Recontextualizing Information and Communication Technologies: The Discourse of Educational Policies in Brazil (1995-2007)

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Abstract

This paper examines how Information and Communication Technologies (henceforth ICT) have been recontextualized in Brazilian educational policies, between 1995 and 2007, from a discourse analytical perspective, focusing on the dialectic relations between structures and strategies, especially as far as teacher education is concerned. It is divided into four sections. The first one is an attempt to summarize concepts and relations involved. The second one deals with the architecture of so-called "emergent new order", by means of key words in the World Bank's discourse. The third section comprehends the recontextualization of the previous discourse in the policies developed by the Brazilian Ministry of Education. Finally, the fourth analyzes the consequences of technological determinism and substitution in competency based educational projects.

INTRODUCTION

In so far as the concepts mentioned in the title may be inscribed in different frameworks, I shall begin by defining the target relations and how they will be approached: discourse and history, texts and contexts, structures and strategies, policies and struggles for hegemony.

First of all, it is important to avoid idealist conceptions of language in contemporary social science. Quoting McNally (1995:1):

> We are witnessing today a new idealism, infecting large sections of the intellectual left, which has turned language not merely into an independent realm, but into an all-pervasive force, so omnipresent, so dominant, as virtually

> to extinguish human agency. Everything is discourse, you see; and discourse is everything. Because human beings are linguistic creatures, because the world in which we act is a world we know and describe through language, it allegedly follows that there is nothing outside language.

This paper assumes that 'we may textually construe (represent, imagine etc) the social world in particular ways, but whether our representations or construals have the effect of changing its construction depends upon various contextual factors' (Fairclough, 2003a:4).

In other words, there are conditions of possibility (both discursive and non-discursive) for the performativity of a text, understood as the 'power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001), as in 'the new planetary vulgate':

> a strange Newspeak. Its vocabulary, which seems to have sprung out of nowhere, is now on everyone's lips [...] intend to remake the world by sweeping away the social and economic conquests of a century of social struggles, henceforth depicted as so many archaisms and obstacles to the emergent new order (2-4).

This reference to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is noteworthy, since it implies (although the authors seem not to take it into account) there are conditions of possibility for, as well as constraints upon, the dialectics of discourse. That is the very reason why Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approaches the dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social practices (Fairclough, 1995, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2006).

Back to McNally's quotation, it is important to recognize that although human agency cannot be extinguished, systematic omission of agencies and agents in discursive practices is an outstanding feature in legitimating what is conveyed by words 'sprung out of nowhere', now 'on everyone's lips'. The same goes for old words and expressions to which new meanings are attached, as they are employed in various contexts, inscribed in specific frameworks, in quite different conditions of production.

In this paper, ideology stands for hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971) meaning in the dialectics between discourse and social change. Its basic assumption is that meaning is produced on specific concrete conditions, both historical and situational. Therefore, words and expressions may be attached to different meanings, depending on who

'says' so, to whom, where and in what circumstances. Although there are reasonably stable and abstract meanings to be looked up in dictionaries, meaning is conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved. As language practices imply hierarchy, domination and resistance, Volosinov (1986:23) concludes that 'sign becomes an arena of the class struggle'.

On the other hand, lexical choices are just one dimension of the complex process of meaning production and legitimation. 'Discourses are more than vocabularies – they also differ in grammatical features' (Fairclough, 2006:4). Syntactic and pragmatic aspects are essential to any textual analysis which intends to grasp intertextual relations: the construction of new discourses through the articulation of elements of existing ones. Besides that, meaning production cannot be reduced to written or spoken language. It involves other semiotic materials, such as visual images, which are more than mere illustrations or 'translations'. They are articulated, basically by convergence or divergence (Barreto, 2002:26), and they re-articulate social elements. Thus, this paper refers to texts in an extended sense. Based on the assumption that language is 'a material form of ideology' (Fairclough, 1995:73), different semiotic materials will be dealt with so as to grasp the dialectics of discourse and social change.

Given historical possibilities and depending on perspectives assumed (i.e. conditions of production of reading), texts can be read differently. Diverse interpretations are to be expected. Nonetheless, one of them tends to be considered 'more acceptable' than others and, as such, regarded as the correct one. In other words, hegemonic meaning is neither a hidden one to be unveiled, nor something missing and waiting for completion, but a sort of excess or 'over-completion'. As a result, the first analytical task is identifying what is assumed, presupposed or simply taken for granted in the empirical objects (texts) produced by discourse(s).

As stated by Fairclough (2005:2),

> momentous changes in contemporary social life are partly changes in discourse, but not just changes in discourse. It is just as important to avoid a reduction of social change to discourse as it is to recognize discourse as an element or dialectical 'moment' of social change'.

He also draws attention to 'the opaque and complex relationship between changes in discourse, which may be rhetorically motivated and real social change, which is in part change in discourse'.

In the above mentioned text, the author distinguishes four elements or 'moments' within the dialectics of discourse: emergence, hegemony, recontextualization and operationalization. Emergence is related to 'translation' of complex realities into discourses, expressed by the construction of new discourses through the articulation of elements of existing discourses. Hegemony involves relations of contestation between discourses, as part of relations of contestation between strategies and between groups of social agents, which may lead to particular discourses (and strategies) hegemonic status. Recontextualization comprehends the dissemination of discourses across structural and scalar boundaries. In the first case, the movement is from one social field to another: as from business to education. In the second, it may be from 'global' organizations to nation-states. Finally, operationalization corresponds to 'the enactment of discourses as new ways of (inter)acting, their inculcation as new ways of being, or identities, their materialization in features of the physical world'.

Recontextualization is the key concept in this paper. It is not just a matter of spread or flow, but 'a complex phenomenon, involving not a simple colonization, but also an active process of appropriation whose character and outcomes depend upon diverse circumstances in diverse contexts" (Fairclough, 2006:101). The dissemination of discourses on ICT across structural and scalar boundaries is to be dealt with. As for the former, ICT, as indicated by the very name, have been produced in different contexts (social relations) and for various purposes (not primarily educational). As for the latter, discourses on ICT have been recontextualized in the ones of 'globalization', 'knowledge-based economy' and especially in the emergent connection between them.

ICT are central to so-called 'new order' both ideologically and materially. They are associated to a sort of *Brave New World*, in which technologies are meant to solve any problems. In hegemonic discourses, they tend to be regarded as the only way out. They are also part of ongoing liberalization of trade in services and other strategies of '*hijacking* globalization in the service of particular national and corporate interests' (Fairclough, 2006:7-8) (italics in the original).

Since educational policies are intentionally part of a political process itself and of its legitimation, empirical evidence will consist of texts produced by two main agencies: the World Bank (WB) and the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC). Although the latter cannot be regarded as mere 'translation' of the former, constraints such as 'governance-related conditionalities' imposed by international financial agencies on developing countries do exist and must be taken into account in any intertextual analysis.

In order to grasp the ways how ICT are recontextualized, WB's texts on Higher (Tertiary) Education will be the main focus:

- 'Higher Education: the Lessons of Experience' (1994);
- 'Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise' (2000);
- 'Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education' (2002);
- 'Lifelong Learning in the Global Knowledge Economy: Challenges for Developing Countries' (2003).

It is also worth underlining a sort of hybrid position held by WB in relation to these texts. On the one hand, they are presented as 'key publications'. On the other, they contain introductory notes regarding responsibility for findings, interpretations, and conclusions: they are the authors', except for the one convened by WB and UNESCO (2000).

As for MEC's publications, the ones related to ICT in teachers' education reform will be approached:

- Secretariat of Distance Education's (SEED) presentation in English;
- Brazilian Open University's (UAB) homepage, one of SEED's links.

All these texts are available on the internet. As the last one on the list is written in Portuguese, except for a summary included in the first, it will be referred to instead of quoted and its visual images will be stressed. All quotations will be italicized so as to make it easier for readers to identify the voices of national and international government agencies in this paper.

ON '*THE EMERGENT NEW ORDER*': revolution, technologies, market, and gap

> Globalization and rapid technological change have made knowledge a critical determinant of competitiveness in the world economy. The World Bank is playing an important role in assisting countries in taking advantage of the opportunities in information and communications technologies (ICTs) to contribute to education goals and poverty reduction strategies. With globalization, the information revolution, and increasing demands for a highly skilled work force, it is clear that nations must accord high priority to building the capacity to effectively utilize technology in education.

This opening quotation, from WB's site 'ICT and education'[i], illustrates two nodal points: (1) the role ICT are supposed to play in the emerging connection between the discourse of 'globalization' and the one of 'knowledge-based economy'; and (2) the discursive strategies used to make a contingent set of policy choices appear to be a matter of inexorable and irreversible world change.

In this context, 'emergence' as a noun, as well as its gerund form ('emerging'), stands for processes without agents, as if they were not produced, as if they have simply occurred everywhere ('sprung out of nowhere'). Agency, time and space play an outstanding role in this construction. As stated by Fairclough (2003b:6-7):

> Global space is represented as an entity [...] the simple present is 'timeless present', representing an indeterminate stretch of time which includes but pre-dates and post-dates the present. [...] The modality of representations of the processes and relations of the global spacetime is epistemic and categorically assertive: positive statements without modal markers which represent processes as real and actual. [...] The actors in the material processes are non-human, inanimate ('new technologies', 'new markets') or nominalized ('change'), and the actor in the verbal process is 'this new world'. The global space-time is represented as processes without human agency.

Taking WB's publications (1994, 2000, 2002, 2003), it is possible to identify an increasing number of emergences converging to a single direction:

- 1994 – neo-liberalism – 'market economy'
- 2000- globalization – 'global market'
- 2002- knowledge-based economy – 'global information market'
- 2003- 'participation in civil society as knowledge economy competency'

'Higher Education: the Lessons of Experience' (1994) is centered on *'policies and practices that hold the most promise of success in the effort to reduce poverty in the developing world'*. While *'higher education in crisis'* is said to be the main concern, another hint to reform is represented by the photograph of the cover, showing *'a trainee technician'* in Dakar, Senegal. If one questions the relationship between this lonely trainee attentively following written instructions and higher education, an answer can be found in: *'Distance education and open learning programs can be effective in increasing access, at modest cost, for underprivileged groups'* (33).

The document also emphasizes the need to remove obstacles as *'strong students activism and weak governments'* to the *'critically needed reform'* (25), to the development of non-university institutions, private financing, and so on, aiming at *'the types of skilled labor demanded in a market economy'* (31).

While the title is referred to past ('experience'), the *'lessons'* convey a promise of success: short-cycle flexible courses on demand and so on. What is at stake is not long term future, as in the following quotation:

> Unless reforms are implemented to improve the performance of higher education, many countries are destined to enter the twenty-first century insufficiently prepared to compete in the global economy, where growth will be based ever more heavily on technical and scientific knowledge (25).

In any attempt to analyze this discourse, three of its assumptions must be pointed out: (1) higher education for *'underprivileged groups'* must be replaced by low cost training; (2) all countries, including *'underprivileged'* ones, are to compete in the global market; and (3) in case some countries are not able to do so, it will be their fault.

'Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise' (2000) was produced by the 'Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries', convened by WB and UNESCO, so as to deepen the previous 'lessons': *'united in the belief that urgent action to expand the quantity and improve the quality of higher education in developing countries should be a top development priority'* (13).

'Belief' is assumed and there seems to be no doubt about what, when, where and how *'solution'* (the word is repeated five times) is to be applied to *'longstanding problems*

and new realities' pointed out in its first chapter: '*expansion*' is stressed as '*a result of the tremendous increase in the number of students'* and '*differentiation*' stands for privatization, referring to '*a process whereby new types of institutions are born and new providers enter the sector*' (19). Both are credited uniquely to so-called '*knowledge revolution*'. What is assumed, presupposed and simply taken for granted is: '*a revolution has occurred in people's ability to access knowledge quickly and from increasingly distant locations'* (35).

'*The new realities facing higher education'* (61) seem to indicate future has come and it is meant to become a sort of everlasting present. *New realities*, mentioned in thirteen instances, are described as '*economic and political'* (92), as well as '*harsh and unforgiving*' (96). They are represented by what is 'emerging': '*the international community at last*' (10); '*globalized world'* (15); '*world economy'* (93); '*knowledge economy*' (42); '*rapidly emerging global knowledge system'* (34); '*new higher education institutions*' (32); and adoption of '*best practices from the industrialized world*' (79).

On the other hand, whatever is emerging is not powerful enough to change the 'old order'. When it comes to '*new knowledge*' (38), the Task Force's discourse implies there is a gap not to be closed or even narrowed: '*This issue is less relevant to low- and lower middle-income countries, whose focus will be on developing the capacity to access and assimilate new knowledge'* (35).

In other words, the basic assumptions of the previous publication (1994) end up by connecting *peril* to *promise*: the one not to be fulfilled, since knowledge and technologies in '*underprivileged*' countries are to be kept within strict (local) boundaries.

'Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education' (2002) introduces an important formal shift: from higher to tertiary education. The idea was already present, but the expression was not. It is also a turn from '*promise*' to '*challenge*', since '*developing and transition countries'*, mentioned more than one hundred times, are told to take responsibility for the prescribed reform.

As the first step is overcoming opposition to reform (109):

policy seminars involving several neighboring countries, held recently in South Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Central and South America, have had a similar eye-opening effect, inducing countries to accept more easily reforms that have already been undertaken elsewhere in the region.

If everything '*is clear*' (as stated in the opening quotation of this section) and yet *eye-opening effects* are to be produced, it follows that a '*consensus-building process'* (mentioned more than twenty times) is needed: *"having already undergone a consensus-building exercise and formulated a national vision on the future of tertiary education would be a clear sign of reform readiness* (111).

'Consensus' may be attained by several means and it is supposed to be national, implying respect for strict boundaries, such as '*disciplines and fields congruent with emerging innovation opportunities in the local environment*' (132). Innovation is a key concept not only because it is mentioned fifty times but especially because it is an outstanding feature of global and local recontextualization of ICT, to be analyzed in the last section of this paper.

The document (2002) also mentions 'emerging realities' (processes) and it includes a set of emergences (results). Both are based on the '*role of knowledge as a major driver of economic development*' (3). The emphasis is on: '*the new demands that today's world markets and emerging technologies are making on higher education*' (24); '*competition from emerging private universities*' (63), '*healthy*' for the sake of '*innovation, and managerial efficiency*' (69), and an '*international market in tertiary education*' (33), summed up in '*the appearance of new providers of tertiary education in a 'borderless education environment*' (xix) and in '*the emergence of a myriad of alliances, linkages, and partnerships within tertiary institutions, across institutions, and even extending beyond the tertiary education sector*' (41).

A whole chapter is dedicated to '*confronting the old challenges: the continuing crisis of tertiary education in developing and transition countries*' (45). '*Better use of emerging technological know-how*' (13) is directly linked to '*access new distance learning products and services; facilitating the delivery of accredited programs*' (180).

In short, the very title of the document indicates there are "new societies", allegedly '*knowledge-driven*' (24), to be constructed and emphasizes the role of tertiary education in the whole construction.

The last key publication is addressedto '*developing countries*' and to '*transition economies of Europe and Central Asia*': 'Lifelong Learning in the Global Knowledge Economy: Challenges for Developing Countries' (2003). Its cover photo is quite different from the one of the lonely (black and adult) trainee attentively following written instructions (1994). It shows a group of young boys in front of a computer. There are no girls, although the text stresses '*gender inequality in access*' (14). They are not all black and it is the white one who controls the mouse. The ones closer to the computer seem to be as attentive as the lonely trainee. As for the others, it is hard to know whether they can see anything on the screen. Since readers cannot see it either, there is no way to guess what they are doing, except for: they are accessing the '*latest technology*' (18). In fact, '*access*' is pervasive in the written text (eighty-seven instances) in constructions such as: accessing '*knowledge*' (34), expanding '*access to learning opportunities*' (36): '*access to learning*' (20) and '*to access learning*' (45, 71), without any qualification or additional information, as if learning did not refer to an internal process.

As indicated in the section '*Using Technology to Transform Learning*', '*learning needs to become more flexible and diverse to allow alternative delivery mechanisms, such as distance education and e-learning, open entry and exit, flexible enrolment, modular courses, and training that is available as and when needed*' (65). In short, learning must meet delivery mechanisms and not the other way round.

The basic assumption is that, once economic and social practices in general have been '*transformed*', it is time to transform learning processes: '*the emergence of the global knowledge economy has put a premium on learning throughout the world*' (13); and '*the emergence of new providers, offering different services and in different ways, represents an opportunity for developing countries*' (55).

The '*emerging realities*' listed reinforce and extend the ones mentioned in previous publications: '*new types of institutions*' (46); participation '*in the emerging knowledge economy*' (101); '*virtual universities*' and '*new providers, such as private sector*

training, international providers, corporate universities, content brokers, and media, are also emerging to complement and challenge traditional institutions'(53); technological standards which '*facilitate compatibility and usability of e-learning products*'(54); '*the emerging modalities [to] open the possibility that a learning system driven by the needs of learners can emerge*' (55); and '*adapting human resources institutions to emerging economic and social demand and to facilitate lifelong learning for a developing knowledge economy*' (110).

As for new features, two aspects are to be stressed. The first one is a legitimizing argument: '*Europe-wide agreement on equivalences and quality assurance mechanisms is emerging (through the Bologna process)*' (xxii). The second is central to the whole formulation: '*new instruments for intercultural competence are emerging*' (22). Although the notion of competence itself and the one of competency based education (Houston 1974) are not new, their recontextualization is substantively different.

The same goes for the operationalization of ICT in distance learning strategies and programs: '*the global knowledge economy and the impact of technology on education are driving this change*' (19). '*The information revolution has expanded networks and provided new opportunities for access to information [...] Changes in ICT have revolutionized the transmission of information*' (2).

As far as all the documents are concerned, 'change' is a pervasive notion. It is always associated to ongoing social change and it is supposed to be deep enough to be represented as 'revolution'. All WB's publications refer to revolution, but the first and the last mention it just once and in a different way. The first (1994) includes the only negative reference: '*ten years of neglect of higher education during the Cultural Revolution*' (61) in China. The last (2003) just mentions revolution in the introduction quoted at the end of the previous paragraph, suggesting that it is now complete and all to be done is to proceed to the next step: spreading (globalizing) its results and effects. In between (2000 and 2002), a revolution is always announced or taken for granted. It can be referred to as information or knowledge revolution, as if they were interchangeable, for the sake of legitimating one of the main ideological constructions: '*the emerging role of knowledge as a major driver of economic development*'(2002:xix).

In order to analyze these constructions, a central assumption can be identified on the same page: changes are to be regarded as results of the '*information and communication revolution*'. As it has been already quoted, '*a revolution has occurred*' (2000:35), but it is important to emphasize it does not imply knowledge production. It is restricted to '*access*' in what Fairclough (2003b:6) describes as 'global spacetime'. Inscribed in a neo-liberal framework, technologies seem to be recontextualized only in/by markets, being ruled by entities called '*market forces*', pervasively invoked in all four documents. [ii]

At the same time there seems to be no room for human agency, directions are 'given' and must be followed: '*outcome-driven governance'* (WB, 2003:105) is stressed among many others '*market-driven needs*' (WB, 2000:36), development is said to be '*knowledge-driven*', and education should be '*competency driven*' (WB 2003:28). Market *requires*, *demands*, *creates*, and so on. The Task Force (WB, 2000) '*believes*' markets are reliable, except for: '*in many developing countries, however, markets do not function well and this leads to a serious misallocation of resources*' (36).

As stated by Fairclough (2006:46-49):

> there is a move towards a more interventional approach, which targets specific *changes in national and corporate governance, in institutions and in social policy (e.g.* social safety nets), and increasingly makes the implementation of such changes a condition for receiving development aid. [...] Government must know when to act, and when to keep out of the way.

In this neo-liberal discourse, countries are urged '*to compete in the global economy*' (WB, 1994:25). In other words, competition remains an outstanding positive value now materialized in brand new configurations '*Today, the growing competition for resources and customers in the context of a global education market is producing a much more complex interplay of forces*' (WB, 2002:84); and '*incentives to make the education system and lifelong learning more effective are strategically designed by putting the institutions under competitive pressure* [...] *education consumers have autonomy to select their providers* [...] *the system encourages institutions to find more efficient ways to offer education and training*' (WB, 2003:91-92).

Besides illustrating the absence of human agency, both quotations are based on the assumption that the role of universities have changed. They are represented as just one institution among a myriad of others in what is called educational market, not only under competitive pressure but also on unequal conditions, as new providers, the World Bank included, 'appear'. According to Fairclough (2006:49): 'Collaborative partnerships, networks and clusters of excellence with companies, all of which suggest a relationship between equals, whereas the indications are that universities are losing their autonomy and increasingly becoming subservient to business'.

Universities are urged to operate under market conditions: to compete for customers, once knowledge is viewed as a commodity to be promoted and sold. As a matter of fact, even personal characteristics and/or internal dispositions are: '*it* [tertiary education] *can encourage independence and initiative, both valuable commodities in the knowledge society*' (WB, 2000:37).

Related to the 'educational market', there are words and expressions such as: '*suppliers*', '*providers*', '*consumers of educational services*', '*commodity*', '*store*', '*delivery*', and so on in 'the commodification of the language of everyday life' (Fairclough, 1999:78). Discourse becomes open to processes of economic calculation, designed for success on markets. In this particular recontextualization, commercial vocabulary gains academic status '*in scholarly and scientific commerce with other nations*' (WB, 2000:42).

'*The increasing exchange of education as a commodity*' is also present in UNESCO's discourse related to ICT in education [iii] and in WTO's documents, as the one quoted below (2000:1-2): [iv]

> to help create conditions favorable to suppliers [...] by removing and reducing obstacles to the transmission of such services across national borders through electronic or physical means, or to the establishment and operation of facilities (schools, classrooms or offices) to provide services to students in their home country or abroad.

This global market is allegedly a '*borderless education environment*', although strict local boundaries are reinforced whenever developing countries are mentioned. The conditions under which this market operates are absolutely clear: favourable to

suppliers so as to be available to consumers. It is a definite one way operation, due to ownership of knowledge and of the means to produce it. Thus any questions on what can be purchased on such a market will lead to two main answers: '*developing countries could also benefit to a much greater extent from the second-hand, but essentially state-of-the-art, research instrumentation that can be purchased on the world market; while the equipment is currently available, many countries are not aware of it*' (WB, 2000:71); and '*supporting innovation by generating new knowledge, accessing global stores of knowledge, and adapting knowledge to local use*' (WB, 2002: xx, 4-5, 24).

In the connection between the discourses of 'knowledge based economy' and 'globalization', a technological revolution has occurred and it has brought about a new way to deal with the undeniable gaps between '*industrial and developing countries*' (WB, 2000:33), '*rich and poor*' (17) and '*North-South*' (69): by taking them all for one to be closed, be it a '*knowledge gap*' (35), a '*digital gap*' or a '*technological gap*' (WB, 2002:14). As stated on page 25, '*there are several favorable factors that can assist countries aspiring to close the gap separating them from scientifically advanced countries*'. Therefore, '*bridging the digital gap/divide*' (vi, xxi, 127, 129, 179) is a central declared project, often legitimated by security and financial arguments, as '*the real danger of a growing digital gap among and within nations*' (WB, 2002:14).

For the sake of emphasis, it is worth repeating that '*a revolution has occurred in people's ability to access knowledge quickly and from increasingly distant locations*' (WB, 2000:35). In short, '*the altered educational landscape produced by globalization and the ICT revolution*' (WB, 2002:65) raises the question of what education is for, and for whom. For developing countries, both knowledge and ICT point out to a very strict possibility: to '*access new distance learning products and services*' (WB, 2002:180).

ON ICT IN THE DISCOURSE OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN BRAZIL (1995-2007)

> While globalization, technological and demographic changes, and the growing economic importance of knowledge are making higher education reform more urgent and challenging than in the past, some of these same factors are also making such reform potentially more attainable (WB, 2000:49).

Considering education is an outstanding dimension of 'governance-related conditionalities' imposed by international financial agencies on developing countries, WB's '*key publications*' have been examined in the previous section. According to Leher (2004:3), 'it is necessary to examine the World Bank's orientations, being the world education ministry for peripheral countries'. On the other hand, having in mind 'recontextualization' is the key concept to the intended approach, it is also necessary to analyze how these conditionalities are dealt with in ongoing national reforms.

The period of time has been chosen so as to match the WB's agenda concerning higher education, involving its shift to tertiary education and two of its basic related assumptions: ICT revolution has occurred and 'new order' is knowledge-driven. Both imply dismissed research and reconfigured teaching. Research sounds as useless as expensive, the moment new knowledge is available on the '*global stores*' already mentioned and all developing countries should do is '*adapting knowledge to local use*' (WB, 2002: 24). As for teaching, new '*suppliers*' and '*providers*' are supposed to '*deliver*' knowledge, by means of ICT, to an increasing number of '*consumers of educational services*'.

It is important to add that this period comprehends two Brazilian Presidents: Fernando Henrique Cardoso (until 2001) and Lula da Silva (from 2002 on), but no distinction is to be made, since there is no remarkable shift to be underlined. In fact, besides undeniable continuities between them, it must be said that Lula has deepened the structural reforms initiated by Cardoso in many ways and sectors, including severe restrictions on social rights.

As far as WB's agenda is concerned, this paper is focused on higher (tertiary) education in its connection with ICT. As it has been already said in the introductory section, two groups of texts are central to express MEC's formulations: (1) the ones signed by the Secretariat of Distance Education (SEED) and presented in English; and (2) the ones related to Brazilian Open University (UAB), especially for the visual images they (used to) convey. [v]

Nonetheless, this intertextual approach cannot be reduced to specific texts. Other official language practices materialize strategic actions developed in Brazil. To illustrate this point, two examples are noteworthy. The first is the addition of the word

'Innovation' to the former Brazilian Ministry of Science and Technology, indicating willingness to do the homework assigned by WB, and the fact that reforms '*tailored*' (WB, 2000:97) are not addressed only to education. The second is a recommendation found in WB (1994:45): '*financial support for needy students*' and (2002:174): '*increase access to tertiary education through student loan program for qualified needy students*'. Since 2004, it has become a national program (PROUNI) involving bargains with the private sector so as to provide poor teaching for poor students (Leher 2004b).[vi] In short, Brazil has been a '*reform-minded*' (WB, 2000:66) State, but it does not mean that 'governance-related conditionalities' have been strictly obeyed. Recontextualization always implies 'translations' within specific conditions and, sometimes, as it will be discussed below, Brazil has gone further in different ways.

Taking 'access' as the key to this section, it is important to consider WB's recommendations concerning ICT as distance learning strategies in developing countries. The starting point (WB, 1994:31) is: as '*many non-university institutions offer training opportunities that respond flexibly to labor market demand*', they are capable of '*increasing access*, *at modest cost*' (33).

The central argument is that higher education in developing countries is labour-intensive, with expenditures being concentrated in the salaries of teaching staff and administrative personnel. As a high level of expenditure per student is entailed, the basic recommendation is the use of more capital-intensive educational technologies: '*in Thailand, for instance, the average ratio is 8:1 in the selective public universities, compared to 745:1 in open universities*' (33).[vii]

The approach starts with '*distance education and open learning programs*' towards '*distance learning*' (2000:49-50):

> In the past, distance learning has been seen mainly as a cost-effective means of meeting demand, with policymakers paying inadequate attention to ensuring that it provides comparable quality to traditional modes of delivery. The Task Force believes that distance education offers many exciting possibilities. Innovative curricula can be combined with interactive, Internet-based technology, traditional educational media such as television and print, written materials, and direct contact with tutors. It needs, however, to be thoroughly integrated into the wider

higher education system, subjected to appropriate accreditation and quality standards, and linked to the outside world.

'*Exciting possibilities*' are associated to '*virtual universities*' in a myriad of combinations. '*Global Development Learning Network*' (GDLN) is created '*to harness the latest technology in the fight against poverty*', '*led by the World Bank as part of its commitment to serve as a Knowledge Bank*' (2002:179). Finally, consortia are '*to develop and deliver distance education courses internationally*' (2003:64).[viii] This way, discourses on ICT are recontextualized in the connection between the ones of 'globalization' and of 'knowledge-based economy'.

As for Brazil, since 1996, ICT in education has meant national distance education programs. The *Secretariat of Distance Education* (SEED) has been created so as to coordinate the recontextualization of ICT in education. Its presentation in English is focused on two initial programs: *TV School Channel* and *National Information Technology Program on Education,* '*until today one of the principal programs of the secretariat, which has installed information technology laboratories all over the country*'. The text stresses what is said to be '*the democratization access*' ('*digital inclusion policies*') and well as its democratic construction: *meetings* and *workshops* to promote some sort of debate on changes, as recommended by WB. It also points out that '*SEED has recently been restructured by means of a Decree in 2004*', just one year after the publication of the latest key publication analyzed.

Besides the evident reduction of ICT to a single purpose (distance education - DE), the passage below conveys other echoes of WB's discourse:

> Distance education (EaD) is a modality of education which is more present in our daily life, strongly boasted by the new information and communication technology, which the potentialities point to meet the new demands of contemporary societies and particularly in Brazil, a privileged country with continental dimensions.

> There are evidences that prove the positive contribution which the information and communication technologies can render the broadening of access to education and in improving the quality of course materials at lower costs, especially to attend the needs of great population in farther regions, in comparison with the traditional ways of teaching and learning.

> Far from being a way to overcome emergency problems or a way to face questions of territorial spaces, this modality of education conquers, progressively, spaces within a diversity of academic and educational systems. Its supply combined with the traditional teaching models in a variety of levels, points out to improvements. However, in the spirit of education throughout life, the distance education has been a fundamental ingredient in the adult population continued education.

As similarities abound in this recontextualization, analysis will be focused on differences. To begin with, this formulation is introduced by an attempt to abort the political dimensions of DE. It would be just a 'modality', instead of a 'strategy". As such, its assumptions and implications may be kept aside in any *meetings* on the theme. Only technical approaches, arguments and '*evidences*' are acceptable when what is taken for granted is to be kept untouched (Barreto, 2006).

Moreover, DE is said to be '*more present in our daily life*'. The possessive ('*our*') suggests experiences people share, at the same time there is no human agency as subject in the whole text. Again, no human action is necessary, once reified technologies are present. They are supposed to '*meet the new demands*' and the '*needs of great population in farther regions*'.

In another opening text in Portuguese, one could read that SEED's actions were grounded in a 'technological system – increasingly cheaper, accessible and easy to use – which is [was] able to', followed by a list of changes pointing out to 'a new paradigm for Brazilian education'. This text is not online anymore. [ix] As for the perspective in which it was grounded, there are many other instances of technological determinism, fetishism and substitution throughout MEC's website.

As for the specific context ('*particularly in Brazil*'), the text boasts about this '*privileged country with continental dimensions*'. Not a single word on problems to face is found. No contradictions, as profound social inequalities, are taken into account. In fact, central arguments to sustain DE include '*broadening of access to education and in improving the quality of course materials at lower costs*'. Even so, they are inscribed in a circular discourse: DE simply '*conquers*' spaces because it '*points out to improvements*'. It is important to underline that, as the text mentions '*evidences to prove*' there is a '*positive contribution*' from DE, it assumes there could be either a negative one or no contribution at all.

The text gathers arguments to legitimate technological substitution: no schools or teachers '*in farther regions*', where a '*great population*' lives. As the chosen adverbs convey relative values, 'far' may refer to the neighborhood and 'great' may be related to unexpected great population in rural areas. This may raise a question related to the amount of people to justify the adoption of DE. Anyway, possible answers are to be examined in the context of the most basic one: what education is for, and for whom.

If one asks for whom, previous geographic criteria seem to be less important than the ones related to age. The expression '*far from*' opens the last paragraph in the sense of 'besides'. '*Improvements*' (undefined, generic) are supposed to be attained when a combination of '*teaching models*' is supplied. Summing up, there is a sort of definite DE ('*the distance education'*) in the indefinite message 'delivered'.

If one asks what education is for, education for-profit is an outstanding feature of the whole construction. The alleged '*fight against poverty*', already mentioned, is driven by task forces against public universities and welcomes any institutions, including non-educational ones: '*private media and publishing houses and technology-driven manufacturing companies already have the skills and knowledge to develop Web-based and multimedia courses and materials for distance learning*' (WB, 2003:64).

Virtual universities are celebrated as '*an emerging phenomenon*' (2003:53). In 2005, Brazilian Open University (UAB) was created as a private law foundation. Its project provides for management under a consortium regimen among public and private universities and companies. Its declared central aims are the democratization of knowledge and the expansion of educational opportunities, as well as innovative methodologies for elementary teachers' education (initial and in-service). ICT are stressed and digital inclusion is suggested.

UAB's alleged democratization contrasts with the students' photos online: white and young. They do not look like 'excluded' Brazilians, since 'no other country outside Africa has such a large black population, about half the total of 160 million, yet blacks are almost totally absent from positions of power'.[x]

When it comes to UAB's target public, there is another divergence between the written text and the visual images shown. UAB is said to be addressed to '*any citizen*

who has completed basic school level and has passed the selective processes'. But the picture shows white and very young people who do not look like needy and/or rural students. Moreover, three of them are so young that they could not have had enough time to complete any level besides kindergarten. Even when WB (2003:28) says they '*must be competency driven rather than age related*', UAB's 'virtual' applicants do not match the criteria.

In all UAB's internal pages referred to 'orientations', one repeated image shows a teacher pointing to the chalkboard in what looks like a traditional class, except for the fact it has been recorded. Readers cannot see the students, except for the pair of shoes on the table. The teacher seems to be 'captured' and the students allowed doing anything they want in front of the screen. As ICT may lead to many shifts in teaching-learning situations, perhaps the image is meant to illustrate the possibility to 'start' it all over again. Once delivered, classes may be 'attended' by millions of students as many times as they want to. That is why initial investments such as '*the cost of developing materials and establishing the technological infrastructure*' (WB 2003:49-51) are stressed.

In UAB's new website, from which the preceding images have been deleted recently, the 'priority' and the central 'aim' are highlighted. The former is '*teacher education*' and the latter is supporting the integration of a national higher education system. As for the connection between them, discourses tend to identify '*ICT revolution*' (WB, 2002:65), already quoted, as the turning point.

At this point is important to recognize that is analyzing MEC's discourse is a much more complex task. Unlike WB's, it is interwoven by many different voices, made of confrontations and tensions in struggles for hegemony. For instance, the expression 'teacher training' is avoided, although 'teacher education' becomes as restrictive as. Democratic references may be incorporated as an attempt to legitimate policies so as to make struggles for hegemony easier. On the other hand, it may consist of arguments to make opposing voices silent:

> MEC foresees the distance education as a teaching modality that, without
> excluding face-to-face activities, is trying to overcome time and space limitations
> with pedagogical application of information and communication technologies,

organizing itself according to peculiar methodology, management and evaluations.

As for all WB's 'key publications', teacher training and its effects on education systems are mentioned. In the last one, assumptions are made explicit: (1) '*many countries have not been successful in providing people with knowledge and competencies*'; (2) '*traditional education methods are ill suited to providing people with the skills they need*'; (3) '*teacher training needs to change*'; (4) '*ICTs can support changes in pedagogy and teacher training—given the appropriate policy framework*'; and (5) '*formal education institutions need to become more flexible*' (WB, 2003:xix-xxi).

In Brazilian educational policies, the architecture of ongoing reform consists of three pillars: '*national curricular lines of direction*', ICT to support DE, and a centralized 'evaluation system' of outcomes at all levels (Barreto, 2001, 2004). In short, they imply the definition of what is to be taught, teaching-learning materials, and national examinations to assess what students have learned. Although official discourses tend to regard DE as the center of the whole construction, the roof those pillars support is competency based education.

'*National curricular lines of direction*' include a diagnosis of educational problems as well as guidelines to solve them. As far as teachers' education is concerned, so-called '*traditional teaching*' is at stake, ICT are regarded as the way out, but their hardcore is a final list of competencies and abilities. Research is dismissed and a sort of mimetic perspective is celebrated: student-teachers must experience what they are expected to do with their students. This training proposal supposes teaching-learning situations to be rather predictable and fix, at the same time it assumes contradictory relationships with reified ICT. For students, ICT are meant to be a revolution in their ways to think and act. For teachers, this alleged revolution points out to time control and to a sort of meaning production management, in order to make students grasp the only (supposed) correct answer.

Competencies '*society demands*' are said to be related to '*teamwork, problem solving* [and] *motivation for lifelong learning*' (WB, 2003:28). At the same time, they are the best way to reduce teachers' education to training, as well as to (re)lexicalize teachers'

work as activities or tasks. In this context, ICT function as a direct link between centralized curriculum and evaluation, especially if their reified representation comes to be hegemonic and if a key reduction is the starting point: ICT just for the sake of DE. These two conditions being attained, ICT may also bridge any gap between technological determinism, as theoretical background, and technological substitution, as strategic action.

CONCLUSION: on struggles for hegemony

> Hegemony is not sought and won once for all, it must be ongoingly sustained
> and struggled for under shifting circumstances and shifts in the competitive field
> of hegemonic projects (Fairclough, 2005:11).

For the moment being, there is a striking combination of modern technical objects and a very old one-way movement: '*delivery*'. As the commodification of educational vocabulary is pervasive, as there are '*global stores of knowledge*' (WB, 2002: xx, 4-5, 24), and as ICT are powerful vehicles in distance learning, delivery entails basically a commercial meaning. ICT can deliver 'knowledge' (take it to people's houses or working places) the same way restaurants deliver food.

Recontextualized as distance learning (or distance education) strategies in so-called global educational market, ICT can also eliminate whatever is not functional to it. Quoting Hinchey & Cadiero-Kaplan (2005:10), 'teaching itself as a profession will be virtually eliminated'. Tutors may survive, perhaps as 'non-unionized, lower-salaried automatons delivering a standardized curriculum in standardized fashion'. In a neo-liberal sense, that is because they are more 'flexible', what can be translated by engaged in precarious work, in which decreasing rights and educational/training needs are inversely proportional to ICT's development, conceived as never-ending.

There seems to be no doubt on what is to be learned and how it is to be learned. There is a ready-made formula and it consists of innovative curricula, interactive media and tutors. Being competency based, it refers to students' performance and it can be a suitable basis for performative texts. Quoting Mattelart (2003:3):

> the second half of the twentieth century has indeed witnessed the creation of
> belief in the miraculous power of information technology. [...] The stakes of the

new digital universe are too multiform and interdisciplinary to be left to technological determinism alone.

Both this 'belief' and deterministic perspectives have been expressed in many ways. Learning is equivalent to accessing computers, as an application of instrumental or 'means-end' rationality to 'educational institutions which are increasingly forced into operating in market ways' (Fairclough, 1999:76). '*New types of institutions*' (WB, 2003:46) are urged to compete. As developing countries will not be able to do so, the gap between them and developed countries is likely to be converted to a 'true planetary educational apartheid' (Leher, 2004a:7).

Within developing countries, similar strategies reinforce 'educational duality' (Gramsci, 1978): computers by the dozens are distributed to bridge the digital divide, as if it were the only one and as if computers and conditions of use were not unequal. In this sort of deceiving 'inclusion of all', ICT stand for granted access to knowledge, as if there were no intellectual property rights involved. [xi] Going back to Brazilian '*curricular lines of direction*', a literal translation of WB's discourse (2000:9) is presented: '*the world economy is changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of present (and future) wealth*'.

As counterpoint, Jessop (2002:4) is quoted:

> Knowledge is a collectively produced common resource based on individual, organizational and collective learning over different time horizons and in varied contexts – non-commercial as well as commercial. Since knowledge is not inherently scarce (in orthodox economic terms, it is a non-rival good), it only gains a commodity form insofar as it is made artificially scarce and access thereto is made to depend on payment (in the form of royalties, license fees, etc.). Thus a profound social reorganization is required to transform knowledge into something that can be sold.

As a by-product of technological determinism, discussed only in technical terms and market driven, ICT can be 'best sellers' and play an outstanding role in the connection between the discourse of globalization and the one of 'knowledge-based society'.

In such a context, struggles for hegemony are hard and unequal. WB's metaphors related to war seem adequate to describe them. The same goes for the environmental ones, considering present threats such as overheating. A myriad of discourses are

meant to shape 'reality' so as to grant legitimation. Chains of formulations are recontextualized across structural and scalar boundaries, taken for granted and, thus, sustained. Agencies and agents tend to be absent, no matter in active or passive voice. As for 'patients', another 'task force' is to be assumed collectively: the condition of 'social agents with capacities for acting and strategizing, not merely the passive objects of larger social processes and changes, and [we] can develop [our] own ways of acting in response to them and within them. But these capacities are dependent on circumstances and conditions' (Fairclough, 2006:123).

Finally, as these words may sound as echoes of Marx (1968:96), we must be careful not to borrow from criticized discourses 'names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language'.

Notes

[i] Available: http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/ EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20264888~menuPK:617610~pagePK:148956~pi PK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html [2 May 2007].

[ii] The expression (market forces) is useful to hide and/or to legitimate human intervention, as in the following quotations: *'governments can use market forces to stimulate increases in the quality and efficiency of higher education'* (WB 1994:18); '*market forces, which attempt to reward good performance, are seldom used to determine pay in the higher education sector*' (WB 2000:.23-4); '*on a global level, market forces are a crucial determinant of the allocation of scientific effort among competing substantive issues*' (WB 2000:79); '*other important changes in the past few years are the rise of market forces in tertiary education and the emergence of a global market for advanced human capital*' (WB 2002:3); and '*market forces are thus playing an increasing role in education around the world*' (WB 2003:19).

[iii] Available: http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2929&URL _DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html [30 April 2007].

[iv]Available: http://docsonline.wto.org/GEN_highLightParent.asp?qu=+%
28+%40meta%5FSymbol+S%FCCSS%FCW%FC%2A+or+TN%FCS%FCW%FC%
2A%29+and+%28+%40meta%5FTitle+Education+%29++&doc=D%3A%2FDDFDO
CUMENTS%2FT%2FS%2FCSS%2FW23%2EDOC%2EHTM&curdoc=15&popTitl
e=S%2FCSS%2FW%2F23 [30 April 2007].

[v] Back to the website in 2008, there were no images left.

[vi] PROUNI does not aim at high-quality public universities. According to WB
(1994:142), Brazilian public universities '*system provides 'high-quality education but
is marked by inefficiencies as compared with private system*' (142). In fact, this public
system is responsible for around 90% of all research developed in the country, as well
as for another remarkable aspect in the document: '*more than two-thirds of all Latin
American postgraduate students are concentrated in just two countries, Brazil and
Mexico*' (49).

[vii] There is a Brazilian example given in the quoted section: the Technology Centers
of SENAI (National Industrial Training Services), in which there is no higher (or even
tertiary) education involved. Straight to the point, there are sets of abilities demanded
by industry to be trained.

[viii] '*The Universitas 21 consortium brings together 17 major public and private
universities from around the world with a publishing company to develop and deliver
distance education courses internationally* (www.universitas21.com)'.

[ix] This text was deleted after a seminar on DE, as one of MEC's staff members had
promised.

[x] According to BBC (2000). Available:.http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/
americas/719134.stm [2 May 2007].

[xi] See '*Reform of the International Intellectual Property Rights Regime*' (WB,
2000:81).

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