

CURRICULUM AND EVALUATION POLICIES AND TEACHING POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

This article revisits some of the guiding principles behind the curriculum reforms in Brazil, specially policies of equality and teaching by skills; it further explores aspects of the relationship between curriculum management and the professionalism of teachers and examines issues concerning result evaluation policies and their implications for the curriculum and school practices.

CURRICULUM • TEACHER LABOUR • TEACHER EDUCATION •
EVALUATION

BEGIN THIS TEXT with some issues arising from the wide-ranging study of teachers policies in the three levels of government, carried out by Bernardete Gatti, Marli André and myself, sponsored by UNESCO in collaboration with MEC in 2011 (GATTI, BARRETTO, ANDRÉ, 2011). I shall carry out a synthesis that will delve into aspects of the relationship between curriculum management and teaching professionalism models, to then examine issues concerning the model of evaluation of the results.

In order to do this I shall begin by touching briefly upon the major characteristics of curricular guidelines in Brazil.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN THE REFORM OF THE BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A RESUMPTION

The current basic education¹ policies are the heirs of the curriculum reforms of the 1990s. They have maintained the national curricular benchmarks and parameters for basic education and the principles upon which they are founded, and more recent curricular guidelines have largely taken them for references. As with the educational reforms carried out in the 1980s and 1990s in several northern hemisphere and Latin American countries, the concept of the curriculum adopted by the Brazilian educational system has come to understand basic education as a continuum governed by the same educational principles.

Keeping pace with changes in the new world order, curriculum guidelines help promote the U-turn in educational policies that enables a change in the axis from policies for equality that are intended for everyone

1 E.N. Basic education in Brazil includes, since de National Constitution of 1988, early childhood education, primary and secondary education (from zero to 17 years old)

indiscriminately – characteristic of the periods of expansion in education systems and universal access within compulsory schooling, to equity policies which attend specific groups. Although the curriculum is made up of areas of specific subject knowledge, it is guided by the interdisciplinary and cross-cutting nature of knowledge and by the need to contextualize it, by the notion of skill or competence, and by an emphasis on diversity.

Acknowledging that there are burning issues in society about which there is no systematized organization of knowledge, such as in traditional school subjects, but which the curriculum cannot ignore, cross-cutting issues are also introduced into it. And thus, in the national context, a space is created within the education systems to address matters such as cultural diversity, gender and sexuality, and the environment, which leads to studies being carried out, and materials being produced for use in basic education about these matters, and to the promotion of teacher training courses.

In both terms of President Luis Inácio ‘Lula’ da Silva administration (2003-2010) National Curriculum Guidelines were maintained, but new emphases and meanings were attributed to them.

The right to education, advocated in past decades basically in its civil, political and social dimensions, was reaffirmed in its broadest dimension, encompassing all the others: as an universal human right. As an inalienable human right, and its major pillar, education was qualified by an adjective. This right began to be understood as quality education. And quality education was everyone’s prerogative. The social quality of education, which should be its result, was impregnated by society’s demands for greater democracy, for a participation in the several decision-making agencies of public and private life, for inclusion, and for the overthrow of inequalities and injustices.

The right to education as a human right imposes itself as a right to difference also. Attention to differences became a core element in the education agenda and classic class inequalities were placed on an equal footing with a whole array of other differences, with none standing out as having greater priority over others in the demand for recognition. The emphasis within curriculum policies, formerly governed by equality of opportunity, increasingly fell upon guaranteeing conditions of access to social and cultural events for segments of the population with limited opportunities.

CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONALISM IN TEACHING: IMPLICATIONS

POLICIES OF THE PLURIANNUAL LEARNING CYCLES

Looking back longer-term over educational policies one can see that certain states and municipalities, which were responsible for maintaining basic education schools, began to adopt policies that were

more explicitly involved with the agenda of the right to education some decades earlier, albeit worded differently from current policies.

When the Rule of Law was re-established in Brazil in the mid-1980s, policies of pluriannual learning cycles spread throughout the country. Although there are significant differences as a result of the socio-political contexts in which the policies were created and introduced, the several government initiatives that introduced learning cycles shared several assumptions. The statement of the right of all to education, sometimes expressed in the slogan “every child is able to learn”, does not directly affect curriculum guidelines. It is reflected in the curriculum by a focus on the organization of the school. Learning times and spaces are made flexible in order to overcome the artificial fragmentation of the learning process caused by repetition and to ensure that all social segments are enabled to learn and to stay in school for longer periods in their school career, while actually learning. As a condition for the actualization of the proposal of teaching in pluriannual learning cycles, the assumption is that the teachers will be involved, and collective work to implement it is demanded. The results expected are: an improvement in the quality of learning; fewer students failing to pass to the following grade; and a lower dropout rate.

Claude Lessard (2010), analyzing how education and curriculum policies are regulated in French-speaking Canada – which also introduced pluriannual learning cycles in primary school in the same period of time – points out similar characteristics regarding management of the teaching work, likewise intended to enhance the quality of teaching and addressing the need to ensure significant learning for all students. The curriculum contents are imprecise, multi-referenced, and the recommendation is that its approach should be diversified, organized through projects, or preferably in interdisciplinary way, so as to come closer to students’ cultural and learning conditions.

In some Brazilian education systems the managing agencies have even gone so far as to question the legitimacy of any form of curriculum systematization. Teachers have been given a large measure of freedom to organize the pedagogical work, both with regard to the choice of content and to the approaches adopted. They are given merely generic guidance, since the expectation is that the curriculum will be reinvented through the collective work of teachers, which should take place in the context of constant dialog with the school community. Student assessment has to do with learning processes but attention is also given to the conditions in which the school delivers teaching.

Studies of learning cycle policies in Brazil show that, according to the teachers themselves, the infrastructure and support that should accompany learning cycle proposals have never provided the necessary support for the work they are supposed to carry out. Behind the discomfort

caused by the ban on holding students back in the cycle, one feels that what no one actually knows is how to make students who were formerly kept within the school gates and who were able to escape only after multiple repeats now begin to learn. What is clear is that the emperor has no clothes: no pedagogy can satisfactorily meet the new demands for schooling, for more democratic access to knowledge, and for inclusion processes (BARRETTO, MITRULIS, 2001; BARRETTO, SOUSA, 2005).

Lessard points out the relationship between these challenges and the appearance, in the 1980s and 1990s, of teacher training proposals referring to teachers knowledge, to teachers knowledge derived from experience, and to the insistence upon a teacher who reflects on his own practice and researches into it.² Simultaneously, formulations such as those of Perrenoud (1999) – who was also the mentor of pluriannual learning cycles in Geneva – seek to establish a strong connection between teacher training and the development of competencies. Common to both proposals is constant reference to contextualized knowledge.

The discourse of a certain type of teacher – the one who examines and reexamines his own teaching – has spread widely throughout Brazil and is endorsed by Brazilian scholars, some of whom also have begun to talk up the need to encourage teacher research about teaching.

The reason why teachers are urged to reflect and research into their own practice is precisely because the practice poses problems for which answers are not given, which leads curriculum policies to activate the knowledge derived from experience, and the contextualized knowledge, as Lessard (2010) proposes. The model is founded upon professionalism in teaching, in other words, on the set of competencies acquired through training and through experience by a professional, which are socially acknowledged as characteristic of a given profession (ALTET, PAQUAY, PERRENOUD, 2003). Change in teaching representations and practices, in other words in the school's culture, is closely linked to the process that allows a teacher's identity to blossom. There is also a demand for solidary work to meet the profession's new challenges. It is not a task that a teacher can cope with alone. The processes of continuous training for the implementation of the curriculum become a demand that stems naturally from this concept of professional operations.

Lessard, however, draws attention to the utopian nature of the model and to its weaknesses, although it brings together a set of principles historically advocated by educators. It has little capacity to institutionalize the changes, and its strategies are fragile and random, which results in many interesting experiments being lost. As studies in Brazil also point out, these are policies that basically place the responsibility for improvements in the quality of education firmly on the shoulders of teachers. The counterpart to the autonomy

² Those of Shulman, (1987), Gauthier et al. (1998), Tardif, Lessard and Lahaye (1991) and Tardif (2003) stand out.

which is granted them is the increase in their burden of work and in responsibilities, without the proper support from education systems.

In Brazil, cycle policies have contributed a great deal to promoting a more regular flow of students in several education systems, enabling a large number of students to advance along their school trajectories. Nonetheless, although the policies cannot be blamed for the unsatisfactory learning results observed in basic education, one cannot claim either that they have been sufficient to leverage teaching quality (GOMES, 2005).

RESULTS BASED POLICIES

In the late 1990s, in a setting where the main challenge was to improve education quality, the formulation of curricula parameters nationwide led, in turn, to the creation of a process of increasing centralization of control over the curriculum. As well as ensuring that no fewer than 162 million textbooks,³ distributed to all public education system in the country by the National Textbook Plan (*Plano Nacional do Livro Didático*), are aligned with the prescriptions of the national curriculum, their broader guidelines have also, to a greater or lesser extent, been referenced in teacher training processes, both initial training and in-service training.

However, as many studies have pointed out, it is external evaluations, particularly standardized student performance assessments that are the preferred instrument for incorporating the working logic of public systems that have been translated within a management model for regulation of public education policies, the hegemonic model today. In Brazil these models have gradually been incorporated, not without conflict concerning the purposes of education and forms of management of education systems by different social forces, including those that support government proposals.

In 1990, and therefore long before national curriculum benchmarks had been formulated, the Ministry of Education set up the Basic Education Assessments System [*Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica – SAEB*], which measures the performance of primary and secondary students through a curriculum benchmark matrix based on teaching by skills, and this came to be referenced in national curriculum parameters, once they had been instituted. In the same decade, the Ministry created the National Secondary Education Exam [*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio – ENEM*] and the National Examination of Courses [*Exame Nacional de Cursos – ENADE*] for higher education. Some states also set up their own assessment systems working under a logic similar to that of SAEB at the time.

In the early twenty-first century, National Curriculum Guidelines (PCNs to use the acronym in Portuguese) spread widely as a general guideline translated by school systems through their own curriculum reinterpretations.⁴ System assessments, seeking to provide input for

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Available at: <<http://undime.org.br/livros-didaticos-reserva-tecnica-e-conservacao-garantem-obras-para-escolas>>.

Retrieved on: 13 June, 2012.
We are therefore talking about one of the largest volumes of publications in the world!

education systems in order to enhance education quality, take on more of a compensatory than a competitive connotation. Data collected about students' performance is used above all to feed back into decisions to be made about teachers' in service training processes.

Sousa and Oliveira (2010), investigating the use of assessment results within the education systems of those states that set up systems similar to SAEB between 2005 and 2007, conclude that such use is still incipient, although they did identify some initiatives seeking to turn the use of data into management instruments.

However, in the second half of the last decade, Brazil's national assessment policy was significantly extended. Apart from the sampled assessment of the SAEB, encompassing students from Brazil's state, municipal and private schools, the *Prova Brasil* was brought in by the Ministry of Education in 2005, and is a census-based assessment to which state and municipal systems sign up voluntarily. It enables a school's results to be situated in relation to its own education systems and to the national average.

In 2007 the Federal Government created the Basic Education Development Index [*Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica – IDEB*], which combines students' performance data with the school's demonstrated capacity to keep its students studying with good results. Performance goals are established and a deadline laid down (2021) by which students in Brazilian schools must reach similar performance standards to those of developed nations. At the same time as schools' learning results are expected to rise on the measurement scales, schools are pressured to make sure that attention is given to students with less likelihood of school success so that their right to learn can be ensured.

Explicit features of equity policies can be identified in this formulation, such as the guidance that in unequal societies all must be served, with the most needy being offered more, a principle that is advocated by Rawls and that does not deprive anyone of being deemed eligible for social cooperation (in RIBEIRO, 2012). In the field of education, and within this perspective, Dubet (2008) sees a fair school in contemporary societies as being one able to guarantee that all who enter it receive the goods and resources of schooling that will ensure them of "baseline equality". Or, as Crahay (2000) argues, one that assures all of an "equality of acquired knowledge". The main components of the concept of equality of acquired knowledge are: focus on learning, respect for students' learning time and the correction of school inequalities, which presupposes the need to recognize differences in order to address them appropriately (in RIBEIRO, 2012).

Within the terms in which education development indicators are proposed, schools and education systems undergo greater pressure to present results based on the standardized measurements of performance. These measurements reinforce numerical indicators, leading to

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Opinion CNE/CEB n.6 (published 10/01/2001), and Opinion CNE/CEB n. 11 (published 7/11/2010), which brought in National Curriculum Guidelines for nine-year compulsory education, ratify the interpretation that the diversified part of the curriculum, mentioned by Law n° 9394/1996, the National Education Guidelines Act (*Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*), is particularly understood as currently being the whole range of readings of the shared portion of the curriculum that education systems and schools are allowed to carry out (through their pedagogical project), within the federative regime.

progression guided by quantitative goals determining the attainment of a given standard of quality which, however, is not clearly defined. Improvement in education quality thus tends ultimately to be translated in equating it with the ability to achieve a good result in IDEB scoring.

The weight of student performance indicators in basic education policies leads to intensified use of standardized assessment in school systems management, often induced by the central sphere. The study that this paper refers to (GATTI, BARRETTO, ANDRÉ, 2011) and the study conducted in 2010 by Brooke and Cunha (2011) of policies for accountability in Brazilian public systems suggest strongly that much more substantive changes than in previous years are under way in state and municipal education systems concerning curriculum management and teaching policies and practices. Brooke and Cunha draw attention to the fact that the creation in certain states (and also in a few municipalities) of evaluation systems leads these systems to undertake an effort to build their own common curricular base so as to enable dialog between teachers and what is expected of schools. These initiatives are driven by the disappointment of management bodies with the lack of impact on improved student performance, either by devolution of assessment results to schools or by in service training.

By making evaluation devices and instruments so central, policies geared to improving the quality of teaching have by and large adopted hierarchical processes of curriculum management where external specialists and/or systems' own specialists are entrusted with "unifying" or "homogenizing" the curricula contents with which schools work so as to enable planning of educational actions and the monitoring of their execution by means of standardized assessment. Brooke and Cunha (2011) argue that when this process involves the participation of teachers it facilitates consensus as to the content to be taught and enables greater teacher adherence to the curriculum implementation process. They also affirm, however, that gradual introduction of the curriculum is a slow process and that lack of mastery of the content speaks to problems in initial teacher training.

What seems to be becoming ever more frequent in school systems is a prescription of what should be taught, and how and when it should be taught, as well as how it should be evaluated, leading teachers to conform with working rules, restricting their autonomy towards school contents and establishing control over their practices. All too often prescription of what should be taught, or of what a student is expected to learn, tends to restrict itself to an evaluation matrix that eventually takes the place of the curriculum.

Pressure to improve educational indicators has also favored proliferation of booklet-based teaching systems. These systems offer contents, approaches and assessment modalities geared toward different

subjects and school grades, and an increasing number of education systems have purchased them, leading some managers to relinquish the pedagogical direction of their schools (ADRIÃO, PERONI, 2009). Teacher training is geared exclusively toward the use of teaching materials and resources that are available and ultimately seen as independent of teachers' proficiency.

However, little is known of the effective use of this material by teachers or of the way in which they reconstruct their teaching practice when receiving such guidance. Although in some schools that have adopted these systems there have been good results obtained in student performance indicators, there is no controlled evidence of the effects of booklet-based curricula on a larger scale.

However, the model in which the "best practices" frequently found in so-called effective schools are generated, seeks to highlight the positive aspects of a curriculum management style spreading rapidly throughout school systems, as Ribeiro's study (2012) shows. Effective schools are precisely those obtaining good IDEB scores, with low levels of truancy and dropout rates, in other words, those welcoming all students and managing to enable even those students most refractory to school culture to obtain success in learning.

These schools enjoy the active involvement of a range of educational actors and generally introduce a common curricular program whose content is made use of in service teacher training processes, which helps teachers overcome problems detected by student assessment results and provides underpinning for types of approach.

What is expected is that best practices should spread widely among teaching systems, leading to a reproduction of the reported experiences. It is known, however, that these practices depend strongly upon context variables such as the institutional track record of the schools or system; therefore they are not reproduced on a large scale nor are they easily replicated.

On this matter, the study by Érnica and Batista (2012) of education in highly vulnerable territories makes the importance of some context variables evident. Their research shows that in contexts of greater inequality and school segregation such as in densely populated and highly urbanized metropolis, the success of a few schools is closely linked to the precariousness of working and teaching conditions in a larger number of other schools in the region. Schools that receive students deemed "undesirable" by the better schools end up internalizing the social dynamics of the surrounding area and are unable to guarantee a school environment that is propitious for teaching and learning. They generally suffer from a high turnover of the teaching staff, a lack of direction, and a condition of anomie. It is therefore necessary to replace the competitive logic that leads to competition among schools to achieve the best results aligned with current measurement systems by more collaborative policies that help

enhance teaching conditions in all schools, given that competition does not lead to improved performance by the entire set of students. Rather, it favors increased inequality and a deficit in the acquisition of schooling.

The radical change occurring in curriculum policies over the last decade has led to the reification of the role of evaluation as a promoter of teaching quality, subsuming underlying questions of quality and the meaning of education of children and adolescents, and its ability to address school and social inequalities, and has narrowed the scope of the curriculum.

Concern for the intentionality of educational actions has been replaced by the priority given to resource management – both human (teachers, pedagogical advisers, school principals, supervisors) and organizational (didactical times, spaces and materials) – geared to the “success” of schools. And if the results of assessment are not satisfactory, what appears on the agenda is not a discussion of pedagogy or its sociocultural overlappings, but the performance of new assessment, leading to increases in the quantity of tests to which students are subjected in school systems.

As Correia (2010) writes in relation to Portugal, sanctions and prizes may also exist, insofar as evaluation devices concern themselves increasingly with the professional qualification of educational agents as a function of student performance, and are based on individual accountability for results and competition between schools.

Teacher training is defended within institutional discourse as part of a continuous process of the construction of qualified practice leading to the affirmation of identity and teacher professionalization. Although it must be agreed that markedly directive guidelines toward pedagogical practice and the obsession for a certain type of result tend to create a weak sense of professional identity. The accent of learning policies may play a positive role by leading to a review of educational proposals in schools, and come closer to the demands of students that must be met by teaching activities. But it is a thin line separating these policies from a pragmatism that ignores links to theoretical knowledge and pedagogical mediation and the broader purposes of education.

Over-standardized curricula, strict control of teaching practices, a certain voluntary action embedded in teachers’ involvement with schools’ proposals and endless evaluations: is this the pedagogy that will be able to assure scholastic progress of large contingents of Brazilian students who only recently have had a longer educational trajectory?

Brooke and Cunha (2011), discussing relations between evaluation and management policies, point to the fragility of external assessment as a pedagogical instrument and to the difficulty of making more productive use of the results of evaluation since most often it is not anchored in systematized curricular proposals enjoying widespread consensus among teachers.

That is why there must be more clearly formulated curricula that can offer a clearer guiding light for their practices without restricting teachers’ initiatives.

LEARNING EXPECTATIONS AND SKILL-BASED TEACHING: TWO INTERDICTIONS

The setting-up of performance goals and their strong power of instigation has triggered pressures from the several education systems to establish learning expectations at a national level, in order to more directly guide the curriculum-related work of schools. The task of formulating learning expectations for primary and secondary education, entrusted to MEC by the National Education Council at the end of 2010 (BRASIL, 2010), has, however, come up against two interdictions.

First interdiction: learning expectations, from a semantic point of view, refer to teaching goals, since intentionality is one of the attributes that cannot be dissociated from educational action. Since teaching goals have been associated, in the field of education, with teaching by objectives and to a more technical tradition, mention of the mere name has been avoided.

There is no consensus on this type of curriculum orientation, either within the central sphere of government or among school subject teaching specialists. The latter have avoided involvement in these tasks. Nor can one count on empirical evidence as to what the school population knows or fails to know in different areas of the curriculum, apart from historical sequences about learning in Portuguese language and in mathematics, measured through system assessments, as well as certain inroads that have been made into student performance in the teaching of Sciences.

Subjects in the school curriculum are not a mere impoverished reproduction of subjects in the benchmark areas. They are cultural constructions produced by the school systems themselves for formative purposes, the goals of which are very distant from the goals of the reference sciences. Their role is eminently a socializing one (CHERVEL, 1990).

Nonetheless, with regard to the field of reference sciences to which the school disciplines reports, one must remember that it grew and multiplied enormously in the twentieth century. Historiography – to give but one example – mentions social, cultural history, the history of thought, themed history and a range of other approaches as the Braudelian one, which incorporates the contribution from several sciences. The same applies to other fields of knowledge.

This means that there are many choices taken concerning theoretical lines followed in the curriculum of school subjects. These are wagers that, despite the relative consensus they enjoy because they have been included in the prescribed curriculum, are naturally open to questioning, and are hardly accompanied by studies providing evidence as to how these approaches are apprehended by the students.

Something is known – albeit not enough – about the use made by teachers of materials and curricula guidance they receive. The study we carried out for UNESCO (GATTI, BARRETTO, ANDRÉ, 2011), for example, turned up some signs that teachers' uses of structured teaching proposals acquired by school systems can be very wide-ranging. There are several studies concerning the use of textbooks, but more accurate indications are lacking as to teaching practice submitted to current detailed guidance contained in curricula.

One must therefore recognize that we have but sketchy knowledge of the curriculum actually put into practice in basic education. This being the case, although society is strongly mobilized with regard to learning expectations year-on-year, within the argument that the definition of expectations can help organize the teacher's work and lead to the attainment of better results, I believe that establishing an annual periodicity of what one expects the entire school population throughout Brazil to learn may cause an unimaginable contingent of students to require additional attention, and this has never been suitably solved by schools. There are generic indications, in the National Curriculum Guidelines, of expectations in learning at the end of two-year learning cycles on primary education. Several curricular proposal in the states use to mark out the school grades were certain contents should concentrate, but maintain a line of continuity for addressing this in other grades.

For that reason decentralized initiatives by certain states and certain municipalities, to formulate curricular proposals will very likely come closer to the concrete actual situation of the region, the schools and the students. Although the municipal education systems created after 1988 are autonomous, there are some states that have worked to connect the educational policies of the public education systems in their territory (from the state and the municipalities), especially with regard to teacher training, which may encompass the effort to formulate a common curricular proposal, enhancing the incipient management capacity of many municipalities in curriculum matter.

However, it is known that this process does not extend to all state systems and will affect very few municipal schools, so that formulating a basic common curriculum with more accurate guidance for schools at a national level remains on the agenda as a demand.

Second interdiction: the learning carried out by subjects is equated in terms of skills to be demonstrated by them under assessment processes.

The concept of competence is polysemous and controversial and its transposition to the curriculum has aroused countless criticism from many scholars, both in Brazil and abroad. These critiques rely mainly on aspects that allies the logic of the competence to the instrumental character of teaching; to a utilitarian view of the curriculum aimed predominantly to

the know-how which best fit the interests of the business world. Crahay (2006) states that the notion of skill engendered by companies has been taken up by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which spread it among managers of the education system; it has been also disseminated by professional training sectors and subsequently by general teacher training sectors, eventually being absorbed by education sciences.

Concerning skills-based teaching, the proposal is that it should not restrict itself to mere reproduction of literate knowledge, rather it should lead the student to mobilize as large a range of cognitive resources as possible so as adequately to respond to a new situation, taking the context into consideration.

Understood in this way, the notion of skill, as Crahay (2006) says, may seduce certain educators in so far as it seems to provide an answer to the issue of the transfer of learning, since the proposal that the school should provide students with the acquisition of important intellectual instruments for social, professional and private life has not been suitably actualized. Skills-based teaching therefore intends to fill the void between knowledge acquired at school, by means of which students do well in exams, and knowledge mobilized by action, constructed through a range of types of learning, often among peers, and employed effectively to make daily occurrences meaningful, although the latter type of knowledge has less explanatory scope than the former.

Initially coupled to a behaviorist approach, the notion of skill evolves into more elaborate formulations, inspired by constructivism, placing the subject at the center of the learning process so as to boost his growing autonomy, and emphasizing not only knowing how to, but also cognitive, intellectual and attitudinal aspects, and these formulations are expressed in professional decision-making and problem-solving in a wide range of settings (DONOSO, CORVALÁN, 2012). Perrenoud (1999) – the skills-based teaching author most widely cited in Brazil – states that the idea of skill demands high-level mental operations by requiring mobilization of knowledge, methods, information and rules to face a situation. Rey (in CRAHAY, 2006) mentions skills at three levels of complexity: Basic skills which enable an operation to be carried out in response to a command (at school, responding to a known question or situation without inherent difficulty); Second-degree skills which mean mobilizing a set of basic procedures and knowledge to respond to a new situation; and Third-degree skills, which demand correctly choosing and matching several basic skills to approach a new, complex situation.

Nonetheless, as Crahay (2006) remarks, the notion of skill has a fragile theoretical statute since one cannot conceive of the problematics of training using a term that serves to designate all aspects referring to

higher psychological functions, but that simultaneously annuls the set of epistemological options that refer to the status of these functions and their determinants.

Probably for this reason Brazilian teachers find it difficult to work with skills-based teaching. The theoretical references they possess for teaching originate basically in reference sciences in which they were trained; the rest is usually contingent, random, uncertain. It is in fact the evaluators who make broad use of the notion of skill.

As Crahay (2006) argues, teaching used to presuppose that mastery of knowledge was necessary and sufficient; today it is recognized that knowledge is necessary for subjects' cognitive development, but is not sufficient. However, its importance cannot be overlooked. Skills-based teaching suggests that the past be made a *tabula rasa* and knowledge be pushed into a non important role.

Evoking Piaget, the author goes on to say that contextualization of knowledge is one stage of the process of cognitive construction; however, the second stage is its decontextualization. It is therefore essential to plan the contextualization and the decontextualization of knowledge, in other words, its generalization in the teaching process. This is one of the reasons why Crahay invites us to abandon the defense of skills and rehabilitate the notion of the conceptual fields, by means of which subject-specific knowledge is restored.

However, the author admits that schools cannot stop there. The instrumental nature privileged by an overly economics-driven ideology accounts for an important dimension of life in society, however, it cannot be allowed a monopoly of school-based education, because it fails dismally to manage to constitute the subject, the first purpose of education. For this to occur there must be a space for self-determination in society and a time that allows the subject to locate himself in history so is better to position himself in the contemporary world, as Touraine advocates.

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