 0,2% as Indigenous. Brazil has a distinct regional distribution pattern of its ethnic-racial groups. Whites are the majority in the prosperous regions of the South and the Southeast, while Blacks predominate in the poorer regions of the North and the Northeast. Table 1 shows the

Table 1: White and black population distribution per region.

Population	White	Black
Brazil	52%	48%
North	24%	76%
Northeast	30%	70%
Southeast	61%	39%
South	83%	17%
Center-West	43%	57%

Source: IBGE/PNAD, 2004.

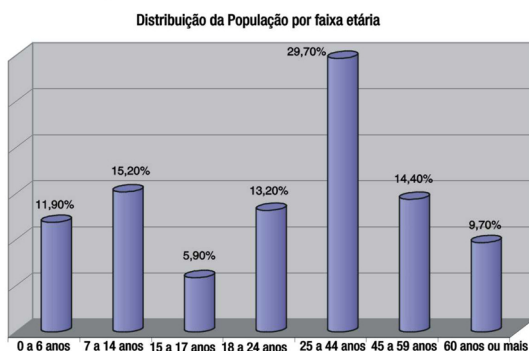
racial composition for each region in Brazil. In the South, with 15.3% of Brazilian population, 83% of its inhabitants identify themselves as White in the census. In the Southeast, the most heavily populated region (43.7% of the country's total), 61% consider themselves Whites. On the other hand, in the North and in the Northeast, with 5% and 30% respectively of the Brazilian population, 70% of the people consider themselves Blacks.

Brazilian demography is currently experiencing the phase known as "the window of opportunities", as the economically active population is increasing. This fact naturally results in more human resources and a larger number of tax payers, as well as a growing educational demand.

Up to age 44, the age composition is analogous for Whites and Blacks, although it later forks due to their different life expectancies. According to the 2005 Brazilian Racial Atlas (Atlas Racial Brasileiro), in the year 2000 White women had a reasonable life expectancy of 73.8 years, whereas Black women's expectancy was down to 69.5 years. As for men, Whites had a life expectancy of 68.2 years, and Blacks only 63.2 years. It is well-known that this difference reflects, above all, a more limited access to educational and health services, as well as to basic infrastructure, such as running water and sanitation (Graphic 1).

1. To summarize, in this study we have adopted the convention of including in the category 'Blacks' all those who consider themselves 'Black' or 'Brown' (or mixed), according to the classification of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE - Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística). In any case, the IBGE has shown that living conditions are very similar in both sub-groups.

Graph 1: Population age distribution.



Source: IBGE/PNAD, 2004.

Inequality overview

Table 2 shows the lower end of income distribution between early and late 1990's. It reveals a general pattern in Brazilian social structure, in which Blacks have long suffered more financial adversities than Whites. Blacks' higher percentage among poor and homeless populations is manifest at both moments. At the same time, the table reflects a general improvement, since the frequency of these problems decreases between a first moment of severe crisis and structural adjustments, and a second moment of a softer crisis and incipient compensatory social policies. Nonetheless, one cannot avoid noticing that Whites progressed proportionally more than Blacks throughout those years.

Table 2: Poor and homeless rates per color.

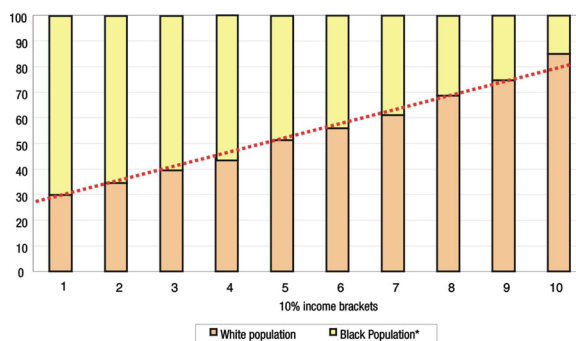
	Percentage of total population		Number of people		
	1992	1999	1992	1999	99/92 (%)
POOR					
Total	41	34	57.329	52.866	-8
Whites	29	23	22.109	19.008	-14
Blacks	55	48	35.099	33.638	-4
HOMELESS					
Total	19	14	27.130	22.329	-18
Whites	12	8	8.966	6.961	-23
Blacks	29	22	18.092	15.374	-15

Source: IPEA, based on the IBGE/PNAD, 1992 and 1999.

In Graph 2 a transverse cut appears in the closest moment, as it informs of the population distribution according to income, for each ten-percent income bracket, and by color as defined in the IBGE. The ratio of Whites and

Blacks in each income bracket draws a slope between the lower levels (where Blacks are the majority) and the higher levels (where Whites make up the largest part). Three fourths of the richest ten percent of Brazilian population place themselves in the White category, while three fourths in the poorest ten percent place themselves in the Black category. In the middle, the percentage of Whites draws a climbing ladder, with the income brackets as steps.

Graph 2: Population distribution per income bracket and color.



Source: PNAD, 1999.

Table 3 shows a certain parallelism between financial inequalities and educational inequalities that open a breach between White majority and Black social-political minority. In illiteracy and in average number of years of schooling, Blacks fair worse than Whites. And while there is a noticeable progress of both of these indicators, the ethnic breach maintains the same depth.

Table 3: Illiteracy rate and average number of years of schooling for population aged 15 or older, per color.

Color	1992	2001
Illiteracy rate		
Brazil	17%	12%
Whites	11%	8%
Blacks	26%	18%
Years of schooling		
Brazil	4,9	6,0
Whites	5,9	6,9
Blacks	3,6	4,7

Source: IBGE/PNAD, 1992-2001.

With table 4 we can X-ray educational inequalities among ethnic groups within a social category that is homogeneous when defined by other variables. The table reveals a build-up

Tabla 4: Ratio of illiteracy rates for the above categories, for population aged 15 or older.

	1991	2000
Color		
Black / White	2,37	2,36
Zone		
Rural / Urban	2,85	2,92
Sex		
Woman / Man	1,02	0,97
Income		
1 minimum salary / over 10 minimum salaries	14,5	20,6
Age		
50 years old / 15 years old	1,91	2,16

Source: IBGE/Censo Demográfico.

of disadvantaged categories on some occasions, and the stubborn persistence of the divisions on other occasions. This build-up is caused by the blatant educational distance between the rich and the poor. With an abyss separating the two ends of income distribution, and since color, region, sex and age are consistent with these extremes of wealth and poverty, these other categories must also receive unequal income.

For this reason, it is no surprise to detect ethnic and urban-rural gaps, although to a lesser degree. The difference is not so marked when comparing men and women, or in the case of youngsters and adults. The tendency, however, does not show the equalization that the educational expansion could have brought along, but an inertia of the educational slants among groups instead. Thus, at the end of the 1990's, the poor were even farther behind than in the previous decade, and illiteracy maps, both ethnic and territorial, kept the same relative distances. As a result, at the beginning of the millennium there were twenty times more illiterates among the poor than among the rich, while illiteracy among Blacks more than doubled illiteracy among Whites, same ratio shown between rural and urban illiteracy.

Primary effects: social background, 'color' and educational performance

School segregation in Brazil allows residents of wealthier neighborhoods and

students of better schools to capture overwhelmingly more advantages than dwellers and students from the sadly famous favelas, the Brazilian slums". Waltenberg (2005) has determined that the effect of students' social background in the PISA national school test results is responsible for 10,25% of the slant among schools in Brazil, in contrast with OCDE's 7.7% average slant attributed to this factor. This slant is perhaps even more severe when we compare Brazil with financially consolidated industrialized countries. The effect shows that the monopoly of opportunities is a reality in Brazil, where the neighborhoods of the rich and the poor have so little in common. This situation is aggravated by the segregation due to the polarization of students between private and public schools, especially in secondary education. It is well-known that wealthy families take their children to private schools so that they may be well prepared to enter university, while low-income students, many of them above-age, attend public schools and cannot get good scores at the university placement exams, being excluded from entering the prestigious public universities, and so they end up paying tuition at lower standard private colleges.

Emulation primary effects are very visible in the strong correlation that can be established between students' ethnic-social background and their academic performance. Table 5 detects two parallel pyramids, since vulnerable students are very rare among wealthy social classes (of any color),

and they proliferate among low-income classes (of any color). It should be noticed, however, that in all income groups Blacks stumble upon more educational problems than Whites. Moreover, a tragic balance between prosperity and educational advantage is also observed in the highest income group, since the educational gap between Blacks and Whites in this group is much greater than in the other income groups.

Table 5: Percentage of students from the 4th grade of primary education with marks considered "very critical" or "critical" in the mathematics exams, per color and financial class.

Financial class	Whites (%)	Blacks (%)	Blacks/Whites
A	10,30	23,40	2,27
B	25,80	31,40	1,22
C	44,10	48,90	1,11
D	61,80	64,00	1,04
E	78,70	80,60	1,02

Source: Inep/Saeb 2003.

The correlation between color groups and academic results is significant in tables 6 and 7. In general, they both reflect Blacks' relative disadvantage. In table 6 school performance marks a deeper breach in this social category than in other categories, since high-income Blacks fair 3.35 times better than low-income Blacks, while the advantage for high-income Whites over low-income Whites is only 2.36 times. Table 7 further depicts this situation, since the percentage of Blacks among students with an 'excellent performance' was lower than Whites' in all courses considered in 1992, and this situation was maintained in 1999.

In spite of those figures, both tables manifest improvements in both groups, one of them being the clear leap forward Blacks have given in higher level courses. Table 6, together with table 4, adds more detail to the influence of income on schooling. The educational polarization previously detected between the rich and the poor shows a smaller gap between the non-poor and the poor. We must interpret, therefore, that the rich have moved away from the general population, and not only from the poor. In the same way, table 6 reveals that Blacks became closer to Whites during the previous decade, especially in the low-income category.

Table 6: School performance according to poverty condition and color. *Ensino Fundamental (primary and secondary education)*. Brazil. 1992 y 1999.

	1992	1999	1999/92 change
Non-poor/ poor			
Total	4,73	3,18	-32,80%
Whites	3,15	2,36	-25,26%
Blacks	4,97	3,35	-32,57%
Whites / Blacks			
Total	2,39	1,80	-24,9%
	2,22	1,72	-22,5%
Non-poor	1,41	1,21	-14,1%

Source: IBGE/PNAD – *microdados*.

In sum, the resulting picture shows persisting shades of educational inequality. Color categories and financial classes continue to define deep educational divisions, although the widespread of primary education has brought along a certain approximation, rather than an equalization, among them. This find evidenced in the statistical studies corroborates many other observations on the repeated disconnection between educational expansion processes and equalization processes (Jonsson; Erikson, 2000). The reasons are clear: the fact that all children have a school place does not mean that they all enjoy the same conditions to use it; nor does the fact that all students conclude basic education cycles grant them the same probability to continue studying at higher education levels; finally, the reduction in educational basic resource needs does not imply that relative inequalities in the access to these resources may be relieved.

Some secondary effects

Students' decisions often reproduce educational inequalities when they face the need to choose among different educational

Table 7: Excellent school performance per color. *Ensino Fundamental*. Brazil. 1992-1999. (in % of students)

	Courses	Total Population	White	Black
1992	1	39,8	51,5	28,3
	4	25,9	36,3	15,3
	5	18,8	26,1	9,3
	8	11,1	17,2	4,0
1999	1	53,2	59,9	46,3
	4	37,1	47,8	26,5
	5	29,5	43,1	19,7
	8	20,4	29,2	11,5

Source: IBGE/PNAD – *microdados*.

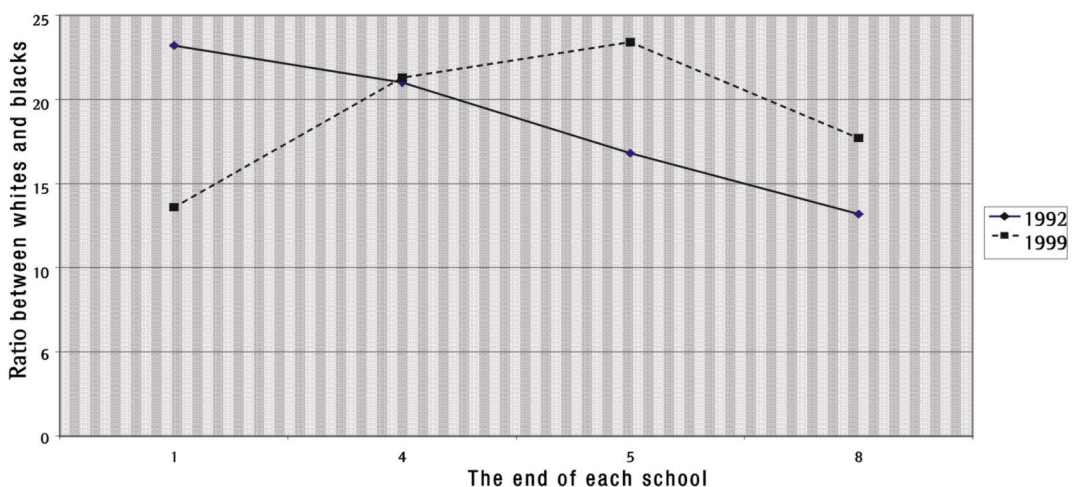
paths, as when the education system branches into separate vocational and professional career options. In these situations they find themselves in front of the dilemma on whether to proceed with their studies or to give up. In the event that they do decide to proceed, they must choose one among several paths, some of them leading straight to university, and others of a technical-professional nature. Following the conventions by Jonsson and Erikson (2000), and by Erikson et al (2005), we can state that this outcome is a secondary effect added on to the main causes of educational inequalities. In Brazil, there seems to be four main options: to drop out of school; to repeat the school year (to take all subjects again); to enroll in a technical-professional school; or finally to continue heading towards university. The data indicate that the secondary effects also occur where continuity dilemmas are imposed, especially in the options concerning their permanence at school after the official school age and their enrollment in university.

Graph 3 outlines the above-age tendency in Brazilian ensino fundamental (primary and secondary education). The curves for 1992 and 1999 reproduce the ratio of White students over Black students that carried

on with their studies at the school-age expected by law. The tendency could not be more conspicuous: while in 1992 this ratio fell sharply after fourth grade, in 1999 it took the opposite direction and gave a leap from that point onward, to decline between fifth and sixth grades. Therefore, the graph indicates that the progress visible in the previous data mostly responded to the decision of many youngsters to carry on studying in spite of being 15 or older and not having concluded their corresponding school year. It all leads to suppose that these youngsters grew up in low-income homes, lived in rural areas and were Black according to the official taxonomy with which they classified themselves in the censuses.

Table 8 suggests that institutional conditions played a mediation effect on above-age. Although in the OCDE countries experts concentrate their attention on the educational branching before or after secondary education, in Brazil the key may simply reside in the amount of resources destined to ensino fundamental (primary and secondary education). This is certainly the case in the North and in the Northeast of Brazil, where above-age is more marked than in the rest of the country and where public expense is noticeably lower. This

Graph 3: Ratio between Whites and Blacks without schooling delay at the end of each school year – *Ensino Fundamental*.



Source: IBGE/PNAD, 1992-1999

Table 8: Above-age among students aged 10 to 14 and average public expense at the beginning of their *ensino fundamental*.

	Average above-age for population aged 10 a 14 (2004)	Average public expense in 'ensino fundamental' (1998, R\$1,00)
Brazil	1,0	668
North	1,3	564
Northeast	1,5	465
Center- West	0,8	839
Southeast	0,7	800
South	0,6	750

Source: IPEA/DISOC and PNAD, 1998-2004

was the pattern in 2004 for population aged 10 to 14, whose schools were poorly equipped six years before, just before their arrival to their initial school years. It seems that, in these less-privileged states, pre-adolescents persevered in their will to study, despite this added inconvenience and despite not having finished their courses at the expected pace.

On the other hand, on average only 57% of the children who entered the first year of primary school managed to complete this cycle (Inep/MEC, 2004), and the percentage is even lower in secondary school, where only 37% of the initial group concludes the last year (Ipea, 2005). As a consequence, potential candidates for higher education only represent a third of the students that started compulsory education. But not all of them keep on studying, above anything because of the need to find a paying job. In 2004 about 60% of those who graduated from middle school were aged 20 or older, and more than half of them had been enrolled in evening courses (Inep/ MEC, 2004). Taking into account that their choices usually centered around university courses available for this same evening period, most of them being private, it is understandable that less than a third of school graduates intended to enter college (Barreto; Schwartzman, 2005).

Along with their financial needs, the low number of places in public universities becomes an obstacle for low-income students to enter college. As for their higher concentration in evening courses, in 2003 nearly 75% of students in the "critical" or "very critical" levels in the university access exam came from such

evening courses. On the other hand, 76% of students that reached a suitable level had graduated at private schools, and 89% had attended day-time classes (Inep/ MEC, 2004). As in the other educational variables, Blacks also suffered these financial and academic obstacles more than Whites.

Conclusion: does universal schooling neutralize inequality?

The 1988 Constitution universalized the social right to education in Brazil, and the governments in the 1990's guaranteed access to school for almost all children. Nevertheless, despite this improvement, educational inequalities strongly persisted among social classes, as well as among ethnic groups. In reality, this progress seems to have resulted in a growing permanence of teenagers at school, many of whom take long to complete their primary education and reach the end of secondary education at the age of twenty. This delay is more common among low-income students, and even more so among those classified as Blacks according to statistics based on color. These students try repeatedly to complete secondary education, although only a small portion chooses to go on to college.

Why is this slant reproduced along with the expansion of schooling? Although we can only give an answer based on first signs of evidence, we are in the position to point out three causes: school segregation, cultural distance between schools and families, and the circumstances that condition youngsters in their

decisions to keep on studying. With segregation, wealthy social groups hoard the best social and material environments for their learning. Not only do they concentrate in the best schools, but through them they also have access to social circles where more information and incentives are presented to them so that they can set themselves long-term educational goals. Cultural distance affects negatively school results of low-income classes and Blacks, since students in these groups are often the first ones that attend school in their family history, thus lacking the resources to complement their school material, and hardly knowing anybody to give them some guidance on their educational options, finding it difficult to progress in their new environment. In spite of these inconveniences, some youngsters go back to school after the age of 15, and some eventually complete their secondary education. On the other hand, the deficiencies in the educational system and the growing importance of finding work forces many other students to drop out before graduating.

Charles Tilly's theory on durable, long-lasting inequalities (1998) conceptualizes these phenomena as expressions of opportunity hoarding and emulation, that is, the two mechanisms that prolong inequalities through time. The first one operates by means of institutional barriers with which one group monopolizes a resource while excluding the rest of the population, as in Brazilian school segregation of social and ethnic-racial classes. The second one consists in transferring some social rules from a prestigious social context to other environments. This phenomenon is evidenced by the cultural distances between schools and low-income families (with the education resumé becoming the reference to measure all cultural expressions), as well as by the polarization between optimistic and resigned decisions taken by the students that try to progress after compulsory education (the rules of the game subtly push them aside in this race). At the same time, emulation can also be

the product of public policies, as in the case of activation programs for low-income families. As for the educational performance, we notice that intentioned emulation takes place in students's decisions to continue studying after compulsory education, influenced by infrastructure needs in their schooling and by the branching of their education into different academic and professional paths.

The presence of these empirical effects puts under scrutiny an expectation deeply rooted in many educational policies. The hypothesis that progress would arrive gradually has certainly been common for many years in big international comparisons. According to this reasoning, as primary education courses were being more widespread, an eventual progress could be expected in secondary and higher education after the required number of years of schooling had elapsed (Treiman; Ganzebrom, 2003). But nowadays the same advocates of that theory have adapted it with the notion that the dispersion in the years of schooling of adult generations tends to delay that progress (Treiman; Ganzebrom, 2003), which is very uneven and incomplete throughout the different regions of the world (UNESCO, 2005). Another important specification added in regard to the above expectation points out that the gradual and steady advance requires initial educational intervention that will create positive discrimination in favor of the poor (Raczynski, 2006).

Our conclusions do not support the forecast of a linear and gradual change. An earthquake might not be needed, but it is very doubtful that the equalization of educational systems will progress step by step starting from some limited initial actions. On the contrary, emulation and opportunity hoarding can only be deactivated significantly if power relations are altered at a certain point in time (Tilly, 1998). In fact, around 1990, with the new Constitution and the demands of a very active political opposition, measures for the universalization of schooling were implemented, thus neutralizing the educational

hoarding evidenced by the general population's high illiteracy rates in many states (as studied by Celso Furtado in the Northeast).

A debate has started in Brazil spurred by the lack of definition of the target groups for a positive discrimination based on color: Blacks or all African Brazilian? Where does each category start? From our point of view, this type of actions could bring some positive contributions, but the discussions about statistical conventions on race and color run the risk to extend forever in a naming maze if one loses sight of the structural depth of these inequalities. In our opinion, hoarding is currently maintained in a regressive tax system and in a brutal urban segregation, but it is also favored by the processes that group students of the same social origin in private schools. Moreover, the mere expansion of places in schools does not erode emulation by creating bridges between the family's aspirations and educational styles on one side, and school pedagogies and guidance on the other.

In order to break the hoarding cycles, more full-time day schools are needed, along with fair rules for the distribution of students, and adequate facilities in all schools. In turn, to counteract emulation there should be a more intense, demanding and continuous teacher training, as well as a series of more participative pedagogical experiments and more college scholarships. All that implies a series of changes in different areas, such as taxes, budget, work and urban planning, along with educational changes, that can only come into effect after modifying the current balance of power among social classes and among ethnic groups.

Up to this day, in the present political scenario, no 'collectivization outbreak' spurred by social awareness has occurred to rearticulate citizens' rights, as occurred in welfare states and as studied by specialists in social policies (Reis; Moore, 2005). The transformations, partial but significant, represented by the democratic transitions in America's South Cone, were the last changes of this kind in its recent history.

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