

CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROLE OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL HEAD AND COMMUNITY DEMAND. RESEARCH WORK ON FOUR CASES IN THE DISTRICT OF MORÓN, BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE, ARGENTINA.

The research process developed between the years 2004 and 2006 was presented as a Master's Thesis and its purpose was the **construction of the role of the primary school head according to the community demand**, in four cases of the district of Morón, Buenos Aires Province, Argentina.

The theoretical position has as a starting point the interpretative paradigm, with contributions from the organizational theory, the political perspective and the social psychology, in an approach that accounts for the complexity of the object of study.

The design follows an intensive qualitative logic, working with a theoretical sample of the head teams selected according to the size, the geographical location, assistance-type services, kind of population of each school and management type.

The so-called "**collector**", "**octopus**", "**historical**" and "**popular**" schools were selected.

The techniques to collect information consist of: interviews, analysis of school and official regulation documents, school stories, district history collection, and regarding quantitative issues, the district evolution between the different censuses conducted and the survey of two cohorts in each school.

The school heads' conceptions are understood as social representations, a category of knowledge social construction.

The school heads conceive of the community as the parents in a restricted sense and in a broad sense they include teachers and students in that conception.

The community demand is perceived as focusing on interpersonal issues and as a reason for intercession confronting the teaching task. It is also considered as judicialization, and as a demand for student enrollment, which turns to be the reason why the schools compete with each other by carrying out marketing procedures in contravention of the regulations in force.

It is understood that the school is an exceptional niche to channel the social demand, and that the school system is, according to the

community's perception, a suitable channel to make known any worry.

The demand is individual. Its collective construction, which may be channeled through School Associations, School Boards and the Educational Unity managed by the District, is biased and non-representative.

According to most school heads, parents are qualified to assess and demand educational quality.

The teachers are seen as education workers and their demand is focused on disciplining students. The school heads must intercede to get support, teacher's commitment and to ensure that the regulations are observed.

The school seems like a privileged niche to channel the demand, since the economic system has an additional legitimation requirement¹. Thus, the school would represent the formal mechanism for demand satisfaction, in order to denature the REAL response to the demand. That is, it is not possible to disregard and restrict the participation; however, neither is it possible its real practice because a "real" democracy would lead to the awareness of the system contradictions.

The role of the school head has been considered as management, from the perspectives of normative, prescription and practice, the latter of which is conceptualized as **Vicissitude**, due to its uncertainty, fickleness and the fact that the possibility of solving the problems that may arise is in conflict with the regulating resources and knowledge of the school heads.

The district adds to this vicissitude some mechanisms of "**evil delegation of the role**" (the other side of the supposed "administrative decentralization"), "**discredit**" and "**tied hands**" (as the other side of the supposed "autonomy.") These mechanisms are explained through the action logic, the bureaucracies, which do not

¹ Habermas, Jürgen, *Problemas de legitimación del capitalismo tardío*. Amorrortu. Buenos Aires, 1975.

respond only to an “infrastructural” role² aiming at the good of all but are also interest mediators – particularly mediators between the interests of the dominating sectors– and generate activities to satisfy their own interests (sector role.)

In some cases, there appears the **management as a resistance** to safeguard the teaching task.

Two management styles have been visualized:

- **Traditional:** Focused on formal and material aspects and on conflict denial.
- **Professional:** Focused on the pedagogical approach, with a higher formation, more committed and which operates outside the principal’s office.

The teamwork cannot be carried out due to the material working conditions and the ideological inconsistencies and contradictions between heads (principals) and deputy heads.

The district does not represent a challenge regarding its demographic or socio-economic conditions but as regards the enrollment distribution and the mistreatment of school heads by the system administrative body.

The required schools focus on showing the school as a private offer, due to the lack of legitimization of the public sector as a defenseless niche with regard to the selection of students.

In the discredited schools there exist the “**intimidating students**” (bullies) who, due to their disruptive behavior, their intellectual level, and their violent conduct might be the cause of the decrease in school enrollment and of the dropout of the students considered to be “normal”; these processes lead to a certain degree of stigmatization and shaping of **another person** by confusing essential and existential aspects of the identity, **a contaminated person** that can infect others if the necessary isolation measures are not taken.

The school heads are pressured into discriminating and excluding this type of students who would be, from another point of view, the system’s “mistreated”, “having callus and scars.”

In every research work, it is observed an **absence of the student** as the subject of schoolwork, in addition to a **vacancy for an adult**

who, in the role of parent and teacher, favors the existence of a childhood environment.

The school has a double mandate for inclusion: a political mandate for social inclusion and a community demand in this regard. On one hand it constitutes a space for the re-elaboration of hegemony, as an environment of reproduction of social class relationships, and on the other hand it undertakes an important remedial and inclusion task, as a result of the action of teachers and school heads. It **includes** by working through mechanisms that compensate for the effects of social crises, thus constituting an impact cushion, without resorting to other organizations. As a structure, the school would be the entity having the greatest permeability to the demand, due to the daily contact with families, teachers and school heads, generating a greater exposure and many opportunities to demand.

The school appears to be a space for attention, thus representing the niche for the resolution of social problematic issues.

It can be concluded that the fact not to be lost sight of is that **the school task is to make it possible knowledge acquisition** in childhood and both meeting the demand and constructing the school head’s role should coincide in this regard.

It is considered that any proposal concerning social policies implies the recognition of universal rights, which require the material conditions that make them possible so as to be effective. Otherwise the school, **which is always able beyond belief**, will continue to turn the task of the school head, the teacher, the parent and the students into a greater and greater **vicissitude**.

Prof. Mg. Mónica MEKLER

Professor of Educational Sciences (University of Morón, Argentina.) Master’s Degree in Education Policy and Management (UNTREF, Argentina). She is a Secondary School and University Teacher in the areas of Argentine Social Thinking and Education Sociology, a Researcher and a Coordinator of the Diplomatura in Higher Education Teaching (a university specialization course in Higher Education Teaching), at the Faculty of Philosophy, Educational Sciences and Humanities of the University of Morón, Argentina. E-mail: meklermonica@hotmail.com, mmekler@unimoron.edu.ar

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² Oszlak, Oscar. *Notas críticas para una teoría de la burocracia estatal*. Buenos Aires: Cedes, 1977.