

Curriculum Policy: Recontextualization and Hybridism (draft)

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Many authors affirm that the curricular field is characterized by hybridism of distinct theoretical tendencies. Frequently, this hybrid characteristic is expressed by an association of principles of critical theories with principles of post-critical theories, linked to the post-modern, post-structural, and post-colonial discourse. Giroux, for example, tries to produce a convergence between these discourses towards a political project linked to the reconstruction of democratic public life. He defends the historic constructions of justice, of authority, of truth, of ethics and of identity, to question modern outlooks centred on comprehension of bases for universal thought. He sustains, furthermore, that cultural policy is a policy of difference, in which difference is not a fixed sign as structuralism proposes, but involves meanings that are the product of mutable different relations and modified in the referential game of the use of language. McLaren equally assumes post-structural affiliations, particularly the analysis of difference and of language. But he goes further in thinking about the validity of the Marxist categories, in their totality and in the material relationships between capital and labour.

In the Brazilian curricular field, we can find this hybridism of critical and post-critical discourses. The post-critical theories are used considering: 1) their more instigating analysis of culture 2) in redefining the comprehension of language and deepening the productive character of culture, especially school culture. But the reference to critical theory is still present in analyses that have the intention of emphasising, political questions, as well as an agenda of social change.

The concern that seems to me pertinent in the development of these associations is to understand their productivity. How do they manage to respond to the problems they construct? How to resolve the tensions generated by the association of critical principles and those that are post-critical? That is, it implies thinking about the association between structure and agency, universal and particular.

In an effort to contribute to this debate from my own research on curriculum policy, I am focusing in this paper on the association that I build, based on Stephen Ball, between recontextualization and hybridism. The concept of recontextualization, constructed by Basil Bernstein in a structuralist framework, is being associated by Ball with the understanding of hybrid cultures, marked by post-colonialist and post-structuralist discussions. Despite the incongruousness that initially can be seen between the concepts of distinct theoretical frameworks, Ball is working towards making the articulation of these concepts feasible.

For Bernstein, the rules of recontextualization regulate the formation of the specific pedagogic discourse of a given context. These rules are part of a broader context, consisting also of distribution and evaluation rules, forming the intrinsic grammar of the pedagogical discourse. It is up to the rules of recontextualization to fix the external and internal limits of the legitimate discourse.

With this model, Bernstein maintains a marked structuralist focus in the strictest sense. In this sense, the change and the resistance are thought of in the context of the functioning of these discursive rules, without investigating the process of imploding such rules, even for the creation of a new structure. The structure is a syntax of possible transformations, so there are impossible transformations in the context of this given structure. The structuralist mark is also present in the construction of binary pairs, understood as expressions of the relationships of classifying power: regulatory discourse / instructional discourse;

field of production / symbolic field; State / organization of production of pedagogic knowledge. On the basis of these pairs, the author situates a very stratified and compartmented definition of the different fields that are active in contextual repositioning, especially those formed by the State and by entities that produce pedagogic knowledge.

Through that analysis, the recontextualization and the ideology associated with it tend to have a negative meaning: the alteration of meaning and change of social ends of the discourses is interpreted as distortion. This is expressed, for example, when Bernstein maintains that one of the possible responses to recontextualization of the pedagogic discourse can be direct contact with scientific knowledge. So, the “negativity” of the recontextualization is related to the “negativity” of reproduction.

Considering such limits, I maintain that the concept of recontextualization continues to be important for researching curriculum policy. By means of this concept, it is possible to mark the re-interpretations as being inherent to the processes of circulation of texts, to articulating the action of multiple contexts in this re-interpretation, identifying the relationships between processes of reproduction, re-interpretation, resistance and change, on very different levels. The centrality, especially, of discursive questions as formers of pedagogic identity is also a productive aspect, since it articulates the discourse – a set of rules of positioning and repositioning of the individual – with the material processes developed by the social division of labour. Since the power relationships are expressed by principles of classification forming the identities and category differences (knowledge, for example), they offer an interesting theoretical model leading to the articulation between power and knowledge.

However, perhaps the most productive aspect of the concept of recontextualization for the understanding of curriculum policy is the search for a constant macro-micro articulation. This allows Stephen Ball to investigate

educational policy considering articulations and re-interpretations in multiple contexts.

When constructing his analysis, Ball initially focuses on recontextualization as a *bricolage* of discourses and texts, but close to the concept of the pedagogic palette of Bernstein. As he goes more deeply into his formulations concerning global-local relationships, the author incorporates the concept of hybridism to the analysis of contextual repositioning, taking advantage of the post-structuralist and post-colonialist cultural discussions. He then goes on to maintain that in a global world, the processes of recontextualization are, above all, producers of hybrid discourses.

When Ball incorporates into recontextualization the understanding of culture through hybridism, he is seeking to understand the nuances and local variations of the educational policies. His investigation characterizes a global political agenda for education centred on performance, on parental choice, on management style, on new vocationalism, on institutional competition and on curricular fundamentalism. But he is investigating how in different places the agenda changes. This parts from the idea of mixture of global logic, both local and distant, always related to contextual repositioning, in which hybridism is configured.

The incorporation of the category of hybridism involves understanding the curriculum policy but as cultural policy. This cultural policy aimed at guiding certain symbolic developments, in obtaining consensus for a given order: developing cultural policy implies in favouring heterogeneity and varied messages that can be read by different people in different ways, without the intent to freeze identities. The guidelines of centrally directed curriculums, however, tend to project certain identities and to regulate their direction.

In an analysis of urban culture and its dispersing forces on modernity, incapable of fixing identities, García Canclini points out the basis of three fundamental processes of hybridisation: decollection, deterritorialization/

reterritorialization and impure genders. With decollection, Canclini tries to understand the associations made between the cultured and the popular, between cultural extracts of distinct social classes, as well as between cultural productions brought close by the dynamics of technology. The second process articulates deterritorialization – the loss of relationship supposedly natural between culture and geographic and social territories – and reterritorialization – reinstating territories, relatively and partially, to the old and new symbolic productions. Finally, there is the production of impure genders, genders constitutionally hybrid produced both from the decollection as well as by deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In these multiples of re-connotation and instauration of new meanings, there are no fixed rules or rich accounts that guide hybridisation.

García Canclini and his analyses of culture stimulates one to think that theoretical collections with which the curriculum is interpreted if dissolved, produce apparently contradictory associations in the name of distinct finalities of those understood as being original. Culture assumes a diffused character, in which identities and differences are mixed and principles of classifications are no longer recognised as such. The decollection, associated to deterritorialization and reterritorialization in symbolic and material spaces, end up producing the so called impure genders. The impurities are conferred because it is impossible to classify them according to the models of the old classically defined curricular collections.

Especially regarding the present Brazilian curriculum policy, the mixtures between constructivism and competences; competency curriculum, interdisciplinary curriculum or cross-curricular themes and disciplinary curriculum; valorising of popular knowledge, of everyday knowledge and of adequate knowledge of the new global world, are examples of hybrid constructions that cannot be understood by the principle of contradiction. One is not dealing with contradictory elements in which one does not exist without the

other, neither can they be explained only by distinctions and oppositions. They are ambivalent discourses in which the supposedly original brands remain, but are simultaneously extinguished by the interconnections established in a *bricolage* that seeks its legitimisation. In this way, the multiple discourses of the policy assume the mark of ambivalence, whereby there is the possibility of conferring more than one category to an object or event.

The genesis of the concept of ambivalence is related to discussions over concept of identity. In the essentialist identities, the classifications are seen as natural, because the identity characteristics are attributes of being. In structuralist identities, the power relationships express themselves through classifications, and, thus, by means of identity and of difference. In this way, power acts by trying to eliminate ambivalence. A useless effort, since ambivalence is built upon its own ordering activity, an aspect not considered by structuralism. For this reason, if we want to incorporate ambivalence, it is necessary to overcome such binary conceptions of identity and of difference of structuralism, considering the simultaneousness of attributes of multiple categories to the being. It is possible to be the same, to be the other, and to be hybrid at the same time. Stuart Hall denominates it as a wave of similarities and differences capable of refusing the division into binary oppositions.

To the extent that power relationships act forming the identities and binary differences, the expression of ambivalence can be seen as a way of escaping from the classificatory dominance. An analogous idea can be read in Canclini. Even if he does not focus on the discussion of ambivalence, he points to the possibility of escape zones configured in the new cultural hybrid scene. It is by means of the oblique powers that he hopes to be able to understand the situations of mutual sustenance between hegemonies and subordinates.

With these concepts, the verticality associated with recontextualization is deconstructed, as well as the binary factors that characterise the changes in discursive rules in the passage from one context to

another. It will not be by classifying rules and regulatory framing that power and control are expressed, or at least not by means of them, but rather by hybridism.

Canclini makes a point of mentioning that a critical theory of hybridisation needs not only to describe new mixtures formed, but to understand the process of hybridisation, identifying what it does not want and what cannot be hybridised. As Bhabha says, hybrid is not a third term that resolves tension between two cultures in a dialectic game of “recognition”. But as authority is formed by the prospect of recognition, the formation of the hybrid, characteristic of the processes of negotiation necessary for exercising authority, impels this recognition into crisis, by generating ambivalent deviations and unpredictable meanings. It is in the dynamics of imposing certain meanings and in the search for their legitimacy when dissensions appear producing ambivalences and disarticulating the authorities. The colonial oppressor’s attempt at discourse, as Hall maintains, is to saturate all, to assume itself as absolute, but as equally there is a necessity to recognise this discourse, there is a necessity to negotiate meanings and attribute significance to guarantee its own authority, generating unexpected effects that escape control.

The understanding of recontextualization as developed by the hybrid process allows us, however, to think of recontextualization in terms of cultural logic of translation. It is not a process of assimilation or of simply adaptation. It is an act in which ambivalences and antagonisms accompany the process of negotiating the difference with the other. The symbolic space of recontextualization is understood as a space of negotiation of meanings.

To affirm recontextualization by hybrid processes implies, therefore, in a re-interpretation of Bernstein’s concepts. So we have risks and challenges. A risk consists of assuming a perspective of acclaim of hybridism. This seems to be, sometimes, Canclini’s point of view, by affirming the appearance of hybridism from individual and collective creativity, being able to overcome classification. From the viewpoint of acclaim, the ideological character of

recontextualization can be replaced by not considering asymmetries of power and an assumption that the escape zones and the possibilities of deviation of meanings are infinite.

Considering the questioning of binary marks and those verticalised of recontextualization, as well as the questioning of acclaiming hybridism as a way of overcoming post-colonialist oppression, we understand that it is possible to associate these concepts, marking the articulation between culture and policy in the incessant negotiations that produce the curriculum policy. In the curriculum policy, the contexts are not seen as an ideological distortion. The hybridisations are neither understood as an overcoming of hierarchies and of the mechanisms of oppression, nor as producers of consensus between the differences. There are oblique power relationships that favour certain meanings in detriment to others in negotiation processes, in which the deviation of meanings is a form of escape from oppression. It is in our interest to investigate the curriculum policy to understand what is privileged.

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