

Educational Challenges and Differences

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The main motivation for an educational development program is the creation of an education target system that can be a historical reference not only in the education areas, but also in other public policy sectors. The health sector has already announced its intention to pursue performance targets in public hospitals, for instance. I am publicly enthusiastic and supportive of the Ministry of Education's sophisticated target system. I have advocated here the adoption of social targets for more than seven years. I think that the proposed system represents an unprecedented opportunity, and maybe the only one in decades, to recover part of our educational lag. While there is no amendment to be made in the wholesale aspect – I can only compliment it – the devil is in the detail and there are measurement and incentive problems associated with complex issues such as this, that must be dealt with through the debate of ideas which produces more light than heat, so that the promise of an education with quality for all can be fulfilled. The perfect evaluation system is a utopia, a type of Holy Grail, which is never found but whose search leads to improvements.

Challenges – The proposed target system is based on a new indicator of educational quality, the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) based on the repetition and drop-out rates as well as the results from *Prova Brasil* (national exams) in each city and town in the country, which will inform the decision on the federal resource transfers to mayors in the area of education. The government will establish targets and will condition the allocation of resources to the adoption of specific measures by the municipal authorities and the improvement of each municipal performance's new indicator. The 1,000 towns with the worst results according to IDEB will receive additional resources and the remaining ones will only receive technical assistance. Adhesion to the program is optional. Municipalities who adhere to the program will have to implement some actions, under the direct guidance of the government's experts. This action in practice corrects the current model of educational expenditure according to the 1988 Constitution by considering school performance in the distribution of public resources.

In my view, the rationale should focus less on determining fixed educational paths to each municipal authority within the PDE – even because there are formidable logistic problems in this action – and more on providing the more general motivation, targets and navigation instruments to all mayors. Disclosing the result from the 2007 IDEB right before the elections in 2008 will encourage mayors, even those who did not sign the All for Education commitment, thus making the electoral market more sensitive to the cause of quality education.

The active participation by the civil society, international organizations like UNESCO and governments should be in tune with ordinary challenges. Core actors in each one of these categories have agreed on the All for Education agreement, suggesting a unique moment

for the coordination and acceleration of educational efforts. Today the education begins to feature in the conversations of young people, teachers, parents in the light of data from each school. Only when the true main stakeholders debate the problems of their schools the battle against the worst quality education in Brazil will begin to be won.

The creation of a simple and intuitive system of educational targets that rates schools from 1 to 10, like IDEB, holds the promise of motivating all agents involved from the young pupil and his/her parents, to mayors and governors. Performance measurement indicators, however, should be manipulation-proof, which is not an easy task in a country well known for its loopholes. IDEB is concerned with the dilemmas in its conception: if the school artificially accelerates the progression of its students to increase their IDEB, it will drop its proficiency, as *Prova Brasil* will attest. This trade off between speed and quality has to be well balanced in order to maximize the IDEB. This may seem like an empirical economist's – as myself – obsession and it may be so, but the index should point in the right direction without throwing away valuable opportunities. It may not be a coincidence that some managers have focused on the acceleration of school flows right after the PDE was announced. This may be a first sign of the IDEB's capacity to change public managers' actions. But in order to ensure that we reach our aim of an education of quality in its multiple dimensions, the education agenda cannot be under the influence of illegitimate interests.

Tips – A first difficult but feasible issue to be addressed is the total inclusion of those out of school into the IDEB as a way to hold accountable the public schools networks for these children and attributing the fair weight of such issue in the index. This should be done by including the stock of students who were and remain out of school according to household surveys. Otherwise, there could have been an incentive to mayors and governors to keep a marginal population out of the system in order to keep their IDEB. In the USA, families are usually inquired when their children are found out of school, which consists of a relevant social control. In this aspect, the current population count in the smallest Brazilian towns combined to the projections based on the IBGE Census should also be included in the general indexⁱⁱ. Another issue here is the creation of a development index of the public school system that considers those out of the school.

Another suggestion in the same line should consider changes in enrolments vis a vis the whole population. It would include transfers between schools and system in the school flow index of the IDEB. In other words, people move from one school to another. This change is possible to be implemented using the new possibility allowed by the School Census of accessing individual school records through time and across schools.

For example, in my son's school, but also in others, a tougher approval criterion is adopted in the second grade of secondary school in order to single out the worst students so that the school can rate well in university entry scores. A student who has studied in a school and the remainder in another should have his knowledge added value divided pro rata by his time in each school. This Salomon-like logic that shares the performance according to the study period gives credit to the lawful school, that which has taught and encouraged the students. It is fundamental to close spaces where results are cooked. Similarly, it is common for courses preparing students for university entry to hire the best students in

initial grades to have a good performance in the university entry. I do not forget my most brilliant college friend wearing the t-shirt from a high profile university prep course, having access to a driver and a scholarship on the grounds of his potential to produce grades fiercely shown in the newspapers. I do not have anything against this advertisement as long as it is not deceiving. The right sign is fundamental for the efficient working of the educational activity, be it private or public. In this aspect, the IDEB means an enormous advance in terms of transparency.

The basic principles of the system should be established a priori before its implementation in order to avoid asymmetric complaints on the part of losers that may be affected by the inevitable adjustments that a 10-year-old educational target may undergo. It is necessary to choose a general philosophy of evaluation and result rewards, applying it to each level of teaching and integrate it into a single system. Following this line of argument, why not apply IDEB's rational to the ENEM and ENADE, which assess individually students from secondary school and universities? Firstly, IDEB's grade will be made individual for each student with the changes brought about by the Ministry of Education in the *Prova Brasil* and the School Census, just like in ENEM and ENADE. In the opposite direction, why not use the IDEB rational for correcting the grades by evasion flows, repetition and transfers in the evaluation of the highest school years? Secondly, the two *Prova Brasil* applied to the 4th and 8th grades assess the students' universe, in contrast with the random sample adopted by the ENADE and the volunteer option of the ENEM. In Enade's case, the difference between a student's grade in the last year of high school and the first year at university is assessed. It is not a pure addition of value because the first year grade is contaminated in a double sense: by the knowledge acquired in the course's first yearⁱⁱⁱ and by the capacity of the university to alter the results. For instance, the school may throw a party to the freshmen on the eve of the first ENADE exam. In this sense, it would be better to define the entry grade before the entry in the university, away from the school that is interested in pushing the grade down to underestimate the student's initial stock of knowledge.

But why not apply ENEM to all students and replace it by the first ENADE exam?

Another ENEM's advantage for all is to improve the information content available for labor market, that is, what will create incentives to its universal coverage in a virtuous circle. As the individual exam, it should allow students to do it again in order to eliminate the risks from a bad exam day.

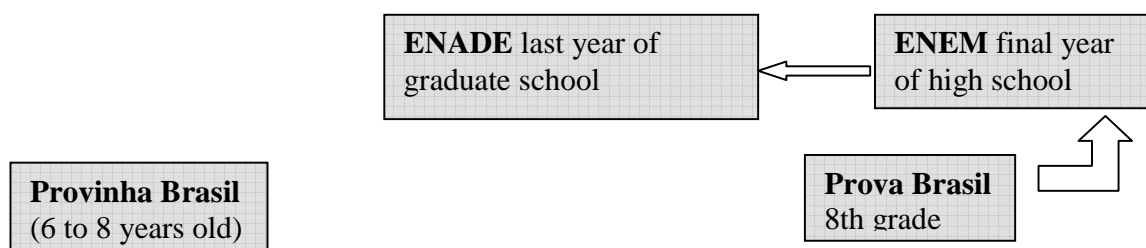
This grade does not have to be included in the school's index, because the law of large numbers smooths out these idiosyncratic variations. Some may legitimately question the exam's style and content, but there is nothing stopping organizations from creating other seals of educational quality with other contents and evaluation styles, as with English proficiency exams, such as Cambridge, etc. IDEB has taken the first step in this direction and should be followed by others.

Differences – An Enem for all can also be useful for other public policies. Granting an extra reward to those finishing high school, currently being discussed within the *Bolsa Família* grant, may benefit from an external evaluation, thus diminishing the potential tensions between teachers and students as in a conditionality system. MIT's Poverty Lab studies show that teachers tend to bias their evaluation criteria when there are

conditionalities and rewards at stake. The core points here are the virtues in contracting this conditionality evaluation, taking the tension out from the teacher-student relationship, while also increasing the evaluation's accuracy. Before being called an elitist for advocating the poor's right to receive resources attached to their grades, I also defend here the difference in grades observed between the start and end of the school cycle, which is a proxy of the knowledge added by the school and whose progress possibility is pro poor by nature. Schools must be assessed for their capacity to add value to the students' knowledge, because this is their most important function. In other words, we are talking about learning films and not knowledge snapshots. One of the few instances where it is advantageous to be little educated is in the capacity to learn. Learning is measured by the comparison between the results attained through time, with adjustments to get comparable flows. If the learning evaluation system is based on added value and its turning into greater financial flows to units, public and private resources in society will tend to migrate to the best returns measured according to educational displacements. Another important point we borrow from the regulation literature is that the distribution of results must be based on the comparison of performance among units, the so called yardstick competition. Relative performance measures are information and aggregate shock-proof as will certainly occur until the date for the IDEB's target improvement in 2021, just one year before Brazil's independency bicentennial anniversary. According to MEC, the goal is to take the Brazilian IDEB to the level of OECD countries, which currently coincide with the level of Brazilian private schools. That is, the challenge is to reduce the lag of the Brazilian system as a whole to less than 15 years. If a target system wants to distribute resources a priori, it should combine the motivation and simplicity of an a priori system as announced, with an a posteriori evaluation system that effectively measures the results. In short, evaluating schools for the effect knowledge value added and compare it to the group of students is equivalent, in truth, to the standard solution of evaluation empirical analysis of difference in difference, which we propose here.

The necessary condition for such system is that the evaluation of all levels of learning converge to methodologies with TRI – Answer to Item Theory that allows comparing grades and their universal and individual characteristics such as those used in SAT, GRE and GMAT exams done in the US. I speak of an integrated system that would go beyond the recently announced Provinha Brasil (for 6 to 8 year-olds) the two Prova Brasil, for the 4th and 8th grades, the ENEM for the last year of high school and Enade share the same properties so that we can compare apples and oranges in the added value measure obtained at each school level.

**Integrated system for the Evaluation of Learning
Relative Value added in between exams (D in D)***





* exams should be universal, individualized and comparable (applying TRI).

Evaluating the relative difference in learning indicates the way for diversity and intra-school cooperation. If the issue is to measure the learning capacity offered by schools, they will tend to mix students from different levels of knowledge in their groups. Certainly more than in a system based on final pictures of knowledge. All we want in a country with our degree of diversity and educational inequality is to mix students from different family backgrounds within educational institutions.

It would turn our school into a space for the joint learning in the interest of all, and not into a space of race or class hatred. With a view to improving the global performance of our schools, students may engage in a cooperative game in each school with the following motto: each one for the education of all and all for the education of one.

ⁱ I would like to thank the helpful discussions with Gabriel Buchmann, Ruben Klein and the other member from the Todos pela Educação Technical committee, to which I belong, without implying in their responsibility for any imprecisions and positions I assumed in this text.

ⁱⁱ For example, the school attendance index created in the Center for Social Policies includes not only the attendance and the length of the school day, but the value zero for those out of school. This point is considered in the universal coverage targets of the *Todos pela Educação* group. Discussion about education targets: www.fgv.br/cps/pesquisas/educa.

ⁱⁱⁱ This issue has been raised by Renato Fragelli from EPGE/FGV.