

## **Comparative study: *theoretical foundations and research tools*\***

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### **Abstract**

This text exposes the theoretical foundations and the research tools of a research program that takes, as an object and sources of studies, curriculum documents (recognized as prescribed curriculum) produced for the spaces of basic education, in the stages of early childhood education, elementary school and in the special education modality. The theoretical foundations and the research tools do not constitute themselves in a simple presentation, but in the recognition of their strategic roles in the resumption of the methodological discussions about the “comparison” in the research development in education, as well as in the results record in a more rigorous and less hybrid writing, in the field of the studies of prescribed curricula. We comprehend to form a comparison version highly shifted to a theoretical and methodological plane, named comparative study. Such a plane is part in a local perspective, that is to say, determined by a geographical location recognized by the states and municipalities, in the investigation of the educational processes and of the meanings of the curricular phenomena in these processes. We use the notion of version by resorting to the intersection of comparative education, comparative history of education, and comparative social sciences. In conclusion, the comparative study on curriculum documents clarifies processes of cultural and ideological relativization in the field of curricular studies, promoting new forms of writing of another history about / of the prescription.

### **Keywords**

Comparative study – Research program – Curriculum documents – Curriculum.

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## Introduction

This text exposes the theoretical foundations and the research tools of a research program that takes, as an object and sources of studies, curriculum documents (recognized as prescribed curriculum) produced for the spaces of basic education, in the stages of early childhood education, elementary school and in the special education modality. Sources and objects, as they are

[...] understood as printed, which select, legitimize and distribute knowledge, mobilize discourses in the production of the truths of the schooling process, and, for that matter, operate in the selection and the distribution of knowledge that comes to the schools and in the way how it must be received. This understanding allows the analysis of its materiality, that is, material support of the construction of practices in the educational spaces. [...] particularly written and dialogical, they occupy, on the one hand, privileged space of reconstitution of the educational ideologies or mentalities subtracted from a particular, official projection; and, on the other hand, they differ from other sources because they contemplate a very detailed purpose, in other words, the fulfillment of functions determined by the diffusion and the practical development of the schooling processes, based on a network of intertextualities that feeds itself on the educational policy to the development of the educational processes in the schools and in the classrooms, respectively. (SILVA, 2016, p. 214).

The spaces are apprehended as instances of school formation, with explicit educational objectives and intentional institutionalized, structured and systematic action, and as a possibility of production, selection and distribution of knowledge in the curricular structures of traditional teaching.

The theoretical foundations and the research tools, within the limits of this text, do not constitute themselves in a simple presentation, but the in recognition of their strategic roles in the resumption of the methodological discussions about the “comparison” in the research development in education, as well as in the results record in a more rigorous and less hybrid writing<sup>2</sup>, in the field of the studies of prescribed curricula. Such writing is understood as an essay criticizing the questioning about the importance of the research with/on the prescribed curriculum, since it seems to be confined to the simple imposition of the dominant groups over the dominated and less favored groups of the society.

Thus, we deconstruct a certain discursive configuration about the relevance of “searching” prescribed curriculum documents for the formal education system, as they materialize schooling projects, transmit knowledge, socialize values, norms and cultural patterns of the group or of the ruling class, that is, “a content prefigured, predicted and controlled by a external pre-existing force” (WILLIAMS, 2006, p. 45).

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**2-** Such writing is taken as a confrontation of analyses that are intentionally opposed to the notion of method and to the systematic ordering of the exposition. For this purpose, we approach Bakhtin's (2003) proposed terms of a possible interpenetration of diverse spheres associated with certain genres of the discourse that, when they are interwoven, generate complications for their definition, as well as for the clear establishment of categories of reading.

In other words, we have researched prescribed curriculum documents, interested in reaffirming that the relationship among knowledge, schools and individuals, described in their interior, also informs about the “inexhaustibility of the practice and of the human intention” (WILLIAMS, 2006, p. 59).

In the process of objectification of this reaffirmation, we circumscribe the curriculum documents to the perspective of “documents-problem”<sup>3</sup> that somehow extend the possibilities of identifying possible contrasts (and also dissensus) in the seizure of the prescription, as part of our notion of freedom allocated in the field of curriculum studies.

## **Substantiating the exercise of exposure of the research tools**

In the academic environment and in the research in Education, the reappearance of comparative studies in the last decade of the twentieth century seems to be centrally determined by the educational policy research, with different theoretical-methodological purposes and alignments. This centrality already existed in the previous centuries, with the early use of travel journals as a means of exchanging information on educational practices, as well as sending government officials and specialists in education to other countries in order to observe other educational systems, with the aim of supporting an already existing system.

In the proposition of the improvement of the educational systems, we find in Hans (1961)<sup>4</sup> observations about the conditions for the development of such a process, founded on the conception of “national state” and on the understanding of the differences among values existing in the most diverse social, cultural, and geographic constitutions and on the traditions of European beliefs, which influence educational processes and forms of institutionalization. Such findings about comparative education are concerned with the configurations existing in the post-war period, from the formations of the States and their responsibilities in proposing new public policies and the relations between these policies and the subjects.

In Brazil, the knowledge of the comparisons of Hans (1961) is accompanied by the reading of the work of Lourenço Filho<sup>5</sup>, in the study of ‘descriptive summaries’ of education systems in ten countries, pointing out differences and constitutive similarities. The analytical dimensions of these summaries are objects of an understanding more closely linked to Psychology, emphasizing what is identified as the foundations of comparative education, that is to say, concept, method and trends.

We have assumed that both Hans’s and Lourenço Filho’s thoughts, in the writing and in the dissemination of their respective propositions of comparative studies, contain

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**3-** Direct reference to the history-problem, by the possibility of refusal of the narrative form, because it requires the “conceptualization of the objects of their investigation”, their integration “in a network of meanings”, thus, making them “if not identical, at least comparable in a given period of time” (FURET, s./d., p. 84).

**4-** The book was published by Companhia Editora Nacional in 1961 for Brazil, based on the 2nd English edition of 1951.

**5-** Educação Comparada e Testes ABC (Comparative Education and ABC Tests), published by Editora Melhoramentos in 1961.

the intention to delimit the disciplinary field of comparative education and, consequently, to list rationalist references for education studies.

To these comparative perspectives, considered consensualist due to perpetuating the control power of the developed countries, usually the former colonial powers, over the least advanced countries, Carnoy (1974), Noah (1984) and Malet (2004) propose the critical comparatism as an ideological rupture. These studies establish themselves as a reaction against:

- a) the objective and closed conditions of the educational and cultural phenomena that the functionalism tends to promote;
- b) the social evolutionism perspectives that, blinded by a continuist conception of history and a pragmatic approach of the educational facts, tend to neglect the processes of social change;
- c) the consensualism, which prevents the scientific undertaking from questioning their aims, which constitutes the best way to delete them, especially when the intervention spaces cross the national boundaries. (MALET, 2004, p. 1311).

In the current context, the perspective seems to focus on different units and objects, determined by the culture and by the discourse, which, for Schriewer (2009), is an indicator that the analysis

[...] becomes an explanatory argument as far as it can identify, by means of conceptually informed reconstructions, solutions of historically realized problems as particular achievements of what in the different sociocultural scenarios - or configurations - is structurally possible. (SCHRIEWER, 2009, p. 95).

In order to understand it in this way, we have witnessed a process of constructing configurations that display the perspective of the intersection between conflict and consensus theories, descriptive and conceptual approaches (cf. NÓVOA, 2009), reflection theory linked to the reform and scientific theory linked to the understanding of the differences among educational systems (MADEIRA, 2009) and/or differences and similarities in the meeting of meaning for the educational processes (FERREIRA, 2009).

What seems most significant in this process is the ability of comparative study to institute itself in a plurality of perspectives, approaches, and methodologies, and at the same time to indicate limits for the understanding of the facts or of the educational phenomena that it compares, establishing itself as a relevant instrument of knowledge and analysis of educational reality. In the case of the limits, the criticisms are constituted from a process that identifies

[...] the deployment of a whole series of mechanisms to fix and pause the flow of time so that a cross-sectional object can be stabilized and discerned—all to be balanced with the recognition that this analytic work takes place within this ongoing flow of time, a flow that is marked by transformations, continuities and discontinuities between possible pasts, presents and futures. (SOBE, 2013, p. 95).

In the wake of the criticism, we come across the proposition of Warde (2013) on the concept of intellectual network

[...] which implies, at least, unidirectional relations, steady in space and in time, between individuals, groups and even entire societies; more than that, the idea of influence brought from the most ancient history of ideas is based on the (psychological) assumption that one pole ascends the other. The first pole is adult, developed, and civilized, and the other one is infantile, underdeveloped, and primitive. (WARDE, 2013, p. 113).

Such an alternative seems to be ignored by the researchers in education who use the comparison, since, in transfer studies, the idea of influence<sup>6</sup> remains, moving them away from the originality. Part of this permanence is delineated in the premise that the thought acts on the thought, the way by which the objects transform each other mutually, what each of them instigates analytically and what each of them receives from analysis, or rather, the effect of the perpetual interchange between the universality and the particularities.

The historical-social writing of the curriculum comes to be taken as part of a discursive universe that exists, according to Peters (2006), under two necessarily articulated forms:

- a) as an objectively structured space of relations among differently positioned agents according to an unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources, that is, of multiple capitals, that operate as socially efficient means in the competition for the appropriation of material goods and scarce ideas, though quite diversified, in the cases of the highly differentiated societies, in various “fields” of activity that characterize the modern West;
- b) as a set of subjectively internalized (via socialization) symbolic schemes of generation and organization of the practical mental and bodily activity of the individual agents, schemes that take the form of socially acquired potential dispositions or modes and tacitly activated to act, think, feel, perceive, interpret, classify and evaluate. (PETERS, 2006, p. 53-54)

Thus, they create and recreate places, establishing an educational, economic and social world through an organized set of meanings and practices, related to a central, effective and dominant process of these meanings, values and actions, lived in and by the access to knowledge.

## **From the discourse and the comparison practice**

The dialogue with the humanities, particularly History and Social Sciences, has shaped what we call a ‘critical turn’, since we have exceeded the field of comparative education. Such an expansion is based on the perspective that the proposition of any study, in comparison, needs to consider, in the explanation of any fact or educational

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**6-** T. S. Eliot (1989) produced reflection on the concepts of influence, for which he delineated the idea that tradition is not reproduction, but a dialectical representation that involves a historical sense permeating the past and the present.

phenomenon, the relations with the political, economic and/or philosophical convictions of the society that they serve, in the historical sense of the period in which they occurred.

In view of that, we have constituted discourses and research practices fed by theoretical and methodological choices, which we assume as a version titled comparative studies, highly shifted to a methodological plane. Such a plane is part in a local perspective, determined by a geographical location recognized by the states and municipalities, in the investigation of the educational processes and of the meanings of the curricular phenomena in these processes.

We use the notion of version by resorting to the intersection of comparative education, comparative history of education, and comparative social sciences. Comparative education is taken as a result of a double movement. On the one hand, it is marked by a growing presence of the educational issues in the creation of school identities, defined not so much from a geographical perspective, but in the sense of belonging to certain discursive communities. On the other hand, shifting from the traditional inter-country reference to dimensions both intra- and extranational, that is, centered in the disciplinary communities, formed by local agents, and in the processes of regulation at national and international levels.

We apprehend the first movement as a product of political-educational interests, presented by repertoire of arguments of the order of the globalization and the internationalization, for which the analyses of the educational contexts produce the desired institutional developments. The comparison justifies educational reforms, curricular innovations and the modernization of the human capital.

The innovations, hypothetically organized with the educational reforms, developed in the period of the 1980s and 1990s, highlight the conservative nature that combats the educational and social decline promoted by progressive education (APPLE, 2005). These reforms are located in the perspective of freeing the school for its entry into the competitive market and, at the same time, recomposing the traditional culture and revisiting values considered as founders of the society (ethics, morals, discipline). The State's most common unit of analysis is thus removed, and the centrality of a "God" is recovered in the directions of daily life, including in the school space, sharpening strategies of reciprocal and boundary influences between religious contexts, and strategies of the educational process, through more rigorous means of regulation and evaluation.

Thus, the reforms inaugurate a new moment for the curriculum development<sup>7</sup>, outlined by "new" formats for the processes of selection and of distribution of knowledge, anchored in macropolitical decisions influenced by the logic of the globalized world market. The macropolitical decisions impact on micropolitics "[...] which is realized in the daily life of the schools, in the classrooms, in the relations between the different subjects that interact in the school space and in the space surrounding the school". (APPLE, 2005, p. 10).

The curriculum development, from a prescriptive perspective, seems to reorganize the process of rereading, or modernization, of the theory of the human capital, anchored

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**7-** In the Brazilian case, materialized through the implementation of a curricular policy, objectified in the National Curricular Parameters for basic education (Preschool, Elementary School and Secondary School) and Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education, with official documents oriented for the school work.

in the logic of the formation of flexible subjects for the employability. Such modernization lifts education, or the process of schooling, to the “protagonist” place in the formation of the efficient and competent citizen.

The research that we have developed, from comparative education, seeks analytical tools that allow, in addition to the hypothesis of the relationship between the power and knowledge, as an expression of education at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the apprehension of the process of self-legitimation of school knowledge and of the educational power. That is to say, the power recognizes the forms of production and dissemination of knowledge and uses it for its exercise.

Moreover, knowledge provides the exercise of the power with the perspective of its ability to solve problems, tensions and social conflicts. This exercise defines the distinctive values, whose specificity is concretized in the frequent consumption of knowledge and cultural practices in their diverse segments of production, among them, the school. In other words, although school knowledge is made available to different social groups, the access to it does not imply equality or quality of consumption or a full understanding of the contents that they add.

In this way, we conceive that

[...] the idea of powerful knowledge could be the beginning of a resource for the educational community both in building new curricula at the national and school levels and in persuading the governments of all the parties about the conditions necessary for the principle of the “right to knowledge for all” to become a reality (YOUNG, 2016, p. 4).

In these ideas, the reinstitution of a past becomes necessary, from the perspective of comparative history of education or, as Eckstein and Noah (1969) would say, the insistence on the quest of the historical-cultural context of each educational system.

The search for the intelligibility that we long for with our practices is located on the reconciliation between the history and the comparison, in the effort to organize an investigation based on historical foundations, by those relating to the historical method. This method has led us to seek the differences and similarities of/in the particular, from the broad historical processes (to understand history as a process), and to reconstruct them as part of a certain reality, which is always complex and open to the transformations, under the action of the social subjects (using the history as a method).

However, the search for the differences and similarities, as Groux (1997) warns, does not go to the consideration of the concepts as universal, or the data collection apart from the analysis that relates them to their context. The visible and the explicit constitute only part of reality; history of comparative education, as a historiographical modality, enters through the reciprocal examination of two or more clippings of time and space of production and consumption of the product (in this case, the curriculum documents).

To this regard, we access Zimmermann and Werner’s ideas (2003) about the Entangled History which

[...] aims to deal with specific objects and problems that escape the comparative methodologies and the transfer studies. It allows us to apprehend unprecedented phenomena from renewed frames of analysis. In so doing, it provides the occasion to probe, for a particular bias, general questions such as scales, categories of analysis, relationship between synchrony and diachrony, regimes of historicity and of reflexivity. Finally, it poses the problem of its own historicity from a triple procedure of historicization: from the object, the categories of analysis and the relations between the researcher and the object. (ZIMMERMANN; WERNER, 2003, p. 90-91).

Noting this procedure of historicization, we turn to the proposed methodological tool, to which our sources and objects materialize a new field of analysis, that is, not only of the practice of comparison, but of what takes shape in the discussions, taken as necessary, about the curriculum, its studies and its truths. That is to say, how the education systems operate, how they are influenced by the national, international and local educational policies, how they influence all these policies, and how they react/adapt to changes.

We emphasize that, in the search for such discussions, we do not approach history alone, from the view of the dominant sectors, nor do we seek the hegemonic or the uniform. On the contrary, we are interested in “another” history. In other words, it is not about rebuilding an “other curriculum”, but making way for “another of itself”.

Such interest is relied on the premise of the figuration, which “serves as a conceptual instrument to modify the antagonistic and contrasted view of an individual and society; understood as a changing pattern in the game of the relations, whose interdependence between the social actors forms a flexible interweaving and with tensions” (ELIAS, 1980, p. 142). This favors the recognition of the relationship between an individual and society as a reciprocally determined and determinant relationship of complex social processes that define, from a long-term perspective, the direction of the different human societies.

When introducing the concept of figuration, we escape the dichotomies that oppose individuals and societies, while at the same time we expose the importance of transiting through three historiographic times: the time of the long-term socio-educational or curricular changes; the medium-term trends, which define a certain period of curriculum history, at the time; and the short term, which determines the current choices.

Thus, we approach to the process of apprehending the dynamics, the transitions and the socio-cultural relations as different texts, which lead to the understanding of the discourses that feed situations of dependence and logics of discrimination constructing ways of thinking and acting. This exercise, own of the comparative social sciences, is linked to a kind of Historical Sociology, pointed by Pereyra (1990) as one of the promising instruments in the construction of critical knowledge about the educational reality.

The educational reality in comparison operationalizes the discovery or non-discovery of regularities, the perception of displacements and transformations, the construction of models and typologies, and the identification of continuities and discontinuities, similarities and differences, explaining the more general determinations that govern the social phenomena.



Such a discovery, within the limits of the description of what we call particular version, emphasizes the characteristics of what we intend in a research tool, admittedly a mixed methodology, but which still incurs in the attempt to overcome the criticisms presented to the researches that use the comparison as a method, namely: mechanisms that correct and interrupt the flow of time so that a cross-sectional object can be stabilized and discerned (SOBE, 2013) and/or the maintenance of the idea of influence (WARDE, 2013).

It seems that there is a consensus among the authors of education, history of education and comparative social sciences on the idea that, for the construction of scientific knowledge, the comparison is fundamental and inherent in the epistemological process. That is, it would not be possible to produce knowledge without the employment of the comparison, because

we elaborate our interpretations keeping in mind a series of specific problems or pre-existing issues - not of data - to which we want to respond. The illumination of the answer - or of the answers - is not the result of an 'experiment' or of the interpretation and explanation proposals that we make, but rather 'experiment' and 'theory' are mutually constructed. (PEREYRA, 1990, p. 45).

Therefore, we are facing a new epistemology of knowledge, of socio-historical nature, which defines research perspectives focused not only on the materiality of the educational facts, but also on the symbolic markets that describe, interpret and locate them in a given space-time (cf. POPKEWITZ, 1998). These markets are inhabited by groups that produce and/or circulate discourses that may or may not imply a policy of non-exemption in the writing of history, which, for Fendler (2013), means that they are given to the educational historians

[...] an opportunity and obligation to question all variables as potential candidates for historiographical scrutiny. After all, how can we exempt from our historical investigations the very historical research tools and languages we use to write history? All of our methodological safeguards, processes of evaluation, analytical classifications, and narrative traditions are haunted by, tied to, and (to some extent) dependent upon, relentlessly fluctuating historical contingencies of time, space, and power. (FENDLER, 2013, p. 228).

What is desired, ultimately, is the possibility to “make see and make believe” as part of the construction of the reality, or rather, of the symbolic power (BOURDIEU, 1989). This possibility per se generates internal tensions, since, from this view, the perception, that the social agents have of the social world, matters. For them, the appointment contributes to constitute the structure of this world, in the deeper, the more widely recognized (i.e., authorized) way. “The investiture consists of sanctioning and sanctifying a difference, making it know and recognize, making it exist as a social difference, known and recognized by the invested agent and by the others”. (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 99).

Furthermore, the historical spaces-times that materialize the difference are approached as holders of their own logic, a social logic that transforms them into a place where the human intentions are manifested. If before, in the Marxist model, the society

constituted the reference space, in the liberal model it seems not to be configured so, since it becomes a component, among others, of a global system of regulation of the financial, intellectual, cultural, and educational capital (cf. CASTELLS, 1996).

In the context of comparative studies, especially those involved in the educational field, we question the validity of the materiality of the differences, mainly because the establishment of 'differences and similarities' over historical contexts marked by distinct economic, social, political and cultural characteristics has been shown to be a very fruitless research procedure in the production of knowledge.

First of all, we anchor ourselves in the categories space and time as presuppositions of the studies of historical character, considering the specific contexts in which their respective educational processes elapse. Another caution is not to search, for the 'other's' study, solutions to problems that face each other within the limits of our analysis propositions, that is, in this or that state or municipality, or to consider that the 'other' is better. This is because the mutual interdependencies end up defining the specificity and the level of complexity of the figurations that the individuals and/or social groups, belonging to geographical limits, establish among themselves, expressing the nexuses of the different tensions, constantly changing.

From the political action to the values and the explanations about the curriculum documents, this methodological tool evinces how they promote the "reinstitution" of teaching and learning practices, as part of instruments of specific regulatory processes that make sense in the designs of the curricular reforms. Reforms proposed by the State to the federated entities, based on mechanisms of interdependence and interrelation, support a "new" pattern of schooling.

### **Comparison areas: units of analysis**

The demand for intelligibilities of the comparative study, within the limits of this version, rests, beyond the intersection between education and social history, on the effort to organize a comparative approach based on historical foundations that represent, according Schriewer (1992), the best instrument for the analytical separation between the general and the particular, necessary for a meaningful historical interpretation.

Thus, we gave shape to the areas of comparison chosen by determining their configuration, closely linked to the conjunctural and structural research movement of the curriculum documents, which seem to be substantiated on the prescriptions, followed by pedagogical guidelines.

We understand the *conjunctural investigation* linked to the learning of the difficulties expressed by the histories of each region of the country, fed by the recognition of the conflicts, interests and anxieties connected to the curricular architecture, from reformist ideas of the 1990s, with which the educational system seems to assume "new" purposes in new practices and contours intended for the process of knowledge distribution. In relation to the *structural investigation*, the publication of the set of curriculum documents (parameters, references and guidelines) is extremely relevant, from the perspective of

organization and qualification of the processes of schooling or of an access to the knowledge considered valuable.

However, we reestablish two questions enunciated by Valensi (1990, apud HAUPT, 1998, p. 211): What scale of comparison to adopt? And why to compare? In this resumption, we explore a second reason for the projection of the areas of comparison, in the case of this study, since they are not limited to the description, but intend to expose arguments related to the theoretical concepts, hypotheses or explanatory models, by which we choose to establish comparability among the investigative movements previously approved.

In order to find answers to these questions, we have developed procedures of categorization and analysis of identified themes, with the purpose to reveal the multiple approaches and perspectives of the studied documents. The first of the tasks, organized by the categorization procedure, is the examination of the available information, from the tracking exercise, and the identification of the information about the production conditions<sup>8</sup>, not limited to a series of observable facts, but idealized elaborately, according to which, in the action of the comparison, models of explanation are detected.

We take these models as expressions of the concepts of field and *habitus*. The field is space of objective relations, which have their own logic, “whose need imposes itself on the agents that are involved in it” and “within which the agents face each other, with means and aims differentiated according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to the conservation, or the transformation of its structure” (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 50).

The areas of comparison, when elected, are understood in the interrelation of the educational, social, symbolic and cultural fields. Thus, they are inserted in a relational space permeated by struggles of conservation and transformation of their structures. They are regarded as strategies and tactics and not only as an expression of the repetition of a simply reproduced discourse, but as a set of dispositions that have been recreated, updated and therefore continually re-produced (produced again) in the course of the studies on curriculum documents.

The concept of field is linked to that of *habitus*, defined as

[...] (systems of durable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as generating and structuring principle of the practices and the representations that can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being the product of the obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their purpose without supposing the conscious intention of the purposes and the express domination of the operations necessary to achieve them and collectively orchestrated, without being the product of the organizing action of a regent (BOURDIEU, 1983, p. 61, emphasis on the original).

The concept of *habitus* shows itself as a theoretical tool capable of answering the central question in relation to the areas of comparison, that is, structured and structuring

**8-** The historical recoveries of the 1980s and 1990s point a latent concern of the Brazilian government about the national economy, as a consequence of the process of belonging to the patterns of the globalization processes dictated by the economies of the “first world”, for which economic growth was central.

dispositions that act as matrices of perception and action, continuously recreated in the course of the analyses, constituting *doxas* (a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominants, which presents itself and imposes itself as a universal point of view) and *nomos* (it evaluates, regulates and regulates what it does), which guide the curricular analyses. In this way, the areas of comparison can be conceived as a *habitus* incorporated by the agents of the field in question, which guides the strategies of the agents in the relations of force of this field.

The areas of comparison are taken as part of the characterization of a discursive universe that, on the one hand, represents the differentiated position of the agents according to an unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources and, on the other hand, a set of symbolic schemes that take the form of potential dispositions or modes socially acquired and tacitly activated to interpret, classify and evaluate.

In this way, they become strategies and tactics in meeting the needs created by the discourses of the “other”, here, specifically, of the State, which, in response to the International Organizations and to the needs printed in their Reports, publishes Directives, Parameters and/or Curricular Guidelines, understood as curriculum documents. This, *per se*, creates the argument of the comparison, that corresponds to the enrichment of its logical and empirical consistency to transform the analyses and satisfy a more specific clipping, the microrrealities or cultural dimensions, to overcome the predominance of the economic factor in the construction of the curriculum documents.

## **Possible nexuses in research with curriculum documents**

The proposal for the use of the comparative studies as a research tool is not based on a pretension to search for differences and similarities among the universes of analysis, while at the same time it does not incur in educational microrrealities, in the perspective of constructing macroconclusions, in this case, of curricular studies. This is because we come closer to distinct historical contexts, contradictions and complexities inherent in these contexts, which sustain the comparison as a kind of methodological renewal.

Renewal, here, means anchoring itself in the determination that the comparative studies are interpretative, aimed to an ideological defense, based on problems, incurring in the search for results and responses to the socio-educational demands. We operate with

[...] two types of guiding questions of the sought analyses, on the one hand, how the logic of social domination in the advanced society and the mechanisms through which it masquerades are deeply anchored in the specifics of the system of classes, of culture and of difference?; and on the other hand, how the curriculum, constituted as a device with marks of control, reproduction and promises of innovation, can hegemonically answer to the needs demanded by the social structure? (SILVA, 2016, p. 216).

We take into account the distinct historical contexts, the contradictions and complexities inherent in these contexts, as the first step of the comparative study. In the sequence, we consider the process of global renewal of this methodology, as Cowen

and Kazamias (2012) analyze, by focusing on the identity crisis through which it passed in the 1960s, putting in question the idealistic, romantic and anti-historical visions that predominated in this area since its constitution.

In addition to the theoretical renovation, the comparison renewed itself over the last decades in terms of themes, as since the end of the nineteenth century it was guided by/in the study of the educational systems in the National States and their “failures”. Today, according to this renovation, we reach the comparative study as a research tool of curriculum documents, produced in states and municipalities, considering other protagonists, such as international and national agencies, networks of researchers and scientific associations.

In this universe, we recognize, besides the cultural forces and the social environment, the dialectical presupposition within/outside the construction of these documents, from the perspective of what certain knowledge represents for the intellectual development of children and young people in school (the powers of knowledge and of the broadening of the world understanding, on a basis different from the one that these children and young people have already had, built on the most immediate experiences of daily life).

However, the discourse of the groups that construct these documents, in the different networks distributed by Brazil, is elucidated by/in the confrontation of the school inequalities, even if proposed in attempts to “erase” the ideological vestiges of/in the schooling process<sup>9</sup>. These inequalities, per se, give shape to the process of Brazilian curricular reorientation, whose elaboration conditions portray a combination of factors, among them the individual rights postulated for all (the right to learning), the conflicts around which knowledge becomes legitimate and the dimensions of the school formation, which are problematized and/or defended by a basic schooling, understood/apprehended as a “state reform”, increased in the same terms, that is, in the midst of economic readjustment policies, among others.

The curricular discourses, in this territory, guide themselves by notions of capital which is school, therefore, symbolic and social, whose (symbolic) pedagogical profit designs a communication situation in the school development. We stress that this development finds expression in the choice of official knowledge as a means of operationalizing the purpose of the basic school and of giving form to the reformist orientations. These orientations are based on a set of personal and social, cognitive and communicative competences, such as knowledge mobilized, operated and applied in situation, whose limit is administered by a reading of developmental psychology committed to learning, teaching and the evaluation.

We have recourse to Santos (2002, p. 347) to emphasize that “a curriculum, even when elaborated by a group that shares common ideas, always represents a precarious consensus about some ideas”. We perceive that, in its prescribed form, it represents a language conveyed by a group (of the Secretariats of Education), that is to say, an authorized language, invested with the authority of this group.

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<sup>9</sup>- See, for example, the movement *Escola Sem Partido* (School Without Party).

The symbolic markets and their “price formation systems” outlined in the curriculum documents establish the parameters for analyzing the first strategies of communication as dependents on an unequal power relation, in order to grasp, as symbolic power, a type of power capable to “do things with words”, in this case about the curriculum development. We emphasize that in the prescription we find not only exchanges of messages, but also relations of authority, value attribution, valorization or devaluation of the various discourses that mark the distance between the official discourse (prescribed official curriculum) and its incorporation in the propositions of the educational networks and in the curricular organization of each school institution (molded curriculum and real curriculum).

## **Final notes**

Investigating curriculum documents in a research program places us, per se, in face of the relationship between the stages and modalities of basic education, as well as of the disciplinary components and the selected and distributed scientific knowledge. We add to this the identification of the objectives, which define the expectations of learning of the school contents, thus recognized by being submitted to the didatization or to how to teach and that, finally, materialize the evaluation, from the perspective of the classroom and on a large scale. Having said that, they formalize the catalogue of “goals”, from the most generic to the most specific, accompanied by the perspective of sanctioning and/or sanctifying the curricular design in comparison, making it know and recognize itself as an object of social difference, known and recognized by/in the investiture of the researcher.

However, we stress that, in the field of the curriculum in Brazil, the crossing of borders does not refer to the comparison, but to the establishment of dialogues on themes. An example of this is the curricular dialogues formulated between Brazil and Mexico (2014), held with the purpose of understanding that the signifiers circulate and produce meanings, discourses and practices of subjectivation. This understanding incurs in the commitment to the deepening of pedagogical knowledge and the construction of new possibilities for thinking about education.

New possibilities arise that, in other frontiers, give form to the comparison as a methodological principle, feeding it on historical, cultural and sociological perspectives, delineating of the national and global economic, political and educational contexts, to apprehend the curriculum as a manifestation of the national identity, based on an international and interdisciplinary approach.

Moreover, approximated to the comparative study, we identify points of consensus and dissent, fundamentally linked to the degree question of internalization of the political, economic and social domination in the production of the documents. This is because the formative conditions of the agents directly involved in the process of selection and legitimation of scientific knowledge incur, or do not, in overcoming the orthodoxies, interests and defenses of each disciplinary area. We add to this the tricks of “neoliberal reason” which empty the debate about the determinants intrinsic to the processes of selection and distribution of scientific knowledge, part of the identity of the curriculum documents.

In this way, the curriculum documents portray the political and normative intentions of the “desired future for schooling”, while profiling the techniques for the government on the educational/training practices. This government is based on the individualization as a procedure to create flexible individuals for the labor market; in the competencies such as the dexterities and the knowledge necessary for the goods management; and in the evaluations as part of the curricular rationality, expressed in the clear relationship between individuals and the responsibility for their actions.

Consequently or through the neoliberal reason itself, the processes of selection and distribution of knowledge, materialized in curriculum documents, contextualize the reference models, that is, the individualized, the competent and the well evaluated, since the choices seem to be expressed by indicatives rather than imperatives. In other words, the existence of this distinction leads us to the idea that we do not learn explicitly; we operate according to the interests of those interested in the schooling of knowledge.

Exemplifying this identification, we present some studies and analyses (in the form of dissertations and theses) built on three prescribed curriculum documents for Basic Education, organized/published by the state education networks of Mato Grosso do Sul State (2012) and City of Campo Grande (2008 and 2012), which result in writings about: the Mathematical component, particularly for the stages of Elementary and Middle School; the presence of the notions of democracy, citizenship and social inclusion as part of the possibilities, or not, of building the curricular justice; the principles, formats and/or vestiges of the policy of knowledge distribution, as a way of interpreting the improvement of the teaching and adaptation to the new demands and social requirements, as well as the need to rethink the work (teaching learning) and to introduce necessary modifications (evaluation).

As for the comparative study of the Mathematical component in the curriculum documents, through the areas of comparison *Mathematical Competence* and *Studies of Numbers, Geometry and Measurement*, it is concluded that the selected knowledge is translated in the necessary mathematical competences, in the drawing of the type of student to be formed and, ultimately, forms the knowledge of the powerful, proper to those who master Mathematics. Regarding the construction of the curricular justice through the comparative study of the notions of *democracy*, *citizenship* and *social inclusion*, transformed into areas of comparison, the curriculum documents do not register the defense of an emancipatory curriculum project, or an ‘anti-hegemonic’ curriculum, because endow them with the condition of school contents, present in the disciplinary components of History, Geography, Portuguese Language and Art. In this context, the analyses about the principles, formats and /or vestiges of the knowledge distribution policy, drawn by the areas of *school comparison*, *curriculum development* and *evaluation*, report that the school restructuring requirements for/in the curriculum development, fueled by neoliberal, neoconservative, and neo-governmental defenses, discipline the form and the evaluation practice by the logics of the market and of the capital.

Finally, these analyses, constructed within the limits of the research program, become revealing of the reach of a more rigorous and less hybrid writing, determined by the comparative study, while recording the functionality of the resource to the

site as an instrument of legitimation of the options assumed in the construction of contextualized knowledge, the result of the restructuring of the scientific research work with curriculum documents.

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