

# Public schools: potencies and challenges

**editorial**

**P**ERIPHERIES 4, dedicated to the topic of public schools, features 20 contributions

from Angola, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Guinea-Bissau, India, Palestine, Paraguay and Syria , highlighting challenges and potencies in each unique context. Published in four languages (Portuguese, English, Spanish, and French) with ten different content types — Interviews, Articles, Photo Essays, Narratives, Special Contributions, Born and Raised in the Peripheries, Peripheries Features, Research, Book Reviews, and Indicators — this edition comes at a crucial moment in the affirmation and defense of public schools, chiefly amid global advances in an ultraconservative agenda and the resulting challenges for Brazil, Latin America, and peripheral countries around the world.

Peripheries Journal's central goal is to spread awareness of and stimulate reflection on what we call the Paradigm of Potency, giving greater recognition and visibility to the inventive potential, complex structures, and wide-reaching practices undertaken by subjects of the peripheries and their institutions in achieving full rights to the city and to democracy.

Stereotyped and stigmatizing representations affect not only peripheral territories, as we know, but also those institutional spaces in which peripheral subjects represent a majority. Public schools are a prime example of this. For the impoverished of Latin America, as well as global peripheral countries, the democratization of access to the school system only came about in the second half of the 20th century.

This broadening of access occurred without most governments making the investments necessary for higher quality education and without valuing universalization of education through college. In countries like Brazil, this held true through secondary school.

Conservative groups have come to affirm that it was not public schooling that lacked quality, rather that the problem lay with students and families attending public schools. On the other hand, critics of traditional education methods maintain that public school professionals have proven themselves incapable of engaging in dialogue with and effectively educating members of popular social groups.

Thus was born the myth that “public schools can't teach and students can't learn.” Private schools, meanwhile, to which the middle-classes have migrated, have become expressions of quality and superiority, in particular because of the results their students achieve on university entrance exams. This process has given rise to the consolidation of a meritocratic perspective with strong ideological elements which sees school competency as a criterion for resource allocation, be that economic, cultural, or of social distinction.

That said, it is well-known that public schools are plural and complex: in their evident contradictions, they fulfill a central role in the broadening of capabilities — especially in terms of access to scientific rationality and new spatial and temporal experiences — for a significant portion of their students, teachers, managers, and for their surrounding territories.

At UNIPeripheries — the International University of the Peripheries — we recognize the legitimacy of various proposals to overcome the common sense narrative of “public schools don't work.”

As such, our task is to — based in the gathering of intellectuals, teachers, students, managers, researchers, writers, poets, journalists, and people dedicated to education and to a more democratically just society — bring conceptual and narrative contributions that

contemplate and make use of schools as spaces of reinterpretation and reinvention of experiences as well as of tensions (sometimes contradictions) in the different possible experiences in public schools.

The challenges facing public schools are enormous. The dispute begins with confronting the perspective and narrative that is only capable of viewing neediness, absence, and incapacity in these spaces, rather than recognizing the structural inequality and racism that produce and perpetuate these challenges.

In the peripheries, we must assume that there exist even more structurally rooted school inequalities, given that these inequalities not only produce precariousness in physical structures, in the lack of teachers and teaching materials, vulnerability of family participation, drop-outs, State-propagated violence, and other difficulties resulting from the daily demands of public schools, but also that they are worsened by the presence and reproduction of a patriarchal, colonialist, capitalist, and racist logic.

Increasingly enveloped in the myth of racial democracy, racism in schools is amplified by power relations that run cross multiple levels of inequality — contributing to the undermining of self-esteem, creating a feeling of disqualification, rendering even more difficult the task of overcoming the challenges that affect the educational system.

The myth of the “impossibility of public schools” resides, on the contrary in the very inability of common sense to recognize the enormous potencies of the subjects that make up, construct, and reinvent the capacity of public schools to overcome adverse conditions. This stands as a barrier to their effective resistance. One of the paths to understanding the everyday life of schools derives from the principle that their subjects, identified as learners, must be seen as protagonists of their actions and own stories, allowing them to break with the practices and knowledge forms that refuse to recognize their stories.

Constituted as such, public school is a legitimate space for differences and diversity. It is a

crucial and formative element in the defense of democracy.

Valuing public schools thus assumes a central role: diversity characterizes not only this legitimate space for knowledge, but also the experiences and personal and plural trajectories present outside the classroom and the school walls.

If, even as the supposedly critical discourses count on and limit themselves to inequalities, giving continuity to the disqualification of public schools, the theme addressed in PERIPHERIES 4 is, in contrast, one of the recognition of public schools as democratic, plural, and necessary, maintaining that there is much more value in their existence, especially in the peripheries. Their capacity for consistently achieving positive results is undeniable.

The goal of this edition is to value the rich experiences that characterize the countless public school institutions in basic education and their subjects in such a way that contributes to the overcoming of a stigmatizing process that does not recognize the value of public schools and the individuals that inhabit them, above all in Brazil, Latin America, and the Global Peripheries.

Peripheries Journal, its producers, and its partners dedicate this edition to public schools — that they may be universal, free, civic, lay, as plural as possible, antiracist, and radically democratic — as a path to overcoming the challenges of today's ultraconservative agenda in its various manifestations around the world.

## interviews

In this edition, Peripheries interviewed two important Brazilian educators: Macaé Evaristo and Ricardo Henriques. Formerly Secretary of Education for the state of Minas Gerais, Coordinator of the Program of Implantation of Indigenous Schools in Minas Gerais and Secretary of Literacy, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Ministry of Education, Evaristo brings to this issue the sensibility and care of a teacher, activist, and manager with a vast trajectory of resistance, struggle, and leadership as a black woman.

Ricardo Henriques, economist and manager with an extensive history in civil society and public administration, takes on, in a technical perspective, how the process of reducing inequalities in public schools must be continuous, in cycles, and with the fundamental premise of guaranteeing excellence with equity, maintaining high expectations for all, including students, teachers, employees, and principals.

With distinct contexts and trajectories, the words of Evaristo and Henriques intersect in the defense of public schools in the most democratic perspective. They account for modern plurality and difference, considering, inevitably the structural racism present in Brazil's radically unequal society.

## articles

The Bissau-Guinean philosophy and intellectual Filomeno Lopes examines the possibility of a construction of a new intellectual paradigm for entrance and graduation from university in African countries with Portuguese as their official language (PALOP). Drawing from the thought of Amílcar Cabral and Paulo Freire in their encounter with social and grassroots movements, Lopes positions himself for the reconstruction of the “dream of the fight for liberation of the PALOP countries: health and training, essential to the construction of peace, progress, and happiness of our peoples.”

Three philosophers discuss the need for deconstructing the hegemonically masculine paradigm in philosophy in “Why read female philosophers?”, directing their attention to the countless important female philosophers in Brazil and the world.

The Living Books project, present at the triple border between Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina, holds reading practice with children in local public schools, expanding access to lettered culture. In a border zone, cultural exchanges and tensions mix with coexistence of multiple identities and languages.

In “Rethinking Challenges for Education Under Occupation,” a series of grassroots movements recognize the importance of participation of students and teachers in the

educational process for a democratic education capable of empowering voices, emancipating minds, and permitting full access to rights in Palestine.

“The Science of Nurturing and School Climate” examines nurturing strategies with a focus on (predominantly black) boys, and analyzes the relations present in the perceptions of teachers, managers, and students in the Rio de Janeiro state public school network.

The challenging context of the teaching system in India becomes apparent in “the public education system and subalternity in India.” Without losing sight of the importance of public schools as an institutional space in peripheral and subaltern communities in India, the article provides a detailed historical analysis, comparing socioeconomic contexts and school results, discrimination, and social exclusion, as well as discussing propositions for educational models that subvert local hierarchies and inequalities.

## **photographic essays**

Imagens do Povo (Images of the People) — the school and photography agency of the Favelas Observatory — produced the essay “Student Protagonism: Schools for, by, and of the Students.” highlighting the importance of high school student organizing for guaranteeing students’ rights and confronting the ultraconservative agenda restricting democratic advances in Brazilian education.

The Alberto Chejolás Baccalaureate, a public and popular high school for youth and adults, organized and managed by social organizations, workers, and the educational community, retakes the Latin American tradition of popular education in Villa 31, an 80+ year old popular neighborhood in Buenos Aires which has spent years fighting for its right to the city.

## **narratives**

The Angolan writer Ondjaki opens the narrative section with “To Teach the Joy of Learning”

in which he rethinks the place and form of learning and teaching in schools with “local creation: children, parents, and educators; home, street, and school,” in dialogue with Portuguese-speaking countries.

The Akewí Poetry Slam of Viçosa, Minas Gerais, shares its experience in “The Interscholastic Akewí Poetry Slam,” with spoken word poetry slam competitions that have taken place in approximately 50 schools in the area, independently produced, with workshops, lectures, event organizations, poetic interventions, and the distribution of informative magazines about Funk, Slams, and Hip-Hop, mixing peripheral cultural manifestations with the emancipatory potential present in Brazilian public schools.

## **special contributions**

PERIPHERIES 4 also features “The Linguistic Pedagogy of Coexistence at Kurdish Schools and The Pedagogy of Peace,” in which contexts of war in Rojava (Northeastern Syria) and Colombia pose direct threats to teachers, students, and society as a whole. These articles feature the subjects themselves and their innovative, democratic practices of resistance, representing of form of addressing policies of genocide by States, paramilitary groups, and para-governmental militias.

## **born and raised in the periphery**

Andrio Candido, the educator, poet, and writer from São Paulo is featured in this edition’s “Born and Raised in the Periphery” section.

## **peripheries features**

The educational organizations Instituto Unibanco and Ação Educativa, two UNiperipheries partners, wrote special contributions for PERIPHERIES 4: “School Management for Equality: Paths to an Anti-Racist Education” and “The Defense of Educational and Cultural

Rights: Indicators of Quality in Education”

## **book review**

Central to the creation and composition of this edition of Peripheries, bell hooks’ book Teaching to Transgress is reviewed here.

## **indicator**

The IDeA — Indicator of Inequality and Learning — is a new instrument for verifying the right to education in Brazil, tuned to the challenges of our time. The indicator “defines education inequalities as the differences in distributions of educational results between students defined by three attributes traditionally considered in addressing educational inequalities: socioeconomic status, race, and gender.”

## **peripheries 5**

The call for articles for PERIPHERIES 5, “Environmental and Democratic Sustainability,” is now available. Send all submissions to revista@imja.org.br (deadline March 2020).

## **who are we?**

See the Team and Board section under “Our Work”.

## **uniperipheries in social media**

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## thanks

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