

The organization of schooling in cycles in Brazil: literature review and research perspectives

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Abstract

This article offers a review of the literature about the organization of schooling in cycles in Brazil, pointing out the aspects that have been emphasized, the limitations and perspectives for the research on this topic. The review covered 147 texts, which were classified into five categories: (a) discussions of theoretical aspects related to cycles in school; (b) production and formulation of policies; (c) implementation of policies; (d) analysis of results of policies and impact on the performance of pupils; and (e) literature review. It is argued that the nature of policies and the analysis of the development of the discourse of these policies are aspects that have been neglected by the research about cycles. Apart from that, it is argued that the following aspects have been little explored: (a) the analysis of the implementation of the policy at school and in the classroom through observations and ethnographic research; (b) the analysis of the trajectory of the policies from their formulation to their implementation in the classroom; (c) studies including the opinion of managers and policymakers involved with schooling in cycles. The conclusion presents aspects that deserve to be studied in greater depth to bring about a clearer, wider, and more critical understanding of the cycles at Brazilian schools.

Keywords

Cycles – Educational policy – Literature review.

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the aspects that have been emphasized in the studies and publications about the organization of schooling in cycles in Brazil, as well as the limitations and perspectives of these studies. The article aims at complementing and expanding on the analyses recently published in three other reviews (Sousa et al., 2003; Gomes, 2004; Barreto and Sousa, 2004). The publication of such reviews demonstrates not just the existence of a significant number of studies on this theme, but also the importance of investigating what has been researched, the limitations and aspects that still need to be further studied.

Despite including as many texts as feasible, the present review should not be seen as comprehensive or complete, due to the difficulties of access to journals of restricted circulation, to the small number of journals electronically available (online journals), to difficulties in collecting theses and dissertations, and also to inconsistencies in the abstracts of these works.

Literature review: school cycles in the Brazilian academic production and publications

From 1987 to 2004, 147 texts about the schooling in cycles in Brazil were published (37 theses and dissertations, 10 books, 38 chapters in books, and 62 articles). Most of these texts were written in Portuguese (143) and just four of them were written in English (Gandin, 2002; Gandin and Apple, 2002a, 2002b; Mainardes, 2004). The programs more frequently dealt with were the Literacy Basic Cycle¹ of the State of São Paulo (24 texts), and in Minas Gerais (13 texts), the Citizen School Project² (24 texts), and the Plural School Project³ (21 texts). The Appendix 1 contains a list of the texts included in this review.

With the objective of narrowing the focus of this literature review the texts included must refer to discussions or programs around

the school organized in cycles. This criterion was essential to make a clear distinction between the programs of schooling in cycles and the regime of continued progression. This distinction is based on the argument that the school in cycles represents the progressive version of the policy of cycles in schools, whereas the regime of continued progression represents the conservative version. In Brazil the phrase 'school in cycles' began to be used in 1984 with the implementation of the Literacy Basic Cycle in the State of São Paulo. However, a more thorough analysis of the discourse of the school in cycles in Brazil reveals that several other experiences preceded the emergence of the school in cycles in the 1980s (Arelaro, 1988; Monteiro, 1996; Barreto and Mitruilis, 1999, 2001; Mainardes, 1998, 2001). In the 1990s, the discourse of this policy was recontextualized in different manners, constituting two versions: one apparently progressive, and the other conservative.

On one side, the policy was incorporated by some administrations and political parties (especially the Workers Party – PT) constituting the progressive version of the policy. According to this progressive version, it is necessary to recognize the differences between the proposals of learning cycles, and formation cycles. Comparatively speaking, the programs of formation cycles represent a more radical rupture, eliminating completely the possibility of retention in fundamental education. In general, there is more investment in the continuing education of teachers, and a more radical change in curriculum and methodological guidelines for the teaching-learning process, as for example the work projects of the Plural School (Belo Horizonte), and the Theme Complexes of the Citizen School (Porto Alegre). The learning cycles, on the other hand, represent a less radical departure, either by keeping the

1. In Portuguese *Ciclo Básico de Alfabetização*.

2. In Portuguese *Projeto Escola Cidadã*.

3. In Portuguese *Projeto Escola Plural*.

possibility of retention at the end of each two- or three-year cycle, or by proposing more superficial changes in curriculum and methodological guidelines for the teaching-learning process. On the other side, the policy was incorporated in a conservative way, giving birth to the regime of continued progression. The emergence of this conservative version is related to the Act 9394/96, which allows education systems to organize schooling in series, cycles, or in the continued progression regime, among other forms of organization included in this Act.

Most of the texts about cycles in schools in Brazil are commentaries, critiques, and explorations of theoretical aspects related to the policy (91 texts). The remaining texts are studies involving fieldwork. Broadly speaking, many of the studies from the first group contribute little to the understanding of the school in cycles, since they do not offer evidence about how the policy has been implemented in Brazil or about its results and effects.

The texts included in the present review can be divided into five categories, according to their approach: (a) discussion of theoretical aspects related to the school in cycles (67 texts); (b) production and formulation of policies (30 texts); (c) implementation of policies (27 texts); (d) results of the policies and impact on the performance of pupils (20 texts); and (e) literature review (3 texts). It is worth noting, however, that some of these texts could be included in more than one category.

Theoretical aspects related to the school in cycles

The first category (67 texts) included pedagogical, sociological, historical, psychological and philosophical aspects related to the organization of the school in cycles. The larger group of studies in this category (40) concentrates on pedagogical aspects. These texts deal with issues related to: the assessment of the organization of the school in cycles (Guilherme, 1998; Sousa, 1998; 2000; 2001;

Alexandrino, 2000; Costa, 2000; Sousa and Alavarse, 2003; Silva, 2001; Perrenoud, 2002; Knoblauch, 2004); how to work with additional support groups for pupils who need more time and support to learn (Cortivoni, 1999; Dorneles, 2004); acceleration classes (Xavier, 2004; Souza, 1999); implications of the school in cycles to the organization of the school, of the curriculum and teaching (Barretto, 1989; Duran, 1990; Tiepolo, 1991; Silva; Davis; Esposito, 1996b, Giusta et al, 1999; Vasconcellos, 1999; Amaral, 2000; Azevedo, 2000; Martins, 2000; Krug, 2001; Kopzinski, 2002; Ávila, 2004; Molina Neto; Molina, 2004; Moreira, 2004); teacher competencies to work at a school in cycles (Thurler, 2001, Perrenoud, 1999); teacher continuing education (Machado, 2001); school in cycles and the education of children with special needs (Baptista, 2004).

The studies about the psychological aspects discuss issues such as the expansion of the time allocated to the pupils' learning, and the importance of organizing the schooling according to the stages of human development (Arroyo, 1999; Lima, 2000; Barbosa, 2004; Becker, 2004; Fortuna, 2004), or according with Vygotsky's theory of the process of psychological development (Teixeira, 2004). Several publications included in the category of psychological and pedagogical aspects can be regarded as fundamental texts of the official discourse related to the school in cycles (Arroyo, 1999; Lima, 2000; Krug, 2000; Perrenoud, 2004a). The sociological aspects involve studies on the opinion of parents about the school in cycles (Freitas, 2000; Abreu, 2002), publicizing strategies (Henriques, 2000); discursive analysis of programs (Souza, 2000; Carneiro, 2002; Pooli and Costa, 2004); power relations and the opinion of teachers about non-retention (Corrêa, 2000); school in cycles and the processes of educational change (Freitas, 1999; João, 2000; Moll, 2004). Philosophical aspects encompass discussions about the school in cycles as an opportunity of democratization of the teaching (Azevedo,

1997; Marques, 1999; Charlot, 2004), as a policy of inclusion (Zaidan, 1999), and about the relationship between cycles and learning time and construction of knowledges (Fischer, 2004). Studies on historical aspects offer elements to understand the emergence and development of the policy in cycles in Brazil (Monteiro, 1996; Mainardes, 1998; 2001; Barretto; Mitrulis, 1999; 2001; Castro, 2000).

Formulation and production of policies

This category includes studies about the process of creation of programs of schooling in cycles, dealing with issues such as the process of formulation of the policy in different states and towns (Barretto, 1987; Pereira, 1988; Lodi, 1989; Nébias, 1990; Bonel, 1992; Negri, 1994; Sampaio, 1994; Bahia, 1995; Krug, 1996; Tavares; Carneiro; Costa, 1997; Moreira, 1999; Pinto, 1999; Alavarse, 2002; Jacomini, 2002; Palma; Alves; Duran, 2003; Tilton, 2004); the process of formulation of policies in a democratic and participative manner (Rocha, 1996; Azevedo, 1998; 1999; Borges, 2000; Gandin; Apple, 2002a; 2002b); the debate about series and cycles (Grossi, 2000; Franco; Fernandes, 2001); the relevance of the implementation of the school in cycles (Arelaro, 1988; Rodrigues; Folchini, 1999; Lüdke, 2000; Borges, 2002; Cunha, 2003); evaluation and processes of exclusion in programs of schools in cycles (Freitas, 2003).

Implementation of policies

In the present review, 27 texts dealt with issues related to the implementation of programs of schooling in cycles. Most of these studies (24 texts) discuss the process of implementation of specific programs, such as Basic Literacy Cycle in the States of São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Paraná (12 texts), the Citizen School Project (2 texts), the Plural School Project (3 texts), the Cabana School⁴ (3 texts),

learning cycles in Vitória da Conquista (1 text), school in cycles in Niterói (1 text), cycles and continued progression in São Paulo (1 text), and analysis of the implementation of the learning cycles project in a town of the State of Paraná (1 text). Three other texts discuss specific questions related to the process of implementation, such as difficulties faced by the teachers (Mazzili, 2000), and the implementation of the policy in the classroom (Oliveira, 2002; Linch, 2002). The majority of the studies about implementation is of theses and dissertations based on qualitative research, usually involving a small number of schools, and including observations, interviews or case studies. Only four studies involved classroom observations (Cruz, 1994; Linch, 2002, Oliveira, 2002; Mainardes, 2004). Some of these studies can be regarded as trajectory studies, since they analyze the process of implementation from the formulation of the policy, production of the texts, to its implementation at the school and in the classroom. Most of these studies favor the analysis of documents of the policy, and do not include interviews with their creators and managers. Some studies about implementation involve the analysis of the impact of the policy on promotion rates, retention rates, and dropout, and also the on the performance of pupils (Silva, 1990; Andrade, 1992; Mainardes, 1995a; 1995b).

The following conclusions can be drawn from these studies:

- (a) The policy of schooling in cycles has a complex nature, especially for involving changes in the system of promotion of the pupils, assessment, teaching-learning, and organization of the school. Due to these features, this policy challenges teachers' beliefs, as well as their professional practice, particularly with regard to their vision about the promotion of all pupils within the cycle

4. In Portuguese *Escola Cabana*.

(Ambrosetti, 1989; 1990; Duran, 1995; Dalben, 2000a, Mazzilli, 2000; Oliveira, 2000; Rodriguez, 2002; Soares, 2002; Fernandes, 2003, Jacomini, 2004).

(b) Many studies indicate the existence of a gap between what is proposed and what is achieved in the context of the school practice (Barbosa, 1991; Cruz, 1994; João, 1990; Leite, 1999; Rodriguez, 2002; Oliveira, 2002; Santos, 2003 a and b). Some studies present evidences that the inequalities and the processes of exclusion found in the school in series are reproduced in programs of schooling in cycles (Linch, 2002; Santos, 2003a; Glória; Mafra, 2004; Mainardes, 2004). Such studies show the contradictions between the rhetoric of the school in cycles and its real and concrete practice. Such rhetoric has presented the school in cycles as a proposal for inclusion, democratization of schooling, and improvement of its quality.

(c) The implementation of this policy demands an intense and continued process of teacher education. Several studies indicate that the education of teachers has been deficient in the processes of implementation (Silva, 1990; Andrade, 1992; Leite, 1999; Mainardes, 2004).

(d) Many studies point out that the majority of programs have been implemented in a 'top-down' manner, without the participation of teachers. This model has been criticized in the literature, and more participative implementation models have been identified as an alternative (Mainardes, 1995a; Leite, 1999; Mainardes, 2004). The implementation of the Citizen School Project is an example of a program in which the participation of teachers was more adequately considered (Gandin, 2002).

(e) Some implementation studies also deal with aspects related to the results and effects of the policy on the rates of promotion, retention and dropout, as well as on the pupils' learning (performance). Studies on the Basic Literacy Cycle demonstrate that

retention was eliminated in one or more stages. However, in many cases, retention was just postponed. As a result, retention rates were high at the end of the cycle (Silva, 1990; 1991; Marques, 1991; Andrade, 1992; Mainardes, 1995a; 1995b). Apart from statistical analyses, empirical studies show that pupils regarded as being 'behind' were put in special groups or kept in the same stage/series, instead of being promoted (Silva, 1990; Cruz, 1994). In programs of schooling in cycles implemented since the 1990s the concept of continuous learning remains problematic. Linch (2002) and Mainardes (2004), for example, identify situations in which pupils were promoted, but remained excluded inside the classrooms, without receiving the necessary support to advance in their learning. These last two studies present evidences of the occurrence of movements of hidden school exclusion (Linch, 2002) and of internal exclusion (Mainardes, 2004). One alternative proposed to face this problem is to prepare teachers to deal with heterogeneous groups, aiming at the existence of more egalitarian classes where all students would have the right to learn, and not just the pupils considered as 'elite' (Mainardes, 2004).

Results of the policies and impact on the performance of pupils

This category (20 texts) includes: (a) analysis of the evaluation of results of pupils' performance; (b) analysis of the impact of programs on rates of promotion and retention; (c) comparison of performance between pupils from schools in series and schools in cycles; and (d) critical analysis of the results of policies for pupil retention.

Eight texts analyze the result of the performance of pupils from the Literacy Basic Cycle of Minas Gerais in the areas of Portuguese and Mathematics (Antunes; Xavier; Freitas, 1992; Antunes; Souza, 1992; Goulart, 1992;

Mendes, 1992; Vianna, 1992a; 1992b; Vianna; Squacio; Vilhena, 1992; Simões, 1996). Most of these texts refer to the analysis of the results of pupils' evaluations applied by the Carlos Chagas Foundation under a commission from the Minas Gerais Secretary for Education with the purpose of monitoring the performance of pupils of the Basic Cycle. There are also studies about the results of the Literacy Basic Cycle of São Paulo (Espósito, 1996; Lockeed, 1996; Silva; Davis; Esposito, 1996), Basic Cycle in the State of Rio de Janeiro (Oliveira, 1998), in Minas Gerais (Alencar, 1989), and comparisons of the impact of the Basic Cycle in Minas Gerais and in São Paulo (Silva e Davis, 1993)⁵. This latter study showed that the implementation of the Basic Cycle reduced retention rates at the first grade of schooling. However, such rates increased at the end of the second grade of the Basic Cycle. Retention rates at the first grade, which before this policy were of 45% and 50% for São Paulo and Minas Gerais, respectively, dropped to 20% after the policy was implemented. At the second grade, retention rates jumped from 30% to 40% and 45%, respectively. Despite that, the authors of those studies recommended the expansion of the system of automatic promotion to all 'series' of fundamental education. Additionally, they put forward the following recommendations: (a) that classes were organized strictly by age; (b) that pupil relocation should be discouraged; (c) that teachers should be better prepared to work with heterogeneous groups; (d) the establishment of continuous follow-up of the process of implementation of the educational innovation; (e) the creation of procedures of evaluation and control that guarantee minimum standards of performance; and (f) that the civil society should be informed as a means of assuring the continuity of the changes proposed.

Based on the results of the Basic Education National Assessment System (SAEB⁶), Ferrão; Beltrão; Santos (2002) and Franco (2004) compared the results of pupils enrolled

at schools organized in series with those of pupils enrolled at schools in cycles. They concluded that, with the exception of the Southern Region, schools organized in cycles fared worse than schools in series. According to Ferrão; Beltrão; Santos (2002), the average proficiency of pupils from schools in series was 30 points above that of pupils from schools with automatic promotion. However, a more careful study based on data obtained from Minas Gerais and São Paulo, states in which the system of 'progressive promotion' was more widely disseminated, showed that there was no substantial loss of quality in the schools that adopted this regime. These studies should, nevertheless, be taken only as an indication of the impact of this system, since the SAEB presents the results for each state of the country split into series and cycles. In the cycles category, the SAEB includes proposals of learning cycles, formation cycles, and the regime of continued progression. Because of the differences between series, cycles and continued progression, these studies would have greater validity and reliability if they compared the data of the series with data from schools in cycles and schools with the regime of continued progression.

Carvalho (2001) and Freitas (2002a; 2002b) analyze the results of cycles under a critical perspective. Carvalho (2001) asserts that it is not enough to analyze the statistical data of promotion and retention of the schooling programs in cycles and the acceleration of schooling. Making use of contributions from Besson (1995), the author intends to look into

“[...] the reverse of the production of these data, that is, to investigate how they have been produced and utilized in the schools' daily life, their interactions with the school culture and their effects upon the children's learning” (Carvalho, 2001, p. 231)

5. This study has been also published in English (Silva; Davis, 1996).

6. In Portuguese *Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Básica*.

Based on observations, interviews, and documental research of a municipal public school in the metropolitan area of the city of São Paulo, the author restates the importance of the policies dedicated to keeping children and youngsters at school, but takes a position against the “statistical camouflage of the ignorance and of failure of the system in teaching”, (Carvalho, 2001, p. 231). Freitas (2002 a and b) argues that the regime of continued progression aims at reducing the economic, social and political costs of the objective forms of exclusion (student failure and evasion) without essentially changing the selectivity of the school, creating a “field of subjective exclusion” (2002a, p. 301). The author considers that the cycles have to be mechanisms of resistance to the logic of serialization, but must be seen as “opportunities to enhance the awareness and action of teachers, pupils and parents, raising them above common-sense, and revealing the real obstacles to the development of the school and of society – and not just as a technical-pedagogical ‘solution’ to student failure” (p. 321).

Literature review

The publications of Sousa et al. (2003), Barretto and Sousa (2004) and Gomes (2004) are reviews of the literature about the organization of the school in cycles in Brazil⁷. None of these studies aims at being comprehensive. Souza et al. (2003) reviewed 96 texts dealing with cycles and continued progression. The authors classified the studies in five categories, namely: (a) historical recovery of the debate about school cycles/ progression in Brazil; (b) problematization of the concept and/or implementation of school cycles and/or progression; (c) comments on the legislation and norms related to school cycles and/or progression; (d) reports of initiatives of implementation of school cycles and/or progression; and (e) analysis of results/impact of the implementation of school cycles and/or

progression. The authors suggest the need for more empirical research. Barretto and Sousa (2004) present an analysis of 96 studies about school cycles and progression carried out between 1980 and 2002. The authors put forward important conclusions, among which the following can be highlighted: (a) although the literature analyzed offers elements to understand the current stage of cycles in Brazil, the ongoing policies require more investigation; the policy of cycles is still a knowledge under construction; (b) the time is right for studies contemplating proposals that embrace the conception and formulation dimensions of policies and of their implementation; and (c) there is the need to develop instruments for a more systematic follow-up and assessment of the impact of policies.

Gomes (2004) reviewed a series of articles, dissertations, theses and works presented in scientific meetings with the purpose of analyzing the result of the implementation of programs. The author offers a synthesis of the favorable and unfavorable aspects of cycles. According to him “there are few large, properly designed studies that go deep into the experiences implemented in entire school systems” (p. 49). From a methodological viewpoint “the qualitative research should go further by applying various models to the aggregate data existent, such as those from the SAEB and others especially collected” (p. 49).

The research about cycles in Brazil: limitations and perspectives

As already pointed out by the other literature reviews, the number of texts and publications about cycles is quite significant. However, despite the variety of information,

7. Besides these three works, one should also mention the important research named “State of knowledge: school cycles and progression (1990-2002)” conducted by a team from the University of São Paulo coordinated by Sandra Maria Z. L. Sousa and Elba Siqueira de Sá Barreto (Sousa and Barreto, 2004).

several aspects need to be further investigated by the studies in this topic because:

(a) There is a dominance of commentaries and critiques. The studies presenting results of actual research constitute a less expressive number of texts. In many cases the texts classified as commentary or critique contribute little to the understanding of this policy.

(b) Several texts seem to just reaffirm the validity of cycles or legitimize the experiences analyzed. Some authors wish to contribute to the rhetoric of the policy without presenting research evidence or a more rigorous and critical attitude. Among the 147 texts included in the present review, only two authors disagree explicitly with this policy (Demo, 1998; Grossi, 2000). Although many studies have emphasized the limitations of the processes of implementation of cycles and the results of the policy, few analyzed the policy under a critical perspective (Moreira, 1999; Carvalho, 2001; Carneiro, 2002; Freitas, 2002a; 2002b; 2003; Gandin, 2002; Linch, 2002; Becker, 2004; Mainardes, 2004; Pooli; Costa, 2004). These studies uncover some of the problems and contradictions of the policy, such as the processes of exclusion in the classroom, the contradictions in the discourse of the policymakers and implementers of the policy, the drifting apart of official proposal and real practice, and still the contradictions between official statistical data and the reality of the schools. Although cycles can be considered a viable alternative for the education of the working classes, one should not ignore the possibility of reproducing in this policy the inequalities found in the serialized regime (Linch, 2002; Mainardes, 2004). The contribution of Bernstein (1996) is essential to understand this possibility. To him, the progressive pedagogical practices, focused on knowledge, can reproduce the inequalities of the conservative pedagogical practices, focused on the market.

(c) Several studies deal with problems related to the formulation, implementation, and results of the programs. However, only a small number of studies discuss alternatives to these problems.

(d) From a methodological point of view, a strong dominance of qualitative studies involving reduced samples can be observed. However, there is a lack of articulation between macro- and micro-structural aspects of the education policy, as well as the articulation between macro- and micro- implementations of the policies. This means that many studies present conclusions valid just to the context investigated, or do not establish relations with national policies, and with similar programs under development in Brazil.

(e) The non-distinction between experiences with (formation and learning) cycles and the regime of continued progression thwarts the deeper understanding of both policies. As previously argued, these two policies constitute the progressive and conservative versions of the discourse of the policy. In terms of analysis and constitution of the literature review, however, the specificity should be respected. In the literature reviewed, a small number of authors make the distinction between cycles and continued progression (Freitas, 2002a; 2002b; 2003; Mainardes, 2004). Krug (2001) establishes the differences between formation cycles and the proposal of the Ministry for Education (four two-year cycles), which constitutes the basis for the National Curriculum Parameters for fundamental education.

(f) The absence of true literature reviews in dissertations and theses has resulted in the repetition of topics (for example, historical aspects of cycles in Brazil), while there are still many gaps in this field of study. Two essential aspects have been excluded from the research: a deeper discussion of the nature of this policy, and an analysis of the

development of the discourse about school cycles in Brazil. There are still aspects that have been poorly explored: (a) the analysis of the implementation of the policy at the school and in the classroom through observations and ethnographic research; (b) the analysis of the trajectory of the policies from their formulation until their implementation in the classroom; and (c) studies including the opinion of school in cycles policymakers. The aspects excluded and little explored in the literature are related, on one side, to the lack of resources to develop wider, deeper studies about programs implemented, and theoretical aspects of the cycles. On the other side, one cannot forget that the research in the field of educational policies is still under construction in Brazil (Azevedo, 1999), and that there is a lack of consistent theoretical frameworks. The absence of these references precludes the development of deeper, more critical and unbiased analyses of these policies.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was that of discussing aspects that have been emphasized in the texts about the organization of schooling in cycles in Brazil, and also their limitations and the perspectives for research in this field. It is a complex policy, whose nature, results, and implications still need to be better investigated.

From a theoretical point of view, there is the need to investigate the nature of the policy itself, and its implications. According to Bernstein (1996), there are the visible and the invisible policies, and they are opposite types of pedagogical practices. The visible pedagogy emphasizes the performance of the pupils and the external products of the children. The regulating and discursive rules are explicit. The visible pedagogies and their modalities will act to produce differences between the children, because they are practices that stratify the

transmission. The invisible pedagogies, on the other hand, are less concerned in producing explicit stratifying differences between the receivers because they are less worried with comparing the performance of the receivers with a common external standard. Their focus does not lie on an 'assessable' performance of the receiver, but on internal processes (cognitive, linguistic, affective, motivational). The rules are implicit. Based on this theory, one can argue that the organization of schools in cycles has many features of the invisible pedagogies: there is an increase in the time dedicated to learning, and retention is eliminated or limited (relaxing of the rules of sequencing), the pupil is taken as the center of the teaching-learning process, the different levels of learning and the individual needs should be catered for (weaker rules of pacing), the evaluation criteria are more implicit, and more value is attached to the process (competence) than to the product (performance). The invisible pedagogies, as explained by Bernstein (1996), are more expensive, and demand more intense continuing education and changes to the management of the school. That author considers that the invisible pedagogies seem to be more adequate to the education of children from the working classes. Despite that, he also argues that both pedagogies (visible and invisible) reproduce class presuppositions. Based on this framework, one can say that part of the difficulties and problems in the implementation of the cycles refers to their complex nature (invisible pedagogy). The transition from the visible pedagogy (series) to an invisible pedagogy (cycles) is a change of code. The analysis of the available literature shows that in most of the experiments with cycles the features of the visible pedagogies are still dominant. Notwithstanding the relevance of this theoretical contribution to the understanding of the nature of cycles, there is the need for studies based on other theoretical-methodological perspectives.

From a practical viewpoint, it would be convenient that future research present alternatives as to how to implement cycles in a more participative and democratic manner, how to better equip teachers for the pedagogical work with heterogeneous classes, about the changes necessary in the management of the school organized in cycles, and also about the knowledges and abilities that should be primarily emphasized in the teacher continuing education projects.

Finally, the article highlights the need to further the analysis of the impact of this policy on the specific groups, such as social classes, gender, race, and learning rhythms or abilities. According to Ball (1994), the notion that policies have effects, instead of just results, seems to be more adequate and embracing. According to him, educational policies have first-order,

and second-order effects. First-order effects refer to changes in practice or structure that can be identified in some schools or in the education system as a whole. Second-order effects refer to changes in the patterns of access, opportunity, and social justice. The research in the field of education policies (in general) and of cycle programs (in particular) would see its quality much improved, and would contribute more strongly to these fields of knowledge, and also to the debate around education policies, if the second-order effects were more intensely explored. Apart from the analysis of the effects of the policies under a more critical perspective, explicating the strategies to deal more efficiently with the inequalities produced by the policies constitutes an essential task in the investigation of education policies.

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Appendix 1 – Texts included in the review according to their category

Formulation and production of policies (30 texts)

ALAVARSE (2002); ARELARO (1988); AZEVEDO (1998, 1999); BAHIA (1995); BARRETTO (1987); BONEL (1992); BORGES (2000, 2002); CUNHA (2003); FRANCO and FERNANDES (2001); FREITAS (2003); GANDIN and APPLE (2002a 2002b); GROSSI (2000); JACOMINI (2002); KRUG (1996); LODI (1989); LÜDKE (2000); MOREIRA (1999); NÉBIAS (1990); NEGRI (1994); PALMA FILHO, ALVES and DURAN (2003); PEREIRA (1988); PINTO (1999); ROCHA (1996); RODRIGUES and FOLCHINI (1999); SAMPAIO (1994); TAVARES, CARNEIRO and COSTA (1997); TITTON (2004).

Theoretical Aspects (67 texts)

Pedagogical Aspects (40)

ALEXANDRINO (2000); AMARAL (2000); ÁVILA (2004); AZEVEDO (2000); BAPTISTA (2004); BARRETO (1989); M. L. BECKER (2004); CORTIVONI (1999); COSTA (2000); DALBEN (2000b); DEMO (1998); DORNELES (2004); DURAN (1990); FORTES (1997); GIUSTA, EUCLIDES and RAMÓN (1999); GUILHERME (1998); KNOBLAUCH (2004); KOPZINSKI (2002); KRUG (2001); KRUG and AZEVEDO (2000); MACHADO (2001); MARTINS (2000); MOLINA NETO and MOLINA (2004); MOREIRA (2004); PERRENOUD (1999, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b); SILVA (2001); SILVA, DAVIS and ESPOSITO (1996b); SOUSA (1998, 2000, 2001); SOUSA and ALAVARSE (2003); SOUZA, MOGETTI, VILLANI, PANICHI, ROSSETO and HUERGA (1999); THURLER (2001); TIEPOLO (1991); VASCONCELLOS (1999); XAVIER (2004).

Sociological Aspects (10)

ABREU (2002); CARNEIRO (2002), CORRÊA (2000); FREITAS, A (1999); FREITAS, E (2000); HENRIQUES (2000); JOÃO (2000); MOLL (2004); POOLI and COSTA (2004); SOUZA (2000).

Historical Aspects (6)

BARRETTO and MITRULIS (1999, 2001); CASTRO (2000); MAINARDES (1998, 2001); MONTEIRO (1996).

Psychological Aspects (6)

ARROYO (1999); BARBOSA (2004); F. BECKER (2004); FORTUNA (2004); LIMA (2000); TEIXEIRA (2004).

Philosophical Aspects (5)

AZEVEDO (1997); CHARLOT (2004); FISCHER (2004); MARQUES (1999); ZAIDAN (1999)

Implementation of policies of cycles (27 texts)

AMBROSETTI (1989, 1990); ANDRADE (1992); BARBOSA (1991); CRUZ (1994); DALBEN (2000a); DURAN (1995); FERNANDES (2003); GANDIN (2002); GLÓRIA and MAFRA (2004); JACOMINI (2004); JOÃO (1990); LEITE (1999); LINCH (2002); MAINARDES (1995a, 1995b, 2004); MARQUES (1991); MAZZILLI (2000); OLIVEIRA (2002); OLIVEIRA (2000); RODRIGUEZ (2002); SANTOS (2003a, 2003b); SILVA (1990, 1991); SOARES (2002).

Results of policies and impact on pupils' performance (20 texts)

ALENCAR (1989); AMARAL (2002); ANTUNES and SOUZA (1992); ANTUNES, XAVIER and FREITAS (1992); CARVALHO (2001); ESPOSITO (1996); FERRÃO, BELTRÃO e SANTOS (2002); FRANCO (2004); FREITAS (2002a, 2002b); GOULART (1992); LOCKEED (1996); MENDES (1992); OLIVEIRA (1998); SILVA and DAVIS (1993); SILVA, DAVIS and ESPOSITO (1996a); SIMÕES (1996); VIANNA (1992a, 1992b); VIANNA, SQUARCIO and VILHENA (1992).

Literature Reviews (3 texts)

BARRETTO and SOUSA (2004); GOMES (2004); SOUSA, ALAVARSE, STEINVASCHER and ARCAS (2003).

Observations

1 – With respect to the books written by several authors (Silva, 1998, Dalben, 2000; Franco, 2001; Moll, 2004), we have chosen to consider each chapter separately.

2 – Master's theses published as books were included only once, inside the book category (Borges, 2000; Krug, 2001; Soares, 2002; Knoblauch, 2004).

3 – Publications referring to programs and projects precursors to the school in cycles (e.g. the System of Progressive Advancements in Santa Catarina, the Organization in Levels in São Paulo, among others) have not been included, with the purpose of keeping a rigorous focus on the school in cycles. Publications about precursor programs and projects cannot, however, be disregarded in the analysis of the development of the discourse of the policies of cycles in Brazil. About this, see Barreto and Mitrulis (1999, 2001) and Mainardes (1998, 2001).

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Tabela 1 - Textos incluídos na revisão de acordo com a abordagem

Categoria	Nº	Frequência (%)
Comentários ou críticas	91	61,9
Pesquisa de campo	56	38,1
Total	147	100,0%

Tabela 2 - Programas focalizados

Ciclo Básico de Alfabetização – Estado de São Paulo	24
Ciclo Básico de Alfabetização – Estado de Minas Gerais	13
Ciclo Básico de Alfabetização – Estado do Paraná	03
Ciclo Básico de Alfabetização – Estados de São Paulo e Minas Gerais	01
Ciclo Básico de Alfabetização – Estado do Pará	01
Ciclos de Aprendizagem – Município de São Paulo	03
Ciclos de Aprendizagem – Vitória da Conquista (BA)	01
Ciclos de Aprendizagem – Curitiba (PR)	01
Ciclos de Aprendizagem – cidade paranaense	01
Ciclos de formação – Estado do Ceará	01
Ciclo e progressão continuada em São Paulo	01
Projeto Escola Cidadã	24
Escola Plural	21
Escola Cabana – Belém (PA)	03
Escola em Ciclos – Niterói (RJ)	01
Total	99

Tabela 3 - Textos incluídos na revisão de acordo com o tipo de material

Material	Número
Teses e Dissertações	37
Livros	10
Capítulos de livros	38
Artigos de periódicos	62
Total	147