Meetings, Dialogs and Interconnections in a Theoretical-analytical Perspective Design[1]

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This study aims to present the theoretical construction that has supported the research I develop in the curriculum field, from what I assume to be its core construction: curriculum as enunciation, as discursive practice. For this purpose, I established a dialog with both Homi Bhabha's ideas and Ernesto Laclau's discourse theory. I therefore seek to run through the movements that led me to open up such dialog, as well as to show how such articulation resulted in the construction of a work perspective for the analysis of curriculum policies.

Bhabha's emphasis on enunciation demonstrates the change he proposes – from a mimetic approach of understanding and analyzing language to a discursive one. It means it is not about an image referring to a transcendental reality, but it is actually an endless process of signification. He explains that from the rupture of a both abstract and direct view between concept and significance, a third place emerges between significant and significance, the locus of enunciation, crossed by multiple and conflicting dimensions which operate in this crisscrossed terrain - neither the one nor the other – mobilizing signification processes.

Thus, Bhabha states that this ambiguity creates a scission process, duplicity that the notion of the disjunctive time of enunciation makes clear – the tension between what he calls pedagogic and performing dimension, as dislocation and ambivalence, based on indetermination. The undecidability inherent to the political language game causes the decision-making to occur through the other, in relation with the difference.

The ideas of undecidability and contingent agreements allow the articulation of Bhabha's propositions with the analysis stated by Laclau, who addresses the political process from the discourse theory, based on the perspective that the latter occurs as a signification process in an undecidable terrain.

Placing the curriculum issue in such theoretical frame makes it possible to avoid apprehending the curriculum policy production processes as polarized contents between excluding forces – the hegemonic (prescribed by the authority power) and the counter-hegemonic (school pedagogic practice) – as fixed identities. It also allows to understand that the curriculm production contexts are instituted and crisscrossed by multiple discursive significations, and that the difference proceeds inside it, identified by contingent demands which produce provisory articulations, instituting precarious agreements forged on what the authors name as work of signification.

The meeting

Together with Pinar (2011), I assume that I am involved in a complicated conversation, an articulation of both movements and ideas that are not placed outside, in theory, like an appropriation of other people's ideas, but that prompts us to understand curriculum as *currere*. So, as thinking over the construction of the theoretical frame I have sought to operate, I review my journey, firstly as a basic education teacher and, then, as a

teacher trainer in both undergraduate and graduate courses, since the problematization emerging from such experience drives my research doing.

Firstly, my questioning was urged by my teacher-students' statements which carried a hard view of the children as well as their families, many times disqualifying them, even when some of them were rather close. Much of what they criticized was directly related to the position they assumed to speak: they, the teachers, and the others, the students, *performatized* in their failure and negativity – not knowing, not being what the school expects and aims. Such view came from teachers who worked at public schools in the outskirts of an urban center like Rio de Janeiro, which is marked by deep and hard-hitting social differences, though it (still) idealizes students corresponding to a 'good student' standard. Hence, there is a wide gap between him/her and me, teachers and students, causing desire/repulsion. In spite of being so close to their students concerning their background, my teacher-students needed to dissociate themselves, to determine their place as teachers, accurately demarcating such border. Though they were debating how to educate in a context marked by difference, it would not outweigh the reproachful or even rejection gaze. In fact, it happened because the debate was about inequality and the possibilities of reversing it, changing the other into the same!

Therefore, mobilized by difference and identity issues, I engaged in the investigation of the curriculum production for teachers education in the 1990s, from the experience developed at UERJ (State University of Rio de Janeiro), which showed that the teachers identity design not only was the curricular production point of articulation, but also the education objectives focus.

On such grounds, I built up a dialog, especially with Homi Bhabha (1994), who discusses difference assuming alterity/otherness as a constituent element of identity, conceiving the latter as hybrid, once the alterity he refers to implies that such hybrid constitution does not work by 'erasing' differences. To the contrary, it irrupts in an ambivalent identification, throwing on such production the uncertainty of cultural significance; thus keeping, as he says, "confronted by its double, the untranslatable-alien and foreign" (p.51)

Owing to such problematization I found myself on the frontier of a journey that had been based on a definition that I now questioned – is there a teachers' identity?

What I have supported (and I still do) as argument is Bhabha's concept of '*neither the one nor the other*' as a possibility of identity elaboration: I understand it is a fluid construction that must allow us to avoid the "the politics of polarity (we can) and emerge as the others of our selves" (p.39). That means the debates should take place on the border, in the negotiation, and that the decisions made – even in the undecidable terrain – must be assumed as provisory in the daily political struggle. This enunciation of difference place is where the possibility of intervention is located, the third place of enunciation that through scission exposes the binarisms overcoming, though I see it from my own questioning.

That is where the first meeting took place – the idea of negotiation with no a priori sense, marked by its invincibility. Hence, the identity problematization arose in other terms, in the deconstruction of the ontological subject.

In the wake of the reading articles prioritizing the culture issue, Hall (2003) debates multiculturalism in dialog with Laclau, articulating his proposition on the universalism/particularism, quoting his claim that…

> Only a conservative identity, closed on itself, could experience hybridization as a loss. But this democratico-hegemonic possibility has to recognize the constitutive

contextualizedldecontextualized terrain of its constitution and take fun advantage of the political possibilities that this undecidability opens.(Laclau, 2007, p.65)

In his *The Location of Culture* first chapter (A Commitment with the Theory), Bhabha (1994) presents his thesis – culture as enunciation and negotiation work in interstitial places – and its supporting arguments as well. There he establishes the core concepts of his work and I now highlight the negotiation one. He argues

When I talk of negotiation rather than negation, it is to convey a temporality that makes it possible to conceive of the articulation of antagonistic or contradictory elements: a dialectic without the emergence of a teleological or transcendent History, and beyond the prescripitive form of symptomatic reading where me nervous tics on the surface of ideology reveal the 'real materialist contraciction' that History embodies. In such a discursive temporality, the event of theory becomes the *negotiation* of contradictory and antagonistic instances that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects, and between theory and practical-political reason. (p.25)

At the end of this excerpt, he indicates a footprint note: 'for a significant elaboration of a similar argument see E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), eh, 3'.

Bhabha, in the same chapter, develops his argument in dialog with Laclau:

the work of hegemony is itself the process of iteration and differentiation. It depends on the production of alternative or antagonistic image that are always produced side by side and in competition with each other. It is this side-by-side nature, this partial presence, or metonymy of antagonism, and its effective signification, that give meaning (quite literally) to a politics of struggle *as the struggle of identification* and the war position. (p. 29)

Consequently, he defends that hegemony requires both iteration and differentiation. He also claims states that negotiation creates room to the interstitial space. Therefore, what he regards as articulation is an approach that refuses the emancipation/power, or culture/ideology polarization, since it is based on binarisms and pursues a stabilization of senses that takes its own political state out of itself. As Laclau (2005, p.54-55) puts it:

We can certainly free some social possibilities but only at the price of repressing others. The relationship between power and freedom is one of permanent renegotiations and displacement of their mutual frontiers, while the two terms of the equation always remain. Even the most democratic of societies will be the expression of power relations, not of a total or gradual elimination of power.

The dialog

Bhabha's (1994) proposition of thinking "the limit of culture as an problem of the enunciation"(p.34), brings another perspective to the debate on identity, changing its understanding as a project to be met as determined, to a movement that, over successive and continuous articulations, negotiations, produces precarious agreements, stops the flow of

significations that prompts us to think identity as permanently unfinished, as hybrid elaboration. The author helps thinking identity as indetermination and discourse, being the latter practice of signification.

The constructed significations are produced in the field of culture and it is in such place they operate. Therefore, culture as enunciation means both the subjects and signifiers of the practices are elaborated as they are discursively stated, placed and represented.

Thus, it is not about mimesis, or ready-made images replacement, drawn from a pre-established collection. It is about mosaics formed by intersection of tension and negotiation. From that, he infers that identity is built in an alterity process, a relational process that occurs in questioning the Other, not as a past to be restaged, but as an articulation activity that carries the subjectivity to an enunciative practice. Bhabha resorts to a psychoanalytic interpretation of identity from the desire dynamics. Alterity therefore causes a relation of desiring the Other's position to arise, as well as an ambiguous feeling of repulsion – of not becoming the Other – to irrupt.

As a result, Bhabha details that such ambiguity causes the scission process understanding is an articulatory action that, unlikely the totalization notion, constitutes a provisory and contingent agreement. This process is where the subject acts, where the identity is possible, since the subject emerges at the moment of decision, even when it is impossible to make. In Laclau's words, "undecidability that needs to be constantly superseded by acts of decision. These acts are precisely what constitute the *subject*"(Laclau, 2007, p. 92). He also argues that :

> Thus, we are left with the paradoxical situation that what constitutes the condition of possibility of a signifying system - its limits - is also what constitutes its condition of impossibility - a blockage of the continuous expansion of the process of signification. (Laclau, 2007, p.37)

Based on the notion of cultural enunciation, I therefore outline the curriculum policy understanding as a discursive phenomenon. Such enunciation makes contingency and liminality the space-time for the production of senses, mobilizing its I and Other, as well as implies a disjunctive present where the interpretation pact is broken, the signifier is neither one nor the other, it is fruit of articulations-crossings established in interval spaces.

Hence, what I have assumed as my work guideline emerges – the understanding of curriculum as discursive practice, based on the prospect of Ernesto Laclau (1998), which defends that policies are political-discursive productions having contingency as a matrix. In other words, that implies thinking the instituting movements of a curriculum do not take place based on a priori senses – the curriculum is shaped in the field of undecidability, in the articulation of different contexts.

As a political-discursive production, I defend that curriculum policies are start with the negotiations and contests in which senses and interests are hybridized in curricular development, showing its state of unfinished political process. It is in the very act of negotiating that signifiers are built through dialog, many times based on conflicting consensus, as the senses are unstable, fluid and permeated by distinct demands and interests.

Questions emerging from the research – dialog consequences

During the recent years, I have been engaged to the analysis of curriculum policies in Rio de Janeiro City (RJ – Brazil). The City Public Schools are managed by the Rio de Janeiro City Education Department (SME), which establishes the City educational policy,

coordinating its implementation as well as assessing its results, to ensure excellence in public pre-elementary and elementary schools, thus contributing to build autonomous and qualified individuals, who are enabled to develop both as professionals and as citizens. The City Education Department is responsible for Pre-elementary Education (6-month to 5-year olds), Elementary Education (1st to 9th grade), and also Youths and Adults Education, in Rio de Janeiro City.

This system has one of the largest public school networks in Latin America, with 658,508 students in 1,008 schools, 247 nursery schools, 202 children development centers, and other 167 partner nursery schools. It also has over 41,600 teachers. (Source: http://www.rio.rj.gov.br/web/sme/conheca-a-secretaria)

Its curriculum directions were established in 2010, reviewed in 2012-2013, initially for 11 school subjects - Physics, Performing Arts, Geography, Foreign Language, Music, Mathematics, Visual Arts, History, Science and Portuguese Language – being English Language added in 2012. It also offers curriculum directions to Kindergarten, Elementary Education as well as specific directions for Youths and Adults Education.

Teaching material is distributed to all schools in the System – the pedagogical support books. Elaborated by the SME, they correspond to bimonthly activities according to the system curriculum directions. The material is presented in full editions (1st to 3rd grades), and in subject related editions to the remaining grades (4th to 9th).

 In this context, the Department develops an assessment system for the whole network. Reassuring the procedural character of this system, as well as the parameters to all assessments carried out at each school, the Department states that each student will be given a global concept to infer his/her learning process. Such concept will consider the teachers evaluation, the bimonthly exam results and the formative aspect of the student's development. The Department creates and distributes to each school the bimonthly exams, which must be taken by all students. Thus, the global concept consists of the assessments carried out by the teachers, the results of the general bimonthly exams and the formative aspects.

In addition, there are annual network assessments – Prova Rio (Rio Exam) – which, as defined by Resolution 1123, SME, establish the guidelines for the school assessment in Rio de Janeiro public network. This evaluation aims to help SME with monitoring and redesigning its actions when necessary. The result of the annual exam is one of the indicators that make the IDE-RIO (Education Development Indicator of Rio de Janeiro City).

The researches have aiming to discuss how a curriculum policy established for a public education network with over 1000 schools is articulated in the school practice, and also to find out what negotiations and conflicts impact it among the interconnections of different production contexts. It was perceived that the senses are mobile, circulating flows that are locally halted, negotiated, but not fixed in an absolute way – they may be locally fixed, but the disputes are not restricted to such fixation. Therefore, the school is a local context, where negotiation takes place, curriculum policies are formulated, where instead of viewing it as an implantation relationship that affects the school, I understand and therefore defend that all these relations are articulated within the school – the negotiation place.

An issue that has arisen from the debates on the curriculum policy analysis is the very idea of a network, of a single project for the whole Rio de Janeiro City as well as the tension that defies both the articulations for the network curriculum policy and each school localisms. Such tension has also turned out in the teachers' identity: both the teacher and *the network* teacher constitute the collective subject I have pursued to problematize

Therefore, in dialog with Laclau it is possible to say that the identity problem happens as political action, since it has no content established *a priori*, but the articulation movements

among hegemonic relations constitute it. It reveals, as the author problematizes, the tension and ambiguity between the particular and the universal, and these terms interaction promotes both dislocations and productivity in political debate.

I believe it is important to emphasize two fundamental concepts for the development of the argument here defended: dislocation and articulation. Bhabha's idea of negotiation irrupts with strength and tension that, beyond the possibility of consensus or synthesis about a common point, in defense of non-erasing difference as well as of its continuous and provoking trace, which demands negotiation, that happens as articulation. The idea of contingent agreement implies sort of a sense of victory that provokes and is provoked by dislocations in the signification process, just as Laclau proposes. Thus, due to the centrality of these concepts, they demand elucidation.

The notion of dislocation carries the importance of the Other in the subject constitution. It is not an erratic movement, based on to the psychoanalytic debate and its symbolisms, the Other represents/exposes the image of the subject's incompleteness, it is threatening since it represents the subject's possibility/impossibility. This Other/exterior, when revealing such ambiguous relation, disturbs the structure in a tension among lack/desire/completeness, dislocating this identity. Such dislocation does not mean a fracture of the full identity, but the understanding that the identity takes place in the movement of dislocation effects; "therefore, the place of dislocation is the subject's place. Far from being a moment of the structure, the subject is the result of the impossibility of the first to be constituted in its self-sufficiency and unrestrictedly dominate over its elements." (BURITY, 1998, p. 20 – free translation).

Thus, on one hand, negotiation implies the denial of an absolute agreement, of a sense of purpose; on the other hand, it presupposes the ambiguity inherent to the antagonistic relation, which is negotiated, articulated, but never actually overcome. Consequently, the condition for political action is the antagonism emergency. What rules the articulation movements is the antagonistic border, since such antagonisms are not binary, contradictory poles with merely differential origin – difference as totality; but they are mutually constituted between equivalencies and differences, between logics that operate in the articulation and formulation of discursive chains. As a result, it is also political – if antagonism is condition of political action, so is the subject in his/her acts of identification/emergency. As Mouffe (2005) states, "For Laclau, undecidability and decision are constitutive of the tension which makes a political society possible" (p.3).

Therefore, when discussing identity in such terms I argue that 'the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between'. (BHABHA, 1994, p. 148) and, in dialog with Laclau (2001, 2005, 2007), it happens as undecidability, what implies flows, unfinished discourses. So, rather than identity, there would be acts of identification which take place both in the articulation of contingent demands and in the flow of signification. Identity would emerge with the subject at the moment of decision-making, which is understood as signification in contingency, instead of an a priori content to condition it.

That way, the idea of undecidability associated with the comprehension of identity as performativity emphasizes a structural indetermination that displaces the constitution of the subjects from the totalization space, from the complete project to an unstable zone hidden by the pedagogic narrative, which is the space of signification, negotiation, translation. I consider that investigating the issue in such terms makes possible to reach and discuss the political processes arisen in teachers' routine actions, assuming that "the subject's constitution terrain is political" (BURITY, 1998, p. 24 – free translation), deepening the debate on teaching as both agency and contingency.

Notes

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