

## Epistemology of comparative education emphasizing educational reforms: a view from the Decolonial theory<sup>1 2 3 4</sup>

### *Epistemologia da Educação Comparada com ênfase em reformas educacionais: um olhar a partir da teoria Decolonial*

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#### Abstract

From the beginning, Comparative Education has a reformist vocation and was permeated by several Epistemologies, which influences the approach on the tensions between the local and the global. Decolonial Theory discusses this tension. This article deals with the Epistemology of Comparative Education emphasizing the educational reforms from a Decolonial perspective. We conducted bibliographic and documental research. Comparative Education has a pragmatic use and the way the Reforms were and still are being implemented does not consider the local specificities of each region. The main conclusion is that the Decolonial Theory gives subsidies for an epistemological turn in the field of Comparative Education with an emphasis on educational reforms in order to (re)think the articulation between the tension of the local and the global.

**Keywords:** Comparative Education, Decolonial Theory, Educational Reforms, Epistemology

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## **Resumo**

*A Educação Comparada, desde o início, possui uma vocação reformista e foi permeada por diversas epistemologias, o que influi na abordagem da tensão entre o local e o global, discutida pela Teoria Decolonial. Este artigo aborda a Epistemologia da Educação Comparada com ênfase em reformas educacionais, partindo da teoria Decolonial. Realizou-se uma pesquisa bibliográfica e documental. A Educação Comparada apresenta um uso pragmático e o modo como as reformas foram e ainda são implementadas não levam em consideração as especificidades locais de cada região. Concluiu-se que a teoria Decolonial apresenta subsídios para um giro epistemológico no campo da Educação Comparada com ênfase em reformas educacionais de modo a (re)pensar a articulação entre a tensão do local e o global.*

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Comparada, Epistemologia, Reformas Educacionais, Teoria Decolonial.

## **Introduction**

Comparing is an inherent process to human life (Franco, 2000). We compare, consciously and unconsciously, the simplest things in daily life. We compare our clothes with that of another, our houses, our lives. When we travel, we look at that new place, always with the familiar reality in mind and, so, we compare. Comparative Education is a growing field in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Amaral, 2015) and presents, since the beginning, an intrinsic relation with the Educational Reforms, as reported in the first methodological attempts of comparative fields.

Officially, Comparative Education emerged in 1817, with Jullien de Paris, in the context of school expansion and the affirmation of science as key pillars to progress, so as to contribute for more grounded educational reforms (Ferreira, 2008). This concept of *more grounded educational reforms* takes place in a context in which Comparative Education intended to be a science, aiming for epistemological and institutional credibility. Thus, comparison should be used to deduce general Education laws applicable to any context.

The term Epistemology was created in 1854, by J. K. Ferrier, however, before the creation of the term, there were already discussions on the issue of knowledge. From the beginning, Epistemology was connected to Positivism (Sánchez Gamboa, 1996, 2007). Epistemology aims to explain the working of sciences, the construction of concepts, instruments, practices, objects, political and social relations (Yarza de los Rios, 2005) and, connected to the field of Comparative Education, it raises questions related to knowledge: How

is it possible to know? How is it possible to compare? What is comparing? Why do we compare? What information should be compared?

During the development of Comparative Education and Educational Reforms, such as mentioned, several epistemological approaches permeated both. These approaches have directly influenced how comparative studies are conducted and applied. In this context, the relation between the global and the local and how educational questions are – or not – transferred from a place to another were – and still are – discussed. Therefore, we raise the following questions:

Why, in the last two centuries, has predominated an epistemology that eliminated from epistemological reflection the cultural and political context of production and reproduction of knowledge: Which were the consequences of such a decontextualization? Are other epistemologies possible today? (Santos & Meneses, 2010, pp. 7)

Zemelman (1999, pp. 16), in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, alerted to the need of Latin-Americans to position themselves “faced by the context of globalization” and, if that did not happen, they would be “simply organizing a thought and its consequent theories in a framework within the parameters”.

In this perspective, we should point out that Decolonial Theory, discussed by the Group Modernity/Coloniality, criticizes a Eurocentric model of knowledge production and the fact that this/these model(s) were taken as more valid than others.

The objective of this article is to approach Comparative Education, particularly educational reforms, from a Decolonial Theory perspective, aiming to (re)think how educational experiences are transplanted and/or implanted in other contexts, disregarding local specificities. To reach this goal, we conducted a bibliographical and documental research. Considering the methodology used for this research, we take Gatti's (2004, pp. 13) statement when mentioning that “the meaning of the results is given by researchers based on their theoretical background”.

## Comparative Education and educational reforms: some considerations

Comparative Education has always had a *reformist* vocation (Rust et al., 2012) because it emerged in a context in which school expansion and science affirmation were establishing themselves as key pillars to progress (Ferreira, 2008). This period is strongly marked by positivist Epistemology, because it connects the conception of scientific valid knowledge to those arising from natural and exact sciences, with testable and quantifiable data. Therefore, educational Reforms should be grounded in comparative studies with statistical data.

On data quantification— a method from natural sciences- we should consider the perspective of Alves-Mazzotti and Gewansznadjer (1998, pp. 6), when inferring that

The construction and analysis of graphics, measurement techniques, statistical tests, and other routine procedures are taught, but the reason behind these procedures are not explained. After all, why do we intend to measure the phenomena? Does science start with a pure and impartial observation, free from prejudices? Can we definitely prove the truth of a scientific theory? What is objectivity?

Pinto (1992) explains that the area of education is intended for the knowledge work rejected by Scientific Institutes. This rejection happens because such types of knowledge are not connected to the conception of current science. Education is disregarded as science, because it does not follow the rigorous procedures of natural sciences.

Similarly, it is important to highlight that, to Pérez Gómez (1998, pp. 99-100),

the science model that has historically imposed itself, in which we were educated and socialized in academic life until nowadays, is a positivist model that has triumphed in the development of natural sciences and the spectacular advancements in technological applications. Thus, it imposed itself as the unique model of scientific conception, monopolizing scientificity.

The relation of Comparative Education with educational reforms can be seen from the beginning of the field. Jullien de Paris, in 1817, hoped that Comparative Education would contribute to the formulation of a science of Education. However, much of the interest to know the educational systems of other countries only resulted from the need to ground the education reforms intended (Ferreira, 2008).

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a development period for Comparative Education. The field acquired a status of science and became a university subject in the United States and other

countries. Several comparative studies were conducted regionally, nationally, and internationally. Seminars, congresses, and meetings were organized. Journals, annuals, and monographs were published, that is, there was a dissemination of data and information on the educational systems of different countries (Carvalho, 2006). Most studies were quantitative and their results were used to justify educational reforms (Bonitatibus, 1989).

Comparative Education is, originally, a field of studies considered European. However, there are evidences of comparative studies in Latin-America and Caribbean since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, the educational systems were under construction after the independence wars and, therefore, many scholars were sent abroad. Brazil, for instance, sent away some educators to observe foreign educational systems, one of them was Rui Barbosa (Lourenço Filho, 2004). Another Brazilian author that stands out in the field of Comparative Education is Anísio Teixeira.

In the context of Latin America and Caribbean, we can also cite José Luis Mora and Lapati, from Mexico, Andrés Bello, from Venezuela and Chile, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, from Argentina and Chile, and José Pedro Varela, from Uruguay. However, the structuring of these systems had some disparities, expanding Comparative Education, by different ways, throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (Ramón Ruiz & Acosta, 2017).

According to Lamarra et al. (2005), Comparative Education has a limited presence as a subject, but the creation of Mercosul<sup>5</sup>, as well as PhDs and master's scholarships funded by Capes in Brazil, has significantly contributed to promote comparative studies among the member countries (Lamarra et al., 2005).

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Comparative Education was influenced, according to Ferrer (2002), by socio-historical approach, with two great representatives: Antônio Nóvoa and Jurgen Schriewer. To Nóvoa and Schriewer (2000), this approach aims to consider the world as a text and to understand how discourses were part of the powers that have divided men and society, and how they confirm situations of dependence and logics of discrimination. Also for these authors, such discourses work as practices of political regulation and, for this reason, are indispensable to comparative studies. Nóvoa (1998, pp. 83) explains that

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<sup>5</sup> Translation note: Mercosul (Southern Common Market) is a trade bloc established in 1991, having as full members Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Comparative Education needs to be a way to understand the other (...) the comparison in education is a history of senses and not a systematized arrangement of facts: the meanings that different communities give to their actions and allow them to build and rebuild the world.

To Schriewer (2002 *apud* Ferrer, 2002), all comparative studies need a relational thought, considering that this thought is characterized in the process of comparison. However, there are two types of relational thought established by a simple comparison and a complex comparison. The simple comparison is the one in which we can observe the relation between observable facts. Complex comparison is the one in which we observe the relation between relations.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we should also consider the definition of Comparative Education by Erwin H. Epstein, because his definition places Comparative Education in the perspective of Globalization and Internationalization. According to Epstein (2008, pp. 2), “what we need is a definition that encompasses all normative streams, and the one that I propose is: comparative education is the application of the intellectual tools of history and the social sciences to understanding international issues of education”.

Globalization has impacted and is impacting the traditional postulates in which Comparative Education has been grounded in the last decades, such as its nationalist roots. The Epistemology of Comparative Education has also been impacted because, with globalization, arises the need to reconsider the object of study and the methodology of the subject, as well as (re)valuing the ways of analysis. Added to that, the concept of time and mobility in Comparative Education and, particularly, the units of analysis that are traditionally used in the comparative analysis, are also suffering the impacts (García Ruiz, 2012).

Though it is difficult to highlight some currents, in these two first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> there is, clearly, a competition among convergent and divergent theoretical approaches, due to the generalized tension between Modernity and Post-modernity (Mitter, 2012, pp. 123). The entry of post-modern theoretical approaches in Comparative Education has more emphasis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, Ferrer (2002) had already announced this tendency in the late 1990s. Ferrer (2002) indicates that V.Rust was one of the first authors to start this debate.

Comparative education has played a very important role in the organization of national educational systems, because the results of these studies provided information to the governments, guiding decision-making and contributing to improve educational systems. However, between the 1970s and 1980s, there were many questions regarding comparative

studies, because their results were used to legitimize national reforming actions by international bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These institutions influenced the elaboration of policies through cooperation programs and prescribed how the countries, mainly peripheral ones, should manage their educational reforms (Carvalho, 2006).

To Popkewitz (1997), the term ‘reforms’ can be understood from two concepts. One of them is the concept of Reforms in the common sense, which “considers reform and interventions as progress” (Popkewitz, 1997, pp. 11); on the other hand, the author also affirms that the reform is “part of a process of social regulation” (Popkewitz, 1997, pp. 12), as the Reforms “refers to the mobilization of publics and the relations of power in the definition of the public space” (Popkewitz, 1997, pp. 11).

To Carvalho (2006), Popkewitz’s (1997) statement on Reforms shows that those taken as natural and needed to social well-being, in fact, hide government practices and forms of intervention in the private spaces of subjects’ lives. Acting to build new forms of action and thought in the world and to build subjects regulated by the State and to its service. The educational reforms are placed as instruments that aim to promote economic development and changes in cultural standards, faced by a scope of “national solidarity” (Popkewitz, 1997, pp. 21).

Popkewitz (2004) states that, in educational reforms, what is foreign is seen as a synonym of progress:

Commonly in national policies and research the heroes of progress are foreigners, immortalized in reform attempts. Foreign names and authors, for example, appear as signs of social, political, and educational progress in national debates. (Popkewitz, 2004, pp. 118)

Inês Aguerrondo (2014) highlights that, in the last 15 years, there has been a series of reflections on educational reforms, depending on the region and context of their scholars.

To Schriewer (1993, 2001), the relation between educational reforms and Comparative Education takes place because, in the educational discourse, there are worldviews or horizons of reference destined to legitimate certain thoughts on the reforms. That is, educational reforms are always justified by an international experience, foreign examples, or models of educational systems. Alcantara (2005) states that Comparative Education is an important field for

educational policy, for the impacts of innovation, and educational reforms. With the phenomenon of globalization, the perspectives of Comparative Education are broadened as the knowledge among nations, States, and societies is, more than ever, necessary.

Regarding Latin America and the Caribbean, the largest number of comparative studies were conducted by international institutions, such as Unesco, the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), the World Bank, and the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL). Comparative education, connected to these agencies of international knowledge, is guided by a North American perspective and a global convergence (Marginson & Mollis, 2001), revealing a pragmatic use, without the proper theoretical reflections of the field, as written by Goergen (1991).

Aguilar (2013, pp. 195) remarks that Goergen “explains fundamental epistemological issues present in the discussion between Positivism and Post-positivism in Social Sciences and the strong parts and the methodological fragilities in the educational field”.

Ferran Ferrer (2002) emphasizes that, in Latin America and the Caribbean, practical studies about educational planning were conducted. Thus, quantitative data methodology was relevant, though hermeneutics was also used. Rosar and Krawczyk (2001) state that, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Latin American and Caribbean countries started educational reforms resulting from a process articulated with the policies of international bodies, which had a homogenizing character. Torres and Schugurensky (2001, pp. 7) point out that

Epistemic communities do not happen in a void, because the diagnosis of problems faced by higher education institutions are strongly influenced by international bureaucracies (mainly the agencies of Bretton Woods) and powerful business lobbies.<sup>6</sup>

However, according to Krawczyk (2013), the studies get stronger in the moments of reconfiguration of those international relations. Thus, in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the comparative studies, in Latin America and the Caribbean, gained new power. Krawczyk (2013) points out that descriptive comparative studies, together

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<sup>6</sup> In the original: las comunidades epistémicas no operan en el vacío, puesto que los diagnósticos de los problemas con los que se confrontan las instituciones de educación superior se ven altamente influenciados por las burocracias internacionales (en particular los organismos de Bretton Woods) y poderosos grupos de presión relacionados con el mundo empresarial.



with experience reports, are meaningful in the study of educational policies. Faced by this, we can see that Comparative education, when not used in pragmatic and utilitarian way, allows

1) to broaden the field regarding the impacts of globalization on the reformulation of educational systems of different countries; 2) to identify what is common or identical and what is specific in these systems; 3) to check if there are alternatives to the standardization or international standardization of educational public policies and show which they are; 4) to capture the relation between globalization processes and regionalization as something contradictory and mutually established; non-linear. (Carvalho, 2013, pp. 431)

Comparative Education in Latin-American and Caribbean context can contribute to the attempt of establishing a dialogue between international and national tensions, local and global, universal and particular, to avoid a juxtaposition of educational reforms without the due theoretical reflections.

## Decolonial Theory and Comparative Education

One of the tensions in the field of Comparative Education is, exactly, the relation between global and local, i.e., the way to establish a relation between both, so that the local and/or the particular is not subjugated. Because of the relation among Education, school institutions, and Culture, when comparing educational aspects, Comparative Education should be careful to local specificities and their respective cultures, not subalternizing and/or prioritizing them, but promoting the recognition of the Other or of oneself (Franco, 2000).

For this reason, a Comparative Education that goes beyond a mere comparison is defended, one that allows knowing the different social, local, and cultural realities that permeate the educational aspects and allow different types of learning in these realities.

As mentioned in the introduction, Comparative Education emerged *officially* in 1817, in France (Goergen, 1991; Lourenço Filho, 2004). Based on the concept of Modernity by Dussel (1992), the field of Comparative Studies can be considered as emerging from the second modernity. The first Modernity, to this author, started in 1492 with the European arrival to the Latin-American and Caribbean continent. For Dussel, the second Modernity would arise from the Enlightening and the French Revolution. This presupposes that the field is permeated by Epistemologies with modern assumptions and have a Eurocentric interpretation of reality.

Comparative Education consolidated itself during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, this consolidation took place through positivist bases, whose parameters of reality interpretation are grounded on the assumptions of natural sciences and reflections from the Enlightening. Later, Comparative Education started to open itself to issues on the *local*, or, in other words, from the perspective of Sadler (1900/1964), an educational system could not be transplanted from one place to another without the due reflection on the local specificities.

Sadler's (1900/1964) perspective, presented in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shows a turn in the field of Comparative Education, calling attention to the specificities of the local culture where the educational system was established and not only to measure the data of the educational systems. However, despite this openness of the field, we should highlight that Sadler was British and worked in the United States, with no indication that his ideals could be referring to the specificities of so-called subaltern places.

Since the First World War in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field of Comparative Education saw itself, once more, crossed by epistemological tensions, due to the advances in technology, social, and natural sciences (Kazamias, 2012). Sadler's (1900/1964) comparative perspectives and their precursors were considered pre-scientific (Kazamias, 2012), because they were "humanists, not scientists; judicious, but qualitative, not quantitative; subjective, not objective" (Noah & Eckstein, 1969, pp. 188). That is, the conceptions that, in some way, try to consider local demands when comparing were labeled as pre-scientific, exactly because they were not within the standards established by Modernity.

Looking to the Other and recognizing, in this movement, the similarities and differences is one of the bases of the comparative process. However, according to Franco (1992), sometimes, the perception of difference, instead of contributing to the (re)cognition of the Other and oneself, from mutual understanding, ends up becoming a type of ideological shield to justify territorial occupation, subjugating and, even, annihilating the Other. The author also affirms that this ideological shield was often used aiming for political gain, coated by a political respectability. Franco (1992) relates this ideological shield to the development of an aristocratic and hierarchical European society, which has a certain notion that white men are superior, justifying their position as colonizers and explorers.

On their hand, Souza and Streck (2019, pp. 267) discuss that "internationalization in education is today an imperative and the construction of a consistent framework will help us to

critically interact with the pedagogical proposals and educational policies of other regions of the world”.

Decolonial Theory is approached by the Latin American Group Modernity/Coloniality, which discusses, at length, the issue of Modernity. It is possible to say that some central figures of this groups are scholars Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres; Ramón Grosfueguel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Edgardo Lander, among others.

Dussek (2000) and Quijano (2005) infer that Modernity, understood as a period arisen from the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Enlightening, is a Eurocentric view of Modernity itself. To these authors, Modernity is divided in two phases. The first started in the mid-1400s, with the beginning of the Age of Exploration and the arrival of Europeans in the current Americas. The second phase is understood as concomitant with the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the Enlightening. The Group discusses some concepts, such as the World-systems Theory; Coloniality of Power, of Being, of Knowledge; Zero-point hubris; Myth of Modernity; and the Geopolitics of Knowledge.

Dussel (2000) explains that modern civilization is understood as better developed, i.e., as superior. This means, even if unconsciously, a position ideologically Eurocentric. This superiority tends to force the development of those considered as primitive, rude, barbarian, as if development was a type of moral demand. However, the development pathway is not at random, but imposed by Europe. With the opposition of barbarism to the civilizing process, modern praxis uses violence, when necessary, to destroy obstacles of such modernization. Mignolo (2005) comments that the dark side of Modernity is Coloniality. Thus, it is important to distinguish the concepts of colonialism and coloniality. They are related but do not have the same meaning.

Regarding the development of European aristocratic and hierarchical society, Decolonial Theory explains that modern civilization is understood as more developed, i.e., superior. Such superiority tends to force the development of those considered more primitive. The process of domination produces victims (in several ways), but violence against the barbarian is seen as an avoidable act and the colonizer sees himself as the hero. To the modern men,

barbarians carry the *blame*, because they oppose themselves to the civilizing process (Dussel, 2000).

Because of that, the ideological shield, cited by Franco (1992), when seen through the lenses of Decolonial Theory, refers to the process of colonization and, more recently, to European colonialism towards Latin America and the Caribbean. However, in the renovation of comparative studies, there is an attempt to dialogue with the Other. According to Cunha (2018, pp. 8), “more recent studies on educational policies and comparative education highlight the importance of knowing the context in its multiple dimensions— historical, economical, and sociocultural”. That is, we can see that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Comparative Education has been concerned with the local and cultural specificities in comparative studies, what shows a paradigm of comparison much different from that established by the second Modernity, arisen from the Enlightening and the French Revolution, grounded in rationality and a humanitarian ideology hostile to differences, to diversity, and to non-European cultures, seen as cultures of a non-scientific knowledge.

To the Group, Social and Human Sciences were used to scientifically legitimize the European domain over other peoples. These discourses are grounded in a geopolitics of knowledge, which declares as illegitimate the simultaneous existence of cultural voices and ways to produce knowledge. In this point lies the criticism of the Group Modernity/Coloniality (Castro-Gómez, 2005).

When discussing Latin America and how it was (and still is) conquered, explored, and subjugated, we should mention José Martí (2005), who strongly criticizes the idea of a conquering civilization:

It is an extraordinary truth: the great universal spirit has a particular face in each continent. Thus we, with our rachitis of a child seriously injured in the crib, have a generous ardor, a courageous restlessness, and the daring flight of an original, brave, and artistic race. All of our work, of our strong America, will inevitably lead to the mark of conquering civilization; but will improve, advance, and surprise with the energy and the creative impulse of a people in its essence. (Martí, 2005, pp. 8)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> In the original: Es una verdad extraordinaria: el gran espíritu universal tiene una faz particular en cada continente. Así nosotros, con todo el raquitismo de un infante mal herido en la cuna, tenemos toda la fogosidad generosa,

Masson (2007 apud Lamar, 2015) emphasizes that the studies of Comparative Education are accused of assuming a positivist position and that the integration South-South is a challenge to the field. However, if the comparative studies supposed a comparison *since* and *for* Latin America and Caribbean, they could contribute to the implementation of adequate compensatory or emerging policies. Lamar (2015), when discussing Comparative Education explains that it should consider the criticisms to Traditional Epistemology, which has great influence in Latin-American and Caribbean education and, because of that “there is the need of a Decolonial turn that implies a shift of attitude in the practical subject and the knowledge, and the decolonization and the dialogue and defense of Epistemological pluralism” (Lamar, 2015, pp. 13539).

## Decolonial theory and educational reforms

The educational reforms, from the Decolonial Theory, can be interpreted as a developmentalist fallacy, attributing to Europe – and more recently the United States — the status of most developed society and peoples. Based on this assumption, all other peoples of Earth should follow the development phases of these contexts aiming to reach social, political, moral, and technological emancipation. As stated by Popkewitz (2016, pp. 20), “teaching and learning theories simultaneously incorporate the affirmation of homogeneity of values and norms, which minimize people’s differences, emphasizing what is common — or what should be common and the “nature” of — to all human beings”.

The positions of Popkewitz (1997) and Schriewer (1993, 2001, 2018) are somewhat close because both authors associate the concept of educational reforms to the foreign and as a synonym of progress. Observing this phenomenon from a Decolonial Theory, we notice that some aspects are similar to what the theoreticians of this movement have been strongly criticizing.

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inquietud valiente y bravo vuelo de una raza original, fiera y artística. Toda obra nuestra, de nuestra América robusta, tendrá, pues, inevitablemente el sello de la civilización conquistadora; pero la mejorará, adelantará y asombrará con la energía y creador empuje de un pueblo en esencia.

Modern civilization describes itself as the most developed and superior (which means unconsciously supporting a Eurocentric position). 2. Superiority forces the development of the most primitive, barbarian, rude, uncivil, as a moral demand. 3. The way to such an educational process of development should be the one followed by Europe (it is, in fact, a unilineal European development which determines, again unconsciously, the “developmentalist fallacy”) [...] (Dussel, 2000, pp. 49).

The criticism towards Eurocentrism, Modernity, and Coloniality takes place because they relegated – and still relegate– non-European cultures. This happens because European expansion, in the perspective of Mignolo (2005, 2007), Maldonado-Torres (2007), Dussel (2007), and Quijano (2005, 2007), implemented in different regions in the continent, a system considered modern/colonial. This colonization system made European culture be considered as unique and legitimate its power over colonized and dominated cultures.

The term Decoloniality is used by the referred Group, because the international division of work between centers and peripheries and the ethnical-racial hierarchy of populations formed for centuries of European colonial expansion has not finished with the end of colonialism and the formation of Nation-States in the former colonies. The periphery — that is, Latin America and Caribbean, among other places — still is in a subordinate position (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007). Thus, granting to educational reforms the notion of development can be an erroneous concept, as the reforms are not always guided towards the development of the context in its particularities and singularities, but in the development of the context, based on a zero point, a reference mark.

Another aspect to be highlighted is that Gorostiaga and Tello (2011) listed seven perspectives of Reforms in Latin America and Caribbean: Economical; Imperative Insertion; Integrationist; Humanist; Critical Normative; Critical Analytic; and Alternative Mundialization. In these alternatives, we can see a strong influence of multilateral bodies and neoliberal conceptions in the educational reforms in the region. Walsh (2007), based on the reflections of Mignolo (2005), states the multilateral bodies use the issue of interculturality as a market hook. Therefore, the reforms influenced by these Bodies can have an intercultural bias, however, they are simply following a commercial logic and are not, in fact, attentive to these questions.

Concerning the neoliberal concept, Lander (2005) affirms that neoliberalism can be understood as a hegemonic discourse. This discourse ends up synthetizing the assumptions and values that should be followed in a modern society regarding issues of humanity, wealth, nature, history, progress, and, mainly, knowledge. That is, educational reforms, when influenced by

neoliberalism, follow a homogenizing and hegemonic current on the way Education, in general, should be organized.

Liberal society, as a universal rule, points to a unique possible future for all other cultures and peoples. Those that could not incorporate themselves to this inexorable march of history are destined to disappear. [...] through the universal character of European historical experience, the ways of knowing developed for the understanding of this society, thus, transform themselves, not only into universal categories to the analysis of any reality, but also into normative proposals that define what all the peoples of the planet should be. These knowledge then become the standards through which one can analyze and detect the deficiencies, the delays, the restraints, and perverse impacts that take place as a product of the primitive or the traditional in all other societies. (Lander, 2005, pp. 13)

From this perspective, educational reforms with a neoliberal bias, when analyzed from the Decolonial Theory, are used to highlight an educational model as the only possible one. Those outside this model are considered unacceptable and/or invalid.

## Final remarks

During the development of Comparative Education, the tension between local and global permeated the field, that is, the way information is compared and interpreted are often used to justify Educational Reforms. The intention to justify the Reforms shows a pragmatic character of Comparative Education, Besides that, the way Reforms were, and are, implemented do not consider the local specificities of each region.

In this context, Decolonial Theory, which is critical of traditional Epistemology, brings evidences to a turn in comparative studies, mainly in educational reforms, allowing a look at the differences and singularities of each context. This allows a dialogue and not only an imposition of concepts and educational theories in heterogeneous contexts, as well as a comparison that values the knowledge of different realities and not only the hierarchy based on models and statistics not applicable to all contexts.

Decolonial Theory also offers subsidies to (re)value the knowledge considered subaltern, when proposing a linear thought, a thought *from* and *to* the historically-colonized contexts. It is also worth mentioning that Decolonial Theory does not intend to deny that, in fact, in some moments, this culture could be more developed in certain aspects. However, the

criteria of this superiority are not always qualitative and its application is uncertain. Therefore, before transplanting an educational reform from one place to another, there needs to be a critical view of the contexts.

As much as Decolonial Theory does not consider only a methodological pathway as valid to knowledge, exactly because it emphasizes the particularities of each place, this theory brings contributions to the methodological field of Comparative Education. These contributions take place when using the dimensions of Coloniality of Being, Knowing, and Power as possible categories of comparative analysis, highlighting the following aspects: Authoritarianism (homogenizing practices that hinder dialogue) x Non-authoritarian practices — democratic/dialogue between practices; Europe as the center of knowledge production x questioning Eurocentrism; Neutrality of Knowledge x Plurality of types of knowledge; Hegemony of a Knowledge x Conjugation of different types of knowledge.

We suggest future studies approaching Brazilian National Curriculum Framework and the epistemological tension between local and global.

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