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## The Theory of Enactment by Stephen Ball: And What If the Notion of Discourse Was Different?<sup>1</sup>

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v24.2111> Este artículo forma parte del número especial Stephen J. Ball y la investigación sobre políticas educativas en América Latina de EPAA/AAPE, Editores invitados Jason Beech y Analía I. Meo.

**Abstract:** The studies of curricular policies, and educational policies in general, based on Ball's theoretical approaches produced at the end of the 1980s are still considered potent in a variety of research work carried out in Brazil and other countries in the world. Several studies incorporate the approach of the policy cycle into curricular research, thus contributing to deepen the understanding of curriculum and open up to other research agendas, especially those directed toward the connections between structural constraints and the possibilities of agency. For these reasons, in this article I focus on Ball's theory of enactment, making it dialogue with the theory of discourse in the post-structural register constructed by Laclau and Derrida. I am interested in strengthening the post-structural register already present in Ball's discussions, seeing his productivity as something positive for more complex views of the curriculum policies that question the separation between interpretation and translation, proposal and practice, structure and agency.

**Key words:** Curriculum Policy; Theory of Enactment; Interpretation; Translation

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<sup>1</sup> This is an unofficial translation and provided for reference only.

### **La teoría de actuación de Stephen Ball: y si la noción de discurso fuera otra?**

**Resumen:** Los estudios sobre políticas curriculares y políticas educacionales basadas, en general, en los enfoques teóricos de Ball difundidos a fines de 1980, continúan siendo considerados potentes en Brasil y en otros países del mundo en diferentes investigaciones. Diversos trabajos incorporan el enfoque de ciclo de políticas a la investigación curricular ayudando a incrementar el entendimiento sobre currículo y posibilitando otras agendas de investigación, particularmente aquellas dirigidas a las conexiones entre restricciones estructurales y posibilidades de acción. Es así como enfoco en este artículo la teoría sobre la actuación de Ball haciéndola dialogar con la teoría del discurso, de registro post-estructural, respaldada en Laclau y Derrida. Mi interés está puesto en reforzar el registro post-estructural presente en las discusiones de Ball, apostando en su productividad para visiones más complejas de políticas de currículo que cuestionan la separación entre interpretación y traducción, teoría y práctica, estructura y acción.

**Palabras clave:** política curricular; interpretación; traducción; teoría de actuación

### **A teoria da atuação de Stephen Ball: e se a noção de discurso fosse outra**

**Resumo:** Os estudos de políticas curriculares, e políticas educacionais de forma geral, com base nas abordagens teóricas de Ball difundidas no fim dos anos 1980, permanecem sendo considerados potentes, no Brasil e em outros países do mundo, em diferentes investigações. Diferentes trabalhos incorporam a abordagem do ciclo de políticas à investigação curricular, contribuindo para ampliar o entendimento de currículo e abrindo para outras agendas de pesquisa, particularmente aquelas dirigidas às conexões entre os constrangimentos estruturais e as possibilidades de agência. Focalizo, assim, neste artigo a teoria da atuação de Ball, fazendo-a dialogar com a teoria do discurso de registro pós-estrutural apoiada em Laclau e Derrida. Interessa-me reforçar o registro pós-estrutural já presente nas discussões de Ball, apostando na sua produtividade para visões mais complexas das políticas de currículo que questionem a separação entre interpretação e tradução, proposta e prática, estrutura e agência.

**Palavras-chave:** política de currículo; teoria da atuação; tradução; interpretação

## **The Theory of Enactment by Stephen Ball: And What If the Notion of Discourse Was Different?**

### **Ball's Impact in the Curriculum Research**

The ties between the fields of curriculum and the sociology of education, notable in the critical approaches owing to the movements of rethinking the North American curriculum and the New Sociology of Education, certainly facilitated the dissemination of Stephen Ball's studies in curriculum research. It should nonetheless be stressed that the fact that Ball's studies seek to deepen the line of research created by Bernstein, which connects macro-sociological models with studies on the micro-policy of the school, also favors such dissemination.

This dissemination also explains why the studies of educational policies based on Ball's theoretical approaches spread in the late 1980s remained potent for various research projects in Brazil and other countries. Unfortunately, these investigations often avoid the recent critical debate on their main Ball's approaches (Bacchi, 2000; Vidovich, 2002; Mainardes, 2006; Lopes & Macedo, 2011; Smith et al., 2014). This production leads me to agree with Carpentier (2013), who claims that the theoretical potency of Ball's work is due to Ball's familiarity with different disciplines, going from sociological contributions to insights from Foucault's philosophy and cultural studies, as well as drawing the educational debate closer to the broader political debate.

Since the early 2000s, I have been working very systematically on the research, using Stephen Ball's policy cycle approach in the curriculum policy research. It was through the curriculum policy research that the books *Reforming Education and Changing Schools* (Ball, Bowe & Gold, 1992) and *Education Reform* (Ball, 1994) became obligatory references for me. As in several other studies on curriculum and educational policies in Brazil, such theoretical discussions and empirical investigations of Ball were extremely important to destabilize stratified models of understanding policy and curriculum (Mainardes & Gandin, 2013). Therefore our research on these topics became more complex and at the same time nuanced.

The policy cycle proved to be a powerful heuristic model not only to question the centrality of the state in curriculum policies, but also to challenge a vertical conception of power that supports such centrality. The Foucaultian decentered concept of power (Ball, 1990, 2013) was incorporated to the policy cycle approach (Ball, Bowe & Gold, 1992; Ball, 1994), questioning the deterministic analyses.

Many other works in Brazil and overseas (see, for example, Chun-Lok, Wing-Yan, 2010; Lingard & Sellar, 2013; Looney, 2010; Oliveira, 2009; Raimundo, Votre & Terra, 2012; Vidovich & O'Donoghue, 2003) incorporate the policy cycle approach into curricular research, thus contributing to deepen the understanding of curriculum and open up to other research agendas, especially those directed toward the connections between structural constraints and the possibilities of agency. It was through this approach that many research groups moved away from a conception of practice as a space of implementation reduced to the dual simplicity of frontal resistance or submissive acceptance (Keddie, 2013; Lopes, 2007; Lopes & Macedo, 2009; Grimaldi, 2012; Nudzor, 2009; Tura, 2011). The practice has entered the field of policy – it is also policy – and opened the door to theory, which questions the separation between curriculum in action and formal curriculum, and also values contingent dimensions on policy (Macedo, 2004, 2006; Lopes & Macedo, 2011).

The notions of policy as text and policy as discourse also proved to be extremely productive for the investigation of the regulatory processes that operate in guiding the reading of political texts in a certain direction, without ignoring the possibility to escape which textuality provides us. In this analysis, Ball also develops a privileged dialogue with Barthes and highlights the importance of theorizing language in the understanding of social and educational dimensions. At the same time as Ball's work was influenced by Bernstein's sociolinguistics and his concern with the connections among the social structure, identities and language, it was also veered away from Bernstein, seeking post-structuralist authors. Ball does not deny certain eclecticism in a project that incorporates post-structuralist hues with aims of social justice to the critical perspective (Ball, 1994) and he renews the sociological understanding, which is so dear to the critical perspectives of curriculum and education in general.

His analysis of globalization (Ball, 1998, 2001) enabled us to understand how global discourses do not homogenize the world. His analysis also improves the research about nuances and locations of educational policies marked by different senses of a political agenda focused on performativity, managerialism, institutional competition and the standard national curriculum. Far from simplifying and viewing such discourses as arising from an economic structure capable of signifying social relations in the same way for all countries, his theorizing about the globalized world sought to understand to what extent these principles are expressed in policies, to which reinterpretations they were submitted and what local aims they attend. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 42) stress, Ball *argues that a transitive meaning of globalization helps in overcoming the temptation to reify globalization as the explanation for certain contemporary education policy developments and pushes us instead to seek for the organizational and individual sources of emergent policy discourses on a global scale*. From this perspective, several studies (Lingard & Ozga, 2008; Maguire, 2010) offer empirical evidence and theoretical devices not only to subsidize a more nuanced interpretation of global policies but also as a

contribution to the ties between curriculum policies and studies of globalization (Winter, 2012; Leite & Fernandes, 2012). In the case of Brazil, it also became the focus of our research to understand how epistemic communities diffuse certain discourses and which knowledge-power relations were constituted in the global-local relations (Dias, 2009; Dias & López, 2006).

The insights of Ball (Ball and Bowe, 1992; Ball, 2006; Maroy & Ball, 2009) also favored a whole series of investigations in Brazil<sup>2</sup>. These investigations are dedicated to understand how different disciplinary communities and educational institutions reinterpret/recontextualize curriculum policies in different ways (Abreu & Lopes, 2008; Agostinho, 2007; Barreiros, 2009; Busnardo & Lopes, 2010; Destro, 2004; Lopes, 2004; Matheus, 2009; Mello, 2008; Morgado, 2003; Oliveira, 2006; Silva, 2006; Souza, 2008; Lopes & Oliveira, 2008; Lopes, Dias & Abreu, 2011). Such researches operate with the broader conclusion that national or centralized curriculum proposals, as well as guidelines established by international agreements, are linked to the global economic project and aimed at establishing a consensus in dealing with curriculum in school. However, they can only be institutionalized because they negotiate with local demands. Besides that, these demands are not necessarily attuned to the political and economic interests of the projects in question. All textual definitions of a policy are produced by disciplinary and pedagogical discourses and, in turn, disperse locally in view of the contingencies of school practices.

However, it is perhaps the notion of recontextualization by hybridism (Ball, 1998) that has earned my utmost attention in different research projects<sup>3</sup>. I sought to investigate the potential of recontextualization by hybridism in order to understand the circulation of discourses and texts in different contexts of curriculum policy (Lopes, 2005, 2008). With further incorporation of the theory of discourse in my research, I have worked to deepen the understanding of the processes of translation in the policies and to understand their differences towards the notion of recontextualization (Lopes, Cunha & Costa, 2013). It was while focusing on the dynamics of translation and interpretation that I read Stephen Ball's theory of enactment.

Through this theory, Ball deepens aspects from his 1994 book *Education Reform* that deserve his systematic attention: the contextualization of policy in action, the discursive interpretation of policy, as well as the questioning of the usual understandings about educational policies that reduce the schools to a space of implementation. In order to develop this theory, the notion of "putting policy into action" is deepened, focusing on the iterative process of interrogating meanings and symbols. Enactment, interpretation, translation and context are central concepts that understand the educational policies in a discursive perspective, and Ball devoted the book this way, both theoretically and empirically.

Subsequently, my intention with this text is to problematize such notions with Ball, and produce its dialogue with theory of discourse (Laclau, 1990, 1996)<sup>4</sup>. Differently from Apple (2013), who sets value to Ball's linking critical theories and post-structural theories in the field of education, my interest lies in strengthening the post-structural register already present in Ball's discussions, seeing this register as something positive for more complex views of curriculum policies.

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<sup>2</sup> To access a study on the appropriation of the studies of Ball in Brazil, see Mainardes & Gandin (2013).

<sup>3</sup> I refer to the projects: "The organization of school knowledge in the *Novo Ensino Médio* policy" (2000-2002), "The curricular integration in Science texts for the high school" (2002-2005), "Curriculum Policy in disciplinary contexts" (2005-2008), all backed with productivity scholarship and aid research from CNPq (Brazilian funding agency).

<sup>4</sup> This movement is also developed by others, albeit for different purposes. See, for example, Warren, Webb, Franklin & Bowers-Brown (2011).

In this sense, strategically, I am not working on the assumption that comparing these different discursive contributions will produce a synthesis or establish arguments to conclude which perspective needs to be followed. Theories are operators that favor and allow certain investigations and conclusions and, at the same time, block others. They also respond to contingencies of the trajectories of each of us as researchers. Therefore, I try to reflect on the possibilities offered by different discursive contributions and understand their productivity for investigations in curriculum policy and curriculum in general.

By all means I think I can contribute to this problematisation, because I agree with the purposes that Ball proposes: understanding institutionally the curriculum policy in schools as contextually mediated, translated, interpreted, as well as to understand the policies as plural and multifaceted, constructed discursively in an incoherent and non-cohesive way.

## The Theory of Enactment

Ball and collaborators develop a theory of enactment in their articles (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Maguire, Hoskins, Ball, & Braun, 2011), but organize this theory more substantively in the book *How Schools Do Policy* (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). In this book, Ball *et al.* set out to present the results of a study guided by the questions: *What different ways do contextual, socio-cultural, and historical factors affect schools when they enact policies? How might the different policies in schools be explained?* (p. 10-11). To answer these questions, case studies conducted in four English schools socially considered as moderately successful were carried out over a period of two and a half years. The empirical work involved 95 interviews (20–24 people from each school) and a thorough document analysis. NVivo research software was used to identify the signifiers on documents.

The schools in question are not viewed as cases to be compared and are not exemplary samples that should have their results extrapolated for the entire system. Inserted into a complex dynamic, schools are at the center of policy enactment. They are organizations that are neither simple nor coherent, but *precarious networks of different and overlapping groups of people, artefacts, and practices* (p. 143).

This investigation and interpretation are developed around the understanding of the process of *enactment*. In this sense, enactment is not a moment but a process *framed by institutional factors involving a range of actors* (p. 14). It involves interpretation as much as translation, *bringing together contextual, historic, and psychosocial dynamics into a relation with texts and imperatives to produce action and activities that are policy* (p. 71).

Through the theory of enactment, there are three parts focused on making up the policy process: the material (physical aspects of the school, depending on the context), the interpretive (the problem of meaning), and the discursive. None of the three alone are considered sufficient to capture, understand, and represent the process of putting policy into action. They are analyzed separately, but at the same time understood in an interrelated manner with constructive tension.

To build this theory of enactment, there are recurrent references to theorists like Foucault and Barthes, whom Ball refers to in previous works. There are also references to *actor-network theory* (ANT), the policy cycle approach, and to Fairclough. The notions of policy as text and as discourse are resumed to affirm that the texts of educational policies tend to be written authoritatively and persuasively, then reinterpreted and translated when put into action (p. 15). In practice, policy actors use various resources to produce their readings and interpretations, based on their experience, skepticism, and criticism (p. 15).

Policies are understood as discursive strategies to produce the student, the teacher, and the purpose of education. This is not a totalizing phenomenon that can saturate the process of

signification without gaps. The conclusions discussed in the book are directed to the understanding that, at present, English curriculum *standards* are imperative policies, where education is reduced to teaching skills and dispositions and also to behavior control. Furthermore, it asserts a productive dimension of teachers in action, primarily with *writerly* texts, as Roland Barthes puts it. Teachers, defined as *meaning-makers* (p. 138), have the power to access *the magic of the signifier* (p. 94), working creatively and engaging in the production of meanings. Therefore, teachers oscillate between creative and submissive dynamics, between the possibility of escaping from imposing political discourses and acquiescence before them. The decision between these paths is not only personal, it depends on the institutional setting receiving the policy, in which everyday events and encounters are important areas to be investigated, as well as the texts that disseminate the policy, in the form of legislation or institutional artifacts like posters, newsletters, plans, and promotional material.

As discursive formations, policies are characterized, in a foucaultian manner, by *gaps, voids, absences, limits and divisions* (p. 16). Primary discourses or master discourses that construct visions of what makes a good teacher, a good student, a good school, are always situated in the history of previous discourses, in a *cemetery of past truths* (Veyne *apud* Ball and colleagues, 2012: 138). Thus, a dispute is developed between contemporary and past discourses, possibly causing *ethical and political discomforts* (p. 138). Therefore, one of the conclusions in the book that somehow summarizes the theory of enactment is that policy changes are taking place, and the significance of what makes teacher and learner are effects of policy. However, all of the changes are incomplete and *other rationalities are still being murmured* (p. 150).

In my view, the theory of enactment deepens issues presented in Stephen Ball's work and not only has analytical power, but also the power of contestation. It questions, centrally, the performative processes in policy, their ties to regulatory mechanisms of practices in restrictive directions of broader educational contributions. It even questions the processes by which education is reduced to instructional purposes, with the consequent disregard of the more significant cultural dimensions. Alternatively, in Ball's terms stated in *Education Reform*, it questions the growing appreciation of first-order effects at the expense of second-order effects related to social justice and equality.

With the theory of enactment, Ball *et al.* are able to advance questioning the verticality of policies and overcome the role of origin given to the context of global influence in the policy cycle approach (Lopes & Macedo, 2011). He asserts that policy "starts" at different points, takes different trajectories, and can be formulated in schools, local authorities, or centralized systems of power (p. 6).

The dynamics of the interpretation have a reference to textuality, and in the book, they are called interpretive. For the analysis of these dynamics, the authors resort to notions of interpretation and translation. Interpretation is the initial reading, the *making sense* of policy. So teachers wonder: What does this text mean to us? What should we do? Should we do something? This is a decoding process related to history and institutional culture (p. 43), but tends to be conceived as the possibility of capturing some fixed sense in the text. These are moments of recontextualization, different points of articulation and authorization to make something a priority. This process is political-institutional and involves *an engagement with the languages of policy* (p. 45).

Translation, in turn, in a second moment, involves the languages of practice, creating a kind of third space between policy and practice. This is an iterative process to produce institutional texts and put them into action. In this analysis, the authors resort to Lendvai and Stubbs (2006, 2007), who understand translation as active reading, a process of re-enactment, reordering, and re-foundation through discursive practices and material, a process of displacement, both spatial – *displacement*; and subjective – *dislocation* (p. 48).

With these notions, Ball *et al.* give a more creative dynamic to the notion of recontextualization (Bernstein) and, because of this, they give a hybrid character to the enactment process (p. 3). However, they still maintain the process of interpretation and translation associated with the transfer of discourses and texts from one context to another, which opens the possibility of designing some fixed sense of meaning within a given context. In other words, only the transit between contexts enables the fluctuation of meaning, because in a given context, the strength of discursive regulation deters the possibility of interpretation and translation inherent to textuality.

It is evident that there is a gap between original texts, linked to the context of production, and texts in schools, in the context of practice. In this context, the authors seek to operate with invention and acquiescence. Therefore, they conclude that engaging creatively to develop the process of putting policy into action is also a form of being captured by the discourse of policy. For my part, I argue that deep within the discursive logic of the theory of enactment, it is also possible to consider the reverse process: the power of policy discourse in the colonization of the contexts of practices is exercised only through the negotiation of meanings of the same discourse in practices. And in this negotiation, such discourses are also captured by these practices. A discourse only exercises its power by putting this same power in question, submitting itself to translation.

Considering these aspects, I argue that the theory of enactment makes the analysis of educational policies and curriculum more powerful, even those referenced in the policy cycle approach. The search for a connection among the interpretive, the material, and the discursive shows up as a rallying perspective of policy research. It shakes stabilized certainties about how practices operate in the production of meanings for policies, and it distances itself from the mere denunciation of exclusion, the idealization of the transformative potential of schools, the homogenizing effects of policies, and the resulting simplification of these same effects.

I emphasize, however, that the authors themselves indicate the existence of limits in the theory of enactment. I will now address some of these limits within the text.

### **And What If the Notion of Discourse Was Different?**

At the end of the book, a question is presented that points to a concern shared by many researchers of educational policies and curriculum: *Do we emphasize interpretational variations and spaces of difference or the colonization of practice by performativity and the triumph of modernization?* (p. 150).

In my reading, and the way the issue is presented in the conclusion, it seems that throughout the book, Ball and his colleagues favor the process of retrenchment and not the production of gaps in the discourses that subjectify us in a certain way. That is, they do not emphasize interpretative variations and discursive spaces of difference. Maybe this is in order for the authors to be imbued with the urgent need to challenge the perverse effects of exclusion that the current policies in the United Kingdom produce, and its ability to multiply these effects by exporting diagnoses and solutions to other countries, including Brazil. I am sympathetic to that feeling; it also permeates my work.

However, this option also signals a silence, which is situated by the authors themselves, in the conclusions. The theory of enactment is silent on power, agency, and space for the difference. I believe that this silence is often present in the theoretical research on educational policy and curriculum in general and I have sought to reflect on this issue. Part of my research work is to construct a theoretical framework that can account for not only the retrenchment processes of difference, but also to seek and destabilize what seems to be settled once and for all. To outline other imaginary pedagogy capable of subjectifying us in a different way, we have to theorize about how, when, and why the difference arises, and understand the other processes blocking other

possibilities of conceiving education. At the same time, it is necessary to understand these blocks as being productive of other discourses that engender other meanings.

To value the space of political contestation, as suggested by Bacchi (2000), I think research should strive to demonstrate that there are other possible discourses, beyond what is presented as the expression of wholeness, the inexorable. Or, in terms of discourse theory, analyze how every discourse is just one particular – a possible difference, that became universal, and for that, it hides the marks of its contingency. I understand how a discourse is constituted, what enables it, as well as the work of expressing the erasure of its contingent nature.

With the movement in the direction towards discursive perspectives (as Ball did), I believe that a significant step was taken. Following Foucault, Ball examines policy as a certain economy of true discourses, but simultaneously as texts, things (legislation and national strategies), and discursive processes. Policy produces subject positions, and within, teachers are signified as both actors and subjects (p. 133). Policy involves relations of power, it does not always say what we should do, but creates conditions for actions to be carried out (Ball, 1994), and thus, is constituted discursively. It is well stated in this book, through a reference to Taylor: *to ignore issues of power is to ensure our own powerlessness* (p. 9). Therefore, Ball and colleagues accurately point out that there are problems in the notion of resistance to account for the question of power.

However, to deepen the prospect of policy-discursive contesting, I felt the need to question the tendency in the field of keeping the poles of regulation and change separate, like opposites. In the enactment theory matrix, it seems to me that these poles are still presented as opposites. There is an effort to think of them as interrelated, but it seems they remain insufficiently associated by each representing the negative of the other. Regulation and change, discourse and text, subject and actor, acquiescence and resistance, colonization and interpretation/translation; such dissociation ultimately makes us oscillate between one pole and the other. It is stated that in the context of practices, both processes develop, but we always go in search of the *greater or lesser degree* of development of one of the poles, giving greater power to one more than the other, in absolute and not contingent terms.

In the theory of enactment, textuality – and in this way, speaking of interpretation/translation and the possibility of escape – seems to be submitted to discourses, while discourses are not shaken by this same textuality. Throughout the book, the authors make it a point to say that there are disputes, although not significant; there is resistance, even though accommodation prevails; there is rejection of policy by schools, but not so much. It seems to me that such submission is inherent in the very construction of the two poles: policy as discourse and policy as text, which in turn connect to the poles of *writerly* and *readerly* texts. The result of this analysis is that we understand how we are discursively regulated and colonized, *subjected* – which is very important – but have progressed little in understanding the possibilities of escape, difference, and change.

A path that seems productive to me – to investigate this problematic – is to think about discursive issues with Laclau, and through him, with Derrida. With them, we start to consider that there is nothing outside of text; all reality is discursive. There are only acts of power breaking the free flow of meaning in the movement of language. All texts are *writerly* – in keeping the use of Barthes' term – and contextually they are always translated into unexpected directions. There is no first presentation or an origin for the meanings from which we operate: there is only representation (re-presentation) and translation. Language is situated outside of any pretense to transparency or immediate reference to objects. The discourse has no external referent that safeguards it and assures its stability, even in an ultimate instance.

When we radicalize the discursive focus, the policies have no origin and are always versions based on interpretations of interpretations. All interpretations are subject to the possibility of failure, a failure that any reading and any policy are faced with. If the meanings are radically contextual,

always translated, a policy to be instituted is doomed to be translated, betrayed, and displaced. There is no way to repeat the syntax of a supposed point of departure, no way a context or the circumstances of a meaning that is assumed original can be recreated. The meaning will always be different. Nevertheless, here is where the power of a policy lies: the possibility of failure also expresses its strength. Only the hegemonized policy can fail, the policy texts that circulate are submitted to different readings, appropriated in different ways and translated so as to create different contexts.

If we operate with this notion of language, translation and interpretation are inseparable; there is no interpretation without translation. Or rather, there is only translation – interpretation of interpretation – by the very flow of language. There is only resignification. There is no origin in policy: nor the government, nor the texts produced, nor the international guidelines, nor the school. There are acts of power, in all contexts, trying to produce a centre in signification and close the discursive structure, even if precarious and contingently.

Discourse (as a regulation process of sense) and text (as a possibility to escape from the established meaning and as the production of difference) are articulated. There can be only interpretation because there is a discourse fixating, albeit provisional and contingently, the free flow of significant meanings. There can only be discourse because there are differences, multiple meanings produced in movements of language to be fixed and composing the field of discourse. I try to work with these two dimensions – discourse and the multiple possibilities of meaning that make up the discourse – as constitutive of each other. Therefore, policy involves antagonism and conflicts without a final resolution, only being destabilized, to create new stabilities by acts of power.

In this perspective, enactment, always discursively constructed, articulates textual and material dimensions. This brings us to an understanding of discourse that incorporates non-discursive practices, unlike Foucault. If we understand discourse as all mediation of meaning, as a decentralized structure, there are no non-discursive practices, nor texts, materials, and practices outside the discourse. Every relationship established with these objects is mediated by language, signified in movements of language, and therefore, signified discursively. Discourse becomes the temporary closure of significance, to produce a center that stabilizes the free flow of differences so that it is possible to produce meaning. Neither positive discourse, nor negative in itself, means the world; it means us; it produces meanings. However, the field of discursivity, of difference, does not cease to operate by the incessant movement of language, destabilizing instituted discourse, with new discourse being produced. As Derrida argues (1996), the political decision produces a consensus, an institution, a stabilization, but only does so because it operates on the chaos, the unstable. There wouldn't be a reason to stabilize what isn't naturally unstable. But if the undecidability follows inhabiting the decision, the politicisation never ceases. The policy does not refer only to the production, of a center, of a stability, a curb on the meaning fluctuation, it is also production of defer, of decentering, of instability. The policy, while operating in an attempt to produce stability, at the same time creates the possibilities of breaking with what appears to be stable.

I believe this is one of the major theoretical challenges: building theories that allow us to simultaneously explain the different changes of sense and stability of meanings in policy, *one articulated to each other and not as two opposite poles*. Or, in other theoretical terms, face the eternal oscillation between the structures that constrain us and the action for social change operated by subjects, conceiving structure and subject in different ways.

From the perspective of the theory of discourse, every subject is split, never complete; it is always a subject of lack. This lack is the condition for the action, because instead of the subject being submitted to a discursive structure that signifies it in a complete manner, it tries to fill the gaps of a precarious structure by contingent decisions, and thus, constituting itself at the same time. The agency becomes the horizon of the structure; the excess of meaning that cannot be symbolized, not

being an empty space. The foundations of this structure are empty spaces and therefore policy becomes a constant attempt to fill these voids, to give an attachment to these foundations, even if precariously.

In this way, we are all intertwined in policymaking; we are contextually responsible for policy. *Policy makers* (who receive this label) have a certain understanding about schools and disseminate it, but also, we are the ones who produce knowledge, who train teachers, who work in different ways in the educational and curricular field; we produce meaning in curriculum policy. We socially dispute the creation of pedagogical discourses; we create processes in which education, teacher, student, school, curriculum, evaluation, but also quality, social justice, emancipation, and knowledge all have meaning.

In this swampy and complex terrain, I have attempted to address the challenge of investigating policies, and therefore, I consider it important for the curriculum field, to change the very meaning of policy. As such, I work with curriculum policy as a fight for the meaning of what curriculum is (Lopes, 2008; Lopes, Dias & Abreu, 2011). It is in this theoretical record that I try to understand why certain standardized curriculum discourses continue to constitute us in certain forms in different countries, in different contexts, under different governments: from Margaret Thatcher to David Cameron passing through Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, from Fernando Henrique Cardoso to Dilma Rouseff passing through Luís Inácio Lula da Silva. I do not overlook, in any way, that discourse of the market and of managerialism penetrates the educational field, and are institutionalized by multilateral organizations, business groups, colonizing different social contexts. Notwithstanding, in the game of global power, if this is to be expected, then so be it. It is up to us to confront this game. But I don't seek to operate with the idea that these discourses are homogeneous or that they have a fixed centre and stable dissemination.

My concern, therefore, has been trying to understand why these master discourses connect, sometimes quite easily, with *our* discourses of social justice. How, for example, meanings like quality of education, social justice, social development, capacity-building for the market and global world, skills, and cognitive domains are becoming equivalent and producing the current restriction of education to teaching. What contextual demands does this equivalence serve (Matheus & Lopes, 2014)?

Why do we still think of curriculum policies as actions that must be the same for all schools? Why are discursive equivalences constituted, in Laclau's terms (1996), which produce the replacements of significant *education quality* through significant *curriculum quality*, of *curriculum quality* for *content taught in the classroom and evaluated in a test* nationally or even internationally? How are condensed meanings of knowledge producing the association between social construction of knowledge and constructivism in education? What are the contextual struggles – in the training courses for teachers, in the production of theories, in the socialization of research articles, in the works with the schools – producing curriculum discourses? Is it possible to bet on the dissemination of other curriculum meanings?

We could still discuss a lot about these issues, but I continue to repeat what Ball and his colleagues say, which is that writing is part of the interpretation. Worthwhile, then, to wager that our academic research might be powerful to produce dislocations of meanings in curriculum discourses.

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