

Sobral: originality and quality in education

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On December 6, Izolda Cela (Vice Governor of Ceará and former Secretary of Education of Sobral and state of Ceará) and Veveu Arruda (Mayor of Sobral) visited Stanford and talked about the success of the educational system in Sobral and Ceará at the Lemann Center Seminar Topics in Brazilian Education.

Although Brazil has improved educational policies, we continue to collect poor results in international rankings. This paradox is the result of the discontinuation of quality educational policies. The quality indicators of education in the top-ranking countries demonstrate that to achieve the best results requires a joint effort of several institutions and the permanence of educational policies. The responsibility for quality education lies with the government, students, teachers, parents, social organizations, businesses, trade unions, but with a fundamental detail: the continuity of quality education policies.

Knowing Sobral's experience, we better understand the reasons for the quality of his educational system: the originality and permanence of a policy that worked. What does it mean to say that Sobral created an educational system based on the existing resources in its territory, ie the economic, social, environmental, cultural and political reality was used as a basis to qualify education? Or, in Isolda's words, "it was a domestic initiative." It is evident that this local initiative was supported by institutions at different scales: state, national and international. This multidimensional and multiscale connection is essential for setting roots and expanding social relationships.

Therefore, what is unique in Sobral's experience is the commitment, responsibility, and investment in education. But why other municipalities do not achieve the same results? Why are these three elements missing that made Sobral a benchmark in high-level education?

The starting point for the construction of a quality education system in Sobral and Ceará is the political decision of the municipal government and the state government, with the support of the federal government. The story of Izolda and Veveu shows the commitment to education. They are educators who renew themselves by creating and join with various other stories from communities, students, parents, and teachers.

A political decision is a keyword that originated a set of continuous and consistent actions. First, a political decision is an act that informs everyone about the opening up of new possibilities. With the joint and participative elaboration of an educational program, with defined goals, teachers, students, and parents know where they want to go. They know what it takes to overcome the conditions of inequality because they have guarantees of basic conditions to promote overcoming.

These conditions are the salary of teachers above the national level, creation of infrastructure with the use of resources, appropriate equipment, and technology, healthy eating, participatory community, appreciation of teachers with a career plan and ongoing training courses. But meeting these conditions alone is not enough.

Favorable principles are needed to promote these conditions. For example: share structured materials and organize permanent evaluations; Always discuss the parameters of evaluation systems to avoid exclusion; If necessary, redo the parameters in order to qualify the system, which means having the competence to review goals and values oriented to the inclusion of all in different conditions. In this way, students and teachers know that their participation must promote continuous improvement. This means that the qualification of a student must be a result of the qualification of the whole, as the individualized improvement would break the system of educational quality.

Sobral's experience has generated a connected network in which everyone has a notion that they are part of a system that works, is recognized and needs constant qualification. The school promotes permanent orientation with the supervision of the education department, directed to the fulfillment of the teaching program. Goals are created as a team, so everyone has to grow together, producing uniform performance and promoting equity.

There is another principle that deserves to be highlighted: the school as a place of construction of knowledge. Classes are spaces for the creation, discovery, and understanding of historical processes. Learning is a fundamental principle which generates an excellent policy of inclusion and qualification: the teacher will attend to the number of students he needs, it can be one, two or thirty.

Sobral's experience teaches us that in order to build quality education policies, a multidimensional and multiscale perspective is needed; That participation with decision-making power is essential, that competitiveness only qualifies when it involves all since individualized competitiveness and productivism are positions that undermine education.

Sobral became a reference for the state of Ceará and for Brazil because it originally demonstrated what all municipalities can do to qualify education.

It remains to be seen what the course of Brazilian education is with the approval of the Proposed Constitutional Amendment that freezes government spending for twenty years. What will happen if the next government of Sobral abandons the educational policy that highlighted the municipality as an example of success? Is this discontinuity the cause of the persistent paradox