



# Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies

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## Mapping Researches on Curriculum in Brazil

Alice Casimiro Lopes

Elizabeth Macedo

Edil Vasconcelos de Paiva

Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro

### Introduction

In Brazil, as well as in many other countries, historical studies have been conducted in the curriculum field trying to understand, up to a certain extent, how it has evolved throughout the years. One of the attempts to map these studies on curriculum carried out in different countries in the world generated the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, organized by William Pinar (2003). Pinar, himself, in a study published with Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995), had already studied the contemporary discourses on curriculum, with an emphasis on the configuration of this field in the United States. In this study, the authors pointed to a reconceptualization of this field in the 1970s which originated, in the following decades, studies that focused on the development of curricula, which brought in a deeper concern the understanding of curriculum as a political text as well as a cultural text. In a more recent study, the same authors (2002) defended that, from the 1990s, there was an “explosion of cultural studies” (p.114), whereas the political interest was maintained, which characterized the reconceptualization. In the historical period analyzed by Pinar *et al.*, the great variety of voices in the curriculum field in the USA called the authors attention, as a kind of cacophony also pointed out by Franklin (1999). If in one hand this cacophony captures the multiplicity of studies and references, on the other hand, it brings the characteristics of isolated studies which have very little articulation, enough to build an area. Pinar *et al.* point out that they are not defending forms that define what a curriculum is, but they are arguing that collaborative work, with autonomy for the proliferation of ideologies and methodologies, is fundamental for a wider complexity of the field.

The hybrid characteristic of the curriculum field, with multiple references, seems to be one of its most important characteristics in different parts of the world, as can be seen in the examples selected for the *Handbook*. Besides this hybridism, it is noticeable the influence of the English and American critical theories — despite being recontextualized — in different countries in the world and the main focus of study on the improvement of school. Reflecting on the analysis presented in the *Handbook*, Pinar (2003) defends that, for the field to expand, historical studies that lessen our

“vulnerability to the political *slogans* and to the discursive and material manipulations of regimes of specific reason and power” (p.30) are necessary.

In Brazil, the historical studies of the curriculum had, in its first formulations, the mark of the denouncement of the transference of American paradigms within the constitution of the field in the country (Domingues, 1986; Cardoso, Santana, Barros & Moreira, 1984). In 1990, Moreira tried to preserve the emergence and the development of the curriculum field in Brazil, seeing “more like a compromise between divergent interests than as a coherent expression of certain purposes and ideologies” (p.18). Working with a triangular focus that articulated international, societal and processing conditions, the author analyzed the emergence of the field in the 1920s, its development in the 1960s and 1970s, and the debates over curriculum in the 1980s. The main focus of the study was the literature in books and articles about curriculum and curricula, written and experienced, of university courses, especially since the introduction of the discipline Curriculum and Programs.

To this study by Moreira, others followed that tried to understand the field which based itself on other document *corpus* and diverse periods. The papers published in the important journals in the country and the research presented in the annual meetings of the National Association of Graduation Studies and Research in Education (Associação Nacional de Pós-graduação e Pesquisa em Educação – ANPEd) (Macedo & Fundão, 1996) and in the National Didactics and Teaching Practice Meetings (Encontros Nacionais de Didática e Prática de Ensino – ENDIPE) between the years of 1990 and 1995, were object of research study done in 1994-1996. This work also includes interviews with the main curriculum researchers in Brazil, trying to establish their vision of the field (Moreira, 1996). Based on the analysis of this production, a redefinition of the notion of educational transference (Moreira & Macedo, 1999) as well as a reinterpretation of the contemporary field of curriculum in Brazil (Moreira, 1998) were attempted.

More recently, Moreira (2003) and Lopes and Macedo (2002 & 2003) engaged in synthetic analysis of the curricular thought. Moreira’s work was centered in the emergence and consolidation of the curriculum field in Brazil and it updated the already existent analysis in the 1990 work. In order to achieve that, Moreira made use of hybridization that, for the author, “provides a more exact vision of the curricular field in Brazil” (p.172), explaining the “dynamic movement of ideas, theories and models between different countries, as well as avoiding analysis that, even though recognizing the existence of interactions and resistances, give secondary importance to the cultural sphere in the process of the formation of a field of studies” (p.182). Lopes and Macedo (2002 & 2003) focused on the Brazilian curricular production of the 1990s, specially analyzing the published literature and the texts presented at conferences by the important research groups in the country. The authors also made use of hybridization arguing that the characteristics of the field are blend between the critical discourses and post-modern discourses and the reterritorial philosophical and sociological discourses that make “the constitution of a curriculum theory more diffused” (Lopes & Macedo, 2002: 48). The

multiplicity of subsidies for the curricular discussion has not only been taking shape due to the sum of different theoretical-methodological tendencies and orientations, but also as tendencies and orientations, which interact and produce cultural hybrids (Dussel, Tiramonti, Birgin, 1998). The hybridism tends to be the greatest characteristic of the field in Brazil in the second half of the 1990s (Lopes & Macedo, 2002), a characteristic that seems to be a world tendency (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 1995).

Closing the historical fast picture of the curricular thought, ANPEd's Curriculum Work Group (Grupo de Trabalho – GT), in 2002, ordered from three of its most traditional members, researches that would map the production of the field having as basis the GT itself. Moreira (2003) and Veiga Neto (2003), tried to evaluate the productions from different perspectives, working with wide thematic and theoretical-methodological categories, while Alves (2003) privileged the analysis of how the daily life have been dealt with in the research presented. Up to a certain point, the multiplicity of the field was addressed in the three texts.

Beyond these three studies, there are others<sup>1</sup> that try to think about the curriculum field through the analysis of diverse products. Despite that, clearly a gap remains: the study of thesis and dissertations produced by the Graduate Programs in Education in Brazil. This gap compromises the understanding of the field, as a great part of the research in education is linked to graduate studies when groups of research are established. Of course we consider that part of the production of these Programs is presented in the main conferences and published in journals and in curricular books which have been studied. But it is also true that the published production in the field, even though numerous, does not account for the multiplicity of studies that have been conducted in the Graduate Programs. The present study intends to fill in this gap, within modest temporal limits – 1996 a 2002 – reporting on the production of these Programs, focusing on basic education – elementary and high school<sup>2</sup>.

### The Focus of Basic Education

Investigations based on cultural studies defend the existence of cultural curricula beyond the walls of the school, understanding that the regulation of the people does not happen only through circulating discourses in the institutionalized pedagogical spaces (Costa, 2000, 2002). Significant curriculum research done by the media, at *shopping centers*, through movies, games, literature, contribute not only to the understanding of the process of production of identities through these cultural artifacts, but they also contribute to the understanding of the effects generated by the circulation of these discourses in the school space.

Without losing consideration for the importance of this production linked to the cultural concepts of curriculum, the expressive part of the field, it is important to point out the understanding that the curriculum has its origin and its development associated to schooling. The concept of curriculum is historically constituted by

the association to the creation of an institutionalized space, with a specific social and material reality, with its own culture and with privileged power in the socialization of knowledge and in the formation of the identities of newer generations. As a consequence of this association, marked in its origins by the expectation to control the cultural activities developed in the school space, it has already been considered less productive the identification of the concept of curriculum beyond the school culture (Veiga Neto, 2002). This justifies the focus of this project on the curriculum research developed in basic education established within formal institutions.

Based on this, it is also absent from this study the research which focus on the professional education, the formation of teachers at middle and superior levels. These levels and modalities of education are usually investigated by other research groups – work and education, teachers training and high education –, which not always have cross-references to the curricular discussion, constituting specific theoretical-methodological marks. It is, then, considered that the investigation of the crossing or non-crossing of these productions deserve other research which would be capable of identifying issues that would come out of this interface between diverse themes of investigation.

It is important to notice that according to this, even though the field of curriculum might not focus exclusively on basic education, it is profoundly related to it, being capable to contribute to its own constitution.

### The concept of field and the selection of the documental corpus

The concept of field is the reference for the vision of the object of this research – the production of knowledge about curriculum in the graduate programs –, in the sense that such object is placed in an area of relations in which its properties are derived (Bourdieu, 1989). The object of investigation, within this perspective, suffers the pressure, the influence and the power relations of the field where it is inserted.

Bourdieu (1988) defines field as a structured space where there is a hierarchy of positions where battles are fought between the dominant and the dominated over the distribution and possession of certain social and cultural capitals which are unequally distributed and accumulated. The assets, which suffer antagonism, are in their majority symbolic, like prestige and recognition. The agents that monopolize the specific authority in the field tend to organize conservative strategies in opposition to the new agents, with a smaller capital, that try to subvert the domination by articulating subversive strategies. For a new agent to be accepted in a certain field, it is necessary that the necessary investments have been made, that is, that certain capital has been accumulated enough to allow for its recognition by its pairs as an integral element of that community. Also according to Bourdieu (1997), the field is a sphere of the social life, a space relatively autonomous,

with its own functional laws, organized around social relations and specific interests.

Considering this, we see the Curriculum field as an intellectual field: a space where different social actors, owners of the social and cultural capital of the area, legitimize certain concepts on the theory of Curriculum and argue over the power to define who has the authority in the area. It is a field capable of influencing official curricular proposals, pedagogical practices in schools, through the different recontextualization processes of its discourses, but it is not constituted by these same proposals and practices. The intellectual field of the Curriculum is a field that produces theories about curricula, legitimized as such by the concurrent struggles in this same field. The productions of the field of Curriculum are, then, constituted as an objectified cultural capital of the field.

In this way, we understand that to analyze the production of the curriculum field includes taking as object the knowledge produced by subjects who are considered legitimate speakers of curriculum. In this sense, we analyze the social production of the field with the understanding that it is not the use of certain theoretical-methodological supports that defines it. The dominating power relations in this field are the ones which make certain supports prevail, according to their interests and specific objectives.

The option to work only with the production of the Programs that institutionally dedicate themselves to the study of the curriculum was taken in order to privilege the production inserted in groups of research and that, therefore, can be thought of as effectively constituting the curriculum field. This privilege takes into account the legitimacy placed on the subjects to talk about curriculum, which is allocated to them by their presence in institutional instances, like: the institutions of schooling and research, where they act as professors, researchers and advisors, specially at a graduate level; the funding agencies, where they are partners and define which types of studies will receive grants; the media through which the production is published; and the forums of researchers. The dominating participation in these instances is one of the main factors to guarantee the legitimacy and authority to define what is curriculum. It is the production with such institutional connections that form, within this perspective, the field of studies of the curriculum. Even though there is some isolated production about curriculum in some graduate Programs, it is understood that these are studies that are not guaranteed to continue and whose insertion into the field does not occur.

Therefore, the selection of the thesis and dissertations analyzed was done in stages. At first the graduate programs that work institutionally with curriculum were delimited. In order to do that, the information found in the reports sent to CAPES<sup>3</sup> by the Programs was used. From a total of 65 Programs (in 2002), one has as the central theme the curriculum, another has a thematic axis about curriculum and 20 have lines of research whose description clearly links them to curriculum. There are also four Programs in which the projects of institutional research, connected to the lines, refer to the curriculum field. Two other Programs, even though they

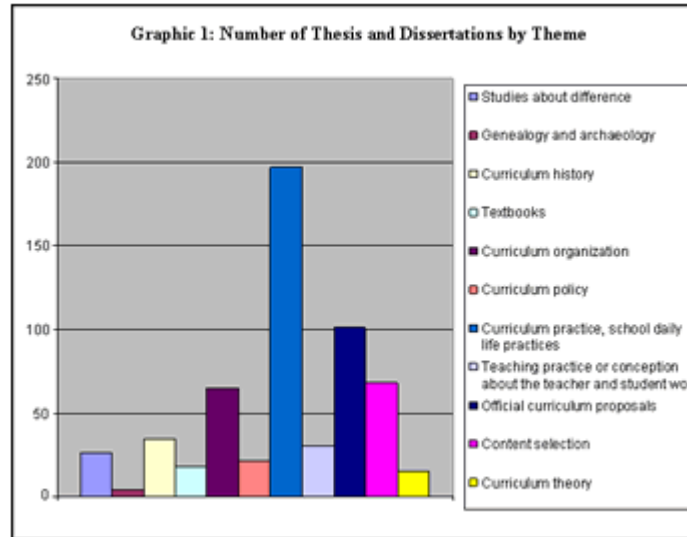
do not mention curriculum in their institutional research, have researchers that publish in the area and participate in specific forums on this theme. Twenty-seven programs were selected<sup>4</sup>. In the second stage, 5075 abstracts of dissertations and thesis produced by these Programs were read and those which referred to curriculum of basic education were selected. The studies that were considered as thesis and dissertations that belonged to the curriculum field reported on: (i) curricular theory; (ii) history of the curriculum or of school subjects, where studies whose central focus was history of education or the history of educational institutions were carefully eliminated; (iii) content selection of the different curricular components, including the teaching of different areas, with the elimination of studies centered only in teaching methodologies or didactics; (iv) curricular organization; (v) general official curricular directives, parameters and proposals; (vi) curricular propositions, either for the school as a whole or for a specific curricular component and (vii) curricular practice, about the curriculum in action, as well as about the daily schooling, as long as curriculum was specifically prioritized; and (ix) teaching practice and/or teaching concepts as an element of the curriculum action.

As to the focus on basic education, the selection was facilitated, using the legal version of the term in Brazil which defines basic education as the schooling from kindergarten to high school, including the young, the adults and special education, which in this case aims at inclusion into regular classes. As a consequence, the research that dealt with professionalizing technical courses as well the courses to form teachers were left outside of this study. Since the option was made for basic education, an expressive national production about curriculum in the social movements and in spaces beyond schools, noticeably marked by the focus on cultural studies was also left outside of this study, as already commentated.

Under these procedures, 435 titles were selected that, read fully (321 – 70.9%) or only the abstract (132), form the corpus of analysis of this study.

The thesis and dissertations were classified (i) by theme; (ii) by theoretical focus, highlighting the most important references; (iii) by the curricular component that was treated; and (iv) by the methodological approach used.

Graphic 1 presents the studies by theme:



**Studies about difference** – in this category were classified studies that focus on questions related to race, gender, sexuality, minority ethnical groups, either from an approach clearly associated to the cultural studies, to post-structuralism theories and the post-colonial studies or utilizing other theoretical sources.

**Curriculum practice, school daily life practices** – this category covers the studies that aim to investigate the curriculum practices, the curriculum experienced in school life and the curriculum in the school quotidian.

**Official curricular proposals** - studies focused on the orientation of official proposals from the federal, state or municipal governments.

**Curriculum policy** – this category covers more comprehensive studies about policies that produce curricula either in the government sphere of influence, or in the schools and/or international influences.

**Curriculum organization** – this category included the studies that focused on content sequences; studies that present analysis of curriculum disciplines; integrated curriculum (inter or trans disciplinary approaches or project method or creative themes, the organization in forming cycles and/or processes of changing knowledge for teaching purposes as for instance the didactic transposition.

**Content selection** – studies that focused on the criteria for content selection from the more comprehensive cultural background to the curriculum and/or to suggest the inclusion or exclusion of content/disciplines in the curriculum.

**Textbooks** – researches that focused on textbooks as formal curriculum.

**Curriculum or school disciplines history** – studies that encompass a descriptive approach to teach the curriculum components; studies about legal prescriptions for teaching; curriculum proposals and studies that work out a curriculum and/or school disciplines history; studies based on the school culture historical approaches and/or the history of education.

**Curriculum theory** – studies that focused and/or worked out a theoretical approach to the curriculum.

**Teaching practices and/or conception about the teacher and student work** – studies that focused on the teacher work and/or teacher and students conceptions of pedagogical practice on the assumption that there is a close relationship between the teacher work and the teacher conception about the curricular work.

**Genealogy/archaeology**- studies that developed curriculum discourse analysis based on Foucault theory.

It was possible to identify a meaningful number of theses and dissertations that focused on the curricular practices (43,5% - 197 in a total of 453 studies), of which the major number build relations between official proposals and curricular practices (12,6% - 57 in a total of 453). These studies focused on the multiple forms that official proposals are apprehended by teachers in their classroom. A theme that also called attention was the official curricular proposals with 22,3% of the studies (101 in 453).

It deserves comments the results related to studies that focused on curriculum organization (17,7% - 80 in 453); and on the selection of contents (16,6 % - 68 in 453). In many cases, these themes were associated with others, especially the curricular practice (21 to organization and 13 to selection). Only 05 studies were identified where the organization of curriculum and the content selection were worked out together. However it is necessary to point out that a discussion that makes problematic the curriculum organization and the content selection does not appear in the studies.

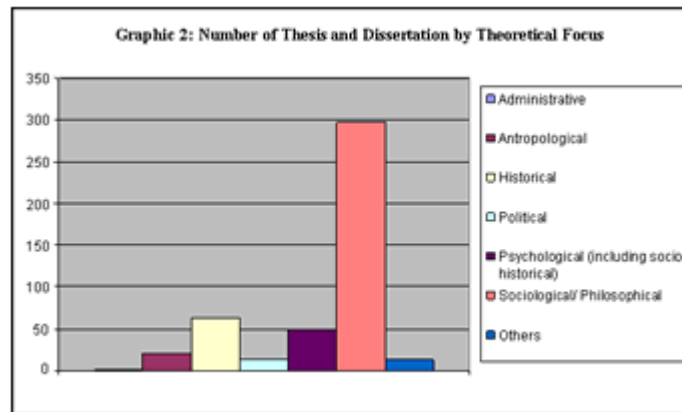
When the level of education studied is considered the following results were found in this investigation: 60,4% (274 in a total of 453 studies) focused the fundamental level; 19,4% (88 in 453) focused on the basic education in general; 15% (968 in 453) focused in medium education; 2,4% (11 in 453) focused in the education of youngster and adults; 2,2 (10 in 453) focused in children education and 0,4 % (2 in 453) focused in children and fundamental education.

The theoretical focus that dominates in the theses and dissertations analyzed was sociological/philosophical (65,6% - 297 studies in 453). Following it was found an expressive number of historical studies (13,7% - 62 in 453). In third place comes the psychological studies (10,6% - 48 in 453). In spite of thematic emphasis in the official curriculum proposals the emphasis in political studies is not significant (2,9% - 13 in 453). In the same way, in spite of thematic emphasis in the curriculum cultural studies, it was found that the emphasis on the anthropological studies is small (4,4 % - 20 in



453), however 126 studies had asserted an ethnographic focus in the field work.

It was found an absence, as detached already by other in the curriculum field (Macedo e Fundão, 1996), of studies with an administrative/scientific focus that characterizes the traditional theory of curriculum. Graphic 2 presents the studies by theoretical focus:



A great number of thesis and dissertations did not clearly explicit the main theoretical focus adopted. It was very common to find a free association of various authors being used to the comprehension of punctual research questions. In these cases a construction of a theoretical framework to support the conceptions of the research object was not found.

In the midst of works that clearly define their theoretical background it is possible to identify an association of more specific authors of the curriculum field with authors of other fields such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology and also authors of works in the specific areas of teaching curricular components.

In general the authors of Sociology of Curriculum were the most referred in the works. Among the foreign authors it was possible to identify the following: Basil Bernstein; Ivor Goodson; Jean Claude Forquin; José Gimeno Sacristán; Michael Apple; Michael Young; Peter Mc Laren. Among the Brazilian authors the most cited were Antonio Flavio Moreira and Tomaz Tadeu da Silva, in his first works in the critical perspective..

The studies with a Marxist approach found support in the works by Antonio Gramsci, Dermeval Saviani, Gaudêncio Frigotto as well as by Paulo Freire. Such references are singled out especially in the political studies however they are less meaningful among all the studies.

In the studies with a psychological approach it is outstanding the reference to Vygotsky, followed by the influence of studies of conceptual changes, especially influent in the thesis and dissertations that focus the curricular components in the area of science.

In the anthropological studies the most cited authors are Jacques Gauthier, Alain Coulon e Clifford Geertz.

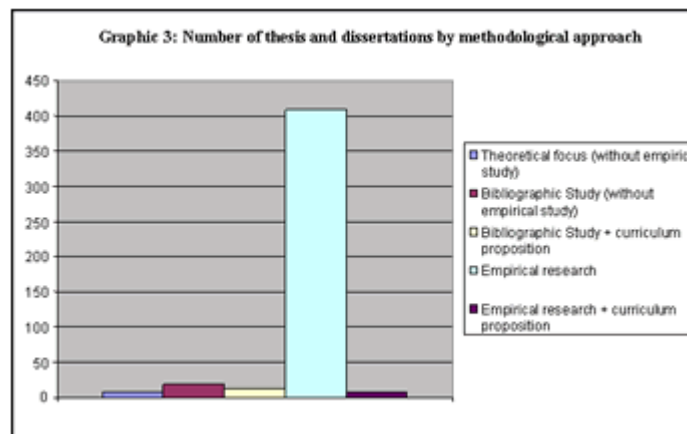
In the thesis and dissertations that have Mathematics as an object of study it is outstanding the influence of studies about ethnomathematic and the reference to authors such as Ubiratan D'ambrósio e Gelsa Knijnik

Among the historical studies it was found from descriptive studies covering the histories of teaching curricular components singularly identified with the legal regulations about teaching and official curriculum proposals to distinguished studies with a consistent theoretical background about the curriculum and history of school subjects. The authors more referred were Ivor Goodson, and André Chervel. There was also reference to authors of cultural history such as Roger Chartier and Carlos Ginzburg.

In the studies related to the complexity, not yet very significant among the studies analyzed, the authors more referred were Edgard Morin, Fritjof Capra, Humberto Maturana and Varella. Such references were associated with discussions about the school quotidian and found support in the works by Michel de Certeau. and Nilda Alves.

The studies marked by the post-critical references were less expressive in number. They are mainly centered in the Graduate Program of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and are based on Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, Henry Giroux and Alfredo Veiga-Neto.

In relation to the methodological approach (Graphic 3) the majority of thesis and dissertation resulted of empirical research (91,4% - 414 in 453). This high number also appears when considered master dissertation (332 in 361) and doctoral thesis (82 in 92). The graduate programs do not diversify in relation to the value ascribed to the empirical work.



Among the master dissertations that resulted from empirical work, 30,4% (111 in 332) were performed with an ethnographical orientation. In second place studies which focus in the analysis of

documents (17,5 – 58 in 332) were identified. It is important to point out that documental analysis matched with other kind of investigations were 32,2% (107 in 332) of the master dissertations .

These kinds of empirical works are followed by studies with interventions in classrooms (8,4 % - 28 in 332); with interviews (7,5 % - 25 in 332) and an association of documental analysis and interviews (7,8 % - 26 in 332).

Empirical Works	TOTAL M+D
Analysis of the researcher personal practice	9
Documental analysis	73
Documental analysis and analysis of the researcher personal practice	1
Documental analysis and interviews	31
Documental analysis and classroom intervention	3
Documental analysis and observations	4
Documental analysis and questionnaires	4
Analysis of official documents and ethnographical orientation	2
Documental analysis, interviews and questionnaires	5
Documental analysis, observations and interviews	12
Documental analysis, questionnaires and observations	3
Interviews	27
Interviews, questionnaires and observations.	1
Studies with an ethnographical orientation	117
Studies with an ethnographical orientation /quotidian	7
Historical studies	22
Quantitative studies	5
Quantitative studies, questionnaires and interviews	1
Intervention in classroom	35
Observations	6
Observations and interviews	8
Strategic research	1
Participant research	1
Action research	19
Questionnaires	5
Questionnaires and interviews	10
Questionnaires and memory	1
Written reports	1
TOTAL	414

In the thesis and dissertations, in a general form, the curricular discussions that specify the analysis of one or more curricular components (67,3 % - 305 in 453), predominate in detriment of studies that focus the curriculum as a whole (32,7 % - 148 in 453).

Among the curricular components more investigated (graphic 4) it is possible to identify the following: History (13,1 % - 40 in 305), Physical Education (11,5 % - 35 in 305), Mathematics (10,5 % - 32 in 305), Sciences (6,6 % - 20 in 305), Environmental Education (6,6 % - 20 in 305), Arts, including Theater, (5,6 % - 17 in 305) and Portuguese Language (5,3% - 16 in 305). These totals do not differ significantly in the master dissertation and doctoral thesis. Through this classification, we constituted a map of the curriculum field in



post-critical referents.

The fact that the dissertations and thesis produced in the graduate programs in education during the 1996 – 2002 period had as the main theoretical focus critical perspectives with sociological and philosophical bases is, therefore, understandable considering the centrality of these perspectives in the curricular discussion of the last decades. At the same time, it was expected that studies whose strong characteristic was the prescription of models for curricular elaboration, with administrative or psychological bases, be less present in the research analyzed, which can be easily verified.

On the other hand, it was surprising, the still small number of studies about culture and even more so the small number of studies whose theoretical matrix is the post-structuralism or authors generically associated to post-modernism (like Deleuze, Derrida, and Guattari). The result indicates that this literature has not penetrated expressively yet in the graduate programs, with exception to the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), whose articulation of research around post-structuralism is impressive. It is interesting to observe that one of most mentioned national authors in the curriculum field was Tomaz Tadeu da Silva, whose research have had its most important references on the post-structural and postmodern matrixes. The ownership of these research in the thesis and dissertations seems, though, to occur without the related acceptance of these matrixes, which can somewhat be understood considering the slide between these critical and post-critical perspectives, as mentioned before.

Two aspects call our attention in thesis and dissertations, considering the option for the critical theorization of the field. The first refers to prescriptive character taken by the majority of the studies analyzed. Of the 453 research, 69 (15.2%) had a strong prescriptive character, presenting as a product of the dissertation of thesis curricular plans for subjects or units of content. The most impressive fact, though, was that about 90% of the analyzed studies proposed, in the form of recommendations, interventions, sometimes generic, others specific, in the schools curricula. Even though these recommendations were presented as suggestions, they take on a prescriptive weight, in the sense that they come legitimized by the research. One of the most reoccurring recommendations was the alteration of the courses that form teachers, which indicated a leadership position of the teacher in the curriculum design, but also that these professionals tend to be treated as those with the greatest responsibility for the multiple inadequacies that the research observed in the curricula.

Both the prescriptive character that the majority of the studies assume, in some form, as to the idea that curricula must be adequate to theory or concrete conditions of the school bring elements that lead us to analyze the form in which the critical theories have been reelaborated within the context of the graduate programs. If it is true that the most traditional theory in the field of curriculum, whose central focus was the prescriptions of curricular designs, is not present in the majority of the studies, it is also

noticeable that the research on critical authors has not overcome the prescriptive character of the field.

This conclusion ends up associating itself to the second aspect that deserves attention in what it has to say about the reelaboration of the critical theories presented by the analyzed studies, that is, the relationship that this option maintains with the field work conducted by the thesis and dissertations. It is relevant to point out that 414 research projects (91, 4%) presented some kind of empirical study, from analysis of documents up to ethnographic studies, indicating a concern and compromise with education as it manifests itself in contextual format in the Brazilian reality. This observation contradicts the perception of a few authors that the University and the Brazilian graduate studies are not interested in the reality of the schools, which can be widely demonstrated by the number of studies conducted in the public schools of different states. This interest, however, even though marked by the comprehensive matrix of the critical theories, ends up manifesting itself methodologically in research that privileges the description, in a certain evaluative manner, of the reality, which generates the accentuated prescriptive tone.

In the 414 thesis and dissertations that had empirical research, it was common that the methodological options were related as options by this or that data collection approach, in a clear assimilation between method and research techniques. Although most of the studies had aimed to present the chosen methodology for the research, with deep use, therefore, of texts from Menga Lüdke and Marli André (1986), this presentation privileged the more instrumental aspects of the research and practically no references were made to the theoretical matrix of the study.

In this sense, despite the prevailing critical matrix, the method still maintains certain autonomy in relation to the theoretical formulations, a characteristic that, according to Cardoso (1976), denounces a certain degree of empiricism, which was observed in a good number of the studies analyzed. It is important to highlight that the option for what Thiollent (1982) would call observational objectivism also indicates a theory that is subjacent to it, because as Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron (1999) recall, "the measurement, the quantitative instruments and, in general, all the operations of the sociological practice, from the elaboration of questionnaires and codification to statistical analysis, are theories in acts for the purpose of construction, consciously or not, of the facts and of the relations between the facts" (p. 58). Therefore, we could say that critical emphasis of the studies is still, in many cases, blended with an empirical-positivist matrix that, contradictorily, acts in the construction of the object of study. This blend explains, in a way, the emphasis on the prescription as highlighted above.

#### **Views on the curricular organization and content selection**

The studies of the curriculum field are identified by the themes related centrally to the selection, organization and distribution of

the teaching contents, where it is understood that such contents are not only concepts, but also knowledge, practice, abilities, visions of the world and values produced in the school culture. As to the constitution of the school knowledge, the selection and organization of teaching contents tend to be prioritized, even if not devaluating the marks brought by the unequal distribution of knowledge in the society due to the different cultural markings (social class, gender, ethnic, race, sexuality). Curriculum involves options, in certain historical context, for contents selected by a wider social culture, but it equally involves the organization of these contents for teaching purposes. The content selection and the curricular organization besides implied in power relations and political and economical processes, are understood as eminently producers of culture: the school culture. The selections and the organization processes not only transfer contents from a wider cultural sphere to the school, by didactic mechanisms. Such processes imply in the production of spheres, practices, visions of the world, abilities and values which form the school culture. It is also an equal part of this culture the school knowledge produced for the school and by the school, constituted by the pedagogical mediation of the cultural and the social.

Therefore, it is not alien that 68 thesis and dissertations that focus on the content selection were identified; 65 focused on curricular organization and 5 looked into selection and organization simultaneously. From the analysis of the theoretical-methodological approach of these thesis and dissertations, however, three inter-related aspects should be highlighted. The first one is the tendency to a reunification of the school knowledge; the second is the disarticulated approach of the issues related to curricular organization and content selection, making it difficult to formulate the problem of these issues; the third one is the focus of the curricular proposition.

Sometimes, thesis and dissertations, even though centered predominantly on a sociological/philosophical focus, do not take into consideration the conclusions of the curriculum research on content selection and curricular organization, assuming a dimension where the school knowledge has a leading role. The school knowledge is not considered as a production which serves the specific social finalities of schooling, as widely discussed by authors as Andre Chervel, Ivor Goodson and Michael Young, and it is focused only in owning or not to the actuality of science or yet to the actuality of the curricular line of thought. In this perspective, there are thesis and dissertations that defend the inclusion of knowledge in the curriculum for basic education - concepts, themes, disciplines – or principles of curricular organization distinct from the traditional ones, specially focused on curricular integration. Usually such research is based on theoretical principles derived from epistemological discussions of the disciplines of reference, on the conclusions of the psychology of learning or even on the relations between knowledge and social dynamics, without establishing a dialogue with the conclusions of the sociological studies about culture and the school knowledge.

A good example is the thesis and dissertations that elaborate on principles of content selection and/or curricular organization based

on teaching-learning theories, more notably Vygotsky. Frequently the studies about this author are not mentioned with conclusions of curriculum research, as if it were possible to derive from a psychology of learning theory, without mediations, a theory of curriculum and learning. As Pérez-Gómez (1996) analyzes, such derivation implies not considering the unpredictability of the actions in a classroom, its conditioning by other dimensions, such as the ethical-political decisions, the serving to other wider institutional and social goals, as well as the partiality of these theories, restrict to aspects and concrete areas of learning. As a result, a prescriptive focus on this knowledge was created. The investigation of the productions that it yields is not prioritized, as well as the meaning of these productions, trying to argue in favor of how this school knowledge should be.

Associated to this first issue, it is also possible to identify the disarticulation of the research on content selection and curricular organization. The possibility that the studies prioritize at times the selection or the organization, investigating more carefully specific aspects of the curriculum, is not questioned. It is important to observe, though, that the investigation of each of these dimensions requires an examination of its interconnections. With this, it is avoided first that the analysis of the content selection is done without considering the modifications of this content in the school culture and second that the curriculum organization does not dialogue with the understanding of the character of the social construction of these contents, as well as with theories of the culture. Equally, such interconnections allow us to investigate changes in the selected contents generated by alterations in the curricular organization and changes in the curricular organization that imply in the circulation of other knowledge, values, and abilities. The disarticulated approach of the selection and the organization tend to devalue the constitution of a problematic<sup>5</sup> of the curricular issues investigated, as the definition of the issues and of the investigated procedures is developed without the more through investigation of the theories of the curriculum, even though there is the frequent careful appropriation of other theoretical supports.

Both the reification of the school knowledge as well as the difficulty to build a problematic of the content selection and of the curricular organization tends to generate a limitation of the research as to the curricular proposition. More than an investigative posture that looks into understanding the curricular dynamics, its conditionings and implications, we search to build proposals, many times idealized, as to how the curriculum should be, if principles external to the school culture were considered.

Considering the importance of the research that has the transformation of the curricular practice as a goal, assuming the political perspective of presenting propositions for teaching, many times such research go beyond the unclear frontier between proposition and prescription, assuming the perspective that it is up to the curricular thought to elaborate models of curriculum. Such perspective is notably accentuated in the research, which focus on the selection of contents and curricular organization. Frequently, instead of producing research that try to understand the curricula



lived within the schools, its relationships to the proposals and to the curricular thought, and that try to understand the content selection made and the curricular arrangements employed, highlighting its social and cultural conditionings, prescriptive research on the practice are developed. In this research, even when there is a concern to highlight why the practice is the way it is, we try to present a model of how it should be. For example, which more actual contents it could focus on and what school subjects should be more valued. In the research that focuses on curricular integration, the prescriptive tendency is also notable, specially presenting new principles of organization of contents or research on curricular integration, frequently based on the critique of the disciplinary curriculum, considering the criteria of the sciences of reference. As to the latter, there is a frequent tendency to situate the formation of teachers and/or in the epistemological teaching concepts the justification for the existence of a fragmented curriculum. This happens also when authors of curriculum sociology are mentioned who point out the relationship between the curricular organization and the power relations established in the wider society, as, for example, Bernstein (1981). This fact reveals, once again, the lack of articulation between the theorization and the investigative principles built, as discussed previously.

### Conclusions

The mapping of the production about curriculum based on the thesis and dissertations from the Graduation Programs in Education in Brazil indicated that the curriculum field has developed within the last decades around certain themes and privileging certain theoretical supports.

Initially, it is important to point out to the large quantity of production on curriculum. Of the 65 existing Programs of Graduation in Education in 2002, 27 had institutional research in the field and were responsible, between 1996 and 2002, for 453 thesis and dissertations on the theme.

Certain characteristics of this abundant production deserve to be highlighted. The first one is related to the diversity of the themes handled and to the different areas of knowledge involved in the studies. The curriculum researchers have focused on curriculum in a general way, but also on discipline areas that go from the arts to the sciences, giving more importance to history, physical education and mathematics. This distribution has been responsible for a variety of theoretical references used and for the building of objects of study. It is possible to point out that, particularly in such studies, a dialogue is developed, sometimes advantageous among theoretical supports of the curriculum field with those results of the investigations in the respective fields of teaching of the specific school subjects and in the fields of the disciplines of reference.

These results point to observations made in previous studies that have shown that hybridism seems to have been the mark of the field in the 1990s. However, it is about an organic diversity marked by a powerful sociological/philosophical tendency. The re-

territorialization of the discourses in the fields of sociology and philosophy in the thesis and dissertations can really overcome, generally speaking, the references to authors of the fields of curriculum and education. The centrality of the critical theories is still the theoretical mark of the field, even though sometimes it appears hybrid with empirical postures and with elements of a post-modern discourse. It is interesting to notice that the post-structuralism and the post-modernism, powerful theoretical supports of the bibliographic production of the field of curriculum, do not have yet the penetration that would be expected in the Programs of Graduate. Generally speaking, it is about supports clearly located in Rio Grande do Sul, being a majority in the UFRGS Program.

The diversity of themes and the incorporation of philosophical and sociological theories have been elements that allow us to perceive how much the field of curriculum has participated in the wider educational debates and of the emerging social concerns. The discourses of these areas that penetrate the field have contributed for the constitution of its identity. At the same time that it makes it plural, this movement diffuses a theoretical conception for the curriculum. The sliding of themes, the hybridism of tendencies are indicators of a growing imprecision that, at times, does not consider the specificity of education and of the curricular processes<sup>6</sup>. We understand that the movement of integration with other fields should occur with the owning of that which is useful for the construction of the objects of the curricular research, with the creative confrontation as the guide of this ownership. The movement that we perceive, especially in the thesis and dissertations, indicate that this confrontation is present, producing interesting conclusions. However, it cannot yet be seen as a mark of the field.

The second characteristic that seems important to highlight is the focus of the studies in the schools. The analysis demonstrated that the curriculum field has tried to control the problematic that concern the teachers in their classrooms, being very common that the themes of study appear due to an insertion of researchers as teachers in the schools. It is about an indicator that is in conflict with a certain interpretation socially accepted that the University and the area of curriculum have been little concerned with the reality of the education and the schools. Not only are the schools the base of the majority of the studies, as in almost all studies there are recommendations trying to handle the problems studied. In this sense, the desire for change and improvement, frequently generate naïve responses, with prescriptions of points of action for the resolution of issues that would require a more global policy of action. But even so they express a bond with concerns of the critical perspective, in the sense of a transformation of the curriculum in the schools with the objective to reduce social exclusion and to lead to emancipation.

Such focus on the schools and on the perspective of social transformation, however, causes a strong tendency to curricular prescription. It is not a prescription that is based on the same model of society associated to theories of social efficiency. Nor is it situated in a majority focus in the appropriateness of the principles

of the productive world and to the rules of the labor market. But even so, the tendency to prescription, in the sense that it makes itself quite present, still slides to the idea that the curriculum should be the former of directed identities for certain goals and for certain models of society, and its the teachers role to attend to these models and goals, according to established criteria fro beyond school dynamics.

In this study we consider assuming a more comprehensive and interpretative perspective of the school dynamics in the constitution of the curriculum, as well as trying to understand the relationship between these dynamics and other social and cultural dynamics in the research on curriculum that are possibilities of overcoming the prescriptive focus in the thesis and dissertations. We understand that this can be developed without disrespecting the most significant aspect of these studies: the valorization of school as a priority space of investigation.

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## Endnotes

1. We would also like to highlight the doctoral thesis of Cunha (1997) that analysis the crisis of the critical theory of curriculum that was presented at the ANPEd's GT of Curriculum in the annual 1999 meeting. The author worked with texts written by the main authors in the field, with interviews with these authors and with observations during the annual meetings.
2. Basic education is the legal term in Brazil which defines the schooling from kindergarten to high school.
3. The graduate programs in Brazil are evaluated by committees of university professors in each area of study organized by an agency of Ministry of Education (CAPES - Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior). The graduate programs send to this agency annually the reports about the development of teaching and researching activities.
4. The graduate courses in education are: FURG, PUC/SP Supervision and Curriculum, PUC/SP History of Education, PUC/MG, UCB, UCGO, UERJ, UFBA, UFC, UFMT, UFPE, UFPR, UFRGS, UFRJ, UFRN, UNB, UNESP/AR, UNESP/PP, UNISINOS, UNIVALI, USP, PUC-RIO,

UNICAMP, UNIJUI, UNIMEP, UFES, UFF, and UFMG.

5. In an epistemological sense, a problematic is a group of problems elaborated by a certain scientific theory that limits in that way its specific field. Therefore, it is a group of more general problems that define the basic concerns and the investigative procedure of a theoretical approach. This problematic is formed from the **actual state** of an issue or theoretical issues at a certain historical moment and which is related to theoretical and scientific practices of a period, as well as to the social context within it is inserted. (Japiassu & Marcondes, 1993)
  6. The number of studies that, in their own definition, deal with curriculum, and that were eliminated from this study because they did not dedicate themselves to its school dimensions, is a strong evidence of this imprecision. This research does not allow for considering this imprecision as the sample used left out these studies.
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