

# WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis  
A collective work by CES



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Centro de Estudos Sociais  
Universidade de Coimbra



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# EDUCATION AND INEQUALITIES

Rui Gomes

Inequalities predate the crisis in education created by the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown by the high retention and dropout rates – mainly affecting social groups with fewer resources –, the failure to attend compulsory schooling in almost all courses of study, the inability to integrate ethnic minorities successfully, the slowness in the process of extending pre-school education, and the deficiencies in the way integrated education is dealt with.

With students having to stay at home, the inequality of access to the digital society became clear, but this is only one example of unequal access to cultural assets. Info-exclusion goes hand in hand with the new technologies to the extent that the latter are used as a simple aid to traditional teaching rather than a tool for differentiated learning anchored in the students' experiences.

Social inequalities turn into school inequalities due to the 18th century graduate class model, in which *many are taught as if they were a class of one*. The traditional mass school model, based on collective education, on the classroom as a space for a fixed and homogeneous group of students and on a standard class time, proved obsolete when confronted with the glaring economic and cultural inequalities between students.

The fiction of the average student as representative of the whole lives on in the institution of the exam. It is assumed that the students who pass the exam are those in a position to receive the same collective education in the next grade. The exam is also a way to certify the value of each student and to insert this value into the productive logic of the capitalist labour market. Through meritocracy, the exam hides the inequalities of economic

resources and the cultural capital of families behind the neutrality and objectivity of the student's results.

Resolving these inequalities will require the following measures:

- Full compliance with 12 years of compulsory education, reducing retention and dropout rates to residual levels.
- Universalisation of pre-school education, integrating it into compulsory education.
- Establishment of specific integration programmes for ethnic minorities and students with special needs.
- Expansion of documentation and information network centres so as to allow a substantial move from reproductive education to productive learning, centred on autonomous paths of knowledge appropriation.
- Ensuring of the replacement of a portion of collective education with project-based education, be it of the tutorial type or in small groups, both remote and face-to-face.
- Replacement of lecture-type classes with supervised group work carried out in new, dedicated school facilities but also remotely, and also remotely, in libraries or other educational and cultural resources available. The standard class time can be replaced with time credits of teachers and students, according to the degree of compliance with the purposes, objectives and tasks set by the curricular goals.
- Gradual extinction of all exams in free and compulsory universal education.