

Is it Possible to Have School Learning Assessment and Meritocracy Together in the School?

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Abstract: This article questions how the assessment of school learning can coexist with meritocracy in a system supposed to ensure equity of opportunities, but that reinforces inequalities in practice. Resistance to new educational approaches is a challenge, and the role of the teacher must go beyond mere knowledge transmission, requiring commitment to the development of citizenship. The "improvement of education quality" must involve real investment in teacher training and teachers' working conditions and cannot be reduced to quantitative indicators that overlook structural inequalities. School learning assessment is considered both an investigative practice and a learning opportunity. Meritocracy is a concept that may reinforce social inequalities by justifying the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities based on merit. The promotion of social justice in a meritocratic system is complex and often insufficient, as it does not eliminate existing structural inequalities and may even perpetuate them.

Keywords: Mathematics Education. Assessment of School Learning. Meritocracy.

¿Es Posible Tener Evaluación del Aprendizaje Escolar y Meritocracia Juntas en la Escuela?

Resumen: En este artículo se cuestiona cómo la evaluación del aprendizaje escolar puede coexistir con la meritocracia en un sistema que, supuestamente, debería garantizar la igualdad de oportunidades, pero que en la práctica refuerza las desigualdades. La resistencia a nuevos enfoques educativos es un desafío, y el rol del docente debe ir más allá de la mera transmisión de conocimientos, exigiendo un compromiso con la construcción de la ciudadanía. La "mejora de la calidad educativa" debe involucrar una inversión real en la formación y condiciones laborales de los docentes, y no puede reducirse a indicadores cuantitativos que ignoran las desigualdades estructurales. La evaluación del aprendizaje escolar se considera tanto una práctica de investigación como una oportunidad de aprendizaje. La meritocracia es un concepto que puede reforzar las desigualdades sociales al justificar la distribución desigual de recursos y oportunidades basándose en el mérito percibido. Promover la justicia social en un sistema meritocrático es complejo y, a menudo, insuficiente, ya que no elimina las desigualdades estructurales existentes y puede perpetuarlas.

Palabras clave: Educación Matemática. Evaluación del Aprendizaje Escolar. Meritocracia.

É Possível ter Avaliação da Aprendizagem Escolar e Meritocracia Juntas na Escola?

Resumo: Questiona-se, neste artigo, como a avaliação da aprendizagem escolar pode coexistir com a meritocracia em um sistema que, supostamente, deveria garantir equidade de oportunidades, mas na prática reforça desigualdades. A resistência a novas abordagens educacionais é um desafio, e o papel do professor deve superar a simples transmissão de conhecimentos, exigindo um compromisso com a construção da cidadania. A “melhoria da qualidade da educação” deve envolver investimento real na formação e nas condições de trabalho dos professores, não podendo ser reduzida a indicadores quantitativos que desconsideram as desigualdades estruturais. Considera-se a avaliação da aprendizagem escolar como uma prática de investigação e uma oportunidade de aprendizagem. A meritocracia é um conceito que pode reforçar desigualdades sociais ao justificar a distribuição desigual de recursos e oportunidades com base no mérito. A promoção de justiça social em um sistema meritocrático é complexa e frequentemente insuficiente, pois não elimina as desigualdades estruturais existentes, podendo perpetuá-las.

Palavras-chave: Educação Matemática. Avaliação da Aprendizagem Escolar. Meritocracia.

1 Introduction

Assessment of School Learning is one of the themes studied by *Grupo de Estudo e Pesquisa em Educação Matemática e Avaliação* (GEPEMA¹), whose members have dedicated to proposing reflections and discussions on assessment practices, assessment tools and other related themes since the beginning of the 2000s. Today, it is still a considerably fertile research theme because we are living in a time in which there are intense changes, and in which the knowledge one holds today might not be useful anymore later. According to Esteban (2002, p. 17, our translation), it is “necessary to reconstruct the assessment process as part of a coordinated movement for the development of a type of pedagogical practice that is committed to inclusion, plurality, respect for differences and collective constructions”.

Simultaneously, it is possible to notice that school produces educational failure as inequalities are systematically reinforced with high dropout and failure rates, which affects mainly lower-income groups (Patto, 2022). Alongside, meritocratic discourse gained strength and became “an essential aspect for the elites to make selections and justify their positions” (Valle & Ruschel, 2009, p. 181).

Apparently, in the current school context,

it is assumed that, by ranking students solely based on their merit, equality of opportunity eliminates social, gender, ethnic and other inequalities inherent to every individual. This type of equality is central to the model of school justice advocated in democratic societies, that is, in societies which consider that all individuals are free and equal in principle, but which also accept that these individuals are distributed into unequal social positions (Dubet, 2006, p. 14, our translation²).

This discourse is rooted in a conception of “restricted democracy”, a system that

¹ <https://www.uel.br/grupo-estudo/gepema/>

² “se supone que, al jerarquizar a los alumnos sólo en función de su mérito, la igualdad de oportunidades elimina las desigualdades sociales, sexuales, étnicas y de otra índole, características de todos los individuos. Este tipo de igualdad es central para el modelo de la justicia escolar en las sociedades democráticas, es decir, en las sociedades que consideran que todos los individuos son libres e iguales en principio, pero que aceptan también que esos individuos estén distribuidos en posiciones sociales desiguales”.

promotes bourgeois domination by privileging a civic culture that is “only accessible to those who are part of a privileged minority, first in terms of wealth, second in terms of power, and third in terms of knowledge” (Fernandes, 1987, p. 18, our translation).

In this article, we aim to build a mosaic³ regarding the relationship between the Assessment of School Learning in mathematics and meritocracy. After presenting all tesserae, we expect to provide an answer to the question: “Is it possible to have Assessment of School Learning and meritocracy simultaneously in school?”. We begin with one assumption, among others, that “everything that takes place within school walls cannot be reduced solely to reasons related to the scope of the school” (Lahire, 2004, p. 74, our translation).

2 First tessera

At the beginning of the 20th century, going to school was an exception, let alone going to university. Today, it seems to be the norm – a norm that is increasingly followed through longer educational paths, due to school failure, for example. Although we have advanced over centuries, we remain constrained by conceptions that are not in line with the present moment (Nóvoa, 2002).

In the historical context we are living in, and given the material conditions we face – and, more precisely, given the ones we lack –, it is more crucial than ever to remain loyal to one’s own convictions and resist the temptation to adopt superficial solutions that are fashionable or that seem convenient, because these are usually convictions held by only a few individuals.

Beliefs such as “those who know something know how to teach it”, “teaching is a gift” and “teachers are born, not made” still prevail, even though reality contradicts them all the time. After all, there are several teachers who “know a lot” but cannot be understood by the students they teach.

According to Fernandes (1987, p. 16, our translation), since the establishment of the Republic in Brazil,

teachers were regarded as interesting because they were seen as mere agents of cultural transmission. Their relationships with students were not relationships of creation. Their role was to preserve the established levels of *culture realization through imitation*. [...] And this trend has prevailed so far.

Although the aforementioned statement was made over thirty years ago, it is still relevant today, unfortunately.

As “‘class repeaters’, teachers lose touch of their roles as educators and do not even question why they teach what they teach. They become a passive part of the process and do the same to their students” (Menezes, 1987, p. 119, our translation). Therefore, they do not acknowledge that

Italian renaissance artists were more important than the bankers who managed the economy of that era; that the turn from the 18th to the 19th century had Napoleon as its central figure, but that Beethoven, a true genius, may have influenced more people through his music up to the present day than the Corsican conqueror [...] Where

³ In this article, we will use mosaic and tessera(e) as metaphors. We understand mosaic as “an image or visual pattern created by embedding small colored pieces into a surface (wall, floor, etc.) and secured with cement” (Houaiss, 2009, our translation) and tessera as “a cube or piece of a mosaic” (Houaiss, 2009, our translation).

producers were replaced with servers [referring to machines], where factories achieved such a production scale that they transformed the world into a planet of the unemployed (Pinsky, 2006, p. 19, our translation).

Teaching work, which does not amount to “teaching classes”, is closely linked to the commitment to questioning teachers’ role in interpreting interests and social contradictions and in the creation of an environment in which everyone could construct their citizenship (Buriasco, 1999). This commitment is also expressed by technical skills, but not only by them.

It is essential for teachers to understand “the historical and cultural variations of mathematical ideas, procedures, and practices that vary across time, culture of origin, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other sociocultural characteristics” (Rosa & Orey, 2019, p. 100).

Moreover, “the main element in a teacher’s human condition is their role as a citizen. If teachers do not strongly embody the figure of the citizen, they will end up becoming tools to any sort of manipulation, whether democratic or totalitarian” (Fernandes, 1987, pp. 21-22, our translation).

Pedagogical practice is permeated by power dynamics that often turn the classroom into a space for following orders and enforcing discipline, rather than a space for producing knowledge or educating individuals (Nóvoa, 1999).

3 Second tessera

The trend that inspires debates in the field of Education is not recent. For example:

- the logic of privatization, which is legitimized by principles of liberalization and choice, in order to consolidate an “education and formation market”;
- the dynamics generated by constant “accountability” to families and society;
- technologization, which oftentimes seem to promote the illusion that education through technology excuses individuals from thinking and trying to comprehend things.

One must be contemporary with their era, which means being an individual who

focuses their gaze on their own era in order to perceive not only the light, but also the darkness. All eras are obscure for those who experience contemporaneity. A contemporary person is precisely someone who knows how to see said obscurity, who is able to write by delving deep into the darkness of the present (Agamben, 2009, pp. 62-63, our translation).

Therefore, we should consider that avoiding false evidence, simplism and senselessness is necessary for a collective reflection to emerge within our society.

The discourse about the improvement of Education has been established. However, discussing about improving the quality of Education without “considering the structural relations that configure teaching means losing sight of how educational activity has been determined historically” (Popkewitz, 1995, p. 40, our translation). Higher “education quality” requires priority investment in teacher professionalization, from initial to continuing education, thus creating a coherent chain of improvement and promoting a significant enhancement of salaries and of existing work conditions (Libâneo, 2010). In order to achieve it, education

policies should involve an effective program to reverse this scenario, which features:

- demoralizing salaries paid to teachers;
- the poor status of our public basic education;
- the poor education received by a large number of teachers;
- disregard for school's actual needs;

that is to say, an effective public policy in education must articulate professional recognition, through fair wages and proper working conditions, and a solid and continuous teacher education, thus addressing the structural factors that have historically undermined educational quality in an integrated way.

In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that “improving the quality of education” cannot be detached from the structural and institutional conditions that shape it. Investing in teacher education and in better work conditions is a fundamental step, but it is not enough. It is necessary to face the reality of an educational system that often neglects structural aspects. Furthermore,

the reference for quality in education legitimizes structural unemployment and underemployment within the globalized economy. It legitimizes the increase in poverty, destitution, underemployment, and disposable employment. The low quality of education received by millions has become a legitimate measure of this globalized structural unemployment (Arroyo, 2017, p. 12, our translation).

The discourse on quality is often limited to an instrumental logic that attributes disproportionate importance to quantifiable results and indicators, while neglecting the complexity of educational policies, of the individuals involved and of their educational processes and contexts (Afonso, 2007).

There is a mistaken conception within society that “improving” assessment methods means automatically “improving” the educational system. Nevertheless, this assumption is incorrect for several reasons (Díaz Barriga, 1999). First, assessment cannot be truly fair within a context in which the social structure is marked by injustice. This structural inequality compromises equity in assessment, making it impossible for assessment to fairly reflect students’ abilities and potential. Besides, an “enhanced” assessment system cannot increase education quality by itself within a context in which there has been a dramatic reduction in subsidies, and where teachers face devalued working conditions with insufficient salaries. It is not possible to foster students’ learning without proper attention to teachers’ intellectual development, to an in-depth study of each student’s individual learning aspects, and without a deep analysis of their material and contextual conditions.

One’s experience in school is only meaningful when it is believed that students will be different when they leave in comparison with when they entered it. It occurs because access to knowledge provides opportunities to see and understand the world, opening possibilities for changing people’s daily actions and their understanding of them. This access to knowledge (but not just that) is also present in teaching and learning processes, and this is an indispensable task for other democratic achievements.

Teachers’ commitment to their classes is intrinsically linked to intentionality and the exercise of freedom, because, as teachers, we will always have the demanding task of

disseminating the joy and responsibility of being free through our words, gestures and actions in our classes.

4 Third tessera

Assessment practices received a considerable boost in the 20th century with the development of the concept of quality of education, efficiency, competencies and skills related to intellectual, social, economic and political activity.

In the 1940s, Ralph Tyler was the first researcher who considered the notion that the school learning assessment process is naturally intrinsic to teaching and learning processes.

Tyler (1973, p. 109, our translation)⁴ stated that

the assessment process means, fundamentally, determining the extent to which curriculum and teaching actually fulfill education goals. Since educational purposes essentially involve changes that occur within human beings, that is, positive transformations in students' behavior, assessment is the process that determines the extent to which these changes have been achieved.

Another contribution made by Tyler was the idea that the assessment of school learning should not occur only at the end of a course; it is necessary to determine the transformations that happened throughout the educational process (Tyler, 1973). Yet, the author suggests that assessment should be carried out at two moments: at the beginning and at the end, and other additional processes may be used throughout the process. It shows that, although Tyler promoted a new understanding of assessment processes, his conception of assessment was still limited to few specific moments.

Later, in the 1960s, Michael Scriven proposed the concepts of formative assessment and summative assessment and established the differences between them. According to Scriven, summative assessment is the assessment carried out at the end of a process and causes little modification in individuals' performance, whereas formative assessment is done throughout the educational process, allowing the necessary adjustments, which are recognized through the evidence that is identified (Scriven, 1967).

In the 1950s, Benjamin Bloom's work pointed out that, depending on certain conditions, assessment had great potential for "improving learning". The author strongly linked teaching and assessment to "educational goals", which should guide teaching practice and, consequently, students' assessment because "once they have classified the objectives they wish to measure, teachers and testers working on evaluation problems may refer to the discussions of the problems related to measuring such objectives" (Bloom, 1956, our translation). Bloom's work was widely diffused and became a reference for the development of assessment tools and for discussions on educational objectives.

At that time, it was believed that well-planned teaching would successfully result in learning; at least, for most students. Those who did not learn were said to carry within themselves the reasons for not having learned. A "measure" to address this issue was to represent students' performance using a line graph. If something resembling a normal curve

⁴ El proceso de evaluación significa, fundamentalmente, determinar en qué medida el currículo y la enseñanza satisfacen realmente los objetivos de la educación. Puesto que los fines educativos consisten esencialmente en cambios que se operan en los seres humanos, es decir, transformaciones positivas en las formas de conducta del estudiante, la evaluación es el proceso de determinar en qué medida se consiguen tales cambios.

was displayed, then performance was considered satisfactory.

It seems that such beliefs have been around for at least 70 years. However, several changes occurred over this time... Could the numerous educational studies that have been conducted support changes in classroom practices, including in assessment?

The type of assessment we have studied and practiced, at least for the past 20 years, does not accept the aforementioned belief. From the assessment perspective adopted by GEPEMA, the priority in its crafting and practice is to foster students' learning. Therefore, it is different from the assessment conceived mainly to serve the purposes of accountability, ranking or certification of competence. And this idea is not new.

According to Freire (1996, p. 44, our translation),

the systems for the pedagogical assessment of students and teachers have increasingly adopted vertical, top-down discourses, but they insist on labelling them as democratic. The challenge posed to us as critical and freedom-loving teachers and students is not, obviously, to oppose assessment, because it is necessary, but to resist the silencing methods through which it has often been conducted. The issue presented to us is to fight for the comprehension and practice of assessment as a tool to value the work done by critical individuals in the service of freedom, rather than domestication. A type of assessment that fosters "speaking to" as a pathway to achieving "talking to".

The assessment of school learning as an investigative practice is an activity of a systematic, dynamic and continuous nature, shared by teachers and students, and focused on what students are able to do. Information obtained through it is useful for both teachers and students to reflect upon, rethink and reconsider their actions in school.

According to Buriasco and Soares (2008, p. 111, our translation),

by encouraging teachers to record, compare and analyze their students' daily production, the aim is to value the discussion on the investigations that both teachers and their students conduct regarding mathematical knowledge during the process of teaching and learning mathematics in school.

Thus, if teachers can interpret and understand how students think and rethink mathematics, they will be able to create teaching strategies based on these understandings. It will not only allow them to adapt their approaches to each student's specific needs, but also to help students establish connections between their own representations and the conventional and established ways of understanding mathematics (Smith, Hillen & Heffernan, 2001).

As a result, both teachers and students can draw on information about the teaching and learning processes that are relevant to them and reflect upon it, aiming to comprehend ways of thinking and the pathways used to solve a task.

From this perspective, assessment primarily serves to support learning, and it is preceded by intention. When focused on monitoring the process of learning, assessment can be considered formative for encompassing reflective actions that impact both students and the teacher. This reflection enables teachers to (re)organize their practice on the one hand, and students to revise their study strategies on the other hand. Therefore, assessment is not concerned with "measuring knowledge", but with fostering new formative opportunities for both sides. As a result, every learning process is also a formative process.

Students must learn something when they are assessed; otherwise, "this assessment"

lacks validity. According to Buriasco (2000, pp. 167-168, our translation),

an assessment that does not generate any learning to teachers and students and that is not followed by any alteration in the pedagogical practice does not make any sense, unless it is not a formative situation, which is not the case when it comes to educational assessment.

In this sense, we consider it important for the assessment of learning to be viewed as an investigative practice, meaning that it should aim to better understand the procedures that led to the answers rather than merely recognizing whether they are right or wrong; instead of believing in the myth about measuring the “distance” between “real” and “ideal”, it should aim to understand and value the different ways students deal with tasks. Especially because, on the one hand, an investigative attitude requires “acknowledging the existence of multiple pathways that can be followed by students” (Buriasco, Ferreira & Ciani, 2022, p. 75, our translation), admitting that they are undergoing a constant learning process, and, as processes, they should not be compared. On the other hand, assessment is a process that involves a great deal of subjectivity and is, therefore, partial and necessarily unfinished; and it cannot be neutral, objective or precise, nor does it have a surefire method.

Although there is a widely disseminated discourse asserting that education is a right for everyone, we still face a reality in which the distribution of cultural capital within society is deeply unequal (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992). Such disparity means that having access to socially valued knowledge is strongly influenced by each individual’s socioeconomic context, which perpetuates exclusion and reinforces social inequality. Thus, it appears to be acceptable that those who do not succeed in the so-called assessments should be excluded from the school system, which separates and ranks students according to sociopolitical criteria, aiming to maintain social stratification, and according to political-economic requirements, in order to generate workforce.

Since this type of assessment that we have in our schools does not help in overcoming the difficulties faced by students and teachers in the teaching and learning processes, it cannot be considered assessment in the fullest sense.

In school, there is a difference between performance assessment and learning assessment (Buriasco, 2000). Performance assessment refers to the product, is done at a specific moment, usually at the end of an educational period, and its result has little chance of being modified. Learning assessment refers to the process. Therefore, it is continuous, taking place throughout the whole period, and allows the resumption of the learning process. A parameter that can be used to characterize the difference between them is intentionality, whether in performance assessment or in learning assessment. Thus, it is important for this parameter to be made clear to all stakeholders and negotiated with them. It should be done through attitude, as attitude is constituted by actions. By doing so, students have a space to voice their views.

If the intention of the assessment is to pass a value judgment or to generate a ranking based on this value, then there is no room for addressing the difficulties faced by teachers and students in the teaching and learning processes, which is in line with the purpose of this type of performance assessment. However, when this intention is applied to the assessment of learning, a contradiction emerges, as judging and ranking students are not inherent to the Assessment of School Learning.

Since it “does not constitute a general theory, but a set of systematized theoretical approaches that provide a basis for a value judgment” (Vianna, 1997, p. 2, our translation),

educational assessment must be part of a political perspective that encourages questioning the role it plays in interpreting social contradictions and interests while committing to the development of citizenship among all parties involved (Buriasco, 1999).

In search of a theoretical perspective on assessment, the work developed within GEPEMA views assessment as a formative tool in the educational process serving both as a diagnostic means in Mathematics teaching and learning processes and as a tool to investigate pedagogical practice.

Assuming assessment as a process that reveals valuable information and that supports essential decisions in teaching and learning processes means understanding it as a didactical tool that really helps students in their learning process. This focus requires acknowledging that each student is unique and accepting that there are multiple possible pathways for both teaching and learning. This view of assessment does not only reflect the diversity of educational pathways, but also fosters a type of environment in which every student can develop in a personalized and authentic way.

Thus, we view assessment as an investigative practice and an opportunity for learning; a type of assessment that is performed constantly throughout the learning process and that primarily aims to contribute to learning.

5 Fourth tessera

Assessment has become a specific field within human sciences, and the literature on it is already extensive. Still, some people feel comfortable enough to talk about it, even when they do not have any theoretical or practical consistency. It seems that to speak about assessment, it is not necessary to have much (or little, if any) knowledge about its functions, about what or who it serves at different moments, situations or contexts. In addition, they do not know the ideological issues that push the debate within this field of knowledge today. For those people, it seems normal and acceptable to rank students; it seems correct to fail and abandon them. They apply the Law of Excluded Middle⁵ without reflecting on the questions raised.

We cannot forget that accepting school failure, whether consciously or not, validates a society model that normalizes inequalities and ignores that educational paths are deeply influenced by factors beyond individual effort. Overlooking the influences of social settings, material conditions, public policies and historical structures that organize individuals' lives means reinforcing the misleading notion that merit alone would be able to explain success or failure. In reality, this logic only serves to sustain and deepen existing social asymmetries.

In everyone's life history, individual effort matters, but there are also other aspects that should be considered, for example, the social context, the political and material conditions – factors beyond our control.

The system in which each person achieves what they deserve through their effort and hard work is called meritocracy. The term meritocracy is polysemous. The etymology of the word *meritocracy* encompasses the Latin word *mereo*: “to deserve, merit, to be entitled to, be worthy of a thing” (Latinitium, s.d.) and *kratos*, from Ancient Greek, meaning power, strength (Perseus Digital Library, s.d.). In Greek mythology, Kratos was the Titan of power and strength, but only of power stemming from strength. Therefore, *meritocracy* directly combines the words merit and power. If, centuries ago, it served as a justification for overthrowing the aristocratic system in which aristocrats held privileges that were inherited from generation to generation,

⁵ “The Law of Excluded Middle: a sentence is either false or true, excluding a third alternative” (Morais Filho, 2016, p. 22, our translation).

today it reinforces myths and inequalities.

It seems desirable to have a world where each person receives what they deserve through their own effort and merit. However, living is not so simple. Why did it take so long for Brazilian female soccer players' talent to be acknowledged? It is not only because of the sexism existing in society, but also because this talent is not valued by the market when it comes to female players. A capitalist system like the one we live in values competition.

It is important to remember that an individual's success, or a group's success, always has a favorable context that involves other people. Meritocracy is used so that a social system that is not disturbed by inequalities can be viewed as fair; a system that makes use of inequalities, where a few earn much while many earn little (Littler, 2013). In a system where this is accepted, how can social justice be promoted? An example is the creation of "inheritance tax". Some people mock the idea, despise it, and among them there are many who propose and advocate meritocracy. Agreeing with a society in which a few take it all is agreeing with social injustice.

Furthermore, this logic permeates the organization of mathematics curricula in school, which, when aligned with neoliberal principles, tends to shift full responsibility for success or failure onto students. This is especially evident in assessment practices reduced to test application, while ignoring different learning conditions. This reinforces the notion that not learning is an individual problem rather than a matter that involves broader social conditions (Taveira, 2024).

In this type of meritocratic society, consumption and the accumulation of assets and capital are encouraged both from the perspective of spending accumulated capital and from the perspective of the status related to "having". Merit "is measured" through accumulation and consumption. Consumption and the accumulation of assets are indicators of success and a sign of merit. There is a great risk that this discourse is reproduced within school through teaching strategies related to entrepreneurship, to the accumulation of capital and to valuing the social status associated with wealthier classes. It may reinforce social inequalities by reaffirming stereotypes and values related to consumption, leading to the false sensation that social mobility can be achieved through individual effort.

We should take into consideration that the fact that some individuals achieve social ascension does not mean that class inequalities have been eliminated; on the contrary, it may help to perpetuate the existing class structure. The system appears to offer opportunities and justice, reinforcing the belief that everyone can improve their status through effort, but, in reality, class structure and inequalities are maintained.

Far from being incompatible with the reproduction of the structure of class relations, the mobility of individuals may contribute to the preservation of these relations, ensuring social stability through a controlled selection of a limited number of individuals, modified for and by individual ascension, thus lending credibility to the belief of social mobility manifested in the school ideology of liberatory school (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1992, p. 176, our translation).

In the society we live in, the level of education one achieves is closely linked to the mechanisms and opportunities for accessing a significant part of the job market. Therefore, school certification plays a crucial role in it. Moreover, the way school found to fulfill its role as a ranking agent has been to compare students with one another.

In an interview with journalist Alves Filho, from *Jornal da Unicamp*, historian Sydney

Chalhoub stated that “meritocracy is a myth that feeds inequalities” (Alves Filho, 2017, our translation) and that

meritocracy as a universal value, detached from the social and historical conditions that mark Brazilian society, is a myth that serves the eternal reproduction of the social and racial inequalities that characterize our society. Therefore, meritocracy is a myth that must be fought against both in theory and in practice. There is nothing that can justify this Darwinist meritocracy, which is the law of the survival of the fittest, and that constantly promotes the exclusion of sectors of Brazilian society. This cannot go on (Alves Filho, 2017, our translation).

Assuming that assessment itself contributes to the improvement of Education quality is a myth that has been well presented. However, the assessment of school learning is linked to the sociopolitical and economic context and to the historical processes that give meaning to it. In light of this, how can assessment itself contribute to the “improvement” of education quality? What does improvement mean? Improvement for whom? What form of assessment are we discussing? What type of education? In which contexts?

We should not forget that, in a meritocratic school, “students are amidst a fundamental contradiction: they are considered fundamentally equal, while, at the same time, they must take a set of tests whose goal is to make them unequal” (Dubet, 2006, p. 32, our translation⁶). In this scenario, there is a false belief that students’ school results are a consequence of their productivity and, therefore, performances deemed insufficient are a direct result of what they lack.

Education, understood as educating human beings to develop their potential for knowledge, judgment and choice in order to live consciously in society, carries the belief that it serves both to maintain value judgments and to change them. In this sense, it can make individuals more aware of themselves and of their peers, more supportive, more able to exercise their citizenship.

6 Sixth tessera

In response to the question asked earlier in this article, we believe we have shown that it is indeed impossible to have Assessment of Learning and Meritocracy simultaneously in school.

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⁶ Os alunos estão no centro de uma contradição fundamental: são considerados fundamentalmente iguais, ao mesmo tempo que devem participar de uma série de provas cujo objetivo é torná-los desiguais.

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