

# The premises of the evaluation process and the production of school curricula: some reflections based on Geography\*

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## Abstract

Considering that the evaluation of apprenticeship plays an important role in the management and promotion of students' intellectual development, this paper aims to present and discuss this role based upon the knowledge transmitted through pedagogical practices in different contexts. In other words, we aim to discuss the evaluation process and its implications on the school curriculum and the building of knowledge in school. This debate will be composed by the output of authors who establish a link between knowledge at school and the factors that are extrinsic to this environment, that is, the mix of social contradictions that characterize the school areas where students and teachers interact, as well as by considerations that derive from a doctoral research that looked into the relationship between the recontextualization of the disciplinary knowledge in different school contexts and the reproduction of educational inequalities. In this article, we show that the definition of evaluation criteria has an impact on the elaboration of the curriculum that is actually followed in school. Furthermore, the perspectives that people have in common and the primary context of students' socialization also show some potential interference upon the choices made by teachers in their daily practices. At last, we put forward a perspective of evaluation in which parameters and criteria are explicit, but may be carried out through different communication and language channels. By doing that, we will hopefully be contributing to the building of foundations of a school that is attentive both to the recognition and valuing of differences, as well as to the mitigation of inequality of access to the socially and historically produced knowledge.

## Keywords

Evaluation – Curriculum – School knowledge – Teaching of Geography.

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## Introduction

Within the present context of divergence and disputes around the meaning of state education, the search for equity in schools is a central element in defining the attitude adopted by teachers towards differences and inequalities of the school environment, especially in Brazil. According to Dubet (2008), due to the democratization of access to education and to the emergence of the phenomenon of a school for the masses, the concept of school justice has become complex. According to him, 'the project of building an equitable school – or the least inequitable school – leads to the articulation and combination of several principles of justice.' (DUBET, 2008, p. 114).

In this sense, he draws our attention to the limitations of the so-called meritocratic equality of opportunities – based on personal merit and skills – as a basis to the establishment of equality in school. In addition to the equality principles connected to the meritocratic equality of opportunities, Dubet (2008) recommends incorporating other forms of equality that might integrate equity-oriented practices that aim at offering better conditions to the socially vulnerable students. Within this context, parameters, criteria and evaluation processes are brought to the forefront, since they enable the management of learning in contexts with social differences and inequality in students' background. Therefore, the evaluation of learning enables

[...] the teacher to observe his/her students in a rather systematic way, to have a better understanding of the way they work, aiming at a systematic and individualized approach in their teaching practices, in order to optimize students' learning. (PERRENOUD, 1999, p. 89).

Within this complex setting, the evaluation process draws our attention to the problems of the curriculum and to the building of knowledge in schools, which are at an important point of tension between actions and politics towards equality and those concerned with valuing diversity in the school environment. In other words, while the teacher must be aware of the different world views that characterize the diversity among the school students, one cannot refrain from aiming at the learning goals and rights of the students, especially when we take into consideration the role played by the school in preparing individuals to act out in broad contexts of life, both in their immediate environment as well as in the various networks and territories of dispute that involve the building of their identities as world citizens.

Our main purpose in this paper is to discuss to what extent the evaluation of learning processes takes into consideration the complexities of knowledge built at school. Rather than providing an exhaustive discussion on this subject, the reflections we present here intend to cast light onto this issue taking into consideration the viewpoint of authors who connect the knowledge built at school to factors that are extrinsic to school, that is, connecting this knowledge to the range of social contradictions that characterize the living environment of the individuals who attend the school. In addition to the work of authors such as François Dubet, Michael Young and Basil Bernstein, in order to illustrate the aspects highlighted here this discussion will also take into consideration

some reflections derived from a doctoral research (STEFENON, 2017) that examined the relationship between the recontextualization of knowledge on school subjects in different school contexts and the (re)production of educational inequalities.

The main focus of our research was to investigate the problem of educational inequality and how Geography, as a school subject, has lost ground in the curricula of different school contexts. In order to do so, based on categories of analysis that looked into the pedagogical practice in these contexts, we systematically watched classes taught by the same Geography teacher in two state schools of different profiles in Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil. In addition to that, we interviewed four teachers of Paraná state network, including the teacher whose classes were watched. From the results gathered, we selected those that we believe can contribute to the debate on the role of the evaluation process in long-established practices and in building knowledge in schools.

Therefore, we will begin by presenting and discussing elements that may contribute to reflect about the role of contemporary schools as well as about aspects that deal with the tension between practices that value diversity and those which promote equality in school. Eventually, having highlighted essential elements from theoretical references that support our viewpoints, we intend to discuss the evaluation criteria and the use of different resources and teaching procedures and evaluation in order to explore a concept of pedagogical practice which is in line with the broad range of preconditions that give shape to the Brazilian state schools.

## **The functions of school and the role played by knowledge**

The people's viewpoints on the function of contemporary school, as well as other important topics in the area of education, are not consensual. Scholars from several areas express their criticism about the actual ability of the school to overcome the contradictions of the contemporary world. Their criticism addresses the romantic thesis according to which the school on its own has the necessary conditions to create a new and more equitable world.

We will be giving emphasis to the arguments presented by Young (2007), with regard to some theses about the actual potentialities and roles of the school, especially those supported by the authors who favored the Reproduction theory in the 1960s and 1970s, on one side, and the so-called post-modern authors, on the other. According to Young, those who favored the Reproduction theory argued for 'the idea that the main role of schools in capitalist societies was to teach the working classes where they should belong' (YOUNG, 2007, p. 1289). As pointed out by this author (YOUNG, 2007, p. 1289), for intellectuals such as Althusser, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, and Willis, the basic function of the school was the mere reproduction of the unequal class relations, which would definitely restrain its potential for social transformation.

On the other hand, the criticism expressed by these post-modern intellectuals, based on another epistemological viewpoint, is rather focused on the potentiality of the institutionalized and disciplinary school knowledge. Below is an example of such criticism:

In his book 'Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison', Foucault (1995) examined schools and hospitals, prisons and asylums, regarding them as institutions of vigilance and control that disciplined students and where knowledge was imparted through school subjects with established rules and precepts. [...] According to Foucault, vigilance was the only alternative to schooling, and the social scientists and educational researchers could do nothing but criticize. (YOUNG, 2007, p. 1290).

Essentially, by questioning the strictness of school's time schedules and physical environment, the paradigm of post-modernity values highly a school that is essentially built on the knowledge that arises from the student's daily life. In other words, diversity is brought to the school, whose role is to foster the development of types of learning which are defined based on the students' contexts.

It is also worth to point out the arguments by Ivan Illich (1985), who defends the 'removal' of school and the 'deinstitutionalization' of the values promoted by school. For this author,

[...] the institutionalization of values inevitably leads to physical pollution, to social polarization and psychic impotence, the three dimensions of a global degeneration process and modernized penury. [...] This process of degeneration is accelerated when non-material necessities are transformed in a demand for goods; when health, education, personal mobility, well-being, and psychological rehabilitation are defined as outcomes of services or 'treatment'. (ILLICH, 1985, p. 16).

By arguing in favor of 'deschooling society' the author points out to the possibility of *self-teaching*, where the individuals of a given society would have total freedom to choose which 'research tools leading to learning objects [...] and teachers' (ILLICH, 1985, p. 89) would be appropriate to the education they wish to receive.

However alluring Illich's proposal of radical autonomy might be in an institution-free environment, it seems hazardous to envisage, on the other hand, a scenario in which individuals could look for education services that merely serve the purpose of reinforcing their own interests, especially when one considers the expansion of authoritarianism, obscurantism and intolerance that mankind is currently going through.

Nevertheless, we believe that by accepting the criticism made by these movements and authors, one tends to disregard other important factors that shape up the communication activity inside the school. Therefore, here we argue that the school must assume the roles of

Organizing the radical development of the compensatory function of inequalities of origin, by means of attention and respect for diversity; [...] and stimulating and facilitating the rebuilding of knowledge, of the prescriptions and behavior rules that the child assimilates in their parallel life previous to school. As Wood (1984, p. 239) would put it, preparing the students to think in critical terms and act in a democratic form in a non-democratic society. (PÉREZ GÓMEZ, 1998, p. 22).

Along those lines, Michel Young (2007) expresses some restriction as to the how the borderlines between school and non-school knowledge are undermined when it comes to

justify the promotion of a curriculum that is more accessible to the different groups that attend the school. According to this author, the weakening of these borderlines makes the school curriculum less meaningful and may deprive people – and especially the poor – from a kind of knowledge that would enable them to question the limiting contingences of life and for promoting change. In the author's view, such a curriculum holds in check the principle of equity inside school, given that its main function is to offer students what he calls 'powerful knowledge':

As we use the word 'knowledge' in general terms, we find it useful to make a distinction between two concepts: 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. The 'knowledge of the powerful' is defined by those who possess knowledge. Historically and even nowadays, when we think about the distribution of access to the university, those with greater power in society have been the ones who have access to certain types of knowledge; this is what I call 'knowledge of the powerful' [...] Therefore, when focusing on the curriculum, we need another concept, which I will call 'powerful knowledge'. This concept does not refer to those who have more access to knowledge or who legitimate it, although both are important issues; rather, it refers to what the knowledge can bring, as, for example, providing reliable information or new ways of thinking about the world. (YOUNG 2007, p. 1294).

Along similar lines, Dubet (2008) suggests, as he arguments in favor of what he regards as an 'equitable school', that the school must acknowledge the importance of the so-called common culture, understood as a minimal amount of knowledge that must be made available to the different learners, regardless of their social or cultural context. For him,

Indeed, it is necessary to change the rules of compulsory schooling, not to belittle it, but to make it assume another role. Instead of defining it by means of a curriculum that few students are able to follow, it is necessary to establish what each student is entitled to have. It must also be made clear that, once they have reached this threshold, nothing prevents them from going further, or even much further. Why depriving students who love school subjects such as Math, Poetry or Technology, as long as the manifestations of their gifts do not become the rule and do not affect that which everyone else is entitled to have? (DUBET, 2008, p. 78).

There seems to be some obvious tension here between different conceptions of school, which indicates that the school must either be firmly based on students' contextual knowledge or that it should also be aware to their historically-produced common culture, which is able to provide students with some knowledge that will enable them to situate themselves in a world that is beyond the limits of their own community.

With regard to the knowledge that is imparted in school, diversity is unquestionably a core issue to be observed in the course outlines and curricula. No schooling can be provided without taking into consideration the reality of students, their anguish and their needs. Yet, one should note that, as pointed out by Sacristán (1995), if it is taken to extremes, the multicultural curriculum may lead school towards some relativism of its social function. According to the author,

[...] an absolute cultural relativism inside the school system would neither be realist, but naïve. After all, schooling is not but a way of providing students with competences for the participation in the predominant social, economic and cultural life, which is always perfectible. Obviously, this is not equally shaped for all cultures. (SACRISTÁN, 1995, p. 106).

When referring to the radicalization of the paradigm of diversity in school, and considering the hypothesis of a marginalization of institutionalized conceptual knowledge, especially when one considers the school attended by the poor, Sacristán (1995) draws our attention to the emergence of a potential barrier for the school to perform its role of giving opportunities to diverse social groups to have access to certain elements of the institutionalized common culture, which are transformed into a curriculum. By doing that, school contributes to the production and/or reproduction of educational inequalities.

## **Bernstein and the evaluation**

Based on Basil Bernstein (1996; 1999)'s ideas, we argue that the function of the school is to enable those individuals who are going through schooling the development of their capacity to handle the communication contexts that are part of their daily life. To this author, the specialized knowledge of the school subjects is not superior to the knowledge shared in the everyday world. In Bernstein's view, each type of communicative text is legitimate in specific contexts of production: since it is consensual knowledge – which is oriented by what Bernstein (1996) calls restrict codes –, it determines communication in informal contexts. In turn, the specialized knowledge of school subjects, which is regulated by elaborated codes, enables the comprehension of communication rules in referenced and institutionalized contexts, as it is the case of school, academy and of speeches and texts transmitted by their respective pedagogical devices.

The word *text*, in this case, may refer to any representation which is 'spoken, written, visual, spacial or expressed through people's attitude or clothing' (BERNSTEIN, 1996, p. 243); still, in the school universe it may also refer to the predominant curriculum, to the teachers' practices, as well as to any production/representation developed by students. The texts, therefore, are taken as the visible dimension of communication, which is oriented and legitimated by a type of 'in-depth grammar' – the code, per se – that corresponds to the invisible dimension underlying the contents of communication. Therefore, according to Bernstein's theory, restricted and elaborated communication codes are principles that regulate the production of texts in human interactions that take place in different communication contexts.

This means that the codes simultaneously allow the identification of borderlines between different communication contexts, as well as the rules that regulate communication within the contexts. In other words,

On the restrict orientation, the meanings are particular, they depend on context and have a direct relation with a specific material basis. On the elaborated orientation, the meanings are

universal, relatively independent on context and have a direct relation with a specific material basis. (MORAIS; NEVES, 2007, p. 116).

According to the author, it is also possible to consider this in-depth grammar that guides the production of texts in terms of 'class codes':

The class codes and their modalities are specific semiotic grammars, which regulate the acquisition, reproduction and legitimation of fundamental rules of exclusion, inclusion and appropriation by which and through which the individuals are selectively created, positioned and put in opposition (BERNSTEIN, 1996, p. 72).

By linking the acquisition of codes to the position of the individuals on the wide spectrum of social class relations, he argues that certain individuals bring from their primary socialization context a specific version of teaching practice that is performed in school. This happens because these individuals belong to a communication context where the implicit codes tend to be more universalist and specialized, that is, they live in environments with a greater presence of interlocutors who are able to recognize elaborate forms of communication. In that sense, the school curriculum is regarded as a privileged text which tends to be more meaningful to these individuals whose social and communication relations are most similar to those favored in school. Therefore, 'the success or failure [in school] is a function of the predominant curriculum in the school, which acts selectively over those who are able to acquire it' (BERNSTEIN, 1996, pp. 166-167).

When one admits the role of social class in promoting inequalities on the acquisition of the elaborated codes – which would allow a greater mobility on the selection of social roles, regardless of the individual's original background –, a specific configuration of the social function of contemporary school emerges. In these terms, it would be its function to provide students the conditions to deal with different contexts of communication through the acquisition of codes that allow them to recognize the validity and legitimacy of texts in several situations of interaction, by means of identification of rules that regulate it.

Therefore, while in the street, in the community or other daily environments forms of communication guided by restrict codes are predominant, in school, at work, in the academia – among other environments that are not part of the individual's immediate life context –, the developed codes are the ones favored in communication. The passage from a code to another, as well as the contextualized use of each of these codes is what characterizes an efficient way of dealing with different contexts.

Given the needs of directing the construction of school curricula in parameters of knowledge that are socially and historically validated, allowing individuals to develop their capacity to manage different communication contexts, the processes of learning management performed by the teacher in the classroom, which are materialized in the evaluation mechanisms, assume a central role. Through evaluation this tension between the valuing of diversity and promotion of equality acquires its higher level of objectivity, demanding from the teachers the necessary perceptiveness to allow the individuals the

freedom to express themselves without depriving them from knowledge that will enable them a thorough and critical comprehension of reality.

The structure of the pedagogical text, that is, the contents of communication within the classroom, is based on a set of rules, which Bernstein (1996) calls 'pedagogical devices'. This device 'provides the intrinsic grammar of the pedagogical speech' (BERNSTEIN, 1996, p. 254) and is regulated by the distributive rules, the rules of recontextualization and the rules of evaluation, which have an interdependent relation.

The distributive rules are a set of norms that establish the limits among the different forms of knowledge, shaping their distribution among the individuals of different social classes, determining the access – often unequal – to the specialized contents. In other words, such rules define what can be taught and to whom something may be taught, based on people's expectations that often derive from the social background of the individuals involved in the educational process. The rules aimed at recontextualization, in turn, are those which 'constitute the pedagogical speech' (BERNSTEIN, 1996, p. 259) in itself. For this author, the several specific speeches of the school subjects are relocated in new contexts and are refocused in this process, in which specialized speeches of different areas are always inserted in a regulatory logic with its own intentionality.

The evaluation rules, which are now the main focus of our attention, refer to the pedagogical practice per se, that is, they are composed by procedures, by students' own learning paces, by sequences and by evaluation criteria, which establish the management of the educational practice. This is to say that the evaluation rules define the validity and the legitimacy of the texts that are produced and/or reproduced within the classroom. By promoting this regulation, the evaluation rules define the communication relationships within the pedagogical practice, and become, therefore, a mechanism of shaping the behavior and rites identified in several educational contexts. (BERNSTEIN, 1996).

Depending on the situation, and on the premises that guide the lesson planning and also on the evaluation procedures, such rules can be considered explicit. This means that the learners tend to be given clear information about these rules, which are established in evaluation criteria that are more strongly controlled by the teacher. On the other hand, the evaluation rules can also assume a more implicit nature, that is, deriving from more open relationships between teachers and learners. In this case, the definition of students' learning paces and the borderlines between different speeches, as well as their validity in the production of pedagogical texts, tends to be more influenced by the students.

Based on this model, one can infer that the evaluation criteria have a direct impact on how the products of the pedagogical practice are determined. According to Moraes et al. (2004), scientific learning depends on explicit evaluation criteria, since the students need to have some clear understanding of what is expected from their performance, considering that the validity of the text, in this case, is determined by an extrinsic set of epistemology referenced knowledge. Therefore, the validation and legitimacy of the texts elaborated by students depend on these criteria being made explicit by the teacher, who is a key player in this legitimation process.

When these criteria are hidden or not based on clear and explicit parameters, one tends to promote a pedagogical practice that is detached from communication codes,

since the texts and student's output will be validated without being guided by something objectively defined or by a set of disciplinary and referenced knowledge. This condition, according to the Bernstein theory, might represent some restriction of the educational experiences provided by school, and lead to the reproduction of educational inequalities.

## **Some reflections based on the researched context**

The reflections derived from the doctoral research used as one of the foundations for writing this paper indicate that the explicitation of evaluation criteria assume different levels in the schools that were investigated. Such levels vary because of the severe limitations that the schools face when dealing with the important role played out by the primary context of socialization of students with regard to the shaping of the pedagogical practice.

Two schools of different profiles were investigated throughout this research: one of them, hereafter referred to as school X, is regarded by the community as a first-rate state school, while the other school, hereafter referred to as school Y, despite being an important and traditional educational institution, does not have the same reputation. The different profiles of these two schools can be certified when we look at the performances of their students on the ENEM [Brazilian National Assessment of High School Education], in which the average score (in all areas of knowledge assessed by the exam) was 736,00 for school X and 592,94 for school Y (BRASIL, 2016).

In addition to this quantitative aspect, the school X has a selection process for the student enrolment, a unique financial support system and a very broad project of classes and extracurricular activities, such as foreign languages courses, discussion forums, reading clubs, art workshops, astronomy club, several sports, among others. Such activities are not provided by school Y. We have chosen these two schools for the study not only due to the identification of the distinct profiles, but also to the fact that a same geography teacher worked in both schools. This enabled us the analysis of shared knowledge in classes aiming to focus, with greater detail, on the contextual factors that interfere on the process of structuring the curricula.

Our research has shown that the students from school X tend to belong to families in which the parents have professional occupations that require a greater level of education. This results in the students' heightening their own expectations, which reflects on the way the teacher sees these expectations. The definition of the level of explicitness of the evaluation criteria, as verified in the results of our research, is also a product of direct action of the teacher when considering this set of expectations involved in the teaching practice. This becomes clear when one considers the statements of the teacher who was interviewed, who works in both schools that were investigated. According to her,

Here at school X they call everything into question. When you hand the evaluation back to them, they come and ask why they didn't get it right. Sometimes they start arguing because of a tiny percentage of a grade, they want the best grades, but want to learn as well. They complain if the teacher doesn't teach, if they don't understand... they are critical. At school Y you hand them the

evaluation back and wait: 'Guys, do you have any questions, something you didn't understand? Come and ask!' No! They ask me to write the correct answers on the blackboard, because I ask them to rewrite the exam, so they can do it again in order to get their final grade, but there is no thought process involved, no questioning. When the student questions their grade (at school X), they are questioning the exam itself. 'What was wrong here? Why did I get it wrong?' He also wants to get the grade, but he is also questioning the evaluation itself. But not over there. There it is all about grades. Of course they want to improve their grades, but it's just for the sake of getting a better grade. And when they question it, usually it's something like: 'Guys, just check the exams to see if the teacher made any mistakes'. But not even that. In this sense, they are very apathetic. (Interview, Teacher A).

The recognition of the legitimacy of the evaluation process, on the student's part, as described by the interviewee, was considered another important factor in clarifying the criteria. During an interaction with one of the students observed in school X, for example, while exploring a piece of information about volcanos, the teacher was interrupted by one of the students, who suggested that the teacher use her time in class to deal with subjects that would, in fact, 'be asked about in the exam', considering that in her presentation the teacher had told them that this piece of information would not be focused on in the evaluation. This situation is a sample of the reality that was investigated, and allows us to consider that student's main interest in the process of legitimacy of the texts produced by them, therefore, involves their expectation in passing exams, both throughout their school career, as beyond it. Therefore, one can argue that even if we consider the interests of the students of this school in the conceptual learning process, the recognition of the legitimacy or the rules of the educational game as well as their expectations for achievements with grades and classifications imposed by the school system, places them on a condition of greater interest for the clarification of evaluation criteria.

On the other hand, this set of expectations seems not to be the main focus when one analyzes the reports of the observations conducted in school Y, where it was observed that:

[...] many students didn't perform the activity proposed by the teacher, presenting several excuses, and playfully showed some disdain with regard to grades. The teacher schedules a written exam for the following week. She says that the contents for the exam (and also writes them on the blackboard) are on chapter 5 of the book, from pages 92 to 109. She did not say or explain what would be actually assessed, just told the students about the pages and chapter that address the subject. (Field Report, School Y).

Therefore, based on what was highlighted, the analysis of the results of the research suggests that setting evaluation criteria, as well as the nature of pedagogical communication itself, tends to be strongly influenced by the students. In some cases, the goal of evaluation is shifted from the body of knowledge about school subjects onto what the students themselves consider true and valid, taking into consideration the knowledge about their own experiences. This flexibilization of evaluation criteria,

or the flexibilization of the borderlines between scientific concepts and spontaneous concepts, according to the terminology proposed by Vygotsky (2008), may potentially make curricula less meaningful, thus contributing to the (re)production of inequalities that originate outside the school.

As we look at the case of the knowledge on Geography, the observations and interviews made in the research demonstrate that when we lose track of the referential of the school subject, the contents of the lesson tend to have a more descriptive and informative profile, with a smaller presence of cognitive conflicts. An example of such was a sequence of activities about the same topic – the internal structure of planet Earth – observed during the empiric research in classes of the first year of High School in both schools that were investigated. While in school Y the activities aiming at reinforcing the contents of the curriculum were based in activities involving painting figures and naming the structures and layers of planet Earth, in school X they used questions of Vestibular exams [which select students for universities] with several levels of complexity, requiring greater cognitive involvement from students and their use of more elaborate thought processes.

At this stage, one realizes that the activities require different cognitive competencies which relate to different forms of textual expression. The evaluation criteria of the several texts that were produced, therefore, are adapted to different learning expectations, both from teachers as well as from the students themselves. This criteria adaptation can also be verified in the interview given by Teacher B, in which he states that in his work contexts he strives to

[...] evaluate whether he managed to realize in the contents that was transmitted and taught, how these contents can help him somehow in his life within a context of practical application that is being evaluated in an exam and whether he managed to assimilate the information. [...] So I often try to get the most I can from an answer in an exam, stimulating the student even through the grade that he will get on the exam, offering in a question that is worth half point., I often can extract up to 0,1 from the student's answer, even if it does not really address what is being asked, but contains something in relation to what was asked. So we try to consider the most we can, or the minimum knowledge that he was able to assimilate. (Interview, Teacher B).

Student's daily knowledge, in situations like the ones pointed out by the teacher in the interview, tends to be considered as legitimate processes of evaluation regardless of being based on conceptual tools deriving from the field of specialized knowledge on the school subjects. When considering contextual conditions, where the students have different profiles, as it is the case in the two schools observed during the field work, such flexibilization of evaluation criteria tends to reflect directly over the implicit code to pedagogic communication, or over the kind of relationship with the knowledge that each of these groups present. This requires that the teacher be extremely sensible in order to identify, interpret and value the differences and inequalities in the contexts where they take place, so that he can manage the learning processes in a way that enables him to reach their goals.

Within this complicated setting, it seems useful to distinguish two fundamental dimensions of the pedagogical practice, as proposed by Young (2011), in order to organize and bring more awareness to this practice.

The first dimension concerns the curriculum, which refers to the knowledge deemed to be important to be accessible to all students in the country. The second dimension concerns pedagogy, which, in contrast, refers to the activities performed by teachers to motivate students and help them to engage with the curriculum and make it meaningful. (YOUNG, 2011, p. 612).

According to Young (2007, 2011), although these two dimensions of pedagogical practice are interdependent, it is important to maintain a certain level of classification between them in order to give visibility to what the student must learn, and also to everything that the student brings along as elements of his experience. By arguing for a conceptual learning in school, where the specialized knowledge on school subjects should be the foundation for building the curriculum, the author advocates an unlimited autonomy of the teacher regarding his lesson planning, since only the teacher has the competency, within the different realms of the educational system, of promoting the effective stimulation of students to promote learning, and thus allow the combination of – or the reconstruction of – scientific and spontaneous concepts, a process that is seen by many (VYGOSTKY, 2008; BERNSTEIN, 1996; DUBET, 2008; YOUNG, 2011; CAVALCANTI, 1998; CASTELLAR, 2007) as the foremost function of school.

In the case of Geography, this reconstruction of spontaneous knowledge and the occasional promotion of the conceptual thought during classes tend to allow an expansion of the forms of seeing the world (CAVALCANTI, 1998), by offering a multiple-level curriculum. This means that when gathering references in specialized knowledge of the school curriculum, Geography may contribute to the student's comprehension of his community in relation to what happens outside it, that is, in its multiple scales of determination. This capacity of conveying explanations is a clear characteristic of the generalization process promoted by the conceptual thought.

When advocating the key role of the teacher in the interpretation of these differences and inequalities in order to establish practical procedures for dealing with it, one must consider that the teacher's autonomy in defining rites and the message to be conveyed in class is absolute. In a certain way, this idea is in line with Sacristán's proposition (1991, p. 75) about the 'relative irresponsibility' of the teacher with regard to the pedagogical practice, in which not always this individual has the necessary conditions to generate change or the proper rites to what is considered a good pedagogical practice. Other elements and factors interfere in this process and impose restrictions and obstacles to the teacher's performance.

As to the reality observed during the research, the sort of expectations of the individuals that attend school, the set of extracurricular activities made available to students, the support structure made available to teachers, the equipment available in school and the teachers' limitations of time, lead to environments distinctly organized, which have a

direct impact on this 'relative irresponsibility' of teachers. An appropriate infrastructure for work, which relies directly on a serious and consistent policy of investments in school, as the case of school X may illustrate, tends to emerge as a prerequisite for the constitution of fertile ground so that the practice of teachers be flexible enough to deal with the diversity that animates the school.

Even taking such difficulties into account, we argue in favour of the definition of a possible action field for teachers that, within the non-ideal conditions that are offered to them, may establish levels of conceptual demands in their classes and exams that may cope with the inequalities that characterize school, by means of the clarification of criteria, diversification of communication channels and the expression of the students, and actions that promote their involvement with classes and school. By having more flexibility in the pedagogical dimension in their daily practices, the teacher will have more concrete conditions of dealing with differences, establishing routes of knowledge construction that are more individualized and connected to the reality of different students. From this point on, based on the theoretical and empirical references that are the foundation for this argument, the teacher will be able to build evaluation criteria which are compatible with a school concept that has the scientific knowledge as a pillar. This school may then accomplish its function of offering the necessary knowledge for life in community in a critical and committed way, both with the construction of a solid and inclusive citizenship as well as with the effort to mitigate inequalities and contradictions that sustain the capitalist world.

## **Final considerations**

The ideas presented in this paper point to the configuration of a school that has conceptual knowledge and the knowledge about the school subjects as a central reference for structuring its curriculum. By defining itself as such, the school institution becomes directly dependent on a clear and explicit presentation of rules and criteria of evaluation, in order to promote learning that allows the students' acquisition of comprehensive tools and critical thinking to understand the world.

The building of conceptual thinking in school, as pointed out by Vygotsky (2008) is a process in which new learning occurs through the combination of spontaneous and scientific concepts. While the former refer to an initiative of building knowledge based on the experience of individuals in their daily lives, the scientific concepts are those produced in environments which are controlled by rules and procedures that allow the freedom of thinking beyond a concrete material base, that is, allowing the critical expansion of what is already known. As Vygotsky points out the expanding nature of consensual knowledge, and the minimization of scientific concepts, he draws our attention to the fact that such encounter has a potential that is intrinsic to change, since it is from the free contemplation of those that submit themselves to this process that new knowledge is rebuilt and put in favor of solving objective problems that derive from the concrete experience of individuals. In other words,

Concepts are built as the result of a complex activity in which all basic intellectual functions take part. Yet, the process cannot be confined to association, attention, image formation, interference or to determinant tendencies. These are all indispensable, but insufficient without the use of the sign – or word – as a means through which we conduct our mental operations, control their course and channel them towards the solution of the problem that we are facing. (VYGOTSKY, 2008, pp. 72-73).

When we emphasize the importance of the process of building concepts as a means for developing the most complex intellectual functions of the human mind, the rules and clear criteria of evaluation, along with evaluation tools that allow the use of different languages of expression and communication in school, become helpful in this arduous task of valuing consensual knowledge that is brought by students without compromising the new conceptual learning, an indispensable condition for the intellectual development of students.

Therefore, the role of evaluation on the management of these new learning tries to go beyond its merely classificatory perspective, pointing to its function of mediating the educational practices – in which the proximity and dialog between teacher and students allow the constructive discovery of solutions for the improvement of the teaching and learning processes –, and also towards putting into effect its formative and diagnostic role, allowing the recognition of student's previous knowledge and their life and thought contexts, as well as becoming an instrument of control of the teaching and learning processes that indicate, in fact, more contextualized paths to different students.

Therefore, here we agree with the idea that “one cannot make a distinction between the reflections about the evaluation and a comprehensive questioning about the purpose of the schools, the school subjects, the pedagogical and didactic contacts and the teaching and learning procedures” (PERRENOUD, 1999, p. 168). By stimulating the debate in school about the role that it represents for the different individuals that attend it, conditions are created for the promotion of an evaluation process that is more committed with students' education and development than with merely classifying them.

Considering the viewpoints presented here, we hope to contribute to the building of the necessary foundations for the school to be able to safely go through this chaotic moment that humanity is going through, produced by the instigation of tensions and authoritarianism in different dimensions of life, among which stand out politics, territorial conflicts, the fragility of democracy, the emergence of all types of fundamentalism, among others.

All of this gives the school the responsibility of looking both at the past as well as the future, in order to provide young people with the effective assistance for understanding their situation in the world, so they can act in it in a global and critical manner. In our view, a school that is really concerned with this chaotic context of transition and uncertainties must be a channel to new utopias, in order to build alternatives which are actually connected to the necessities and hopes of a more democratic, plural and inclusive society.

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