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15. SCHOOL REPRESENTATION IN CURRICULUM POLICIES

INTRODUCTION

Education, whether viewed in terms of a research field or as a cultural process, is admittedly a much broader field than just teaching or the institutionalized schooling processes. The history of curricular thought, by contrast, is directly related to the school institution. Research into ways of interpreting school knowledge, organizing content and activities for teaching purposes, thinking about education and producing social identities, identifying the different conflicting processes of signifying the curriculum and, through it, project subjectivities, is – particularly in Western culture – directly related to the idea of creating a social institution named *school*, with all its conflicting goals.

Although there may be research that theorizes curriculum outside of school – the curriculum of museums, for example (Rose, 2006; Vallance, 2004, 2006) – we consider that the curriculum emerges as a signifier intrinsically linked to school. There is a historical dispute in the field between those who seek ways to develop the curriculum in school and those who try to understand how the curriculum is developed in this institution and theorized in the educational field (Pinar et al., 1995). It is through the latter option that we articulate and position ourselves in the field towards the signification of curriculum.

Our research focuses on curriculum policies, understood as attempts to establish meanings – whether through documents produced in the spheres of government and schools, or through theoretical and academic texts. The politically-constituted meanings of curriculum, school, culture and difference have been especially important to us.¹ In this paper, we propose to address the meanings of school, given their effects on the production of discourses in curriculum policies.

Our investigations have led us to conclude that school has been identified in different curriculum policies in existence today as the *locus* of practice. There is a significant consensus in understanding school practice as curriculum *actually* enacted. Such an interpretation involves both the meanings that define school as the redeemer of all social problems, as well as those in which the institution is presented as the place of absence, marked by traditional practices unable to cope with the changes in the contemporary world and by a mobilization of the forms of knowledge supposed to be necessary for that world. In addition, by highlighting the teacher's role in the policies – whether as architect of traditionalism and the one to be blamed

for the lack of quality, or as a partner in opposition to that tradition – the idea that the school is the locus of a true experience prevails.

In our opinion, recent curricular policies in Brazil have conceived of the school, and the practices that take place in it, as a place to be pollinated by political discourses, and not as an integral part of the mentioned policy. Since such understanding has serious political consequences with respect to the possibilities of curriculum decision-making, we seek to disseminate in this article meanings that deconstruct the structures of signification and which could underpin the stability of this understanding. We are committed to a policy without determination and, in Derrida's terms, to the opening of radical possibilities *to differ* and *to be*, and that is the reason why we have invested in this deconstruction.

Therefore, we will use Laclau's theory of discourse and Derrida's deconstructionist contributions, in addition to contemporary works in the field of curriculum, to explain the discursive closures that recent curriculum policies are constructing, particularly in Brazil. By focusing on these policies we aim to evidenciate which will enable us to develop our reasoning; there will, therefore, be no exhaustive study of data nor even a more detailed presentation of these policies. In fact, we do not consider that the investigated process is limited to the Brazilian space-time or even to the possible invention of a Latin American register. This discourse, as with any other discourse, does not irradiate from a center and is not restricted to specific geographical or geopolitical boundaries. Thus, it may prove even more powerful in the setting-up of current curricular policies.

In order to develop the proposed arguments, we will begin with a section in which we explore the notions of policies and representation with which we operate, focusing on displaced and contingent structures. Subsequently, we will focus on some convergences concerning the notion of school representation in policies, using documents signed by the Ministry of Education in Brazil between 2009 and 2012. As discourses, however, those convergences transcend space and time and are part of curricular policies, in different ways, not being confined to any time or to the Brazilian federal level. Our purpose is to identify which meanings of school (in articulation with meanings of curriculum) those discourses seek to establish. The choice to investigate this time-frame more closely reflects our purpose: to attempt to (re)signify the curriculum in its current form. As we point out, such convergences do not form isolated discourses. Meanings may sometimes overlap and reinforce each other in each convergence. The decision to record them separately is due to the need to try and to explore more rigorously the theoretical aspects that allow its deconstruction. Finally, we will address unforeseen possibilities for the signification of school and curriculum.

Policy and Representation

We operate in this article/chapter with the notion of policy in the post-foundational and post-structural register. We define policy as the processes of articulation around

the power to signify, fixing provisional preferred meanings in very specific historical and cultural formations (Hall, 2003). In this process, a number of other possibilities of meaning inscribed in the very practice of assigning meanings as *différance* is excluded. In other words, the proliferation of possible meanings for the eternal differ is stemmed, and it is not possible to imagine this staunchness as derived from any positive or structural determination. The action of signifying/representing is an act of power capable of making equivalent signifiers, whose only relation between themselves is the difference itself.

In trying to understand this process, we have used the theory of discourse as understood by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in which the notions of dislocation and contingency are interconnected to produce a provisional closing effect, unstable and elusive, subject to dispute in time and space. In Laclau's understanding (1990), political decisions, as fixations, cannot be attributed to a social structure that places the subject at specific positions from which its decisions derive. At the same time, however, the theory of discourse rejects a relativism which abolishes any structuring of social meanings or, at least, any possibility of setting [or creating] meanings. It assumes, distinctly, that "the dimension of antagonism is (...) constitutive of human societies" (Mouffe, 2007, p. 16) and that any aggregation of something we call society, however necessary, is impossible. Thus, it is necessary to build a theory of decision as a way to understand the fixation of meanings within a non-foundational perspective.

In the view of theory of discourse, to theorize about the decision is to understand how certain meanings are hegemonized, or become temporary centers that hold a structure of meanings. In unstructured structure, any meaning could potentially be created, but only some will be through the decisions that create a temporary structure and simultaneously create the subject (always subjectivity) as such. Even if the decision of the subject creates an objective order, it is essentially chaotic, indicating that the decision is still impossible. In other words, we can say that the symbolic order will always continue to be interrupted by the Real (Žižek, 1990). In this interpretation, the Real should not be confused with reality, since it assumes the Lacanian dimension, referring to what cannot be represented, to what has no substance, which belongs to the order of non-sense and as such is inserted in the structure by its resistance to be symbolized, as a gap, a fault, a failure (Lacan, 1994). The Real belongs to the order of the impossible, in the sense that it precedes language, referring to what cannot be included in all articulations that comprise reality (symbolic creations named by language).

The interruption of the symbolic order by the Real thus maintains an eternally dislocated structure of meanings; hence, the work to represent and sustain a hegemonic representation is continuous. This is because the limit of the process of signification is given by this dislocation to which we are subjected when confronted with the non-symbolized, to the time of an impossibility of representation or of any meaning whatsoever: the Real. The dislocation is composed of a space of representation completely heterogeneous in relation to the articulation chain, constructed in other

discursive formations and impossible to predict by the structure (Laclau, 1990). For a simpler picture, we could say that multiple orders are likely to be targeted, whilst not being predicted by the rules derived from the structure. The hegemony of one or some of these orders requires political articulation, since there is no concrete world or set of rational rules that can serve as a criterion to imply what would be the most appropriate representation. This articulation is the very foundation of policies as intersubjective space.

Some representations produced in these political processes are stronger than others; that is, they hide their temporariness and contingency in a most effective way by assuming the empty place of the universal and remain in it for long periods of time. In these representations, the particular character of every representation is practically erased and one has the illusion that it is possible to represent the totality of a phenomenon. These representations operate around empty signifiers and their strength is related to the intensity with which subjects experience feelings of failure and disorder, to the universality and expansion of chains of equivalences it provides.

The curriculum discourses we use here as a pretext to discuss school representation in policies are, as in any discourse, intended to stem the flow of difference, producing the closure of signification. They are not, obviously, able to dominate the field of discursivity, even if founded on very strong hegemonic discourses, such as in the case of Enlightenment. We assume that, when recent curriculum policies disseminate a certain discourse about school, what they do is to raise a given representation, metonymically, to the representation of the whole, beyond specific contexts and contingencies. This is a universal discourse about school, but which cannot be understood as a transparent and objective representation. Like any representation, this also features a supplementary characteristic in relation to language (Laclau, 1993, 2001). Since it refers to what is absent, the representation never fulfills the promise of presenting itself as a full presence. The fact that we operate with representations and that we succumb to this supplementary process means that we are always striving to fill the gap in signification. In this sense, the representation as such can only be feasible because there is a permanent dislocation between representation and represented, signifier and signified.

Thus, the political discourses with which we engage build a set of actions in order to universalize a position, establishing a hegemony, which is distinctive of policies. With Laclau (1990), hegemonized discursive structures that signify us in a certain way, that signify the curriculum, the teacher, the school, do not preclude the dislocation of the structure in order to enable other meanings. As argued by Laclau (1990), hegemony is not the realization of a rationality preceding the hegemonic action, but a radical construction, always contingent. The act of dislocation is not the action of a pre-constituted subject that decides for the dislocation or not, or who operates in language games and a shifting of meanings or not, who intends to translate or not. The subject is the result of the impossibility to form the structure as such; other subjectivities are constituted in the attempt to fill the gaps in the structure. If we are precarious beings, we attempt to achieve self-determination

through different identifications, which are also doomed to fail, when we are faced with taking decision. We can say that, over time, all hegemony fails.

The subjects produced by the decision have their identities transformed to the extent that certain possibilities of being are updated and others are discarded. It is not, however, to assume different identities in different contexts. They are different identities in new contexts, since identity and context are modified in the decision making process. It is from this perspective that the theory of discourse points to a radical contextualization of all identity, of all representation from any policies, as the effect of the contingency of all social objectivity. There is no separation between identities and the conditions of existence of the identities; there are no fully established identities, since they are subject to a contingency. There are no political disputes among identities fully constituted, but disputes among deformed objects defined in specific contexts.

Contexts, in turn, are not spaces with defined borders, existing in the world, but rather discursive constructions in/of the world. They are not objects waiting for the expansion and refinement of our ability to suggest their borders and thus identify them. The production of centers and of political contexts depends on acts of power, and constitutes certain discourses – in this paper, pedagogical ones. Contextual agendas are produced and changed in the actual movement of the policy. Through this interpretation, there are no school contexts to be listed or included in some kind of taxonomy that allows us to typify the schools. Nor it is possible to conceive the possibility of applying a particular political orientation to a context, as an array that has its essence submitted to the complements of the various regions and cultures. Such regions and cultures cannot be listed either as pre-constituted identities.

To submit a policy to a radical contextualization is to assume that if a context is not determinable, it cannot be saturated. All text will always be subject to translation: an unambiguous reading is impossible, it is impossible to refer to a source of the meaning; as all (re)iteration introduces supplements that modify the meanings, which allows context and text to be others (Derrida, 1991). As discussed in Lopes, Cunha and Costa (2013), all rules supposedly able to control the instituting character of curriculum undergo constant changes in the act of being applied (to use the dichotomy to which we are used). The objectivity of policies is neither essential nor rationally mandatory but stems from contextual and contingent decisions.

School Representation in Curriculum Policies: Some Convergences

First of all, some specificities of curriculum centralization in Brazil ought to be highlighted. To the extent that it occurs at different levels – national, state and municipal – and in different instances, the possibility of control is even more diffuse and the negotiations of meaning featuring any policies are yet broadened even further. Only in the last two decades there have been, at least, 6 national guidelines,² each accompanied by a set of related documents addressed to the teacher and school. Some states and municipalities organize their own curriculum projects, which

have been interpreted as new documents or as recontextualizations, translations, political hybrids or contextual (re)readings of national proposals.³ Not to mention the national assessments that have a common core, which often constitute another “national curriculum”.

Each proposal refers to different ways of organizing the curriculum and is based on various theoretical assumptions, being produced in the articulations among different social demands (Cunha & Lopes, 2013; Matheus & Lopes, 2014) and multiple containment processes of differing (Macedo, 2011, 2013). Still, the meanings granted to school converge at many times and they are our object of investigation. The convergences that we announce here are not objects mined and identified as the same, but in the way of traces/traits – *la trace*, in Derrida’s sense – that lead us to assume that *no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is simply not present. (...) There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces* (Derrida, 1981, p. 26). We bet, therefore, that the meanings we create by our readings may resonate in texts from other contexts, subject to a translation that allows such convergences.

Convergence 1: School as social redemption and the importance of knowledge

One of the common convergences in most curriculum policies emphasizes the crucial role of school in students’ education, which goes beyond educational boundaries. This discourse reaffirms the value of school and, at the same time, gives it a myriad of goals that extrapolate the possibilities of school. Especially in an unequal society like Brazil, this process points to the failure of the institution:

In other words, it has not been possible, as it should, to build in the country, for all basic education students, a quality school, which could ensure them [the students]: the continuity at school; success in studies; meaningful and relevant knowledge learning; skills development; the adoption of ethical procedures and the acquisition of values necessary for the commitment to a Brazilian society increasingly fair and democratic and to a less unequal and more solidary world, grounded on diversity, solidarity and respect among different social groups and individuals. (Brazil, 2009, p. 8)

The desired school takes a leading role in the fight for social justice, and this is *an essential foundation for the exercise of citizenship in its fullness – and the ability to reach all other rights depends on it* (Brazil, 2010c, Art. 5º). The quality of education, centered on schooling, is conceived as the only vector that is able to jointly promote economic and social development for the full sustainability of the country (Brazil, 2010b). Citizenship as a *promise of sociability* defines the need for the school *to expand part of its duties*. Among these duties, the school is expected to be able to *keep the peace in social relations, in view of the increasingly large and destructive forms of violence* (Brazil, 2009, p. 10). Such examples make explicit that the school is defined as a panacea capable of, or with the duty to, solving all social

problems. It is represented as a condition of citizenship, social justice, reduction of violence, among other things. It is a representation that is certainly repeated in different national contexts. Taubman (2009), when analyzing the North American reality, pointed out that school was expected to solve every social problem – racism, corruption, poverty – as well as prepare “for the labor market, democracy, academic success” (p. 138).

With these demands, society has entrusted school with functions that it is unable to perform. Then, such demands lead teachers to feelings of shame and failure, “for not being able to live up to our ideal of ego and to the ideal image we have of ourselves” (Taubman, 2009, p. 139). In addition, the representation of redemptive school is at odds with the social experiences we live. On the one hand, as thoroughly documented by Ribeiro (2002), the recognition of citizenship and the struggle for social justice stems, in Brazil, in many cases, from social movements initiated by individuals who happen to be unschooled or with little school background. On the other hand, the quality of school is far more influenced by social and citizenship conditions than school is able to influence those conditions (Sahlberg, 2014).

In Brazil, the representation of school as the time-space of social redemption is even more problematic in that the school curriculum is defined as *school experiences that unfold around knowledge* (Brazil, 2010a, p. 18). School, in turn, is seen as

the only way to access systematized knowledge for certain segments of the population (...) which increases the responsibility of primary education in its function to ensure everybody with the learning of curriculum content that is able to provide the basic tools to more fully participate in the social, economic and cultural development of the country. (Brazil, 2009, p. 45)

In this perspective, the social demands placed on school would be resolved by the domain of a set of knowledge assumed to be stable, either by tradition, by science or by history, disregarding the political struggles for the signification of knowledge that still operate in different school contexts. As the demands placed on school are excessive, the inability to meet them is made explicit, in that this inability is shifted to the individuals, teacher or student. As argued by Macedo (2011), this strategy extinguishes the stories of segregation and prejudice that mark the individual’s social experience. The responsibility for exclusion is individualized; it becomes the effect of non-learning [or non-teaching] of basic knowledge or, more specifically, of curriculum content. Besides being responsible for his/her own failure as a citizen, this citizen is still [or will be] the aberration in a quality school. This aberration cannot be eliminated, since there is always the possibility that something is not learned [or taught].

Convergence 2: The school AS the place of absence

The second convergence we highlight here refers to the representation of school as a constitutive outside. This constitutive outside is able to legitimize curriculum intervention towards a redeeming school. In a world marked by changes

(technological, cultural, economic), the actual school is defined as the space-time of traditional practices, *a standardized model developed through the same educational rhythms and settings, similar to industrial processes* (Brazil, 2010a, p. 48). Although presented as part of what exists, the actual school only exists as an error, anachronism, vice, nightmare, which justifies the act of searching for the desired school.

The description of school as a place of absence makes use of different discursive strategies, among which stand out its results in the form of quantitative data. The statistics of various social indicators, such as dropout and repetition rates and centralized exam data, are cited in order to produce a picture of the school that is, in fact, an image of its own problems. The promise is that the use of these different textual elements ensures access to the objective reality of the school and confirms its failure in basic schooling.

The Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB, in Portuguese), has shown that Brazilian education, in general, from the point of view of learning, has virtually stagnated since 1999 onwards, at a level far below the desirable. [...]

Table 2 (with Portuguese language and mathematics results in SAEB) shows that the country lags way behind in relation to students' learning with respect to countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For example, when it comes to Portuguese taught in the 4th grade of elementary school, according to the minimum cut-off scores proposed by the Education For All Movement, Brazil was expected to achieve 200 points or more in the evaluation of SAEB – and not the 176 actually achieved. Moreover, the difference between the desired and the obtained score in SAEB 2007 increases along different school grades. This is particularly evident in mathematics. The difference (Δ) in the 4th grade of primary education is of 32 points; in the 8th grade of elementary school, it is of 53 points; and in 3rd grade of elementary school, this difference reaches 77 points (Brazil, 2010b, p. 4).

As stated by Appadurai (2001), this discourse of statistics, proposed as merely descriptive, is actually performative. When creating classes, it delimits homogeneous bodies and flattens the differences when establishing acceptable distinctions between two classes. Thus, the description of the school for its lack of quality produces that which describes and enables intervention. "Reality" is produced primarily by a discursive strategy that allows, at the same time, to control the difference, approaching it to the already known and thus making it a bizarre example of what needs to be overcome. Hence, different contexts and differences of all kinds – assumed as empirically existent, but subject to an array that unifies them – are homogenized in such a way that a set of homogeneous actions is justified and centrally defined to account for the specificities of the schools.

Convergence 3: The [desired] school, locus of policy application

In view of the current/ school radiography and the redemptive potential of the institution, policies are established a priori that school needs to be *reinvented*

or *recreated*: this is its *challenge* (Brazil, 2010a, p. 10). To a certain extent, this reinvention occurs in a vacuum, as if new practices, new language, new pedagogies were taken-for-granted objects that could be implemented without reference to traditions. It is considered to be possible to replace the signs without reference to previous chains of signs. There is the claim that curriculum proposals are generically able to guide the way to fulfilling this shortage and to achieving the desired school.

In this context, it becomes necessary to face some obstacles in the school under its responsibility. Among them, it is worth highlighting the schooling and the appreciation of teachers, as well as the construction of curricula appropriate to the reality of our schools and to the needs of all those involved in the educational process. To do so, it is pivotal to develop subsidies for the school and teachers to be able to formulate and develop curricula that are up-to-date, attractive and able to facilitate access to the symbolic goods produced in social life for all. In addition, it is urgent that such curricula promote the formation of a common national base able to welcome the diversity that characterizes the Brazilian society and our schools. (Brazil, 2009, p. 8)

This quote is an example of a number of others specifying school as the place of practice and, as we shall see in the next convergence, the teacher as a practitioner within the limits set by the proposed. School is where the implementation takes place and not the space of policy or of definition of curricular possibilities. Policies take place elsewhere, as an instance of power that is required to guide and define the rules, to present a grounding that is able to contain the possible differences of the curriculum process in school and ensure the supposed homogeneity as a right and mandatory goal. That is, the homogeneity of statistical standards (convergence 2) which wish to ensure knowledge for all (convergence 1). It is up to instances outside the school – government agencies, the University, nongovernmental organizations and even private institutions – to provide the guidelines so that the school can produce the curricular experience.

This distinction between the production and implementation of policy is one of the most prevalent characteristics in educational policies, as highlighted by different authors. Already in the 1990s, Goodson (1995) argued that the dichotomous model, with functional articulations between active and pre-active curriculum dimensions, provided a “curriculum ideology as prescription” (p. 67). For the author, this model maintains control and power in the hands of state bureaucracies, conceiving practice as fully controlled and as the space of liberation – provided this release does not challenge the rhetoric of prescription. Ball, also, in different works (with Bowe & Gold, 1992, 1994; with Maguire & Braun, 2012) – and after proposing that policies are studied from the circularity of meaning around five contexts, among which that of practice – criticizes policy interpretation as documents or guidelines production decoupled from school and, therefore, also decoupled from curriculum practices. He argues that this gap turns out to signify school practice as prescription and the school as a space of experience. Although the analysis model proposed by Ball

maintains a certain linearity and hierarchy between contexts, by defining the context of practice as that of recontextualization of meanings that have their origin in the context of international influence (Lopes & Macedo, 2011), his complaint is relevant to reflections upon the political consequences of the distinction between formulation and implementation of curriculum. The most visible of these consequences is the masking of the dynamics of political process, inducing a vertical understanding of power, and the subsequent disempowerment of the teacher and school space, which will be discussed in the next convergence.

Here it may be important to question, as does Taubman (2009) in relation to national audit culture: how does an interpretation that disempowers the teacher become hegemonized in the educational context? How do many of the teachers themselves adhere to the discourse of national guidelines, desiring an instrument that prescribes what should be taught? First, such instruments, as argued by Taubman (2009), provide teachers with a fantasy of omnipotence, strengthened by success narratives of international experiences. For a teacher experiencing shame and guilt for failing to achieve what is expected from school (convergence 1), this fantasy works as hope of knowing what to do and of having someone to blame. Although this fault socially slips back into implementation, the teacher may at least blame the curriculum imposed for the errors that take place at schools.

According to Taubman (2009), however, it is not only feelings of fear, shame, fantasy, loss and guilt that produce the adherence of teachers to centralized models of policy that disempower them; there is, for the author, a given language of pedagogy itself that provides technical support for such adherence. In the case analyzed by Taubman, it is language-based learning. Regarding the gap highlighted here, the distinction between formal and enacted curriculum; but, more than that, the fantasy of presence that underpins this and other distinctions.

As stated by Scott (1991), in a classic text that discusses experience in realistic epistemology, “seeing is the source of knowledge. Writing is reproduction, transmission – communication of knowledge gained through experience (visual and visceral)” (p. 776). In the curriculum field, the distinctions between written and lived rely on that same distinction. While the mediation of language is obvious in the proposed curriculum, shifting authorship to the point of seeming anonymous, the enacted curriculum in school pretends to keep a direct and natural relationship with the meaning. This distinction sustains, on the one hand, the understanding that it is in the school that curriculum takes place and, on the other, the perception of the primacy of formal curriculum, as it is mediated by language, hovering above practice. What remains obscured in this game is the fact that both regimes are historically and discursively constituted (Macedo, 2011).

Convergence 4: The school as a place of authentic experience of teachers

Even though the gap between policy and implementation is the constituent of curriculum policies in Brazil, the documents expresses a constant concern for the

figure of the teacher and for the school environment as that in which the curriculum is brought to life. Strangely, even in policies taking on a directive and prescriptive tone, the need to ensure the teacher's working autonomy is made explicit:

(...) curriculum policies are not only limited to proposals and practices as written documents, but include planning processes, experienced and reconstructed in multiple spaces and multiple singularities in the social body of education. (Brazil, 2010a, 19)

The guidelines are still essential to support education systems, institutions, teachers and managers in the design and implementation of pedagogical proposals (...), so as to suit new requirements developed in order to ensure the realization of children's rights in day care centers, pre-schools and schools. (Brazil, 2009, 15)

The teaching role is always a prominent theme in Brazilian curriculum policies, as it is in pedagogical thinking. There are references, not always explicit, nor referring to Freire's thought only, but to the whole Marxist tradition with its criticism of alienated labor. Also the progressivist literature, important rhetoric in the first half of the last century, and the discussion of the reflective teacher are references which, though fragmentary, justify this emphasis. The forms in which such a leading role is represented bring about the boundary of the already mentioned gap. The teacher is not the producer of policies, but rather the one who *reframes the knowledge of reference disciplines, and does so because this knowledge relates to everyday knowledge, to experience* (Brazil, 2009, p. 66).

In this sense, the teacher is sometimes described as a partner of policies, the very center of educational transformation, and other times as the hurdle to that transformation. The representation of this obstacle is usually associated, by curricular documents, to poor schooling, with much less frequent mention to working conditions and salary. Although not explicit, the idea that the teacher can also be a subversive agent also circulates in the spaces of policy making. In this sense, the failure to implement policies is transformed, romantically, into a teacher's strength as he or she is seen as capable of producing alternatives to what is imposed, in a kind of bottom-up model.

With such obstacles, policies seek to strengthen the partnership through different strategies. In addition to macro discourses that instill in the teacher feelings of fear and blame for the failure and the technical support given by educational theory, there are other discursive strategies widely used by curriculum documents to approach the teacher. As stated by Ball (1994), with reference to Barthes, readerly texts are much more engaging to the reader than the writerly ones, which is why no curriculum can be fully prescriptive – otherwise it would not be read. Hence, documents are quite detailed, but remain constant references to new meanings to be produced by teachers, inviting them to participate [which will in sequence feed the feeling of fear and guilt]. In addition to these references, the strategy of simulating alleged

classroom situations, describing, by way of example, “the reality” of the school is also used to bring the teacher closer to the formal curricula. Both strategies are especially present in documents that support the work of teachers.

Thus, if practice is the place of error, it is also the place where authentic school experience lies and that which needs to be recovered – as resistance or as a starting point for curriculum implementation. As stated by Scott (1991), the “authority of experience” enables the “claim for legitimacy” (p. 776) within an epistemology in which the notions of observing and experiencing are at the source of knowledge. As with the use of quantitative data, experience arises here also as actual data, as something that people have. The discursive and subjective processes by which experiences are produced are eclipsed and, therefore, partnership and resistance are located “outside the discursive construction and [thus] the agency is reified as an inherent attribute of individuals, however decontextualized” (p. 777).

Closing Words

This article strives to question the objectivity/identity that curriculum policy tries to place on schools. If, on the one hand, to project identities and to try to build social meanings, curbing the differ regarding language is proper to policy and to the need to communicate, to assume that these identities are fixed and stable entities is the death of the policy itself. To operate with identification processes as a constant *come to be*, as submitted to contextual disputes, seeing that they are contingent, is a bet on the democratic character of policies, in the possibility of keeping the place of the universal empty, because in dispute, without the supposition that an act of power could establish once and for all the erasure of other meanings.

In assuming this perspective, we are not positioning ourselves in an anomie or in political nihilism, accepting the absence of projects for schooling, or even some attempt to hegemonize and constitute pedagogical discourses. We are committed to the absence of fixed rules or of guarantees, and to the consequent criticism of prescriptions that attempt to impose rationality as constitutive of the best representation of the school. Or even that attempt to impose a picture of school as an expression of a reality that is supposed to be contained in descriptions and normativities. Any project for the school and the curriculum, in this approach, is designed in the dimension of radical contingency, in the absence of certainty, it is submitted to a political game [of language].

In view of this political perspective, we argue that to the extent that curriculum policy tends to be constructed as a production dissociated from school, and, therefore, from curriculum practices, policy is meant as a place of prescription for school practice and contributes to the significance of the school as a space of experience. Operating with the curriculum policy in a discursive perspective, tuned with no separation between proposal and practice, between formal and enacted curriculum – that is, in our reasoning, the way to disseminate other meanings in policies, and contribute to the overall deconstruction of this discourse.

From the beginning and throughout our research trajectory, we worked towards the direction supported by Ball, conceiving the context of practice as that in which the action of the subject appears more centrally. As per the definition of the authors (Ball, Bowe, & Gold, 1992, p. 21), the context of practice is the place in which the “real consequences” of political texts are experienced. Such texts, although with a representational history, do not penetrate the institutional (and social) empty space. They are read in schools from the stories, experiences, values and purposes of the subjects who constitute them. This leads us to the conclusion that, although the political texts restrict the scope of possible actions, creative social action is always possible. The context of practice is productive, despite the constraints established by the restructured power relations, redistributed and recreated by the policies.

With the choice of post-foundational and post-structural perspectives with Laclau and Derrida, we deepen the appreciation for unforeseen possibilities for the signification of terms like school and curriculum, for the contextualization of the whole policy and for the affirmation of the heterogeneity of the social. To write and circulate curricular texts – documents, standards, proposals, books and even academic papers such as this – is an attempt to control meanings and make discourses. Each of these texts also often attempt to say how the curriculum and the school should be. However, it seems to be more productive to distance ourselves from this prescription knowing that we just circulate signifiers that will be read in different and unforeseen ways. However strong the directions of discursive registers, there are always possibilities to escape towards routes of different signification.

From this perspective, to invest more and more in the attempt to control what cannot be controlled, to organize ways of homogenizing identities, does not seem the most productive way of making policies. To incorporate the dimension of the failure of reading of any political text to policy, and its project of setting meanings, may be a more pluralist and heterogeneous bet. The political text only disseminates meanings if it is read and, when read in a Derridarian way, it is translated and fails in the attempt to impose a single reading. This failure is its strength and it is also the chance to escape its confinements.

Identifications of school, curriculum and education guide our understanding of the world. Nevertheless, the identification and reference points are due to acts of power that slow down the significance and the free flow of meaning. To theorize them as discursive is what promotes, in our view, deconstructive events, favoring identities to be recreated and translated in unforeseen and different ways.

NOTES

- ¹ Refer to the website in the research line of Curriculum: actors, knowledge and culture of the Graduate Program in Education of the State University of Rio de Janeiro www.curriculo-uerj.pro.br
- ² National curriculum guidelines for primary education in 1997; national curriculum guidelines for primary education in 1998; parameters and national curriculum guidelines for high school in 1998; national curriculum guidelines in 2006; national curriculum guidelines for Basic Education in 2010;

and national curriculum guidelines to high school in 2011. It is currently under discussion to define common national curriculum bases, in a process involving different public and private political actors (Ball, 2012; Macedo, 2013).

³ See, for example, the work of Barreto & Lopes (2010); Cunha & Lopes (2013); Frangella & Barreiros (2007); Lima and Lopes (2010); Matheus & Lopes (2011, 2014); Oliveira (2012); Tura (2011).

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