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Autores / Curadores: Andrea Barrientos Soto, Gracia González-Gijón, Andrés Soriano Díaz

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ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION AND SECOND CHANCE SCHOOLS: GLOBAL AND LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON ITS HISTORY AND OUTLOOK

Andrea Barrientos Soto
andreabarrientos01@gmail.com

Gracia González-Gijón
graciag@ugr.es

Andrés Soriano Díaz
asoriano@ugr.es

Research Group on Emerging Values, Social Education and Educational Policy
Faculty of Education
University of Granada
Campus de Cartuja, s/n
18071, Granada, Spain

Abstract:

Alternative Education has become a tool for inclusion for young people with particular needs not normally addressed in homogeneous schools. This article presents a theoretical review of its history, its typology and the organizational schemes used as it correlates to the regular school system. We review the impact of Alternative Education´s Second Chance Schools on student performance and retention based on the experience in Latin America, Europe and the US.

Keywords: Alternative Education; Disadvantaged youth; Early School Leaving; History of Education; Second Chance Schools

1. INTRODUCTION

We examine Alternative Education (AE) from three perspectives: private primary, private secondary, and public secondary schools, so that, we may recognize the encompassing realities under the general nomenclature of AE. We review the history of AE in Europe, the UK, United States and Puerto Rico, focus on the schemes that govern it as well as delving into the model of higher educational level, Second Chance Schools (SCS), and its contribution to quality education for disadvantaged youth within a framework of social justice.

2. HISTORY OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

AE responds to the continuous search for a better educational option in the face of the homogeneous pedagogical model, characterized by its rigidity, authoritarianism and uniformity (Carbonell, 2016). For many, today's regular school falls short of providing the thinking and life skills that learners need in the 21st century.

In 2015, an international campaign Manifesto 15ª, signed by schools, learners and pedagogues from European and American countries, demanded a new conceptualization of education which, among others, requested an end to mandatory exams used solely for measuring short-term results (García, 2016). This dissatisfaction is a base from which AE emerges. Carbonell (2016) uses adjectives to reference these schools:

> […] Radical, alternative, open, without walls, different, unconventional, free, non-schools, anti-authoritarian, libertarian, outside the system, democratic […] but they are always alternatives to […] conventional schooling (Carbonell, 2016, p. 99).

In a historical perspective, the US of the 1960s during the struggles in favor of civil rights for African Americans and ethnic minorities, education remained one of the most imperative mechanisms for segregation. In this context, AE emerges as an opportunity to balance the scales of access to quality education previously denied to minorities, and that, in addition, it has served as an experimental laboratory, where new ways of teaching and evaluation are tested (Sliwka, 2012).

AE in the US and UK could be defined as a component and, at the same time, a product of the countercultural revolution of the turbulent 1960s. In the next two decades, regular education assumed a remedial character which aimed to cure the problems produced in many generations of learners, trained in a highly standardized system and a memory-based methodology (Mills and McGregor, 2017).

A key experience is the Summerhill school founded by Neill in the UK, as a primary and secondary co-ed boarding school. Summerhill (Neill, 1986), a centenary school, is considered by educators as the first experience of democratic education systematically documented. The theoretical-conceptual proposal and its concrete application are based on freedom as the ability to decide and act while respecting others. Classes are free, decisions are made in a weekly assembly, self-regulation is sought, the needs of learners are considered and the interference of adults is rejected.

Before Summerhill, alternative schools in Europe existed through the work undertaken by the Church to rescue young people displaced by migration, industrialization, poverty or wars. Examples include the Italian Barbiana School, established by priest Lorenzo Milani (1954) who used the collective writing technique with students to publish a letter calling for reform to avoid the inequality that causes school abandonment.

> […] We have also seen that with them [students who lag behind] school is more difficult. Sometimes we are tempted to get them out of the way. But if we lose them, school is no longer school. It is a hospital that heals the healthy and rejects the sick. It becomes an increasingly irremediable instrument of differentiation (Students of the Barbiana School, 1986, p. 14).

This concern has been present in Latin America since the 19th century. Of the first examples is the school founded (1810) by the Puerto Rican brother and sister, Rafael and Celestina Cordero y Molina (of the few free educated negros at the time) who provided free basic education to black and mulatto boys and girls, excluded by the slavery law (Quintero, 2009).

Today´s AE is based on the holistic vision of education that sees the learner as autonomous, centered on the idea that the learner's natural curiosity allows the learner to acquire mastery of the content and not the other way around (Palladino, 2021). This occurs in a context of smaller-scale schools, reduced sizes classes, in which relationships between teachers and learners are consciously built; and where the socio-emotional dimension of the teaching-learning process is highlighted through a democratic, non-punitive and non-violent approach to education, as well as through the full student participation and creation of culturally-based activities (Mills and McCluskey, 2018).

In 1997, the Parent's Guide to Alternative Education listed 20 different types of alternative schools and six educational trends in the US (Miller, 2004). That list may have undergone changes, but the differences stem from the philosophical and values priorities that each one exhibits. Most alternative pedagogical models are founded on the stages of human development and neuro-educational processes. For example, the Montessori method and Rebeca Wild's school are based on Piaget to determine the areas of work by the stages of human development -0 to 3 years, 3 to 6 years, 6 to 12 years. While Waldorf uses a system based on anthropological observation to determine the most age-appropriate curriculum, divided into three evolutionary stages: first (0-7), second (8-14) and third (15-21) (García, 2016, p. 64). Yet most alternative pedagogies concur that they:

- Perceive the child is not conceived as an incomplete "human"
- Promote the child's self-regulation
- Discipline becomes self-discipline
- Avoid being adult-centric
- Share decision-making
- Link studies with nature and the environment
- Use multiple resources to complement the textbook
- Children of different levels share the classroom
- Teach humanities and arts in equal proportions to science and mathematics (Ibid, 2016, pp. 30-33).

Those authors who advanced this perspective include Hostos, Dewey, Montessori, Illich, among others. Hostos, Puerto Rican philosopher and educator, who at the end of the 19th century promoted culture and patriotism in the face of years of Spanish colonization and later US occupation. Hostos proposed the creation of a League of Puerto Rican Patriots that would implement compulsory education for boys and girls as well as a night-school for day laborers in order to eliminate the causes of poverty. Hostos promoted cooperatives and community choirs to foster Puerto Rican solidarity, both economic and civil (Hostos, 1969, p. 5).

For Dewey, teaching and the curriculum must follow the stages of development of the child who must be integrated into society through democratic experiential learning. Illich, for his part, distinguished between schooling and education and promoted open and free teaching -outside of school- so as to create a "dialogue in equality". He advocated that teaching was not a monopoly of teachers but rather to be sought by maximizing experts´ skills in different fields.

From Latin America, the educational proposals of the Cuban José Martí, the Chilean Gabriela Mistral or the Normal School in Costa Rica and their ideologues were based on a new education stemming from the student´s context through life experiences. Freire assumes these principles but transcends them with a more complex proposal that explicitly intends to train thoughtful and committed individuals. Freire's liberating education comes about through a transformation based on the principle of dialogue, where teachers -who would also be critical researchers- facilitate the development through a process of praxis, reflection and permanent action. In this sense, "the Pedagogy of the oppressed ceases to be the oppressed and becomes the pedagogy of men in the process of permanent liberation" (Freire, 1993, p. 34).

Different from the neoliberal economic and business models of "efficiency and quality" that influenced education in the 90s, AE offered options to offset the ravages of a public education that heavily privileged testing and memorization (Lange and Sletten, 2002). In these decades, not only did the early school leaving rates increase but school violence grew exponentially and became another determining factor. In the UK and the US, bullying begins to be documented and its incidence on early school leaving is studied for the first time. As a result, children who receive

education at home increases, for religious or medical reasons, or in response to the violence or harassment experienced in the regular school (Mills and McGregor, 2017).

Homeschooling, also considered alternative, has expanded worldwide among families with particular characteristics, professional couples and educated middle class. This requires that at least one of the guardians prepare the curriculum and remain at home. However, there are families that choose this approach despite the economic sacrifice that it entails. There are families whose homeschooling structure resembles a regular school with schedules, textbooks, and homework. While others, implement the "unschooling" curriculum where learning is learner-directed (García, 2016).

This increasing demand meant that by 1998 in the US, 20 states had official definitions of AE and four years later (2002), 48 states had legislated on it (Porowski, O´Conner & Luo, 2014). An estimated 6 % of all high schools in the US are alternative (Deeds and DePaoli, 2017). In the case of Spain, the Ludus directory, which includes schools of different currents, went from registering 30 projects in 2013 to more than 800 in 2016 (García, 2016, p. 28).

Part of the history of AE includes its great contributions to regular education. It has pioneered innovative practices that are now widely accepted, such as reducing the learner-teacher ratio, the theme-based curriculum, learning communities, teacher empowerment, assessment or authentic evaluation, among others (Lange and Sletten, 2002).

The nomenclature used in AE can be categorized based on philosophical influences and schools of thought. These include in Table 1: Conventional Transmission Model, Learning Based on Freedom to Learn, the Social Constructivist Model, Critical Pedagogy, Spiritual Development, and Holistic Education, comprehensive or humanistic (Miller, 2004). There are modalities, models and methodologies that coincide in several categories, for example, the Montessori methodology that, while seeking a self-directed exploration in the learning process, also seeks a continuous association with nature.

Table 1. Models present in AE

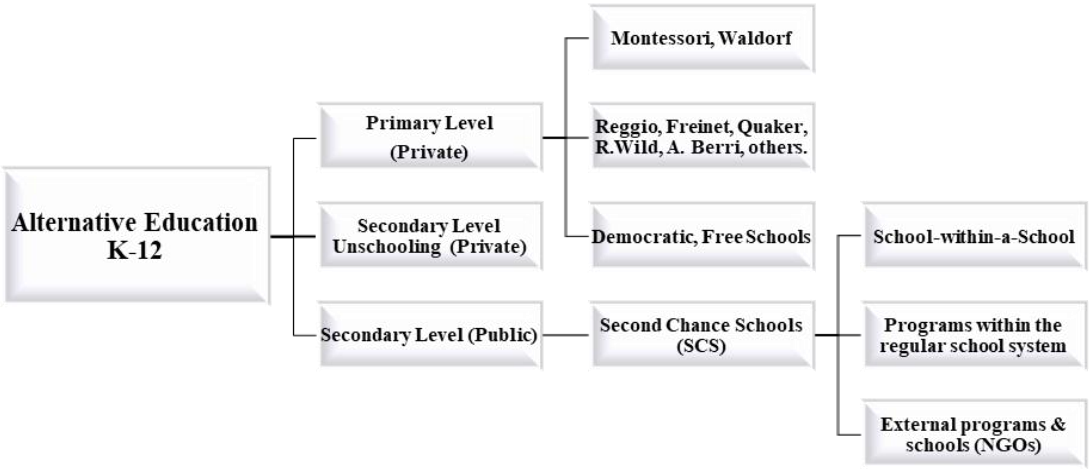
Model	Description	Examples
Transmission Model	The established information (textbooks) is transmitted and delivered. There is a body of authoritatively learned facts outside of the personal experiences of the learner. The educator controls the information and the means of standardized evaluation.	Homogenous, regular, normalized Education, may include religious, military education.
Learning base for the Freedom to Learn	Focuses on the self-motivation of the learner to explore and learn relevant to their interests. The freedom and autonomy are not restricted. A participatory system is exercised with each person exercising voice and vote in decision-making, as a microcosm of a participatory society.	Influences: Neill, Illich, Tolstoy, John Holt, Ferrer, Yaacov Hecht Schools: Summerhill, Modern School Ferrer, Sudbury Valley School, Democratic Schools of Israel
Social Constructivist Model, Progressive Education	It is based on social learning and encourages collaboration, exploration and problem solving in creative ways. It is based on integral language and cooperative learning. This focuses on the child and the aspects of improvement and social justice in their community, immediate and global.	Influences: Dewey, Vygotsky, Freinet Schools: Friends Quaker, Reggio Emilia, Amara Berri, Freinet, Rebeca Wild
Critical Pedagogy	It proposes that education should have an explicit objective of social responsibility with society. Education is conceived as an ethical and collective act. Propelled from public education, it teaches solidarity, equality and social justice as opposed to violence and exploitation, the divisions of racism and classism and the effects of globalization and corporate expansionism.	Influences: Hostos, Dewey, Freire, Habermas, Mollenhauer & Thiersch Schools: Unschooling Movement, Nuestra Escuela
Spiritual Development	Driven by the search for (inner) peace, this education seeks the spiritual dimension of human development. They view human development in light of spirituality thereby uses archetypes to place learners in work groups. It is directed by the teachers and is not considered a free model, nor is it self-directed by the learner.	Influences: Ghandi, Montessori, R. Steiner Schools: Waldorf Steiner, Montessori, Forrest-outdoor schools
Holistic, Humanistic and Integral Education	Creates a balance between structure and freedom, individuality and social responsibility, spiritual wisdom and spontaneity. Many incorporate techniques from other models, but are guided by their own master wisdom to make their experience unique implementing an integrated «world curriculum». More than a model, it is an attitude of openness towards the world through learning.	Influences: Ken Wilbur, Krishnamurti, Parker Palmer Schools: Ananda Marga, Waldorf Steiner, Friends Quaker, Robert Muller School

Source: Adapted from Miller, 2004.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL SQUEMES IN THE PROVISION

Currently there are three organizational models of AE: private elementary level, public secondary level and public secondary level (Figure 1). In this analysis, we will address the secondary level models.

Figure 1. AE Provision



Source: Authors´ elaboration.

A. Private Secondary Level

The last decades have seen the emergence of private alternative secondary schools, since many have expanded at the request of parents. And some have adopted the concept of "unschooling" (AERO, 2020). Prominent in both Canada and the US, these schools are guided by the concept of the learner as a shaper of their own process which implies that the element of compulsory schooling is excluded and the process rests on the resolution and motivation of each learner.

Inspired by the freedom to learn model and democratic education, each learner establishes their study program and dedicates their time to research through Project Based Learning (PBL). This is complemented through volunteer activities, speaker´s series and the city's public cultural services. Learners determine how and when their learning is assessed. They do not use textbooks or standardized tests but rather portfolios where they accumulate their work and are used to determine the level of effort invested (Alliance for Self-Directed Education, 2021).

Interestingly, many "unschooling" schools integrate Education for Peace and Human Rights into their curriculums. These aim to provide a balanced view of a history that consistently omits that of antiwar, peaceful and social justice movements (Del Pozo, Jiménez and Author, 2018). They try to relive these milestones through readings, guest speakers and visits to historical places that engage learners in current events from a nonviolent perspective. These networks of schools and educators share anti-racist, anti-oppression curricular materials to adequately address the subject in the classroom[1].

These concerns date back several decades to the research of educators and sociologists Michael W. Apple, John Holt, and Basil Bernstein who delved into the hidden curriculum and linked it to a systemic view of racism and classism present in educational materials, practices, and policies of the time (Author, 2020).

B. Public Secondary Level

The alternative pedagogical model applied to public secondary education is designed for young people who face precarious life circumstances (pregnancy, paternity or economic responsibility for other family members) and present academic lag, who without this option would not finish school. These schools receive at-risk learners referred by other institutions or the juvenile justice system (Glassett & Daniels, 2014, p. 107).

The concept of Second Chance Schools (SCS) originates from the experience of the European Economic Community in the late 1990s and is characterized as experimental initiatives, adapted to the student´s social and cultural environment, organized as flexible and motivating educational alternatives (UNESCO, 2009, p. 81). SCS coexist within regular schools, school-within-a-school, in such a way that they function as a bubble within the physical campus of the regular school (Figure 1). There are also SCS with independent (all-in-one) facilities formed by government agencies where young people receive all services in one place. Some are community based "organizations-schools" which facilitate classes, activities and services with their own resources.

[1] https://www.theantiracisteducator.com/about

These schools have the advantage of knowing the learners through community networks from the areas they serve and anchoring educational experiences in the context of their neighborhoods.

The SCS work according to the objective they pursue and the needs presented by the population of learners they serve. A use of technology and flexible scheduling are a staple in most modalities. Table 2 highlights this diversity since the interventions, duration or program vary according to the need of the learner.

Table 2. Types of SCS and its Modalities

Type of school	Modality
1. School-within-a-School	It is a separate space with a specialized academic staff within a regular school. This strategy is commonly used to reduce the learners/teacher ratio.
2. School without Walls	Classes, seminars, trainings, and services are offered at various locations within a community and have flexible hours for learners.
3. Residential Schools	The school receives learners sent by the judicial courts or by families. They reside on-site and have educational and counseling services.
4. Learning Centers	They offer a special curriculum (teen parenting, vocational) and are located within organizations, churches, and often offer a combination of services, such as transportation and child care.
5. Schools in Universities	Centers that integrate young people into university life, provide certain services to improve academic growth, some function as laboratory schools.
6. Summer Schools	Some are dedicated to strengthening the academic deficiencies of lagging regular learners; others focus on specific interest and seek to complement a regular school or to entertain while on vacation.
7. Magnet Schools	Its staff and curriculum are specialized by areas of interest. They receive learners from any geographic area. Voluntary student participation.
8. Charter Schools	Quasi-private schools that operate under contract and have the participation of parents-community in its operation. They offer specific curricular topics.
9. Reentry Classrooms	Housed within a regular school, learners return to the regular school after the intervention. These can be multilevel and have a professional team for educational, psychological and social support and work in small groups.

Source: Adapted from Lange and Sletten, 2002; Roberson, 2015.

In Latin America, SCS bear similarities with the aforementioned modalities. It is possible to understand the region´s AE policies in three strategies: prevention programs within regular schools; alternative educational spaces (reentry classrooms) for those who have interrupted their educational path; and SCS (UNESCO, 2009, p. 81).

A UNESCO report on SCS (2009), proposes a less linear look at school abandonment which is relevant for young people who have "interrupted" their educational path. With the high rates of early school leaving, governments in Latin America[2], are seeing in SCS ways to encourage the return to education through alternative means, without it representing a social and economic "death sentence". However, this requires a different view of SCS,

> The educational system, [...] continues to be thought of as a vertical system [...] not as cycles and integrated and valid learning circuits in themselves, in a modular structure capable of allowing various points of entry and exit, various learning paths, alternation or combination between education and training, study and work, theory and practice. Such a structure would be better suited to the paradigm of lifelong learning [...] (Torres, 2005, in UNESCO, 2009, p. 85).

In Puerto Rico, the Sustainable Student Support Centers of the island´s education agency (DEPR, 2014) supports some 14 schools that serve approximately 1,200 learners annually, who have been outside the system for more than six consecutive months. In addition, there is an independent entity, Alliance for Alternative Education, which represents ten centers and serves over 1,000 learners annually (AEA, 2012). The AEA´s results point to substantial changes in young people that translate into a retention rate of more than 95 %, with student attendance exceeding 90 %. Most students graduate to continue post-secondary and university studies, or join the job market or start their own businesses (Ibid.). But perhaps the greatest achievement of this Alliance has been the public education campaign, and subsequent approval, on the *Enabling Act for the development of Alternative Education* (Camara de Reps., 2012), which homologates degrees and opens the way for other SCS to operate.

1. Effectivity of Second Chance Schools (SCS)

The effectiveness of many State-operated SCS is determined by traditional indicators of quality and progress, generally based on student performance, the graduation rate and the number of

[2] It reports on SCS in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay.

learners who reenter the regular classroom. These types of evaluations do not always consider the added value of SCS. They exclude assessing the psychosocial development or the strengthening of life skills that accompany the learning process (Lange and Sletten, 2002). Therefore, it is suggested that the evaluation be comprehensive,

> Ignoring the outcomes of non-traditional learners can negate the positive outcomes that have emerged in the areas of greatest satisfaction, self-esteem, and connection to school, outcomes that can ultimately keep students on track (Lange and Sletten, 2002, p. 22).

Studies show that the personalized alternative model is successful, exhibiting greater learner retention and graduation (Glassett and Daniels, 2014, p. 115). For Roberson, part of the success rests in being "highly structured and extremely flexible", structured in operational terms and flexible in pedagogical terms (Roberson, 2015, p. 58).

Educators recognize that SCS are effective in reducing violent behaviors, academic enrichment, improving self-awareness, positive attitude towards school and self-learning, strengthening personal motivation and a creating a better appreciation of ethnic diversity and healthy living. In addition, research shows progress in young people in terms of their level of commitment, and motivation in their academic development (Glassett and Daniels, 2014).

The SCS with the most significant achievements are those that offer a learning community, an engaging and adaptable curriculum, and a strategic plan for the achievement of the student's educational goals (Raywid, 1994). Inspired by alternative pedagogies at the elementary level, SCS tend to work with smaller groups, which strengthens personal relationships, a better understanding of the topics and a more collaborative behavior of the learners. The confidence that teachers express to learners creates an environment of commitment, stimulates them to be more efficient, perfects their skills and behavior, and this improves their performance (Roberson, 2015).

The above does not deny the challenges that leaners face nor does it change the perception of this type of education in some circles. Among the most common criticisms are the lack of academic rigor. Some SCS do not present significant academic challenges nor do they exhibit the necessary

academic rigor in their curriculum or pedagogy. "Having a caring environment without a solid curricular offering is insufficient for the provision of a meaningful and socially just education" (European Commission, 2013, p. 89). SCS that highlight deficiencies rather than adopting a strengths-based perspective, leads to lower expectations and less rigorous instruction (Glassett & Daniels, 2014).

To reduce this academic risk, it is necessary to establish clear objectives, set challenges, and establish high standards of performance. Many have corrected and succeeded. According to the OECD (2012), SCS make significant progress in terms of retention and have broadened their philosophy to better focus on the cognitive and socio-emotional development of the student. Several OECD countries have analyzed legislation and obtained funding to include SCS in their education systems. This is due to the growing interest of parents in an education focused not on past achievement but "on the student's potential for growth" (Sliwka, 2012, p. 2).

Thus, SCS represent a real mechanism to recover learners who have abandoned school and, in this way, mitigate the long-term economic impact on the community. According to the calculations of the Alliance for Excellent Education (National Alternative Education Association, 2009), for each student recovered, the State saves about $ 260,000US annually, translated as losses in wages, taxes and productivity throughout life. Along the same lines, SCS in the European Union have registered comparable results. When comparing the cost/benefit, SCS represent a good investment, both in financial and human resources, generating better results for learners than those of job-placement programs of the European Union (European Commission, 2013).

4. CONCLUSIONS

There has been an effort to document AE, yet much remains to be done. Added to this is the scarce dissemination of the results of SCS and the need for society to understand the severe implications of continuing with a conventional system that expels non-conforming learners, who abandon school prematurely in significant numbers. In light of this, we present some considerations:

- *Evaluation*: A rigorous and comprehensive evaluation is essential to dissolve questions about the quality and effectiveness of SCS.
- *Internal revision of values*: Include a curriculum that consciously builds a culture of peace and equality by teaching about systemic inequities and historical biases, so that motivated learners can engage in useful projects to contribute to their communities.
- *World of work*: Develop skills and experiences through volunteer activities and internships, to better transition learners to the world of work, bringing the young person closer to finding a profession/occupation.
- *Research and documentation*: A longitudinal research are needed to track learner´s educational, professional, occupational destinations over time. Knowing the whereabouts of learners and their social impact can be one of the best effectiveness indicators (European Commission, 2013).

The evaluation of the pilot project on SCS –in eleven countries of the European Union– carried out in 2011, set out to identify the characteristics and determine which ones and in what hierarchy condition their success. The report reveals that: *it is not one or other, more or less, important factors that give good results, but rather the whole:*

> The evaluation […] found that the relative importance of the different factors varies according to the opinions and experiences of the interviewees [...] and it seems that it is the cumulative effect of the different characteristics of these schools that makes them effective (European Commission, 2013, p. 91).

We can conclude that alternative pedagogical models not only lay the historical and epistemological bases of AE, but they continue to influence new models of education. Different from each other, due to their ideological, philosophical and methodological approaches, and conditioned by a time and a geography, they all contribute to change. Through the support for the success of young people coupled with enriching, respectful and inclusive environments, alternative schools and second chance schools have created a new path to learning for children and young people who require different educational experiences.

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