

National curriculum for elementary school education: the common culture project

Alice Casimiro Lopes¹ (Ph.D)

National curriculum policy

In recent years, national curriculum policies have been developed in several countries of the western world, although the best example of centralization in curriculum policies is still the English policy. A sweeping educational reform, made in the 1980s during Margaret Thatcher's term of office, had as one of its milestones the curriculum established by the Educational Reform Acts of 1988 and 1990. Some modifications in that project were introduced in 1993, but its principal centralizing characteristics continued (Whitty *et al*, 1999), imparting to the English curriculum guidelines concentrated on developing flexible production methods in industry and for retrieving an imaginary past of national glories, which it was hoped would have a civilizing influence (Ball, 1994).

That reform was a significant breakaway from the policies developed until then in England. Not only because the previous curriculum was basically organized by local authorities, was much more flexible and designed to adapt to the characteristics of the schools and the pupils, but also the curricular change came associated to a group of actions related to conservative viewpoints tuned to the market (Whitty *et al*, 1999). The schools were then organized into ranking through which they received - or not - investments. In response, many of them began to enroll pupils they considered would guarantee good results in the evaluations, giving rise to the exclusion of black candidates and children with special needs. The possibility was established for the parents to choose where they would enroll their children, according to the school's performance in the exams. Likewise, the functions of the local authorities in the relationship with the schools and the independence of teachers in curricular decisions were reduced.

That group of changes allows us to conclude that in no country of the western world was the centralizing curricular process so dominant and so marked by

¹ – Professor at State University of Rio de Janeiro. Home-page: www.curriculo-uerj.pro.br

relations with the market as in England. Perhaps because of that, although the English reform may have been more thorough than a mere introduction of a national curriculum, great emphasis was put in the scope of the curriculum on investigating than centralization, as it became emblematic of the other models of national curriculum in the globalized world. Also in the 1980s, the educational reform in New Zealand introduced a national curricular structure, associated to systems of centralized evaluation in the results; in Sweden, the 1985 education law established detailed national curricular guidelines, including the components of each course in 60-minute teaching units; in the United States and Australia, in spite of the decentralized teaching system, some states took centralizing measures that influenced the other states of the federation (Whitty *et al*, 1999). Mention should also be made of the reform in Spain, begun in 1990, which, despite the countless differences between the nations of the Spanish state, proposed a curricular unification that much influenced Brazil.

Hence, when the first versions of the national curricular standards (PCN¹) for elementary school teaching were published in Brazil as from 1995, criticisms of them were produced in a way related to those already developed by curriculum researchers of other countries, analyzing their own experiences. Frequent references were made to studies made by Michael Apple and Gimeno Sacristán about the ongoing curricular reforms in the USA and Spain, respectively. Those two authors, by the way, were not against the idea of a national curriculum in itself, but maintained (Apple, 1994; Gimeno Sacristán, 1998) that, under another policy direction, the national curriculum could work in an emancipating perspective. Their critical views progressed against associating that project to neo-liberalism and to market policies, **then taking on focus an specific conjuncture**. A certain national curriculum, associated to the particular politico-economic situation and not to any national curriculum, was criticized.

In other Brazilian analyses, the criticisms were, particularly, developed through an association between national curriculum, international political-economic rationale under neo-liberal principles and cultural homogeneity. Globalization was interpreted as a process capable of saturating local contexts with restrictive market logic, generating what was popularly called the *McDonaldization* of education, because of the idea of forming a *McWorld* (Gentili, 1996).

Today, ten years after the first proposals and criticisms, there are more studies that affirm the heterogeneity of national curriculum policies (Candau, 1999;

Email: alice@curriculo-uerj.pro.br

\ _ Professor at State University of Rio de Janeiro. Home-page: www.curriculo-uerj.pro.br In Brazil, The national curricular standards are called *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* (PCN).

Lingard, 2004; Lopes, 2002). The institution of some targets established by a global project is not denied, but it is argued that the materialization of the global proposals in national contexts is hybridized for local policy projects. In other words, for a global project to be constituted, national curriculum policies have to be associated to local conceptions, to be able to respond to projects under discussion in the Nation-States, producing heterogeneity of curricular guidelines in the different countries.

A neo-liberal curricular reform was not made (or it is not made) in Brazil on the same terms as the English reform, either because the PCN did not incorporate the neo-conservative standpoints of England valorizing the major narratives of the past, or because the evaluation processes of the schools were not so far-reaching. Projects like the *Nova Escola*¹ (New School) organized by the state of Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil, -rewarding elementary school teachers unequally according to the evaluation of their schools - did not take on the national magnitude of the evaluation of English schools, even if it expressed the same logic of instituting principles of business competition between schools and teachers. Nor do we have PCN equal to the national curricular proposals of other countries. For example, the PCN for elementary school education in Brazil do not have the detailing of the Basic Common Contents (CBC²) for the same level of education in Argentina, a country that has characteristics of economic submission in the world scenario close to those of Brazil. In the CBC, defining the curriculum was entrusted, above all, to specialists in scientific disciplines (Amantea *et al*, 2006) who issued detailed lists of concepts, whereas in Brazil, the specialists in teaching the subjects³ produced documents of the areas, imparting to them specific pedagogic conceptions from their fields of research. The PCN for elementary school education in Brazil were more in tune with the curricular proposals of Spain for the same teaching level, to the point that César Coll, coordinator of the Spanish proposal, acted as a consultant to the Ministry of Education in Brazil. Consequently, it is possible to identify a pronounced similarity between the two proposals because of the association of disciplinary components with cross-curricular themes. Even so, the characteristics of the subjects and of the cross-curricular themes in Brazil do not reproduce the Spanish model and are peculiar to the trajectories of disciplinary communities and

1_ The New School (Nova Escola) project is organized by the Rio de Janeiro State Department of Education for evaluating schools, using that evaluation to grant differentiated rewards to teachers of schools belonging to the state educational system.

2_ The Basic Common Contents in Argentina are called *Conteúdos Básicos Comuns* (CBC)

3_ I work with the idea that school subject is different from a scientific field (discipline) and an academic subject.

to the social movements that worked together to compose those themes and subjects. Mention should also be made of how locally movements were formed around the national curriculum proposals for elementary school education to defend groups historically excluded from Brazilian government educational actions, such as Brazil's indigenous peoples (Monte, 2006).

Also in the national context there are signs of curricular heterogeneity. As I have already discussed in other studies (Lopes, 2004; 2005), the curricular proposals developed in the last ten years have principles oriented toward colonization of curricular practices, establishing limits for the action of schools through evaluation, financing and the assimilation of educational "solutions" submitted to market principles. Even so, there are many interpretations of such proposals in practices, in different subjects and in different schools, producing varied meanings for the curriculum policies.

An example of the heterogeneous action of the context of the practice may be found in the curricular changes made in the *Colégio Pedro II*¹, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil. This school, known for its traditional teaching, with encyclopedic and humanist traits, was influenced by the national curricular proposals for elementary school education, but blended the principles of those proposals with the principles of proposals for high school teaching, such as, for example, interdisciplinarity and contextualization. Particularly because those principles are not formed as novelties, but were already part of institutional projects that had been incorporated by the central proposals (Oliveira, 2006).

Even in England, where the control procedures were more stringent, there is a micropolitics in schools, capable of interpreting in different ways the guidelines established and of producing new meanings for those same guidelines (Ball, 1989; Ball & Bowe, 1992). Ball & Bowe (1992) even affirmed that the strength of the disciplinary curriculum² is so accentuated in England that the national curriculum ended up subordinated to the subjects, instead of being weakened by them.

Therefore, considering the continuous production cycle of policies proposed by Stephen Ball (1992), doubts can be raised about models that analyze curricular

¹— *Colégio Pedro II* was founded in 1837 in Rio de Janeiro, then capital of the Brazilian Empire, with the task of setting a standard for Brazil's other schools, particularly at high school level. At present, it no longer has its original assignment, but is a federal school, directly subordinated to the Ministry of Education and, for that reason, used as a laboratory for implementing the recent curricular reforms.

²— A disciplinary curriculum organizes school subjects into a disciplinary matrix that does not impede that different mechanisms of integration be created, be it through integrated subjects, or through the attempt of articulating isolated subjects. For Bernstein, the disciplinary curriculum is organized in a collection code.

policies as being developed from the bottom-upwards, as if they were “packages” launched in practice. Also, it is not appropriate to state that the practices are disregarded by the centralized official curricular proposals. Such models of analysis express a dichotomy between proposal and practice, without investigating the recontextualization of the practices in the proposals and of the proposals in the practices. Meanings of the practices are in the official curricular proposals, not only because a few school teachers participated in preparing the national curricular standards for elementary school teaching, but because there is a circulation of discourses and texts, continually being recontextualized, producing the cultural hybrids that form the curriculum (Lopes, 2006). From that viewpoint, the separation between proposal and practice, written curriculum and curriculum in action should be relativized, considering the two dimensions as components of the same object: the curriculum.

As a consequence, there is no democratization of meanings, or non-hierarchical cultural plurality, because the hybrid cultural productions are also developed under certain power relationships, capable of favoring certain meanings in detriment to others, capable of forbidding certain discourses and texts and of establishing limits for negotiating means in the production of curriculum policies. The policies, however, are then understood as products of those negotiations in different contexts, in which constantly reinterpreted texts and discourses circulate. Ambivalence in those texts and discourses can produce sliding of senses and meanings which favor heterogeneous and diversified interpretation in the different contexts.

Nonetheless, even recognizing the heterogeneity of the curriculum policies produced from the PCN in Brazil, or supposing the possibility of critical and contra-hegemonic interpretations being developed as centralized curricular guidelines, I am still against the national curriculum.

Why be against the national curriculum?

Every proposal for a national curriculum incorporates the claim of homogeneity, the supposition that the homogeneity of common standards and of basic universal knowledges to be taught to everyone would be desirable. That claim is not new in the history of education and has been particularly defended for elementary school education. As and when this level of teaching is understood in different countries to be the guarantor of the common basis of knowledges to every citizen, the debate on the universality of that basis is vital in the history of education. In the proposal for making Didactics the “art of teaching everything to every-

one”, in Comenius, in the 17th century, a body of knowledges was already defended to be distributed to the people for education in a certain rationality. At that time, rationality was sought based on Nature as a divine work. For Comenius it would be necessary that:

(...) 1) very intelligent and talented persons should be educated in the sciences and in the arts; 2) languages should be investigated; 3) customs should be shaped observing honesty; 4) God should be loved sincerely. (Comenius, p. 96)

Throughout the history of the curriculum, as much in simultaneity as in temporal successiveness, the aims of those knowledges may be distinct- knowledges necessary for the market, for life, for the globalized technological world, for educating a managing elite, for an essential citizenship, for a democratic society, and for an emancipating aim. Similarly, the ideological conceptions that are the basis for defending such common knowledges are projects for political dispute. However the idea that there is a group of knowledges, if not guaranteeing, at least forming the possibility of achieving the envisaged aims, continues to be the intersection point between the different projects.

The possibility is thus defended of defining that single body of knowledges and the fact that it is fundamental for the invention of social institutions and/or for understanding the codes necessary for understanding those institutions. A way of taking a stance regarding the debate about that body of common knowledges is through by criticizing the envisaged aims. In the case of Apple and Gimeno Sacristán, mentioned above, a standpoint against the national curriculum was developed basically because of the excluding nature of the educational purposes defended, without denying the importance of a common culture. In a critical view of curriculum, Gimeno Sacristán (1998) argue that the project of a common culture may contribute toward equality of opportunities, as a referential of required minimum quality. To that end, says the author, the decision on the curriculum must be democratic and should not seek to define the practice or its contents in every detail.

Among the leading authors who substantiate the possibility of that common culture, seeking democratic finalities, is Raymond Williams, a Marxist scholar of culture and one of the main influences of critical curriculum studies. Williams (1984) defends the intrinsic relations between culture and education of a society, maintaining that the selection of curricular contents is always a particular selection of the culture. For Williams, that selection is always a product of emphases and

omissions, organically related to the choices and to the broader aims of education. Those choices and aims are seen by the author as an association between instructing: a) the members of a group in the predominant cultural standards in that group; b) in the skills necessary for the varied occupations and work positions; c) for a general education; d) in the behaviors, values, knowledges and attitudes considered appropriate for the educated human and for social wellbeing. All that instruction is historical and continues in transformation, as well as it is not unique for a given society, which is why it involves conflicts in its definition. In that perspective, Williams defended as minimum knowledges for every child:

(a) extensive practice in the fundamental languages of English and mathematics; (b) General knowledge of ourselves and our environment, taught at the secondary stage not as disciplines but as general knowledge drawn from the disciplines which clarify at a higher stage, i.e., (i) biology, psychology, (ii) social history, law and political institutions, sociology, descriptive economics, geography including actual industry and trade, (iii) physics and chemistry; (c) History and criticism of literature, the visual arts, music, dramatic performance, landscape and architecture; (d) Extensive practice in democratic procedures, including meetings, negotiations, and the select and conduct of leaders in democratic organizations. Extensive practice in the use of libraries, newspapers and magazines, radio and television programmes, and other sources of information, opinion and influence; (e) Introduction to at least one other culture, including its language, history, geography, institutions and arts, to be given in part by visiting and exchange. (Williams, 1984, 174-5).

In Williams' interpretation, when building a democratic society there is a need for a common culture and for an equally democratic education, capable of surpassing prevailing social and educational standards, based on a supposedly unchanging structure of classes. His interpretation considers viewing the culture of a period as a structure of meanings, a way of private life resulting from all the elements of a general social organization. That does not mean, for the author, that all the individuals of a given society should share in the same way that structure of meanings, but the fact that they form a society is, in part, due to the sharing of that

structure.

Williams himself, however, when presenting his proposal of knowledges essential for the curriculum, does not refrain from affirming it just as a basis for a discussion, pointing out the difficulty of consensus on that issue, because the interests, the ideologies and the aims of the different social groups are contradictory. In his view, the political struggle for that common culture is associated to the struggle against class privileges and social barriers, and is radically different to other social projects. His intention is not to leave public education to the mercy of market games, but to guarantee its aims of creating and expressing the values of a democratic education.

Williams' standpoint, therefore, supposes the possibility of a consensus between what is considered democratic education, and the knowledges considered necessary for it. As for the possibility of defining that group of knowledges at a national or global¹ level, that is what I am against. After all, even if we consider a reasonably small and homogeneous group, limited to middle class, having higher education, consumers of products considered intellectualized and active in social struggles through socialist projects, we find extremely differing knowledges, constructed throughout also differing and multifaceted life histories. In some cases, knowledges that are very far from those listed by Raymond Williams as necessary for a common democratic culture.

That question gets still more complex if we consider, as Williams himself does, that the knowledges are not systems of information or reified groups of knowledges, but cultural productions. To select a body of knowledges as capable of composing a common culture and to transmit that culture means interpreting those knowledges, associating them to certain practices and specific teaching institutions. The result is that those knowledges are obligatorily reconstructed, producing new cultures. That is, the actual process of constructing a culture considered common produces a cultural plurality that rejects the common culture.

Hall (1997) contributes toward understanding that process when he points out how each school and each social practice engender their own universe of meanings and practices, i.e. their own culture. The classic separation between the material and the symbolic dissolves, although this does not mean that the material does not exist, but the understanding that every social practice depends on and is related

¹ It should be considered that, at the present time, some curricular proposals are prepared with the aim of attending supranational or multilateral projects. Examples are the curricular proposals considered for education in the Mercosul (Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela) and the Bologna project, for European university education.

to meanings, depends on discourses that constitute it as practice (Hall, 1997). Culture is plural and multifaceted, formed by the different ways by which reality is interpreted and by the different realities shaped in that interpretation. For that reason, in times of centrality of culture, the question of the difference also becomes central. To define a culture as common is to seek a homogeneity that aims to disguise and silence the differences. Instead of conceiving different kinds of meaning of the world, the common culture project tries to impose a single kind or a primordial kind of meaning, as the most right, most correct and the only one capable of guaranteeing the intended desired aims, whether they are democratic or not.

Particularly regarding the curriculum, it must be considered that various social mechanisms already exist that regulate culture and contribute toward certain common routes, capable of forming what is known as tradition. Training teachers, textbooks, the media and the curricular organization in subjects are only some of those mechanisms through which the curriculum is regulated. Instituting a national curriculum involves taking those regulating processes further, because that curriculum, added to the processes of centralized evaluation, begin to act on all the other existing social mechanisms and tend to foster the attempt to colonize the practices in a given direction. Clashes continue occurring, hybrid cultures are constructed, as I have discussed here, heterogeneity continues to mark the process, although a standard guaranteeing certain ends begins to be used to broaden the regulating of the culture, establishing that regulatory milestone as desirable, appropriate and fundamental for producing the curriculum in schools.

It seems to me more productive if curricular actions of governmental agencies did not aim to establish a certain direction for curricular practice, but to favor conditions for improving the practices in the multiple directions in which the practices are established. To opt for a curricular organization and a selection of contents, however big the discussion on their definition is, is to presuppose that there is only one route or that there is a better, consensual route, for political struggles about the production of meanings and senses in social practices.

That model still gives rise to yet another difficulty of a theoretical-practical nature: the quasi-exclusivity of governmental actions regarding the attempt to “introduce” the centralized official proposals, seeing them as a reference and evaluating the practice on the basis of such references. With this, the governmental actions fail to consider productive practices in their diversity, and also fail to engender the most varied actions that take into account cultural - regional, institutional and even disciplinary differences that condition the practices.

If governmental actions are confined to that option, the efforts become useless and the criticisms multiply. In the case of the PCN for elementary school

education in Brazil, for example, their text is criticized because it is not accessible and sufficiently clear to permit an unequivocal interpretation through practice, as if that unequivocal reading were possible. Teacher training is always seen as insufficient to handle such a hoped for interpretation. Practice and teacher training are then analyzed only by what they lack, because of their failure to produce a given curricular proposal. Consequently, no analysis is made of what they produce, as well as of their possibilities of engendering cultural practices of the most varying kinds, working in emancipating directions.

In spite of those and of a number of other criticisms already made by different authors, proposals for the national curriculum still continue in the globalized world. Those proposals are part of an internationalized discourse envisaging the cultural colonization of peripheral countries by educational strategies and solutions of the central countries. Particularly with regard to elementary school education in Brazil, although the past four years have been under a leftist government¹, the national curricular guidelines, documents setting out legal principles for curricular organization, are still maintained; standards for elementary school education are still curricular references for many of the notices published by the Ministry of Education; a system for evaluating and distributing textbooks is still being developed based on the PCN. As a way, then, of understanding why the national curricular proposal continues, I will now show how the interests and aims of different groups combine to defend a national curriculum as a solution for educa-

¹The period discussed in this article contemplates three presidential mandates in Brazil. The first two mandates (1995-1998 and 1999-2002) were of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, backed by rightwing political parties, explicitly defending neo-liberal policies, such as the privatization of state-controlled companies. In those two mandates the principal features of the more recent curricular reforms were developed: a change in educational legislation through the institution of the 1996 Law of Policies and Bases, the publication of national curricular guidelines for elementary school and high school education; the publication of national curricular standards for elementary school and high school education, as well as curricular references for preschool education; the institutionalization of systems for centralized evaluation of the results; a system for evaluating and distributing textbooks for elementary school education to the schools, among other actions. The third mandate was of President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2006), backed by leftist and center parties, critics of the neo-liberal model. Even so, his government continued with many of the previous government's educational actions, due to the fact that it did not revoke the respective documents and because it expanded the textbook policy to high school teaching. At the moment, we are beginning the second presidential mandate of the Lula government. Regarding continuities and disruptions between the Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Lula da Silva governments, with regard to curricular policies, see Lopes (2004).

tional problems.

Why the national curriculum continues?

Many studies have pointed out that the current convergence of educational policies, particularly curricular policies, can be understood as resulting from the influence of multilateral agencies financing projects, such as the World Bank (an association of International Bank for Reconstruction and Development - IBRD - and the International Development Association - IDA) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)¹, and political-economic restrictions established by the hegemonic States in the world, notably the United States. Those global political-economic milestones, however, are not sufficient to grasp the dynamics that lead Nation-States led by ideologically different political groups to adopt the same diagnoses and proposals of solution for the political problems faced. In the case of Brazil, leftist political groups, in a broad arc of alliances, took over the federal government in recent history and maintained centralizing curricular policies and educational policies marked by the same excluding principles. It could be argued that such groups - like the Workers Party (PT), led by president Luís Inácio Lula da Silva - , once in the government, was unable to introduce a reform in the State capable of redirecting the route of ongoing projects. Contracts signed earlier had to be fulfilled, while the State was submitted to the same economic restrictions imposed by international agencies. That explanation, however, is not enough for understanding the discursive features associated to the economic restrictions established.

With regard particularly to curricular policies, I feel this is a more in-depth process of forming a culture capable of engendering conceptions in defense of the national curriculum, especially for elementary education, in political groups with very different ideological characteristics. As Ball (2004) says, it is a case of constructing an international political discourse considered infallible for solving national economic problems: valorization of the globalized world, institution of evaluation processes based on market principles, and a focus on flexible and multivalent worker training.

To produce such broader explanations of the scenarios of policies in the Nation-States, among them curricular policies, I feel it is necessary to associate the action of *epistemic communities* to the causes of the convergence of policies. The

¹ - I am citing the most important multilateral agencies financing projects in Brazil.

concept of *epistemic communities* was constructed to understand the influence on the State exercised by groups of specialists, not exclusively scientists, but also politicians, entrepreneurs, bankers and administrators. It is sought, therefore, to situate relations between knowledge and power that intervene in policies, especially in the context of international relations (Antoniades, 2003), being associated to a conception of policy as production to beyond the actions of the State, without, however, disregarding the State as a player in the process. It is not just any group capable of influencing the production of policies that is part of an epistemic community. Only those groups that share common conceptions, values and regimes of truth among them and that operate in policies through the position they occupy with regard to knowledge are defined as formers of epistemic communities. Haas (1992) says, for example, that there are no epistemic communities when discussing human rights, but they are fundamental for debating environmental policies. What distinguishes epistemic communities from other social agents is the fact that they are formed by a network of professional persons with recognized skill and competence in a particular domain, at the same time as they claim a relevant political authority on account of the authority they exercise in their specific area of knowledge (Antoniades, 2003).

As this is a concept that emerges from intrinsic relations between knowledge (*episteme*) and power, the epistemic communities have the power to favor certain discourses and certain world conceptions and visions, a set of beliefs, notions of validity of knowledge, evaluation criteria, regulatory standards and policy projects, at a given historical moment, as solutions for socially experienced problems. They are socially legitimated groups that have influence in policies, whether holding positions in governments or not, in a process that associates ideas and interests.

In the specific case of curricular policies, the members of a global epistemic community are international consultants, working in government and/or in development agencies, producers of books and documents that analyze the educational situation of countries and propose solutions, entrepreneurs that discuss matters relating to the school's knowledges. All these subjects organize seminars, conferences, publications and disclose in the media ideas on curricular policies. The Delors Report (2001), produced by Unesco with the participation of representatives of different countries, to present guidelines for educational policies in the globalized world, is just one of the examples of those productions that influence curricular policies (Dias & López, 2006).

Epistemic communities thus work as channels through which new ideas circulate from societies to governments and from one country to another (Haas, 1992), either through regional agreements in common markets, or through exchanges of

proposals and solutions among governments of different countries. They work both in diagnosing the reality- what is the problem to be faced? and in suggesting solutions regarding that diagnosis - what to do to solve the problems diagnosed? - How to solve them?

A conception of a common culture to be formed by a national curriculum is one of the discourses being divulged at present by epistemic communities in the field of the curriculum. This discourse is capable of passing through different ideological groups that produce curricular policies, either in the field of the context of international influence, or in the field of the context of defining curricular texts at a governmental level, or also in the context of practices (Ball, 1992). At present, both those who defend social training objectives for the market and those that defend emancipating views are in favor of the common culture project for a national curriculum, seeking to project the identities they consider pertinent for achieving the desired purposes. Political struggles take place between those groups, in a dispute for the space given to the desired aims, but alignments are also produced, because of the defense of a common culture project. In this way, although very often opposing aims are defended, such groups strengthen each other in defending projects like national curricular standards, evaluations of textbooks and centralized evaluation systems. They may diverge on what should be said in curricular proposals like the PCN, they may disagree on the different evaluation criteria, but they tend toward a consensus in defense of the existence of the national curriculum and the centralized evaluation systems. In this way, a process of negotiation of meanings is established to produce the various curricular texts, forming discourse hybrids. For example, in the PCN for elementary school, in Brazil, it is as much possible to identify the discourse of valorizing the past, of what is instituted, of tradition, as to attempt to connect with the instituting body:

The construction of the Common National Basis goes through the constitution of knowledges integrated to science and to technology, created by human intelligence. However creative and daring, knowledge will end up by founding a tradition, by creating a reference. Our relationship with what is instituted should not, therefore, be of wanting to destroy it or crystallize it. Without looking at what is instituted, we create gaps, we distort memories and identities, we lose a link with our history and we break mirrors that show our shapes. Modernity, however critical it may have been of tradition, was designed from age-old references and paradigms. The relationship

with the past must be cultivated, provided time is understood as something dynamic and not simply linear and sequential. The association of what is created with the creator allows the broadening of knowledges, without removing them from their historicity and, in the case of Brazil, interaction among our different ethnic groups, with African, indigenous, European and Eastern roots (Brazil, 1998).

What is created tends to be submitted to the knowledges that envisage the desired identities, making the diversity of knowledges accepted. However, that acceptance depends on the different knowledges - ethnic, religious, class-oriented - being questioned and integrated into a conception of Brazilian nation, conceived for beyond the difference:

Special attention should be paid, also, in this Guideline, to avoid pedagogic proposals being reductionist or excluding, leading to the excesses of the “poor school for the poor”, or of ethnic and religious groups just for themselves. When working on the inseparable relationship between knowledge, language and feelings, the teachers will have to be sensitive enough to integrate these aspects of human behavior, discussing them and comparing them in a critical, constructive and sympathetic attitude, in line with the perspective and richness of diversity of the great Brazilian nation (Brazil, 1998).

So much that the centrality of the common basis continues, that the diversity is affirmed, but the priority of the common contents is guaranteed. The project of the common culture is not disrupted.

Hence, respecting the regional and local characteristics of society, of culture, of the economy and of the population served by the schools, all the pupils will have right of access to the same learning contents, based on a curricular paradigm presented in varying and specific educational contexts. This is one of the fundamental guidelines of the National Education (Brazil, 1998).

It is significant that the discussion of those contexts does not actually take place; while the definition of the “curricular paradigm” is established from the

subjects listed in the document (Portuguese Language and Mother Tongue, for indigenous and migrant populations; Mathematics, Sciences, Geography, History, Foreign Language, Artistic Education, Physical Education, Religious Education). There is no discussion about criteria for selecting contents, nor is any reasoning presented in favor of opting for such subjects (why not others?). The centrality of the curricular discussion refers to the organization of the contents, as if it was necessary to discuss only the way of presenting them, to inter-relate them, and the presentation methods. Hence, the tendency is confirmed to naturalize scholastic contents, to treat them as unquestionable or at least previously established from their introduction in a system of subjects. It is the subjects that guarantee the mobilization of knowledges of the common culture and form the logic of traditional culture, considered a part of the knowledges selected throughout the history of humanity.

While I understand subjects to be sociohistorical constructions, expressions of social and political struggles of actors organized into communities - the disciplinary communities - (Goodson, 1983, 1997), I maintain that such communities are associated to the epistemic communities in the curricular policies. This is a singularity of curricular policies compared to other public policies: the work of the leaderships of disciplinary communities, defending their interests and their pedagogic conceptions, conditions and is conditioned by the predominance of the disciplinary curriculum in curricular policies. With that, the disciplinary communities tend to act as epistemic communities, strengthening the common culture, particularly in elementary school education.

The stability of the disciplinary curriculum thus ensures not only a stability of knowledges, but the stability of the actual defense of a common culture, even though the aims assumed by such subjects are modified, due to the projects being discussed. In curricular policies, maintaining the subjects guarantees the maintenance of that project, in spite of changes in the ideological orientations of groups disputing power. All the more so because, the defense of a common culture remains in different ideological projects and subjects are the expression of that culture.

Conclusions

I have sought to explain how Brazilian curricular policies are not homogeneous and how they are produced in a continuous cycle that articulates texts and discourses that transcend the sphere of government and of the Nation-State. To that effect, the national curriculum continues because, more than associated to a

neo-liberal policy, it is part of a policy defending a common culture. The fact that, at the present time, that policy is being associated to market interests, due to the influence of global events, does not prevent it from being defended by other groups with differing interests and aims.

To explain that process I have used the category of epistemic community, considering it capable of associating power and knowledge, interests and ideas, as much in global as in local contexts. Particularly with respect to curricular policies for elementary school, local epistemic communities include the disciplinary communities working on the production of the policy texts, in a recontextualized way. The disciplinary communities, defending their ideas, their projects for improving the state-run school and the interests of their disciplinary territory, associate to defend the national curriculum and the common culture project. Particularly due to the fact that the common culture is most clearly defined in disciplinary terms. Consequently, they both reinterpret and redefine global guidelines and submit to them, strengthening them and disseminating them.

The essential questioning I am discussing in this text does not refer to the aims defended by the disciplinary communities, but to the association of those aims to the idea of a national curriculum and, therefore, to the common culture project, especially present in the curricular proposals for elementary school education. Continuing to defend a common culture, although affirming its flexibility and understanding how much it has to be plural, because of its multiple reinterpretations, is to opt for regulating meanings of the curriculum, a process that focuses the restriction of the difference and the attempt to silence the multiple possibilities of knowledges and values in the most varied curricular practices.

I think, therefore, that the questioning to be done has two closely associated directions: criticism of the project for restricting the difference through a common culture, developed throughout the history of the curriculum, and criticism of the excluding social aims proposed by that project at the present time. These days, in spite of the multiple meanings under dispute, relations with the market are still one of the signs of colonization of curricular practices and, therefore, of cultural practices. In that colonization, the common culture does not even assume a relationship with a liberal social project, like in other times, but is valorized by the barter value in the market that it will guarantee to each individual. Although projects defending a common culture may not always have those aims, at the moment when they associated to defend the national curriculum, they end up associating, in a hybridized way, with the objectives of that training for the market.

Referências Bibliográficas

- AMANTEA, Alejandra; CAPPELLETTI, Graciela; COLS, Estela; FEENEY, Silvina (2006). Concepciones sobre curriculum, el contenido escolar y el profesor en los procesos de elaboración de textos curriculares en Argentina. In: LOPES, Alice C. and MACEDO, Elizabeth. **Políticas de currículo em múltiplos contextos**. São Paulo: Cortez, p. 38-69.
- ANTONIADES, Andreas (2003). Epistemic communities, epistemes and the construction of (world) politics. **Global society**, vol. 17, n. 1, p. 21-38.
- APPLE, Michael (1994). A política do conhecimento oficial: faz sentido a idéia de um currículo nacional? In: MOREIRA, Antonio Flávio B. e SILVA, Tomaz Tadeu da (orgs.). **Currículo, cultura e sociedade**. São Paulo: Cortez, p. 59-92.
- BALL, Stephen J (1989). **La micropolítica de la escuela** - hacia una teoría de la organización escolar. Barcelona, Paidós.
- BALL, Stephen J. (1992). The policy processes and the processes of policy. In: BOWE, R., BALL, S., GOLD, A. (org.) **Reforming education & changing school: case studies in policy sociology**. Londres / Nova Iorque: Routledge, p.6-23
- BALL, Stephen J. (1994). **Education reform** - a critical and post-structural approach. Buckingham: Open University.
- BALL, Stephen J. (2004). Performatividade, privatização e o pós-estado do bem-estar. **Educação & Sociedade**, v. 25, n. 89, p. 1105-1126, set/dez.
- BALL, Stephen e BOWE, Richard (1992). Subject departments and the “implementation” of National Curriculum policy: an overview of the issues. **Journal of Curriculum Studies**, v. 24, n. 2, p. 97-115.
- BRASIL, Ministério da Educação (1995). **Parâmetros curriculares nacionais para o ensino fundamental** - Versão preliminar. Brasília, nov.
- BRASIL, Ministério da Educação (1998). **Diretrizes curriculares nacionais para o ensino fundamental**. Brasília, jan.
- CANDAU, Vera Maria (1999). Reformas Educacionais hoje na América Latina. In: MOREIRA, Antonio Flavio Barbosa. **Currículo: políticas e práticas**. Campinas: Papirus.
- COMÊNIO (1997). **Didática Magna**. São Paulo, Martins Fontes.
- DELORS, Jacques. (org.) (2001). **Educação: um tesouro a descobrir**. Relatório para a Unesco da Comissão Internacional sobre a Educação para o século XXI. São Paulo: Cortez; Brasília, DF: MEC, UNESCO.

- DIAS, Rosanne Evangelista & LÓPEZ, Silvia Braña. Conhecimento e interesse na produção de políticas de currículo. **VII Colóquio sobre Questões Curriculares**. Braga, Minho University, p. 2583-95.
- FACULDADE DE EDUCAÇÃO, UFRGS (1996). Parecer sobre os parâmetros curriculares nacionais. **Educação & Realidade**. Porto Alegre, v. 21, n. 1, jan/jun, p. 229-241.
- GENTILI, Pablo (1996). Neoliberalismo e educação: manual do usuário. In: SILVA, Tomaz Tadeu da & GENTILI, Pablo. **Escola S.A.** Brasília, CNTE, p. 9-49.
- GIMENO SACRISTÁN, José (1998). O que são os conteúdos de ensino? In: GIMENO SACRISTÁN, J. & PÉREZ GÓMEZ, A. I. **Compreender e transformar o ensino**. Porto Alegre, ArtMed, p. 149-196.
- GOODSON, Ivor (1983). **School Subjects and Curriculum Change: Case Studies in Curriculum History**. London, Croom Helm.
- GOODSON, Ivor (1997). **The Changing Curriculum studies in social construction**. New York, Peter Lang
- HAAS, Peter (1992). Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination, **International organization**, vol. 46, n. 1, p. 21-26.
- HALL, Stuart (1997). A centralidade da cultura: notas sobre as revoluções de nosso tempo. **Educação & Realidade**. Porto Alegre, v. 22, n. 2, jul/dez, p.15-46.
- LINGARD, Bob (2004). É e não é: globalização vernacular, política e reestruturação educacional. In: BURBULES, N. e TORRES, C. A. (org). **Globalização e educação**. Porto Alegre, ArtMed.
- LOPES, Alice Casimiro (2004). Políticas curriculares: continuidade ou mudança de rumos. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**. Rio de Janeiro, n 26, p. 109-118. Accessed www.capes.gov.br/periodicos.
- LOPES, Alice Casimiro (2005). Política de currículo: recontextualização e hibridismo. **Currículo sem fronteiras**, vol. 5, n. 2, jul/dez, p. 50-64. Accessed in <http://www.curriculosemfronteiras.org/artigos.htm>
- LOPES, Alice Casimiro (2006). Discursos nas Políticas de Currículo **Currículo sem fronteiras**, vol. 6, n. 2, jul/dez, p. 33-52. Accessed in <http://www.curriculosemfronteiras.org/artigos.htm>
- MONTE, Nietta (2006). Políticas curriculares e povos indígenas no Brasil recente. **Políticas de currículo em múltiplos contextos**. São Paulo: Cortez, p. 205-218.
- OLIVEIRA, Ana de (2006). **A Disciplina escolar História no Colégio Pedro II: reinterpretções curriculares dos anos de 1980 aos primeiros anos do século XXI**. Master Dissertation. State University of Rio de Janeiro.
- WHITTY, Geoff; POWER, Sally; HALPIN, David (1999). **La escuela, el Estado**