

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY FORMATION AND
LEGITIMATION IN BRAZIL: 1995-2008

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to my youngest daughter, Julianna,
who turned my world upside down and has never stopped surprising me.

Acknowledgments

Growing up in a poor and large family, with parents who didn't even complete their primary education, I have experienced in very powerful ways how education can change one's life trajectory, regardless of one's social and economic background. All but one of my six brothers and sisters have a degree, five have M. A.s, and three of them – including myself – are working on Ph. D.s. The youngest, Adilson E. Motter, is a professor at Northwestern University.

What could be told as a family success story underscores a unique case of social mobility due to educational opportunities, which is at odds with the fate of most fellow Brazilians. After all, huge social inequalities continue to be a formidable obstacle for the underprivileged to have access to a good education. I do believe that a just and equitable society is a pre-condition to education equality and not the other way around. This uncompromising conviction has encouraged my work in education over the last fifteen years and guided me during the unlikely journey that has brought me so far.

I am deeply indebted to many people who have given me support along the way. To name just a few won't diminish my profound gratitude to those who remained backstage and anonymous. They encouraged me to pursue a dream that seemed completely out of reach for a country boy from Cafelândia, a small town in the South of Brazil, where growing crops and looking after chickens is the most common destiny. My parents, Otavio and Maria, were wise enough to see education as the best legacy they could leave to their seven children. They worked very hard on a small farm to give us dignity and schooling. I owe them all I have achieved.

My large family is an everlasting source of joy and shared growth. We still enjoy gatherings with everybody around the table for Sunday lunch and holiday celebrations. I am grateful to all my brothers (Adelar, Irineu and Adilson), and sisters (Alaides, Marli and Arlete) for their continuing friendship and closeness, especially during the four years I lived in the United

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For a committed educator, to raise and nurture his or her own children to be autonomous individuals, critical thinkers, active citizens and, above all, happy persons, is the ultimate challenge. My three children – Paula, Otavio and Julianna – have proved that my faults as a parent shouldn't undermine their own prospect of a fulfilling life, as they are growing up and somehow managing to develop a set of values which have helped them to make good judgments and responsible choices. I am blessed to have them in my life.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION - MAPPING OUT A SUBJECT IN MOTION

There are advantages in being able to write your Ph.D. thesis without stirring from in front of the TV set.

Terry Eagleton, *After Theory*

Catching up with the news (a vignette)

Early Monday morning, September 8, 2003. I arrived at Guarulhos International Airport in São Paulo on a flight from Chicago. Although it had only been eight months since my last trip to Brazil, I was particularly excited to return home because it was a unique historical moment for the Brazilian nation. When I had been in Brazil in early January that year, a week after Lula's inauguration, popular expectations were high. The country was going through a major political change with the Worker's Party's (PT) rise to national power. However, assuming that the new administration and the Brazilian public's honeymoon period had ended, I expected to find a tenser political climate, a more critical press, and the first signs of popular discontent with the seeming incapacity of the Lula government to solve the country's most pressing social and economic problems.

Eager to catch up with the current events and to get a flavor of the ongoing political debate, I walked straight to the first newsstand at the airport, where I bought two national newspapers and two news magazines (*Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Veja* and *Época*), which I would read compulsively during my journey to Congonhas airport to catch my flight to Brasília, my final destination. Although I had been keeping regular tabs on the Brazilian press coverage via Internet, only the contact with the printed

press could infuse me with that reassuring feeling of again being in touch with ‘*reality*’ in my country, from which I had felt rather detached since I had left in late August 2000.

As I glimpsed the newspapers’ front page headlines, colorful pictures portraying the military top brass attending military parades on Independence Day, September 7, grabbed my attention. The public display of patriotism brought back memories of my school days in the 1970s, during the dictatorship, when all school students were required to march in a military-like parade. Such reminiscences, however, would dissipate quickly as I flipped through the following pages and figured out that I could –or should –start my exploratory fieldwork right away: several articles on education were prominently featured in all the news media I had in my hands.

The front section of *Folha de S. Paulo* had a full-page interview with a former Ministry of Education (MEC)¹ official during the Cardoso government launching a blunt attack on the Lula government’s educational policy (Lo Prete, 2003). The paper gave nearly an entire page to a recurring and controversial theme: national assessment policies (Gois, 2003b). The *O Estado de S. Paulo*, in turn, editorialized “*O ‘enterro’ do projeto educacional*” [“The ‘death and burial’ of the educational project”] of the São Paulo Municipal Government, also under PT administration that time, which had prioritized the building of well-equipped schools in the poorest neighborhoods on the city’s outskirts. A few pages later, the paper highlighted an article on “*Programa Brasil Alfabetizado*” [“The Literate Brazil Program”], which would be launched that afternoon in Brasília. The news stressed that the purpose of the “late announcement” of the initiative by the Lula government was to stave off criticisms considering it “all talk, little walk” on social

¹ From now on the Ministry will be mentioned as MEC, from “Ministério de Educação e Cultura”, as its former abbreviation is still in use.

affairs (Cafardo, 2003, p. A9).

Education, especially higher education, was also one of the subjects highlighted in Brazil's leading news magazines. *Veja* ran an article supporting the assessment system instituted by the former government and harshly criticized the changes proposed by the new administration (Weinberg, 2003). *Época*, in turn, reported that international investment funds had “their eyes on Brazilian schools”, a business worth billions of *reals*^{*}, and which has experienced explosive growth over the last few years. Thanks to “objective indicators” on the performance of educational institutions produced by national assessments, investors could now put their funds in those private universities that presented “good teaching results”, which in turn would attract more students and therefore offer a higher profit (Aguilar, 2003).

As a former journalist, I knew that editors often struggled with lack of “hot” stories to enhance the Monday edition and that education is always a good source of news stories to fill in the gaps.² However, the fact that several of the country's most influential newspapers and magazines were running multiple stories on education that day seemed to indicate something more than mere coincidence or “Monday’s issues”. I read all the articles trying to figure out the reason for this unusual prominence of educational policies. The factual treatment of the subject of each article and the lack of a broader context, however, prevented me from getting “the big picture”. Actually, as I would learn later on, the week prior to my arrival the Minister of Education had triggered a political

* The Brazilian national currency.

² This assertion would be further confirmed by an experienced former full-time education reporter who made his career at the *Folha* in the 1990s. Speaking of his difficulties in getting material on education printed, inasmuch as newsworthiness criteria determine that stories on crimes and accidents always take precedence, he noted that the first lesson education reporters need to learn is that “‘cold’ articles on

firestorm by disclosing a report commissioned by MEC which proposed drastic changes to the higher education assessment policies established by the Cardoso government, the chief instrument of which was a nationwide mandatory exam for graduating students. All the major national news media editorialized against the report, contending that ranking higher education institutions according to their performance was in the “consumers’ best interests,” as *Veja* blatantly put it:

One of the leading instruments to protect citizens and consumers is comparison. When you travel, you can choose flights according to ticket price and departure time, and hotels where you'll stay, also according to the facilities offered. The same is true when choosing a restaurant, clothes, or a car. One efficient form of comparison is to analyze rankings. (...) Seven years ago, Brazil, which is not particularly strong in producing statistics, invented an admirable ranking system – the National Course Examination, better known as *Provão* [Big Test]. (Weinberg, 2003, p. 48)

The political context

This rather lengthy opening vignette was intended to provide a glance of the political context in which the first phase of fieldwork would be conducted, just after a historical power shift at the federal level through a democratic election. As already mentioned, I arrived in Brazil when the Minister of Education was at the center of a major political crisis, the results of which I would track over the following weeks, both in the press as well as backstage.³ The controversy began with the MEC announcement to

education cannot compete on an equal standing as 'hot' stories. (Personal interview with Fernando Rossetti, São Paulo, October 4 2003).

³ I was just about to finish the first draft of my research project when, on January 23, 2004, President Lula dismissed the Minister of Education, Cristovam Buarque, a senator from his own party. According to the press, the President was unhappy with his poor performance and his constant public demands for greater funding for education. Tarso Genro, appointed to the position, was the former Mayor of Porto Alegre, a city

do away with the '*Provão*'. With this, educational policy was thrust to the center of national politics, becoming one of the major battlefronts between the Lula government and its opposition, associated with the former administration. Newspapers and magazines that Monday both reflected and further instigated this conflict.⁴

As a number of previous studies have shown, the mainstream media, mostly conservative, were largely supportive of the Cardoso government's educational agenda (ANDI, 2000). National assessment policies were enthusiastically embraced as the centerpiece of a sweeping educational restructuring initiated in 1995 (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 1996). Not surprisingly, President Cardoso's Minister of Education, Paulo Renato Souza, was ready to concede that the media played a crucial role in the debate on national policies during his tenure.⁵ Given this overt engagement, I wanted to examine whether or not the government shift had been accompanied by any significant change in *which* educational issues regularly appeared in the national press and, even more important, *how* they were framed.

When I arrived in Brasília, it became certain that the '*timing*' for my initial fieldwork could not have been more appropriate. At the same time, I feared that I would become engrossed and distracted by the political disputes underlying the ongoing educational debate, whose main contenders were MEC officials during the Cardoso and

governed by PT administrations for 16 years, from 1989 to 2004, where the local government had launched an educational project called *Citizen School*, which has been widely praised as innovative and socially inclusive (see Gandin, 2002; Gandin and Apple, 2003).

⁴ The fact that education has increasingly become more controversial and that social policy has become the main target of criticism leveled against the Lula government seems to point to contradictions arising from the surprising continuance of the neo-liberal macroeconomic policy. For the frustration of many of its supporters, what initially might have been looked upon as a tactic to win over the confidence of the market, soon became a declaration of faith in the existing economic model. For an excellent analysis of the dilemmas and challenges facing the Lula government during its early years, see João A. de Paula (org.), *A Economia Política da Mudança* [The Political Economy of Change] (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2003).

Lula administrations. For reasons that I shall explain shortly, I had good reason to be wary of becoming personally and emotionally involved in the political frays, losing sight of important issues related to my research project. As I was about to enter the institutional and political setting of my fieldwork, I was aware that I had to simultaneously perform multiple assignments. On the one hand, I had very practical tasks at hand, which were collecting data through interviews, archival research, selecting and sampling media materials. On the other hand, I needed to theoretically and methodologically consolidate my research project, which I intended to do by incorporating certain insights in interviews with key policy actors. I was consciously taking a risky path by conceptualizing my research while actually doing it (Becker, 1998). I was counting on my experience as a journalist and education policy analyst and, most importantly, on a network of social relations established in both fields. I reflect on these experiences and assets in the next section.

Crossroads: personal trajectory and research agenda

Any scholarly undertaking has a particular genealogy, in many ways more deeply intertwined with one's personal trajectory than one would be ready to admit. This thesis is by no means an exception to that rule. When I chose to study the role of media in education policy formation in Brazil, I was deliberately drawing upon my experience as a policy practitioner and professional journalist, with a background in media studies.⁶ At

⁵ Personal interview with Paulo Renato Souza (São Paulo, October 7 2003).

⁶ My M.A. dissertation is an in-depth analysis of political clientelism in the distribution of radio and television stations to private operators connected to local political elites. My investigation showed how the

this point, a brief autobiographical account of these experiences is in order. I shall make explicit how my involvement with education policy-making over the last thirteen years has profoundly affected the construction of my subject of inquiry and the way I approach it. This double role as researcher and policy-maker raises a number of ethical issues, which I shall address in the closing section of Chapter 3.

Encountering education

My encounter with educational policy was a result of a sudden turn in my journalism career. Despite working several years as a professional journalist and as a temporary Assistant Professor at University of Brasília (UnB), by late 1995 I was facing unemployment. Then I learned that the National Council of State Secretaries of Education (Conselho Nacional de Secretários de Educação – CONSED), which had just established an office in Brasília, was hiring a press advisor. I applied for the job, and after an interview was immediately hired. My first task was to create a weekly newsletter to keep state education officials informed of developments regarding national education policies, at a time when the Federal Government was undertaking a sweeping education reform. Since the CONSED staff numbered only three people, I soon took on other assignments, assuming the *de facto* position of a policy analyst.

Without any specific training in education policy, I suddenly found myself participating in national conferences, meetings, and round tables where fundamental changes in the federal educational framework and national policies were being discussed

Federal Government used concessions “to buy support” in Congress and influence its decisions during the National Constituent Assembly (1987/1988). (See Motter, 1994).

and negotiated. As the multi-purpose CONSED advisor, I was frequently in touch with state secretaries of education, national education officials, and members of the educational community at large. Just as I was getting used to my job, a new career shift occurred that would extend my involvement with education, particularly policy formation. Having passed a public employment examination and taken a six-month training course at the National Public Administration School (ENAP), I was appointed to the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP), linked to MEC.⁷

When I was hired in November 1996, INEP was about to undergo a radical institutional redesign, from which it would eventually emerge as the leading institution in the restructuring of the Brazilian education system, entrusted with the development and implementation of a comprehensive national assessment system covering all education levels.⁸ Moreover, it was responsible for the production of national educational statistics and indicators. The revamped *new* INEP can be seen as part of the new administrative apparatuses of the “evaluative state” (Neave, 1988), and as such has performed strategic functions that have enabled central government to steer “the education system at distance” (Whitty *et al.*, 1998; Apple 2001). I did not subject these sweeping transformations to critical reflection during my four years there. I rather enthusiastically embraced the opportunity of working for an institution committed to promoting education reforms in a country where they are so sorely needed.

In early 1998, I was promoted to the INEP President’s Chief of Staff, a middle-rank position that would enable me to regularly attend high-level meetings at MEC. This

⁷ This training was designed to prepare career civil servants in accordance with the managerial ideology that presided over the State reform undertaken by the Cardoso government (see Chapter 5).

experience familiarized me with the national arena of educational policy-making and gave me an insider's view of decision-making processes at the center of policy formation during the second half of the first term and the first half of the second term of the Cardoso government (1995-2002). I happened to be working at MEC when the Federal Government was vigorously promoting educational reforms, a period when the State was undergoing major transformations toward what has been called the "managerial state" (Clarke & Newman, 1997).

I was trained to be part of a new elite of public servants who were expected to take a leadership role in revamping public administration by acting as 'managers', as opposed to the old-fashioned 'bureaucrats'⁹ (Pereira, 1999a). Few government organizations were more successful than INEP in reshaping and reinventing themselves in accordance with the managerial model. Due to my training as a journalist and policy analyst, even though a newcomer to education, the main tasks I was assigned to were to write and review official reports, policy statements, executive summaries, briefings, press releases, and all sorts of institutional documents.¹⁰ I worked close to media specialists

⁸ Currently, Brazil has three major systems in place: the National Evaluation System of Basic Education (SAEB); the National Secondary School Exam (ENEM); and the National Evaluation System of Higher Education (SINAES).

⁹ From the viewpoint of the mainstream press, this "managerial turn" blurred the line between public administration and the private sector, introducing into the former the advantages of the latter. As *Veja* put it, "Now, university graduated civil servants that the government is trying to attract are closer to private sector executives: they must have a solid academic background, professional ambitions and be willing to face huge challenges, such as improving the sectors of the public apparatus in which they were hired." Cf. Gabriela Carelli, "Aonde chegamos: bons empregos só no Estado" [Where we have arrived: good jobs only in the State"], *Veja*, March 24 2004.

¹⁰ My first major job was the official report *Basic Education in Brazil: 1991-1997*, presented at the Second EFA-9 Group Ministerial Review Meeting, in Islamabad, Pakistan, September 14 to 16, 1997. Next, I wrote the draft for a national campaign called '*Toda Criança na Escola*' (All Children at School), which was launched in late September 1997 and helped Cardoso's reelection the following year. I also contributed to the blueprint for the National Education Plan, which set up national goals for a ten-year period (2001-2010). Finally, I had the opportunity to write the outline of the *Brazilian Statement to the World Education Forum*, held in Dakar, Senegal, April 26 to 28, 2000.

and experienced, in very concrete and powerful ways how marketing techniques have become pervasive in education policy and discourse.

This study is, in a certain way, a journey that required me to critically re-examine my experience and revisit some of my writings for INEP and MEC, which I left in August 2000 when I was granted paid leave to go to the United States to take a Ph.D. in Education.¹¹ After many years engaged in education policy-making, immersion in the rich environment of academic life provided me with an unique opportunity to come into contact with critical, post-structural, postcolonial, and feminist theories from which I borrow theoretical insights, methodological tools and interpretive devices used in this thesis. In late August 2004, I returned to Brazil, where I resumed my job at MEC and finished the research for this thesis.

Research design and methodological approach

In this section I shall spell out three core theoretical premises that inform my research design and methodological approach: first, my understanding of *public* education policy as something mediated by the state but not reducible to its interventions, which does not prevent me from recognizing the state's primacy and leadership in education restructuring (Apple *et al.*, 2003); second, my clear focus on the *Brazilian arena*, even though I take into account other competing arenas of educational policy-

¹¹ During the next four years, I would do a fair amount of coursework with scholars like Michael W. Apple, Gloria Ladson- Billings, James Gee, Thomas Popkewitz, Andreas Kazamias, Michael Olneck, Amy Stambach, and Jennifer O'Day in the Departments of Curriculum and Instructions and Education Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin. Particularly useful for the development of this study was Hemant Shah's class on Critical and Cultural Studies of Mass Communication, in the Department of Journalism, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos' seminar on Reinventing Social Emancipation, a crosslisted course offered by the Department of Sociology and Law School.

making such as state and municipal governments and the increasing influence of the international organizations on national policies (Taylor *et. al.*, 1997); third, my central assumption – to be checked against policy actors’ perceptions and empirical data – that over the last two decade the media have begun to play a pivotal role in education policy formation, which, in turn, points to a broader transformation of the public sphere, a phenomenon often associated with the ‘*mediatization*’ of politics and government (Fairclough, 1995, 2000; Bennett & Entman, 2001). As I shall probe later, such a trend is particularly visible in Brazil, where powerful private media conglomerates compete with political parties and state institutions in shaping public agendas and policies.

This structural shift has given rise to what has been called the “*political spectacle*”, which is believed to weaken democracy by inhibiting and distorting political participation (Murray, 1985, 1988). Education policy has been particularly prone to symbolic manipulation by the State and dominant groups, a trend that seems to increase under the leadership of neo-liberals and neoconservatives (Smith *et al.*, 2004; Apple, 2001; Lugg, 1996). These attempts, however, have been met with a great deal of resistance from social movements and dissenting groups, which in turn have also increasingly relied on media strategies in order to mobilize their constituencies. Social and political organizers seem to have taken seriously Bourdieu’s (1996) warning that “anyone who still believes that you can organize a political demonstration without paying attention to television risks being left behind” (p. 22).

However, such media-based strategy for collective action can hardly foster the kind of political consciousness and agency required for sustained social changes (Gitlin, 2003 [1980]). The uncritical adoption by social movements of what Gamson (1992,

p.185) labels the “hot button approach”, responding to the political spectacle by mimicking promotion and marketing strategies to “sell” their cause, depoliticizes the issues at stake and “undermines the goal of increasing people’s sense of agency”. Moreover, it feeds and extends “the pervasive cynicism about those who run the society to include those who supposedly challenge their domination”.

What is the implication of all this for education policy, and, more specifically, for this study? The trends referred to above seem to suggest that policy-making has to a great extent become a “struggle over meaning”, an insight taken up by post-structuralist analyses. It is my central postulate in this thesis that such contests have been increasingly played out *in and through the mass media*, with worrying consequences for education and democratic participation, which I shall examine in detail in the following chapters.

By stressing the symbolic dimension of politics and further asserting that the media has become a *strategic arena* where struggles over meaning are played out, I do not imply that policy contests are reducible to their symbolic forms. Rather, they encompass nitty-gritty materialities and are wholly embedded in existing power relations. Ball (1994) captures these complexities in a theoretically elegant definition of policy as “an ‘economy of power’, a set of technologies and practices which are realized and struggled over in local settings. Policy is both text and action, words and deeds; it is what is enacted as well as what is intended” (p.10). From this perspective, policy is not something the state has the monopoly over and can freely dispose to spur social changes. Instead, policy-making is an “ongoing and dynamic” process involving a multitude of practices in which a whole host of actors are engaged, interacting with each other and the State. Here I conceive of the State not as an *entity* or *object* but as a ‘strategic-relational’

space where competing but unequally endowed parties struggle over meaning and material resources (Jessop, 1990; Popkewitz, 2000). In the same vein, I conceive the media as standing in a dialectical relationship with the social whole. This means that the media, as a key cultural and social institution in contemporary societies, simultaneously re-presents and constructs reality at the same time that it is socially shaped.

I argue in this thesis that policy practices and interactions are largely *mediated* in the sense that they are realized in a public sphere structurally and discursively constituted and shaped by privately owned and operated media. It goes without saying that “subordinated social groups usually lack equal access to the material means of equal participation” in such a space (Fraser, 1997, p. 79). This does not obscure the paramount importance of the state in the provision and distribution of common goods, notably when it comes to equal opportunities in education (Taylor *et al.* 1997; Apple *et al.*, 2003). On the contrary, as Ball (1994) rightly pointed out, “any decent theory of education policy must attend to the workings of the state. But any decent theory of education policy must not be limited to state control perspective” (p. 10).

The second sentence of Ball’s statement reminds us that while the state strives to foster and “manage change” through government interventions, it cannot keep policy processes and their outcomes entirely in its grip. The state itself is penetrated by conflicting interests and competing agendas. In other words, the state is not an entity but rather – “a set of relations through which governing and government are produced” (Popkewitz, 2000, p. 192). Struggles over policy may therefore arise and unfold in multiple arenas. One might want to add that under the aegis of globalization, policy-making stretches well beyond the nation-state. Developing countries, and in particular

their educational systems, have been strongly influenced by international agencies in the past two decades. (Bonal, 2002)

Policies are struggled over in local settings as they become “policies in use,” or, in other words, as they are appropriated and rearticulated in unintended, counter-hegemonic ways. As Apple (2003) points out, “[w]here something comes from...need not determine its political or educational use in any concrete situation” (p.14). Through this process of re-appropriation and recontextualization, social movements play a major role in affecting educational change, even *when* and *where* their access to policy-making processes seems structurally and politically blocked or constrained. Kenway’s (1990) definition effectively captures this interplay of multiple arenas and actors in policy formation: “Policy represents the temporary settlements between diverse, competing, and unequal forces within civil society, within the state itself and between associated discursive regimes” (quoted in Taylor et al., 1997, p. 32). In a similar fashion, Taylor and her colleagues stress the inherently “political nature of policy as a compromise which is struggled over at all stages by competing interests” (p. 24). Policies, then, are always provisional, contingent, and unstable compromises.

It is at this point that the media enter the process of education policy formation and legitimation, but not as a neutral broker. Rather, the mainstream media have an agenda of their own, which by and large coalesces around the interests of dominant groups. Therefore, the *mediatization* of education policy formation amplifies and crystallizes relations of domination and subordination by ensuring that only certain voices are heard as meaningful, legitimate, and authoritative. Probing this assumption is a central component of this study.

That said, I do not subscribe to an overtly structural view that regards the mass communication system as a monolithic ideological apparatus in the Althusserian sense (Herman and Chomsky, 2002 [1988]). Instead, I assume that the media is a political, social, economic, and cultural institution with ‘*relative autonomy*’ both in relation to the state and the economy, much like educational institutions.¹² Gamson (1992) proposes that, “the mass media are a system in which active agents with specific purposes are constantly engaged in a process of supplying meaning” (pp. xi-xii). He goes on to suggest that “rather than thinking of them as a set of stimuli to which individuals respond, we should think of them as the site of a complex symbolic contest over which interpretations will prevail” (pp. xi-xii).

This view is consistent with the constructionist perspective in communication research, which postulates that media actors, government officials, social activists, and audiences are actively engaged in making meaning, although this “contest” takes place on a highly uneven playing field and the “players” are subject to power relations and structural constraints (Crigler, 1998; Pride, 2002). An analysis of the political economy of the mass media is therefore a crucial step to help us understand who are likely to be the winners and losers in *mediated* policy contests (see Chapter 2).

Statement of thesis and research questions

This study was conducted in a scholarly environment in which a large amount of empirical and conceptual research has investigated and described the link between

¹² A classic discussion of the relative autonomy of culture and education is Michael W. Apple’s, *Education and Power*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

hegemonic globalization models and market-based educational reforms in Brazil and elsewhere. When considering how globalization discourses and processes have increasingly shaped national educational policies in developing countries, researchers and analysts tend to highlight the crucial role of international organizations in performing a particular discourse of educational reforms that makes neo-liberal solutions seem natural and even progressive. However, the centrality of the media in the process through which the global discourses of neo-liberalism are taken up, re-articulated and re-appropriated in national settings has not been closely examined.

My purpose in conducting this study is to fill this void by demonstrating that in order to reach a better understanding of educational globalization, analyses must account for the way in which the corporate media frame and shape education debate and policies. My contention is that – as a key cultural, economic and political institution – the media provide a privileged vantage point to examine how global hegemonic paradigms and ideologies have been re-articulated and re-appropriated to form and inform the emerging dominant educational discourse underpinning current educational restructuring in Brazil. Moreover, my research finds that the media’s active engagement in education policy formation has meant an increasing marketization of public discourse and colonization of the educational field by an economic thinking and rationality.

Part of the significance of my research lies in its potential to help social activists and critical educators in two ways: to recognize the *mass media* as a “*strategic site of struggle*” over meanings and symbolic representations of schools and their agents; and to envision strategies to be more effective and meaningful in their efforts to advance democratic educational reforms. After all, the conservative educational agenda put

forward by the mainstream media must be faced and challenged by counter-hegemonic educational visions if we really want to interrupt neo-liberal reforms. This study explores the ways in which the media have contributed to conservative educational mobilization by empowering and legitimating experts who favor market-based educational policies and by systematically excluding and muting dissenting voices.

In this respect, my thesis asks and attempts to address the following questions: How are global hegemonic educational discourses and reforms re-articulated and re-appropriated by the dominant media in the Brazilian context? Who has been empowered and legitimated by media representations of schools, teachers, parents and students? Who has been disempowered and delegitimated? To what extent does media coverage of the education issues promote, distort, or prevent democratic participation in policy formation?

The 2002 landmark election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who came to embody the hopes of dispossessed and disfranchised Brazilians, represented a major political shift, providing a unique opportunity to consider the role of the media in struggles over education policies under a progressive government. The mainstream media, by and large conservative, were supporting the Cardoso government's market-oriented reforms. As the national authority over education was transferred to PT, counter-hegemonic social movements and progressive political actors within the new power coalition saw a historical chance to push forward an alternative policy and globalization agenda. Reformist forces unleashed by the Lula government were met with fierce resistance from the dominant media, adamantly committed to defending the course taken by the previous administration (1995-2002).

The significance of my research also derives from the contributions it makes to demonstrate that contradictions would be magnified by the Lula government's attempt to combine a very conservative economic agenda with a progressive social and educational agenda. By acknowledging the relative autonomy of education, my thesis makes it possible to consider how a major change of government has affected the dominant media coverage of educational issues. This comparative perspective enables me to address the following questions: What are the areas that are challenged now and which were not before? And what are the areas that are not challenged now and which were before? Which are the educational issues that continue to be absent from the national media? What was never said before the PT victory in the 2002 presidential election and has been increasingly said since then?

Yet the genuine contribution of this study will be measured in terms of its usefulness to help critical educators and social activists in their daily struggles for social and educational equality in a country eager to overcome entrenched injustices, inequalities, and oppression.

Organization of the Dissertation

In order to cover the broad topic described above and to address the research questions which guide this scholarly undertaking, I chose to organize the thesis into eight chapters. It is worth noting that its final format and content differ greatly from the first outline sketched out five years ago, when I formulated my research plan and started my data collection. Insights gained from my exploratory fieldwork and the early analysis of

the data, as well as major political events that have had a huge impact on the development of education policies, such as the successive replacements at the Ministry of Education (MEC) during Lula's first term of office, and his reelection in 2006, followed by the launching of the Education Development Plan (PDE), in March 2007, required me to adjust my research focus and my directions. In brief, it was during the course of investigation itself and the process of reflection which accompanied every step that I faced new questionings and was challenged to give a more accurate and nuanced interpretation of the large amount of data collected over a span of almost fifteen years (1995-2008).

This introductory chapter illustrates certain practical problems and unforeseen turns in education policy formation in Brazil during the period covered by this study, which compelled me to review early assumptions and research strategies. Instead of providing a full and detailed account of the Brazilian political and historical context, I have introduced my research topic – the role of the media in education policy formation and legitimation – by giving glimpses of certain critical moments in the national educational agenda which attracted considerable media attention.

The debut of the Workers' Party (PT) on the national stage, following Lula's landslide victory in the 2002 presidential election, is portrayed as a defining political event which provides the backdrop for this study. By disclosing my participation in education policy-making during much of the period covered by this dissertation, I address issues of objectivity and neutrality vis-à-vis political commitments and my personal agenda which could compromise and impair my analysis.

In Chapter 2, I assemble the theoretical scaffolding which will enable me to explore the linkage and interplay between a media-centered polity in contemporary mass societies and the education policy formation process, with specific focus on the Brazilian context. First, I recognize transnational media conglomerates as an important force of globalization, a complex phenomenon which has had major impact on national education restructuring over the last two decades. Next, I contend that private media corporations, moved by their own commercial interests and ideological commitments, compete with the State, political parties, social movements and other interest groups in setting the public educational agenda and shaping the issues of the day. As education is increasingly seen as a source of legitimacy – and profit –, transnational media conglomerates are investing heavily in the textbook publishing market, a trend that has become particularly noticeable in Brazil after the opening of its economy in the 1990s.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the multi-method approach I have employed in my research, based on the combined use of four qualitative tools: in-depth interviews with key policy actors; qualitative content analysis of sampled media coverage of selected educational issues; critical analysis of official texts and policy documents; and the literature review. Descriptive in nature and scope, this chapter offers a thorough explanation of my choices in terms of methodology and research strategies, as well as an account of my experience as a novice researcher. I also report the access to sources and data collection, starting with exploratory fieldwork carried out in 2003. Given the centrality of the media in this study, I detail the criteria used to select the *national* news media organizations on which I would center my investigation and the method used to

sample media materials for my analysis. Last but not least, I bring up some ethical issues raised by this study and briefly discuss how I responded to them.

Chapter 4 is where I lay out a comprehensive analytical framework to account for the four threads which are woven together to form what I call here the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil, namely: human capital theory, ideology of meritocracy, cultural deficit theory, and managerialism. Drawing upon various sources and media samples, I provide a detailed discussion of human capital theory, which was rehabilitated in academic circles in the 1990s and became the favorite paradigm to explain the seemingly intractable inequalities rooted in the historical formation process of Brazilian society. I depict how this school of thought, dominated by economicism, has profoundly influenced social and educational policies in Brazil during the period covered by this dissertation. I further examine, through the lenses of dominant media, how this economic thinking and rationality have colonized the educational field in Brazil, a phenomenon linked to global hegemonic tendencies in education. Last, I briefly describe the “ideology of competency” and address the key role of media experts in producing and legitimizing the dominant educational discourse.

In Chapter 5, I analyze the ideology of meritocracy and cultural deficit theories as sides of the same coin. Both assign full responsibility to individuals and their families for their success or failure in an increasingly competitive society. I identify the ideology of meritocracy as one of the main ideological underpinnings of the dominant educational discourse, based on which education is rhetorically conceived and promoted as a major opportunity equalizer and a powerful social mobility mechanism, providing the notion of fairness that is absolutely crucial for the system to gain and retain its legitimacy. I

highlight the crucial role of national evaluations, used to rank schools and sort out the best students, to legitimize education as a meritocratic contest. In this chapter, I also describe how cultural deficit theories have been employed by privileged groups to blame the victims and by the dominant media to silence their voices, to naturalize inequalities, and to make exclusion invisible. Linked to this, I illustrate how media discourse has been more than instrumental to promote the self-victimization of the new middle-class, manufacturing its anxieties and mobilizing its political allies against social and economic reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and ameliorating income distribution. Finally, I hint at the emergence of social movements which mobilize disenfranchised and subaltern groups to call for social justice and class and race-based affirmative action in education, challenging the ideology of meritocracy, now increasingly perceived as an ideological device used to legitimize privileges enjoyed by dominant groups and keeping them unchecked.

Chapter 6 offers a detailed description and analysis of the so-called managerialism, which is associated with the State reform and structural adjustment carried out by the Cardoso government in the 1990s. I examine how the far-reaching process of globalization has deeply affected national educational policies and the redefinition of the role of the state. The analysis that follows particularly focuses on how managerial ideology has impacted and colonized the field of education, providing the rationality for the establishment of national standardized tests and performance-based accountability mechanisms as the linchpin of the current education restructuring. Next, I point out that decentralization of educational policies and provision of education coupled with the adoption of centralized mechanisms of surveillance and control over schools has

been one of the chief components of the new managerial model implemented in the Brazilian education system in the last fifteen years. Lastly, I illustrate how the mainstream media have decisively contributed to framing the educational debate in such a way that a new common sense has been forged around a managerial approach to school reform, which postulates that “teachers’ salaries have nothing to do with teaching quality” and that “good management counts more than the bulk of the money spent on education.”

In Chapter 7, I check the coherence and consistency of the analytical framework built upon empirical bases and spelled out in the previous chapters, employing it to examine the Education Development Plan (PDE), a sweeping educational policy launched by the Lula government in early 2007. The PDE is recognized as a milestone in the bewildering history of public education in Brazil and is presented as the enactment of the dominant educational discourse in national policy. By linking it to global hegemonic templates of education reforms, I intend to prove my hypothesis that the engagement of the dominant media in educational policy formation in Brazil has favored the adoption of market-oriented models of education and society. I describe the PDE as the embodiment of a *new education consensus*, forged through an unlikely alliance between the Lula government and the powerful business-driven movement *Todos pela Educação* – TPE (Everyone for Education), which alienates teachers’ unions, progressive social movements and other historical allies of the PT. I characterize the PDE as the corollary of the ongoing ideological contest over the educational reform and policy which has accompanied the transition to democracy during the last two decades, highlighting the contradictions arising from the adoption of a performance-based accountability approach

for school reform under the PT leadership. Lastly, I briefly describe the teachers' unions' reaction to and mobilization against the increase in national standardized tests and the push for the adoption of merit pay and performance-based financial reward schemes in public schools, stimulated by the PDE.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I give my conclusions on the pivotal role of the media in the formation and legitimation of education policy in Brazil over the last fifteen years. Instead of summarizing and reassessing arguments already presented in the previous chapters, I extend my analysis a step further in order to incorporate recent developments in education policy, which seem to confirm the worrying trends described throughout this dissertation. The increasing marketization of education is becoming more apparent, as private media conglomerates target schools as part of their core business strategies. I contend that current education policies favor the commoditization and standardization of school curriculum, opening up new opportunities for private investment in the growing textbook and educational materials market. The process of concentration and consolidation in the media industry is also affecting the education sector, especially in the textbook publishing industry. As the PDE stresses a performance-based accountability system, anchored in national standardized test scores, it seems probable that Brazil is heading toward the adoption of a national mandatory curriculum. This is the emerging agenda revealed by this study – and again the dominant media is taking the lead.

Before I conclude this introductory chapter, two important caveats are needed. Firstly, I want to emphasize that this thesis was developed and written in a span of five years, from 2003 to 2008. During the last four years, I have been back in Brazil and spent three years working again at MEC and INEP. My personal involvement in the national

arena of education policy formation and my closeness to key policy-makers are reflected on every page of this dissertation. As the readers of this dissertation can judge for themselves, I do believe that my personal attachment to the subject of this study did not undermine my ability as a critical analyst. The second caveat refers to the organization of the thesis, which does not follow strictly academic standards. Instead of having a rigid separation and hierarchy between chapters, starting with the traditional description of research choices and methodological procedures, followed by a chapter devoted to the presentation of the theoretical framework, and only then turn to the analysis made, this thesis attempts to integrate all these elements in a journalistic-style narrative that reflects my personal training and experience. While the first three chapters still follow a more traditional pattern, from Chapter 4 onward elements of theory and analysis are sometimes intercalated and woven together. Though risking occasional overstatements, this choice allows me to cover a larger spectrum of issues related to my research questions, integrating them into a useful analytical framework that helps us to make sense of current events and trends in educational restructuring in Brazil and, hopefully, elsewhere.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN EDUCATION POLICY FORMATION

In the last decade the media corporations have committed two important mistakes: 1) they have spread the thesis that the support of Brazil for the liberal consensus is the sign of prosperity; 2) they have believed in the daydream. (...) A victim of itself, the media has become news. The sector is going through an unprecedented crisis. Perhaps the worst in the last fifty years (...) The embarrassing truth is that in recent years journalism has avoided the task of clearly exposing the contradictions of the single model. (...) The deciding power has moved from the public sphere to the private arena. At a speed at which the means of mass communication have not been able to accompany. (...) It was imagined that, in peripheral countries like Brazil, a renewed and streamlined state would be able to give vent to the historical demands of society. It would regulate the market and finally provide for a distribution of income, health, income, security, etc. (...) A liberal feast is taking place to which the great majority have not been invited. (...) Decisive movements are only captured by contemporary journalism in its terminal phase. The stages of the formulation of decisions, which are commanded by a market out of control and has been handed over to the external logic, have been ignored. If the means of communication fail to prepare themselves to cover this decision-making nucleus which is becoming superimposed over the State, they will be condemned to merely relating existing facts. They will completely lose their utilitarian meaning. (...) Journalism will become converted into a mere prophet of what has already happened.

Josias de Souza, Journalist and ex-Director of the Brasília branch of the *Folha de S.Paulo* (02 May 2004, p. A5)

The lengthy passage quoted above, written by a well-known Brazilian journalist, reveals an unusual self-reflexive criticism in a major Brazilian newspaper that belongs to the top tier of the dominant media in Brazil. In his insightful article titled “*In crisis, the press become the prophet of what has already happened*”, Souza (2004) accuses media corporations of becoming victims of their own over-confidence and blind faith in the neo-liberal ideology – even though he avoids naming it. Embodied by the so-called “*Washington Consensus*”¹³, this global model of structural adjustment was fervently

¹³ This expression was first proposed by John Williamson, a Washington-based economist who coined it in 1990 to summarize a list of 10 policy recommendations for developing countries which, being trapped by chronic economic problems (explosive inflation rates, recession, increasing unemployment etc.), were dramatically destabilized by the foreign debt crisis that erupted in the early 1980s. Williamson claimed that his ‘decalogue’ – a set of neo-liberal policies, which include privatization, deregulation, trade liberalization,

embraced by the Cardoso government with the promise of bringing prosperity and stability to the embattled Brazilian economy. The media corporations – Souza argues – ended up believing in the rosy picture they helped to paint of Brazil’s prospects in the globalizing economy. Ill-conceived expansion plans, financed by foreign loans, and heavy investments in new information technologies during the Internet bubble indebted the major Brazilian media conglomerates, which went through an unprecedented crisis when the economic recovery vanished, in 2001. “The embarrassing truth is that in the last few years the press has exonerated itself from the task of clearly exposing the contradictions of the single model”. Souza goes on to note that “the power of decision shifted from the public sphere to the private arena at such a speed that the mass communication media were not able to follow” (Souza, 2004, p. A5). Indeed, the neo-liberal consensus in Brazil during the 1990s owes a great deal to the dominant media’s active and unabashed engagement and support. The faith in the free market did not fade away even after the crisis knocked on the very doors of the media corporations.

Why should we be concerned with how the media frame and shape the debate on education? What kind of insights can we gain by analyzing the formation of education policy through the lenses of the dominant media? My major claim in this thesis is that we must acknowledge the central role of the media if we are to reach a better understanding of educational restructuring over the last two decades in Brazil, which is closely linked to global education discourse and reforms.

public spending reduction etc. – represented a broad consensus among policy-makers of international institutions headquartered in the capital of the United States – hence, the “Washington Consensus.” See John Williamson, “What Washington Means for Policy Reform,” in John Williamson, ed., *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1990).

According to Stuart Hall (1997) the media can “give us a set of symptomatic clues as to what seem to be the flashpoints, the unsettled issues, the underlying tensions, the traumas of the collective unconscious in the culture of late-modern society” (p. 231). Hence, the analysis of the educational discourse from the vantage point of the mainstream media may reveal the “major fault-lines running through the body politic”, making visible both contradictions within the hegemonic alliance and, therefore, providing insights from which we can begin to chart and design new strategies in the struggle for educational change and social justice. In his insightful discussion on the centrality of culture, Hall goes on to offer a second argument that can be recruited in support of choosing the media as a subject of study by asserting that “struggles over power increasingly take a symbolic and discursive rather than simply a physical and compulsive form, and politics itself increasingly assumes the form of a ‘cultural politics’” (p. 213).

The media institution is so effective to convey a dominant worldview and to form opinion regarding public issues because it reflects people’s common sense (Bourdieu, 1996). More than being instrumental for the legitimation of the state, the growing coverage devoted to educational issues highlights the media’s own need for legitimacy. I will return to this point later on.

From the outset, I shall disclose two premises underlying my investigation: firstly, I conceive the media as a key economic, political, and cultural institution in contemporary societies; secondly, I approach the media as a strategic site of struggle and contestation over meanings, which play a pivotal role in winning consent and sustaining hegemony within the capitalist framework. Both concepts employed here (consent and hegemony) are borrowed from Gramsci (1997).

In this chapter I shall lay down the theoretical framework that will support my empirical analysis, which is continued in the next chapters. Drawing upon selected approaches applied to Communication Research and critical Cultural Studies, I devise a theoretical perspective and assemble analytical tools that will enable me to investigate the role of the media in educational policy formation and legitimation in Brazil.

Firstly, I discuss the political economy of the mass media, relating this structural dimension to its cultural and ideological function in sustaining the hegemony of the dominant alliance. Secondly, I analyze the current transformations and trends that are reshaping the *mediascapes*¹⁴ worldwide and link these complex processes to the core dynamic of capitalism and globalization, highlighting certain contradictions and potential counter-hegemonic uses of the so-called new media. Thirdly, I provide a brief review of the literature on the relationship between media and education, exploring certain useful insights provided by the few theorists who have recognized the relevance of this nexus. Finally, in the last section, I assemble the theoretical scaffolding which will allow me to analyze my data in the next chapters.

¹⁴ This concept is borrowed from Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). It refers simultaneously "to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios)...and to the images of the world created by these media" (p. 35). I think that the concept's major strength resides exactly in that it conveys the idea of a world that is increasingly perceived and experienced through the media. Drawing upon Benedict Anderson's notion of *imagined communities*, Appadurai suggests that people and groups around the globe take up these *mediascapes* to create multiple *imagined worlds* (p. 33). This plurality of imagined worlds points to the disjunctures and asymmetries associated with the processes of globalization, which affect the real living conditions of the world's population in powerful ways. A similar use of this concept is found in Greg Dimitriadis and Cameron McCarthy's *Reading and Teaching the Postcolonial* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

Media and Hegemony: Devising a Critical Theory Perspective

As implied above, in order to understand the processes of social, political, and cultural change in contemporary societies, “we must give a central role to the development of communications media and their impact.” Yet, as John Thompson (1995) pointed out, few social theorists “have treated communication media with the seriousness they deserve” (p. 3). Why is it that so many theorists of social change have come to regard the media as “a sphere of the superficial and the ephemeral” or a sort of epiphenomenon unworthy of any serious academic inquiry? For Thompson (1995) this “attitude of suspiciousness toward the media” has historical and intellectual roots in classical social thought, which, understandably, lacks any systematic theorizing on the role of the media in the shaping of modern societies. By drawing largely upon thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the electronic media were still incipient or did not even exist, contemporary social theorists have tended to neglect this key-institution and the impact of which their predecessors could not have fully appreciated during their lifetime.

In *The Media and Modernity* (1995), John Thompson attempted to fill this void by laying down a social theory of the media that places the development of ever-expanding networks of communication at the heart of contemporary processes of social and cultural change. However, if we are to come to grips with the role of the media in the shaping of modern societies, we cannot take them in isolation. Rather, we need “to be concerned with the ways in which these networks are interwoven with other forms of power –

economic, political and military – and how they have been used by actors, both individual and collective, to pursue their aims” (p. 4). This statement should not be read as suggesting that the media are just *carriers* that can be recruited and manipulated by individual or collective actors to get their messages passed on. Instead, as I shall shortly argue, the mass media and the powerful private conglomerates that control them in capitalist societies are important political and economic actors in their own right. Mazzoleni (1995, p. 308) expresses this idea with a powerful rhetorical flourish: “Yesterday everything circled around the parties, today everything circles around, and in the space of, the media” (cited in Nóvoa & deJong-Lambert, 2004).

Indeed, the centrality of the media is a salient feature of societies nowadays. However, we should avoid any essentializing position because media are not in a vacuum and do not stand above all other social and political institutions. Rather, as social organizations, media institutions are fully embedded in the unequal distribution of power and resources. This requires one to recognize that the media maintain a dialectical relationship with the social whole. That is, they shape society, but are also socially shaped. Here, I hint briefly at the media’s influence on other social institutions (Bourdieu, 1996). Some political theorists have argued that the *mediatization* of politics has meant not only a steady and irreversible decline of the importance of political parties, but also a major change in the very nature of politics. Giovanni Sartori (1997, pp. 69-72) characterizes this transformation as the rise of “videopolitics,” by which he refers to the overwhelming influence of television in the formation of public opinion. In a similar fashion, John Urry (2003) suggests that citizens have experienced an increasing exposure

to “new forms of informational and mediated power” (p. 113). In short, he contends that “mediatization involves the enhanced visualization of power” (p. 155).

This visibility is realized through a “mediated publicness,” in which the exercise of political power takes on even more symbolic and performative forms. The advent of modern electronic media, therefore, has given rise to what Thompson (2000, p. 40) calls “the society of self-disclosure,” which is characterized by the blurring of the boundaries between the public and private spheres, something we have witnessed daily on the eve of the political scandals we have been living through. In this media-saturated environment, politics is transformed into pure spectacle (Murray, 1988; Debord, 1994), and consent is sought through “managerial methods of promotion and forms of consultation of public opinion”, in what has been called “government by spin doctor” (Fairclough, 2000, p. 12). Indeed, media consultants and spin doctors have taken the center stage in the mediated arena of modern politics, exercising great influence in the framing of parties’ and candidates’ platforms and strategies, hence shaping the political process itself (Thompson, 2000, pp. 262-263). Their disproportionate power, felt everywhere, severely undermines the democratic processes of participation and public deliberation.

The mediatization and spectacularization of politics and social life – a trend well illustrated by the current tidal wave of reality shows on television around the world – has deleterious effects on democracy (Kellner, 2003; Thompson, 2000). Education and schools have not being immune to such trends, as standardized tests have become the chief restructuring tool (see Smith *et al.*, 2004). Some of these effects have been widely recognized as a growing disengagement and withdrawal from public life and as a general cynicism toward politics and politicians (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Hardt and Negri

(2000) point to a sweeping degradation of “what was once imagined as the public sphere” and suggest that media-driven politics “destroys any collective form of sociality – individualizing social actors in their separate automobiles and in front of separate video screens – and at the same time imposes a new mass sociality, a new uniformity of action and thought” (pp.321-322). After positing this over-statement, the authors hasten to correct themselves by asserting that “the common conception that the media (and television in particular) have destroyed politics is false only to the extent that it seems based on an idealized notion of what democratic political discourse, exchange, and participation consisted of in the era prior to this media age”.

Indeed, as Porto (2001) has cogently argued, many of the all too often outcries against the steady decline of political participation in Western societies, measured in terms of turnout rates, is based on a thoroughly romanticized view of the past. In the same vein, mediated politics in contemporary mass democracies is seen as corrupting and as taking the place of more authentic and direct forms of democracy, which never really existed. Writing of the conservative restoration in the United State, Michael Apple (2001) has aptly noted that to revere a pristine pastime made up of order, social and cultural stability, and to pay respect to authority, on the one hand, and to decry an ongoing decay of social institutions and traditional values, on the other, is a recurrent conservative cantilena. Far from being inconsequential or residual, such claims for restoration have been accommodated and championed under the umbrella of what Apple has called “conservative modernization” – a hegemonic project that, in the U.S., brings together neo-liberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists, and fractions of the managerial and professional middle class.

The double positioning of the media in capitalist societies

What is it that, in distinguishing the media from other institutions, makes us give the media more attention? One thing seems plainly clear: the ideological function of the media is not reducible to its central role in cultural production. Obviously, the mass media are a key institution in the sub-field of “large-scale production” (Bourdieu, 1996). However, in today’s informational economy, the media also play a key economic role (Castells, 1996). According to Hardt and Negri (2000), “at the pinnacle of contemporary production, information and communication are the very commodities produced; the network itself is the site of both production and circulation” (p. 298). In the same vein, following closely in Raymond Williams’ footsteps, Stuart Hall (1997) notes that,

The means of producing, circulating, and exchanging have been dramatically expanded through the new media technologies and the information revolution. The old distinction which classical Marxism used to make between the economic ‘base’ and the ideological ‘superstructure’ is difficult to sustain in circumstances where the media both form a critical part of the material infrastructure of modern societies and are the principal means by which ideas and images are circulated. (Hall, 1997, p. 209)

In this sense, media industries are more than just a relay of the cultural circuit. They are implicated in all stages of the capitalist economy: production, circulation/distribution, and consumption (Apple, 1995). This crucial transformation, which lies at the heart of the new global capitalism, calls into question Althusser’s (1971) location of the media of communication in modern societies as pertaining to “state ideological apparatuses.” Taking up Gramsci’s concept of *hegemony*, he rightly asserts

that the capitalist state, under the leadership of the ruling class, entails both repressive and ideological functions. Therefore, the state power that secures the reproduction of the relations of production, hence domination, is increasingly exercised through ideological forms and mechanisms rather than by recourse to brute force. What Althusser (1971) stresses, however, (paying his dues to Gramsci), is that “*no class holds State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses*” (p. 146) (italics in the English edition). Interestingly enough, writing in the effervescent Paris of the 1960s student protests, Althusser identified schools as the new “dominant state ideological apparatuses,” a position that was once held by the Catholic Church in Western societies. I doubt if he would today consider media less important than schools. His view on the role of mass schooling in capitalist social formation, however, was a very instrumental one, conceived in terms of correspondence theory. In the same vein, Althusser saw communication apparatuses, regardless of their being *publicly* or *privately* owned, as performing a single function: to contribute to the enactment and maintenance of the ruling ideology. That is a rather reductive view, which has been largely discredited as an example of a-historic “structuralism” (Gandin, 2002).

Though writing in the 1920s and 1930s (thus, before the advent of modern electronic media, especially television), Gramsci (1997) did not fail to acknowledge that the then emerging popular media (newspapers, magazines, and radio) should be treated as key institutions in the construction of common sense and, therefore, in the winning and retaining of hegemony. Clearly, as many of his interpreters have pointed out, by *hegemony* Gramsci means a dynamic, ever-changing mode of political and cultural

domination enacted and legitimated through *consent* rather than force or repression. This *game* is predominantly played out in civil society or, in Habermas' (1989) sense, in the public sphere. Nancy Fraser (1997) weaves both concepts together (public sphere and hegemony) in an enlightening passage that is worth quoting at length:

The public sphere produces consent by means of circulation of discourses that construct the 'common sense' of the day and represent the existing order as natural and/or just, but not simply as a ruse that is imposed. Rather, the public sphere in its mature form includes sufficient participation and sufficient representation of multiple interests and perspectives to permit most people most of the time to recognize themselves in its discourses. People who are ultimately disadvantaged by the social construction of consent nonetheless manage to find in the discourses of the public sphere representations of their interests, aspirations, life-problems, and anxieties that are close enough to resonate with their own lived self-representations, identities, and feelings. Their consent to hegemonic rule is secured when their culturally constructed perspectives are taken up and articulated with other culturally constructed perspectives in hegemonic sociopolitical projects. (Fraser, 1997, p. 95, n.15)

Two elements in Fraser's approach are worth retaining: firstly, her emphasis on discursive practices and representations, on identities and feelings as constitutive of hegemonic discourse or, for that matter, of counter-hegemonic challenges; secondly, her underlying acknowledgement of the central role of common sense in the winning and securing of hegemony. Moreover, Fraser provides a powerful argument to rebut the theories of media effects centered on cognition (Porto, 2001). Rather, as I shall argue, the media mold what Raymond Williams (1977) called "structures of feelings," deeply ingrained in our self-identity, our ways of being in the world. The media are, indeed, crucially important in the construction of the public sphere and, therefore, in the enactment of hegemony. As in this particular study from which the passage above was

quoted, Fraser is critically discussing Habermas' notion of the public sphere, pointing out its shortcomings from a feminist perspective, she does recognize, as he did, the paramount importance of the media "for the circulation of views" in contemporary societies. In line with Habermas' thinking, she suggests that mainstream media are, at one and the same time, an indispensable means for – and a major constraint on – the expansion and democratization of the public sphere. For one basic reason, they are, by and large, "privately owned and operated for profit" (Fraser, 1997, p. 79). To note, in her quarrel with Habermas's critical social theory, Fraser has eloquently argued that a truly democratic public sphere must be exonerated from a male dominance perspective (see Fraser, 1989. pp. 113-143).

Gramsci's prolific concept of *hegemony* is an enabling tool that has been productively deployed in several media studies (Gitlin, 2003 [1980]; Porto, 2001; Hallin, 1994) and critical education works (Apple, 2001; Gandin, 2002; Pedroni, 2003). However, one should be aware that, as Hallin (1994, p. 12) warns us, much of its appeal could well lie in its "obviousness." To say, for instance, that mainstream media play a key role in the enactment and maintenance of dominant groups' hegemonic positions may sound tautological. Likewise, it is easy to claim that alternative media (community radio and television, union newspapers, web sites, and the like) play a role in the construction of counter-hegemonic discourses (Williams, 1977). As an overused concept, the theoretical coupling of hegemony and counter-hegemony has become a sliding signifier. A second theoretical difficulty haunting the concept of hegemony is that it seems more suitable for the explanation of continuity than of change (Mander, 1999). This idea is also implied in Gitlin's (2003) assertion that we should acknowledge "the penetrating

importance of the notion of hegemony – uniting persuasion from above with consent from below – *for comprehending the endurance of advanced capitalist society*” (p. 10) (italics are mine).

Mapping the *Mediascapes*: structural transformations, current trends and some disturbing prospects

The restructuring of capitalism over the last two decades, under the aegis of neo-liberalism and globalization, has been accompanied by an unprecedented escalation of corporate concentration in all economic sectors (Du Boff & Herman, 2001). However, no other single industry has been through a more accelerated process of consolidation during this period of time than the media sectors like communications and entertainment, a process of acceleration that has resulted in a dramatic concentration of media ownership nationally and globally. Indeed, as Hardt and Negri (2000) aptly note, “communications networks have become the most active terrain of mergers and competition for the most powerful transnational corporations” (p. 298). This race to control the global information infrastructure and flow has placed heavy pressures on governments, notably those in developing countries, to deregulate and privatize telecommunications.¹⁵

Robert McChesney’s *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (2000) provides a well-documented account of this millennial transformation and offers a thoughtful analysis of the seemingly unstoppable oligopolistic trends sweeping through corporate media

¹⁵ In tandem with this international trend, Brazil carried out a comprehensive program of privatization during the Cardoso government (1995-2002), which included telecommunications. More recently, Congress passed a constitutional amendment allowing transnational companies to take over Brazilian media outlets.

worldwide. McChesney identifies three interwoven trends that are reshaping the global media at the dawn of the twenty-first century: corporate concentration, conglomeration, and hypercommercialism.¹⁶ Media concentration, he goes on to explain, is the outcome of two intertwined dynamics: *horizontal integration*, which means fewer firms dominating each sector of the media (for instance, broadcasting, book publishing, film production, and magazine and newspaper publishing); *vertical integration*, which refers to a process whereby a small handful of media corporations take control of content production and distribution networks (for instance, film studios owning movie theaters and television networks) (see McChesney, 2000, pp. 15-29). These two movements have crossed each other's paths to produce the recent trend of the conglomeration of media ownership, which has led to the formation of a half dozen behemoths that own the major outlets in all media sectors, from film studios, broadcasting, recorded music, and cable systems to magazine, newspaper, and book publishing.¹⁷

Though hardly a new phenomenon, media concentration has accelerated dramatically over the past two decades. The first edition of Ben Bagdikian's seminal work *The Media Monopoly*, published in 1983, counted around fifty firms dominating mass media in the U.S. market. Fifteen years later, in 1997, that number had dropped fivefold, and the "top tier" of the media was reduced to no more than ten players. Finally, in its sixth edition, in 2000, *The Media Monopoly*'s updated score showed a stunning

¹⁶ For a thoughtful critique, based on British experience, of the old left's distrust of commercial competition and of the new right's blind faith that de-regulation and privatization, coupled with technological changes, would lead to more competition in media and communications, see Richard Collins and Cristina Murrioni, *New Media, New Policies* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1996).

¹⁷ In many Latin America countries, including Brazil, media conglomerates are now aggressively pursuing profits in the textbook publishing market. This is a clear signal that education could well become the new frontier for the expansion of media corporations. (More on this in Chapter 8).

result: only six mega-corporations control all the major mass media.¹⁸ This seemingly unstoppable trend represents a major threat to democracy. For Bagdikian (2000), “The prospect is for a giantism and concentrated power beyond anything ever seen.... The lasting social and political implications are sobering” (p. xi).

This oligopolization process and the emergence of new and powerful global players coincided with a deep restructuring of telecommunications in Brazil, which was carried out as from 1995. The end of the state monopoly, followed by the privatization of the sector, attracted the interest of the largest international conglomerates. According to Venício A. Lima (2004), the new global trends of the consolidation and concentration of ownership and the appearance of global players found a favorable environment to prosper in Brazil, bearing in mind that in Brazil the mass media had traditionally developed as private oligopolies. However, Lima states that the new configuration of the sector on a global scale has taken on special characteristics in Brazil:

firstly, as the historical dominance of the sector by a small number of family groups and by the local and/or regional elites has remained unaltered; secondly, because we are witnessing the entry of a new and powerful actor in the sector: religious organizations, particularly the evangelical churches; thirdly, because the hegemonic position of a single Brazilian group, the Globo Organizations, remains”. (Lima, 2004, p. 94)

However, the increasing globalization of the communications sector openly contradicts the persistence of the old family structures on which the control and concentration of the ownership of the mass media has always been based in Brazil (Motter, 1994). Recent figures show that about 90% of both electronic and printed Brazilian media is controlled

¹⁸ The six behemoths or “parent firms” are: General Electric, Viacom, Disney, Bertelsmann, AOL-Time Warner, and Murdoch/News Corporation (Fox).

by thirteen family groups (Lima, 2004, pp. 105-106). Three of these groups are of particular interest for this study: the Marinho family, which controls the Globo Organizations; the Civita family, which controls the Abril Group (which publishes the *Veja* news magazine); and the Frias family, which controls the Folha Group (publishers of the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper).¹⁹

The prevalence of family groups is rooted in the clientelism of Brazilian broadcasting, which was in force until the establishment of the new Federal Constitution in 1988. The President of the Republic had the exclusive prerogative to distribute radio and television concessions to his allies, and this was systematically carried out as a form of “political currency” in order to buy support in the National Congress.²⁰ As a result, a link was established between the family groups that control the means of mass communication and the local and regional political elites, who, in many cases, were the same, such being the symbiosis between the two groups.²¹

Lima (2004) concluded that globalization has failed to alter these two dominant characteristics of the Brazilian media: the prevalence of family groups associated with local and political elites, and the hegemony of the Globo Organizations, although it has resulted in a greater concentration of ownership and an unprecedented financial crisis.

¹⁹ The Marinho and Frias families are associated with the newspaper *Valor Econômico*, the main business newspaper in Brazil.

²⁰ My MA dissertation is a rather lengthy analysis of political clientelism in the distribution of radio and television concessions for private operators, most of them linked to local political elites. My investigation shows how the government used concessions to buy support in Congress during the National Constituent Assembly (1987/1988). See Paulino Motter, *A Batalha Invisível da Constituinte: Interesses Privados versus Carater Público da Radiodifusão no Brasil* [The Invisible Battle of the Constituent Assembly: Private Interests versus the Public Character of Broadcasting in Brazil]. (Brasília: Universidade de Brasília, 1994, 326 pp.)

²¹ Although the traditional clientelist politics are in decline, the political and electoral power of the so-called “colonels” still remains to a great extent in the control of radio and television broadcasting companies.

The forces of the global market have been challenging the old family structures, and this enables us to foresee a gradual increase in the process of denationalization and the consolidation of the global players in the sector.

New media: technological hype and potential counter-hegemonic uses

The rise of the Internet as a global web and the development of more interactive informational technologies – the so-called *new* media – have been welcomed as a promise of more diversity and democracy. However, such hopes may vanish with the growing colonization of the Internet by commercial interests backed by the same few mega-corporations that already control the *old* media. As McChesney (2000) cogently states, “the Internet is being incorporated into the heart of the corporate communication system, decidedly undermining the democratic potential envisioned by its founders” (p. ix). This somber prospect is confirmed by an unsuspected source, *The Wall Street Journal*, which reported that “the top 20 online news sites are owned by 16 large media companies, with the top five sites getting more traffic than the other 15 combined.”²²

Nonetheless, one should be cautious when denying any democratic and emancipatory potential to the Internet and other new information technologies. For one thing, as McIntyre-Mills (2000) has rightly asserted, technologies are not value-free, but “they can be colonized or taken over by those with other values and used for other purposes” (p. 25). In the case of the Internet, developed originally for military purposes, its actual uses, for good or bad, have served a range of aims and interests. For instance,

²² Yochi J. Dreazen and Joe Flint, “FCC Eases Media-Ownership Caps, Clearing the Way for New Mergers”, in *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 June 2003, p. A1-10.

transnational advocacy networks dedicated to human rights, the environment, indigenous peoples' rights, and women's rights – to name the most prominent – have benefited immensely from new communication technologies (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Though most of these international networks are organized, funded, and led by agencies and NGOs from the North (thus reproducing the same asymmetries and imbalance of power that characterizes the relationships between countries), access to the web and to the flow of information that it enables has greatly contributed to the empowerment of local social movements in the Third World.²³ On the other hand, computer networks have also provided a powerful mobilization tool for militias, white supremacist groups, and all sorts of retrograde identity-based social movements, some of them openly sponsoring the politics of hate.²⁴

Corporate concentration, conglomeration, and hypercommercialism are not the only disturbing trends sweeping through the global *mediascapes*. These structural shifts have been accompanied by an ideological realignment toward the right, which has increasingly brought the mainstream media under the expanding control and influence of neoconservative groups. In *Educating the "Right" Way* (2001), Michael Apple provides an enlightening illustration of this phenomenon in the U.S. by showing how authoritarian populist religious groups have taken advantage of the electronic pulpit to proselytize their ideas and mobilize grassroots movements. As Apple (2001) rightly notes, "the creative use of radio, television, and now Internet by conservative evangelicals demonstrates how

²³ An enlightening example of how grassroots women's movements in Brazil are interacting with transnational feminist networks is provided by Millie Thayer, "Transnational Feminism: Reading Joan Scott in the Brazilian *Sertão*" in *Ethnography*, Vol. 2(2): 243-271.

²⁴ For a thoroughly insightful and well-documented analysis of both progressive and retrogressive identity-based social movements, see Manuel Castells, *The Information Age, Vol. II: The Power of Identity* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1997).

potent a force such media can be (...)” (p. 137). Lima (2004) has pointed out the same trend in Brazil, where the second largest national television network is owned by an evangelical church.²⁵

What sense are we to make of all this? First, there is no evidence whatsoever that, in the foreseeable future, the *mass* media will fade away or have their influence over the shaping of popular culture severely reduced. Second, although promising in many ways, the *new* media are not being democratized with the speed that those who have vested interests in their expansion and those who naively see virtual communities as the solution for the intractable problems in the real world would have us believe. This makes one wonders whether Bill Gates was ironic or just disingenuous when he delivered the following striking remarks: “One of the wonderful things about the information highway is that virtual equity is far easier to achieve than real-world equity... We are all created equal in the virtual world” (quoted in Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 304).

In truth, it seems to me that, in the “real world,” the digital divide that keeps the vast majority of the world’s population outside the gates (so to speak) of the “virtual world,” preventing these people from fully participating in contemporary societies, is tightly interwoven with the unequal distribution of power and wealth, so that the marginalized status of the masses and the digital divide end up reinforcing each other. Schools can certainly help to open the gates of the “virtual world” and to promote digital inclusion. This is, indeed, a *sine qua non* for any closing of the material gap between the haves and haves-nots in the real world, without which “virtual equity” will remain just that – a fiction. Finally, progressive educators can make, and are already making,

²⁵ The Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD) acquired TV Record in 1990 and within a few years transformed it into a network which reached all of Brazil. At the same time it set up a political wing,

extensive use of the Internet to create progressive networks, to build alliances, and to act more effectively in their push for democratic schools (Sung & Apple, 2003).

Analytical frameworks for thinking about *nexus* of the media and educational change

Are the mainstream media serving the interests of a democratic society or are they, instead, privileging the viewpoints of powerful political and economic groups? Are the media free to permit opinions of whatever source? Is there public sovereignty over the media, as suggested by liberal theory? In their groundbreaking book *Manufacturing Consent* (2002 [1988]), Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky answer these questions with a bold ‘no’, claiming that the media’s main function is “to serve and propagandize on behalf of the powerful societal interests that control and finance them” (p. xi). They go on to argue that there are three basic “structural factors” precluding the media from being plural and democratic: they are privately owned and operated, they are economically dependent on major funding sources (advertisers), and they develop and maintain an intimate relationship with those who make the news (government office-holders, politicians, business leaders, and so on). Given such structural constraints, media behavior and performance are over-determined by “[the media’s] corporate character and integration into the political economy of the dominant economic system” (p. xii).

Based on these assumptions, Herman and Chomsky spelled out an analytical framework called the “propaganda model.” This model assumes that “*all the news that’s*

electing the so-called “evangelical block” in the National Congress (see Lima, 2004).

fit to print,” as reads the famous motto of *The New York Times*, is selected through a complex, multilevel system of filters, which prevents oppositional views from circulating. The main filters are owners, advertisers, news makers (sources), news shapers (experts, authoritative voices), and flak producers (powerful stakeholders and pressure groups). The propaganda model predicts that “the media will present a picture of the world which defends and inculcates the economic, social, and political agendas of the privileged groups that dominate the domestic economy, and who therefore also largely control the government” (Mitchell & Schoeffel, 2002, p. 15).

The close relationship between corporate media and government is self-evident. After all, media depend on reliable sources, a dependence that means lower costs for the gathering of information and higher credibility for the news organization in question. This explains the preference for official governmental sources. Conservative think tanks have been very effective in recruiting experts in different subjects and making them available to the mainstream media. They provide precious raw material for journalists: quotes and soundbites that support acceptable opinions. Another portentous device that conservative groups have mastered in order to influence news media coverage is what Herman and Chomsky call “flak.” Put simply, the term refers to negative feedback from powerful institutions such as the government, big corporations, conservative watchdogs, and monitoring groups. To be sure, the Internet has allowed for a host of initiatives sponsored by progressive groups, which are also monitoring the media.²⁶

Daniel Hallin (1994) contends that, by taking an overtly structuralist perspective, Herman and Chomsky came up with a model that is “perfectly unidimensional”: it

²⁶ For a good example in the U.S. see <http://www.alternet.org>; in Brazil, see <http://www.observatoriodaimprensa.org.br>

presumes that the media perform a single function – “that of reproducing dominant conceptions of the political world” – and it assumes that the filtration system operates efficiently without facing internal resistance (from, for example, the professional ideology of journalism) and external pressures (from oppositional forces). “The result – he goes on to assert – is that Herman and Chomsky give us a view of the media that is flat and static, which gives us no way of understanding change or variation” (p. 13). In response to such criticism, Chomsky contends that the propaganda model does allow for “critical debate,” but claims that the media constrain it by “framing” the debate in accordance with “the basic assumptions of the official doctrines, and thereby marginalizes and eliminates authentic and rational critical discussion.” By “bounding the debate within certain acceptable limits – that do not challenge the existing structure of power and domination – the media play a crucial role in that the debate only enhances the strength of the assumptions, ingraining them in people’s minds as the entire possible spectrum of opinion that there is” (in Mitchell & Schoeffel, 2002, p. 13).

My contention is that, when the state and dominant groups have strategic interests at stake, the propaganda model does seem to hold. For instance, the coverage before and during the Iraqi invasion proved once more that, when perceived national interests are at stake, the U.S. mainstream media are “upbeat and enthusiastic in their adoption of the government propaganda framework” (Mitchell & Schoeffel, 2002, p. 31). However, I do not share Herman and Chomsky’s view of journalists and reporters as just puppets or “just replaceable pieces” lacking agency and autonomy. I do not, however, mean to neglect structural and professional constraints that severely restrict their autonomy. To

sum up, the major contribution of Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model is to offer a useful framework within which we can analyze the political economy of the media.

Bourdieu's prolific concept of "journalistic field"

In one of his last works, *On Television and Journalism* (1996), the late Pierre Bourdieu confronted the role of the media in the field of cultural production. More specifically, he attempted to set out a framework within which the journalistic field, seen as a politically significant sub-field within the field of cultural production can be analyzed. Though modest in length and depth, especially if measured against his previous works, Bourdieu's *On Television and Journalism* does offer certain compelling insights that could be profitably recruited to analyze the complex relationship between the media and education. Before proceeding with the examination of these insights, however, one caveat is due: Bourdieu's cogent analysis is often undermined by an overt bias against journalists, or, as I mentioned earlier, toward "newspaper intellectuals," whom the French sociologist mercilessly lambasts throughout his book. It is not that such criticism is undeserved, but that Bourdieu reveals an elitist dismissal of the popular media that is all too often found in the academic sphere, a dismissal that obstructs a fruitful dialogue between intellectuals and popular media professionals.

In contrast with Herman and Chomsky's overtly structural approach, Bourdieu's view (which is also deeply influenced by structuralist assumptions) relies on a definition of the journalistic field in which this field is no less than "a microcosm with its own laws," so that "what happens in it cannot be understood by looking only at external

factors.” Rather, he contends, we have to consider “the totality of the objective power relations that structure the field” (pp. 39-40). The concept of *field* is a crucial one in Bourdieu’s sociological thought and refers to a “structured social space.” In his own words, “It contains people who dominate and others who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field” (p. 40). When it comes to the journalistic field, the economic competition between media companies has a major impact. Analyzing the political economy of the media is therefore of paramount importance if we are to understand how this field operates. Another defining principle is the “symbolic weight” that accrues from each media outlet.

How does the journalistic field affect other fields? What are Bourdieu’s main contributions to the critical analysis of the media’s role in educational policy formation? For Bourdieu (1996), the media threaten and challenge the autonomy of other fields, imposing upon them the principle of legitimacy based on ratings and visibility. As the media “never fail to offer their verdicts,” they condemn other fields (political fields, academic fields, and the like) to “heteronomy,” by which Bourdieu means “the loss of autonomy through subjection to external forces.” He goes on to assert that, “in every field, the influence of the journalistic field tends to favor those actors and institutions closer to the market” (p. 73). One can also think of an educational field where the media legitimate experts who favor market-driven reforms. These “heteronomous educators” depend on media recognition through which they validate their claims of expertise, regardless of their credibility and prestige within the academic educational community

(see Chapter 4). Therefore, it is not surprising that the debate around educational reforms is increasingly shaped in the language of journalism and the popular media.

Bourdieu's notion of *field* is useful in that it enables the media to be seen as having a relative autonomy in relation to the state and the economy, though the media is embedded in both the state and the economy. However, I contend that, in order to make this concept profitable, it is necessary to correct two shortcomings: first, Bourdieu's analysis of the *news media* as constitutive of the *journalistic field* makes a clear cut separation between information and entertainment, ignoring the current trend of blurring this line (Fairclough, 2000; Porto, 2001); second, and linked to that, he tends to see the media as performing a single function and, therefore, gets trapped in the same unidimensionality that haunts the theoretical frameworks of Althusser's ideological state apparatuses and Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model.

Media agenda-setting and the education policy debate

There is a robust body of theories and an immense amount of research literature on the influence of mass media, notably on how they affect public assumptions, preferences, attitudes, and moods. A focal point of communication research has been their impact on the formation of public opinion regarding political issues. A comprehensive account of these theories goes far beyond the scope of this thesis.²⁷

Rather, I shall focus here on a few selected communications research perspectives that

²⁷ A thoroughly well-researched and comprehensive review of media effects and reception research is provided by Mauro Porto (2001), *op. cit.*, specifically in Chapter Four. For a discussion centered on the role of the news media in the formation of public opinion, see Maxwell McCombs *et al.*, *Contemporary Public Opinion: Issues and the News* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 1991).

seem particularly suitable and relevant for the investigation of the role of the media in educational policy formation and legitimation.

One major achievement of communications research in the last three decades has been the demonstration of the agenda-setting role of the mass media, following McCombs and Shaw's (1972) proposition that "the mass media set the agenda of each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward political issues" (quoted in Porto, 2001). In its simplest formulation, the agenda-setting perspective proposes that "the news media define to a significant degree what are the major issues of the day" (McCombs *et al.*, 1991, p. vii). In an inspired statement that McCombs and Shaw took up as the departing point in the formulation of their agenda-setting hypothesis, Bernard Cohen (1963) asserted that "the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (quoted in McCombs *et al.*, 1991, p. 12).

The plausibility and appeal of the idea that mass media are powerful issue agenda setters has attracted a great deal of attention in communication research. Though, since McCombs and Shaw's (1972) groundbreaking research, a number of studies have confirmed the media agenda-setting effect, this approach's contribution to the enhancement of our understanding of how media actually affect public opinion is, at best, modest. What is more, the agenda-setting power of the media is, to a certain degree, countervailed and undermined by the considerable influence of government in the shaping of news agendas. As Swanson and Mancini (1996) have noted, one result of the rise of the mass media as a relatively autonomous power center "is the potential for struggle between officials and journalists for control of the agenda and for the power to

frame or interpret the important events and issues of the day” (p. 16). This is, indeed, particularly noticeable in relation to educational issues (ANDI, 2000, 2005).

Framing perspective: the media as a site of struggle over meaning

Mass communication theorists have borrowed Erving Goffman’s (1974) concept of *frame*, which was originally developed in relation to the organization of our everyday experiences in face-to-face interactions, and have turned it into a promising approach for media studies.²⁸ Todd Gitlin’s (2003 [1980]) groundbreaking book *The Whole World Is Watching*, a pioneering work on the use of this concept in media studies, defines media frames as “*persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and representation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual*” (pp. 6-7) (author’s italics).

We can think of media frames as maps that guide us through our everyday life, helping us to make sense of everyday events, thus *mediating* our perception of reality. In truth, by framing issues and events in a particular way, the media not only re-present reality, but also create it. At a deep level, then, the media’s frames “make the world beyond direct experience look natural...” (Gitlin, 2003, p. 6). Therefore, they have a clear ideological function. Yet, frames are not mere conveyers of the dominant ideology as long as any media message is open to *alternative* and *oppositional* readings (Hall, 2001). Moreover, in the same fashion as the state’s strategy of legitimation, media “take account

²⁸ For a comprehensive review of theoretical and methodological perspectives on framing, see Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., and August E. Grant (eds.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001).

of certain popular currents and pressures, symbolically incorporating them, repacking and distributing them throughout the society” (Gitlin, 2003, p.11). Of course, there are clear limits to dissenting views, since the media tend to present a rather negative image of groups and social movements that challenge the existing order. This trend does not imply, however, that social movements cannot influence media coverage. Indeed, social movements have been doing this through “media events” and other strategies. As I shall argue shortly, framing is a resource that can be also pursued by opposition groups struggling for social and political change.

A growing body of research on social movements has drawn attention to how media framing affects “collective actors’ interpretation of reality” and, on the other hand, how social movements can advance their agendas by using framing as a resource for mobilization (Gamson, 1992; McAdam *et al.*, 1996; Della Porta, 1999). McAdam and his colleagues (1996) refer to framing processes as “the cultural dimension of social movement,” through which meanings and definitions are constructed and shared. Drawing upon David Snow’s notion, they define framing as the “*conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action*” (author’s italics) (McAdam *et al.*, 1996, p. 6). Though bearing the imprint of its formulation in media studies, here the concept of framing processes gains political significance in that it is linked to struggles over meanings, which are of tremendous importance for collective actions in education.

Studies of framing effects have shown that exposure to the mass media’s dominant frames of particular issues influences citizens’ views and opinions on these issues. However, this influence is not unproblematic. Gamson’s (1992) seminal work

Talking Politics contends that mass media do not constitute the only source that people use to make sense of public issues. Instead, people draw upon experiential knowledge and popular wisdom in the construction of meanings and in the framing of issues. This combination of different sources may result in the construction of collective action frames that challenge dominant media frames. This complexity points to the difficulty of disentangling experiential knowledge and the personal element from mediated experiences. “Media images have no fixed meaning but involve a negotiation with heterogeneous audiences that may provide them with meanings quite different from the preferred reading”. (Gamson, 1992, p. 98)

As far as I know, there are few studies in education that pursue framing perspectives to account for struggles over schools and education reforms. An excellent exception is Amy Binder’s (2002) *Contentious Curricula*, which presents an insightful analysis of Afrocentrism and creationism movements in the United States. Though strikingly different in their motifs and roots, both groups have sought legitimacy by making use of similar arguments and strategies. Moreover, both movements have attracted a great deal of media attention, as their claims have also been met with fierce contestation from the State and counter-movements. It goes without saying that mass media have been more than instrumental in the generating and sustaining of such controversies. Binder (2002) takes Afrocentrists and Creationists as an example of dissenting groups engaged in contentious politics and submits them to a close examination in order to locate “the degree to which their ‘framing’ of the issues resonated with and, perhaps, even changed the wider cultural discourses of the day” (p. 9). While pursuing a quite innovative approach, Binder relies on a rather narrow definition of

framing, viewed as “the rhetorical activity that movements’ leaders use to try to connect their arguments about a set of issues to audiences’ common-sense understanding about those same issues” (p. 12).

A better understanding of the power of framing and, more specifically, of how media frames work will enable social movements and community groups to develop strategies for the use of media in the advancement of their political agendas. In more practical terms, by becoming aware of dominant frames, subaltern groups can elaborate counter-hegemonic frames that better reflect their experiences and interests.

The ongoing struggle and public debate in Brazil surrounding the adoption of class and race-based affirmative action policy in public universities provides an interesting illustration of competing frames. Its adversaries and detractors, with the ostensive support of the dominant media, invariably use expressions like “racial quotas”, “quota policy” and “reserved places” to oppose affirmative actions.²⁹ This frame suggests that such a policy is paternalistic and undeservedly privileges certain social groups, thereby contradicting the principles of a democratic society and a meritocracy where “all have equal rights” (see Kamel, 2006; Fry *et alii*, 2007). On the other hand, the social movements which are struggling for racial equality and the inclusion of black people in Brazilian university education prefer to use the concepts “affirmative action” and “positive discrimination”. This frame has the connotation of the racial inclusion and social justice which has been attributed to this policy by the black movement and its allies (Telles, 2003).

²⁹ No theme in public policy has awoken greater militancy from the dominant media than the legislative proposals that establish the Statute of Racial Equality and the regime of the reserved places in public universities for blacks and native Indians.

It is important to remember that Brazil was the last Western society to abolish slavery in 1888. The present debate on the condition of black people in society also shows two competing frames: the first holds that it is the poverty that keeps Afro-Brazilians at the bottom of the social structure (see Kamel, 2006); and the second maintains that it is racism that keeps black people trapped in poverty. The supporters of the first thesis see education as an equalizer, a catapult of social mobility, a remedy for poverty and the exclusion of black people. The supporters of the second thesis see education as a reproducer of the social and racial hierarchies which keep black people at a disadvantage and propose affirmative action in order to make up for the poorer resources of black people, which can be attributed to racial discrimination (see Telles, 2003).

To sum up, the agenda-setting perspective focuses primarily on *which* issues are covered and how they set the policy agenda whereas framing research focuses primarily on *how* an issue or event is depicted in the news (Tankard, 2001, p. 101). Seeing both as complementary, McCombs (2001) claims that framing is the second level of agenda-setting analysis. The major shortcomings of both approaches is that they overemphasize cognitive effects, and, for this very reason, privilege content over form. It is particularly remarkable that framing research that is related to television (e.g. Porto, 2001) has neglected the “grammar” of the medium, downplaying the format and visual language. As Fairclough (1995, p. 57) has cogently argued, “meanings are necessarily realized in forms, and differences in meaning entail differences in form. Conversely, it is a sensible working assumption that where forms are different, there will be some difference in meaning.” Therefore, to deploy agenda-setting and framing approaches productively, we have to evacuate them from an ingrained positivist orientation.

Research on Media and Education policy formation and legitimation

In his quite extensive work on the European educational space, Antonio Nóvoa (2002) identifies three main influences that have led to current ways of thinking about education in Europe: agenda-setting by the media, the new “planetspeak” of the international expert’s discourse, and what he designates as “the excesses of past and future in discussions about Europe” (which refers to the strong emphasis on a common past/heritage/culture, and a bold rhetoric about the twenty-first century) in creating a knowledge-based society.³⁰ Here, I want to focus on the first two influences as both of them place the media at the center of the contemporary educational debate. By the “agenda setting by the media,” Nóvoa alludes to “the spread of discourses that dramatize educational matters, imposing ‘solutions’ through the structure of questions and portrayal of problems.”

Drawing upon Bourdieu’s concept of “newspaper intellectuals,” Nóvoa goes on to assert that media tend to produce a discourse of consensus, which is shown by the pervasive use of terms such as quality, efficiency, accountability, responsibility, autonomy, choice, market, and customer. This discourse is further corroborated and legitimized by the deployment of the “experts’ opinions.” Thus the discourses of both media and expert are blended together, generating a consensual view on the perceived educational problems and challenges that impinge upon public opinion. This view creates a common sense that is further audited and estimated through polls. The circle of

³⁰ These concepts and ideas were further extended in Antonio Nóvoa and William deJong-Lambert, “The Education of Europe: Apprehending EU Educational Policies” (2004).

policymaking is completed when those in charge base their policy choices and decisions on the assumed preferences of the public. What seems a rather democratic process of decision-making is, in fact, a peculiar form of “democratic authoritarianism” “based on the model of consumerism” (Nóvoa & deJong-Lambert, 2004).

However, it would be too narrow an approach if we just considered how mainstream media dictate the educational agenda and frame the debate in a particular and discernable way. Instead, as Nóvoa (2002) suggests, we need to broaden the scope of analysis in order to account for the deleterious consequences of the media’s agenda-setting power for democracy. He alludes to two trends associated with what has been called the mediatization of politics: the first relates to the adoption of an “instant democracy based on regular estimation of public opinion”; and the second refers to the rise of the “society of spectacle” (Debord, 1994) or the “political spectacle” (Murray, 1985, 1988). Opinion polling and focus groups are the barometers that “allow the government to develop its policy in a way that incorporates public opinion from the start” (Fairclough, 2000, p. 5). This permanent monitoring of public opinion, which might be perceived as the government’s commitment to greater responsiveness, enables a strategy for winning of consent that relies heavily upon promotional means. What this means is that before launching any major reform or policy proposal, the government devises a carefully calculated advertising plan, “selecting a particular representation of it, particular wordings that will be most effective in achieving consent.” In other words, the government chooses and sponsors a specific frame, which is likely to be further adopted by the dominant media. As mentioned before, there are many research findings

suggesting that the government has great leverage in the shaping of news agendas, especially regarding policy issues.

In a study conducted in Brazil, which analyzed the coverage of educational issues in 62 newspapers, an overwhelming predominance of official sources was observed (ANDI, 2000).³¹ Moreover, the Ministry of Education (MEC) appeared, by far, the “*primary definer*” of the agenda of the newspapers in the field of education. In contrast, there was a very limited presence of other stakeholders and an almost complete absence of those segments directly linked to schools, such as teachers, parents, and students. From the news stories analyzed in this survey, 83 percent focused on the state-education relationship while only 17 percent addressed educational issues and focused primarily on the teaching-learning process and used non-governmental stakeholders as the prime sources. It was hardly a surprise to find that official reports on the results of national evaluations and statistical surveys were extensively covered. Similarly, announcements of new policy proposals and the launch of new programs received broad coverage. The conclusion to be drawn from this study is that, in Brazil, the government governs – if I am allowed the redundancy – the news agenda of educational issues.

On analyzing the results of this study³², the then President of the National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE), Carlos Augusto Abicalil, recognizes that what prevails in press coverage on education is an “absolute verticalization, exacerbated centralism” that qualifies and authorizes only one single source – the Ministry of

³¹ This research was undertaken by the Center for Media and Policy Studies, linked to the Center for Advanced Multidisciplinary Studies of the University of Brasília. I was a member of the team of researchers that conducted this study. Cf. ANDI, *Final Report of the Media & Education Forum: Perspectives on Information Quality* (Brasília, DF: ANDI, 2000).

³² The results of this survey were presented and discussed at a national forum, held in São Paulo, which brought together education officials and journalists. (ANDI, 2000)

Education (MEC). He complains that the CNTE and its affiliated teachers unions are not considered a reliable and legitimate source of information on education; instead, they receive, at most, some media attention when they are involved in a conflict, such as demonstrations, walk-outs, strikes, and campaigns for higher wages and better working conditions. In such situations, teaching unions tend to be represented negatively, as opposition movements. Finally, Abicalil remarks that teaching union leaders are only interviewed to react to new policy proposals announced by the government.

The media coverage therefore reproduces the same contradiction involved in the discourse on educational reforms, in which decentralization and the participation of school communities are repeatedly highlighted as central elements of the strategy whereby public schools will be improved. The institutional arena where these policies are formulated, increasingly centralized in MEC, and the public space for negotiating these policies with the different stakeholders, increasingly constructed and mediated by the media, overlap. Thus, in a certain sense, the media have become the forum *par excellence* for the discussion, formulation, and legitimation of education policies in Brazil.

In 2005, MEC commissioned a new study on the coverage of education in the Brazilian press, following the same methodology used in the first survey (ANDI, 2005). When opening the seminar at which the results would be presented, the then Minister of Education, Tarso Genro, stated that “education has never been discussed so much and has never taken up so much space in the media”. And he finished off: “Education has been transformed into a national debate”.³³ Interestingly enough, Genro took advantage to

³³ The results of this study were presented in the seminar “*A Educação na Imprensa Brasileira: Responsabilidade e Qualidade da Informação*” [Education in the Brazilian Press: Responsibility and Information Quality], held on May 18 2005 in São Paulo. A personal observation is necessary here: my

criticize the way in which the media had been covering the discussion on the “policy of social quotas”, remarking that a qualitative study made by MEC had stated that common sense had identified this policy as discriminatory, negative, paternalistic and against the principles of the meritocracy.

Curiously, the change of government does not seem to have affected the educational coverage, except in the case of an increase in the participation of the local and regional press. This second study covers 57 newspapers from all regions of Brazil. Using the methodology of the composite month, and using as a reference the base year of 2004, 5,362 texts (opinion articles, editorials, columns, interviews and reports on the theme of education) were selected and analyzed. The study, whose aim was to quantitatively measure the various aspects of educational coverage, confirmed the predominance of official sources, especially MEC. Higher education continued to receive greater attention from the media (33.4%) than elementary education (8.4%), and high schools (5.0%).

The study had serious shortcomings, such as the wrong use of the concept of framing in the design of the focus of coverage, using three categories: public teaching, private teaching, and civil society (ANDI, 2005, pp. 41-45). The study concluded that “66.1% of the texts were framed according to a vision of the public sector”, reaffirming the prevalence of the official sources. As the study was made by a group of specialists who were familiar with the concept of framing, it was surprising to see this concept treated as “linguistic expressions used in the texts”. The highlighted example could not be more eloquent: “the expression ‘quota policy’ frequently appears dissociated from

ideas such as affirmative action and the inclusion of populations which have been historically cut off from the system” (p. 43). The authors lament that “journalists have apparently not understood that the quota policy is nothing other than a specific type of affirmative action policy”. The study is limited to stating that the expression “quota policy” appears in 5.0% of the articles, while “affirmative action” only appears in 1.7% of the texts on subject. Thus the study commissioned by MEC ignores the dispute over framing, which, in turn, hides a stubborn ideological dispute which was just beginning, as realized by Tarso Genro at the opening of the seminar. The analysis which was presented also failed to mention the economicist bias of the coverage of educational and social themes, limiting its comments to remarks on the lack of contextualization as a marked characteristic of educational journalism.

The ex-President of CNTE, Carlos Augusto Abicalil, who is now a PT Federal Representative, remembered his participation in the 1999 seminar, when the results of the first study were presented. He observed that although the protagonism of MEC as the “*primary definer*” remains, society is more participative, which can be seen in the variety of themes discussed in the media. As a parliamentary representative, he stresses the poor visibility of the legislative discussions in educational coverage, and concludes that the National Congress is an absent actor.

The study on the coverage of education in the Brazilian media which was commissioned by MEC was criticized for supposedly serving the interests of the educational agenda of the Lula government. In the report presented to the São Paulo seminar, the study is presented as a joint report of the Childhood Rights News Agency (ANDI) and MEC, supported by UNESCO. Like the first study, this survey was financed

by MEC, though the financing was transferred to UNESCO. The head of the Media Department of MEC, Milena Weber, replied to the criticism by stating that MEC did not interfere in the choice of the consultants or in the preparation of the final report. The prevalence of the theme “quota policy/ affirmative action” in the media was one of the results which was commemorated by MEC as this was one of the few new themes introduced into the educational debate by the Lula government.

The two studies described above (ANDI, 2000, 2005) use a methodology which permits only an analysis of quantitative coverage. Thus there is no analysis of the content, which is the main aim of this thesis. However, they signal the themes which have had most coverage in the Brazilian media in the last decade. Based on these two studies, it is not possible to infer the extent to which the dominant media have influenced the educational debate and agenda, and, in more concrete terms, the formulation of public policy in the period covered. My aim of this study is to help fill this void.

Conclusion

It is my initial assumption that the mass media have increasingly taken center stage in the educational debate and policy formation in Brazil. This trend, observed in other countries, requires us to recognize the media as a “strategic site of struggle and contestation over meanings” if we are to get a better understanding of current educational restructuring. Furthermore, I claim that the media provide a privileged window through which one can examine how global and local discourses have blended together to form a specific *rationality* underpinning education reforms in Brazil over the last fifteen years.

Moreover, media texts reveal two processes, in particular: the marketization of public discourse, and the colonization of education discourse by economic rationality.

A study aimed at exploring these relationships requires a multidisciplinary approach. A fruitful integrative approach can be obtained through an integration of the very frameworks that I reviewed earlier into a multi-level analysis that looks, firstly, at the economics and politics of the mass media, calling into question both the nature of the market within which the media are operating and their relationship to the State; secondly, at institutional features and constraints related to the organization, production, and practices of media institutions; and, thirdly, at the wider sociocultural context of mass media communication, (which is to say, social and cultural structures, relations, practices, and values). The political economy of the mass media is an important determining factors of their practices and products.

This framework enables the analyst to see media discourse as a set of “sociocultural practices,” and helps the analyst avoid a “monolithic view of the role of media in ideological reproduction which understates the extent of diversity and change in media practices and media discourse” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 28). As Fairclough (1995) has contended, “media texts constitute a sensitive barometer of socio-cultural [and educational] change, and they should be seen as valuable material for researching change” (p. 52). One fundamental aspect to be accounted for in any serious analysis of the media’s role in educational policy formation is how, in mediated public discourse, different categories of media voices are structured in relation to one another. By adopting such a perspective, one can avoid a common pitfall in framing analysis, the proponents of which tend to neglect both the construction of identities and the manner in which media

impose “ordering upon voices and discourse.” For one thing, the diversity of voices can be grossly misrepresented, since “sheer presence is not in itself a straightforward measure of greater equity” (p. 187).

In the next chapter I present the methodological approach I have employed in my research, and I describe every step I took on the long journey from the starting point to the finishing line.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODS AND STRATEGIES

In this study, I have applied a multimethod approach which combines the following qualitative tools: (1) in-depth interviews with key policy actors³⁴; (2) a qualitative content analysis of a sample of media coverage of selected educational issues; (3) a critical analysis of policy documents; and (4) a broad literature review.

Triangulation of interviews and qualitative analysis of the media sample will enable me to answer the following questions: How are dominant and dissenting education discourses represented *in* and *by* the Brazilian mainstream media? Who is empowered and legitimated by media representations? Who is disempowered? How do the media construct the identities of the “protagonists” and “antagonists” in educational struggles and reforms? To what extent does media coverage of the education issues analyzed in this study promote, distort, or prevent democratic participation in policy formation? Do the media frame the debate and shape the perceptions of policy actors?

In order to address these compelling questions, I chose to center my investigation on the formation of the dominant educational discourse in Brazil over the last fifteen years and on how it has affected education restructuring efforts carried out during the Cardoso (1995-2002) and Lula (2003-present) governments. My empirical analysis identifies four elements that stand out as central tenets of this emerging hegemonic discourse, which informs current education policies and practices: (i) human capital

³⁴ By *key policy actors* or *policy-makers* I mean top-level national education officials (formers and current Ministers of Education, Secretaries of Education, senior advisors etc.), leaders of national organizations in the educational field (teachers’ unions, professional associations, NGOs etc.), high-profile social and education activists, members of the National Congress (senators and representatives), and education specialists. I further include journalists in this category (reporters, columnists, editors etc.) and economists who regularly write or speak about education in the national media.

theory; (ii) ideology of meritocracy; (iii) cultural deficit theory; and (iv) managerialism. Each of these elements intersects with the political agendas and strategies of the four groups that Apple (2001) pointed to as the driving forces behind the conservative modernization, namely: neo-liberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists, and a fraction of the new professional and managerial middle-class. In the next chapters, I extensively analyze how these elements concur to forge a new consensus around national educational reforms and policies, which is epitomized by Education Development Plan (PDE) of the Lula government, launched in April 2007 (see Chapter 7).

Here it suffices to say that the identification of the four main ideological strands that mingle together to form the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil is based on the perception of policy-makers' of what the main educational issues are cross-checked against their relative salience in the media and the dominant frames which have surrounded them during the period covered by this study (1995-2008). Therefore, as my first source of data, the interviews oriented further research choices and decisions. This does not mean I started my fieldwork without making assumptions about which themes have come to dominate the Brazilian educational agenda over the last two decades. Instead, I chose to begin my research with interviews because I sought a distinct perspective on the galvanizing educational issues of today. Nevertheless, given my hypothesis of the centrality of the media, I expected to find a great degree of consistency on educational themes between all interviewees and media frames on these issues.

This research strategy, however, requires me to be aware of certain potential pitfalls. For instance, by centering my interviews on policy actors' perceptions and opinions I risk taking an approach that "concentrates too much on what those who inhabit

policy think about and misses and fails to attend to what they do not think about” (Ball, 1994, p. 21). Moreover, by selecting issues based on the congruency of what policy actors perceive as important issues and their actual relative salience in the media I might be trapped into a *naturalist fallacy*.³⁵ That is, I may be assuming that something is more important because powerful stakeholders regard it as such. On the other hand, for practical reasons, my choice of which issues to focus on takes into account whether or not they have received significant attention by the national media. It would be unfeasible to analyze an issue with little or no press coverage at all. As noted before, media coverage on education in Brazil has been strongly influenced by official sources. Therefore, the government’s educational agenda to a great extent determines what appears regularly in print and what does not. (See ANDI, 2000 and 2005)

Based on this understanding of the media, the additional questions I address in this study are: Which educational issues have been absent in the Brazilian media? What is missed in the educational debate? Why have certain topics been systematically ignored *in* and *by* the dominant media? From a critical perspective grounded on social justice principles, which are the crucial issues that remain invisible in public discourse? What was never mentioned before the Workers’ Party’s (PT) victory in the 2002 presidential election that has been increasingly talked about since then? Who is entitled to have an opinion about education reforms and a voice in the national press? Whose voices are systematically muted or dismissed?

Through interviews with key policy-makers and a critical analysis of policy documents and a media sample, I intend to survey issues that have dominated the national

³⁵ I am indebted to Michael W. Apple for this insight.

educational agenda, as well as to shed light on “absent presences” over the last fifteen years. That is, I will identify and articulate common elements which have cut across the two governments compared in this study and what has been missed in the public debate both in terms of particular issues and voices. My main sources, as I shall describe in greater detail later, are national daily newspapers and weekly news magazines, as well as one major national television network, which make up what I call the dominant media.

As already mentioned, the interviews first and foremost helped me to map possible discrepancies between what policy-makers perceive as important and what the media regard as newsworthy, and converging framing strategies employed by both parties (policy-makers and the media). A sharp mismatch, though unlikely, might suggest two things: firstly, that the institution of the media is relatively autonomous to a greater degree than often assumed; secondly, that cleavages and overlaps between social class structures and audiences may largely determine how policy-makers, journalists, editors, and media producers – themselves members of a particular social class – frame particular education issues. For example, the printed press tends to devote larger proportions of its educational coverage to the *vestibular* (the university entrance examination) and to higher education in general, providing valuable information for middle-class parents and students who are the newspapers’ main readers (ANDI, 2005). In contrast, basic public education policies receive much less attention as they do not directly affect the majority of newspaper and news magazine readers.³⁶ Therefore, an analysis of the class

³⁶ According to Fernando Rossetti, when the *Datafolha* Research Institute, linked to *Folha de S. Paulo*, began conducting a daily survey of its readers – *DataDia* – it discovered that material on public primary and secondary education policies enjoyed lower readership than articles on issues that parents should consider when choosing a private school for their children. For example, an article on the relationship between the stimulation of children and cognitive development would attract much more attention from news readers than an in depth report on the restructuring of elementary and secondary public schools. Due to their poor

configuration of Brazilian society is required for a better understanding of which particular groups are legitimated and empowered and which groups are delegitimated and disempowered by the centrality of the media in education policy formation.

In order to carry out this research project, I rely on my sensitivities as a socially critical individual. I recognize my privileged position as an educated white middle-class male, whose consciousness and identity are shaped and mediated by the interplay of class, gender, and race dynamics. My social position and background need not undermine my ability to engage in the kind of critical reflection required here, but they do affect the way I look at the issues focused on in this study. Moreover, my worldview and the particular agenda I bring as a researcher could lead me to ratify what is present in the debate and at one and the same time to prevent me from seeing what is absent. However, I tried to exercise reflexivity while conducting the research by pondering over the selection of issues and by using different strategies of analysis, which I describe in details below.

Access to sources and data collection

This study has been designed and developed over a span of eight years since I started my Ph.D. program at the UW-Madison in the fall of 2000. During my stay in the United States, I went to Brazil three times for the first phase of this study: for a month between May and June 2001, for three weeks in January 2003 just after Lula's inauguration, and for two months from September to November 2003. These regular

quality, public schools are almost exclusively attended by children of low socio-economic status. (Personal Interview with Fernando Rossetti - São Paulo, October 4, 2003).

visits to Brazil, although not planned as specific phases of data collection, allowed me to cultivate relationships with education officials and keep track of the latest events in Brazilian politics and national education policies. Moreover, while I was living in the U.S., I regularly received press releases, newsletters, official reports, and all sorts of policy documents over the Internet. In late August 2004, I went back to Brazil to resume my job at MEC, where I stayed until September 2007.³⁷ I consider this period to be the second phase of this study. It is worth emphasizing that I had a chance to be an insider at the center of the national education policy formation during part of both administrations I analyze in this study, which provided me with a privileged viewpoint.

When I went to Brazil in September 2003 specifically to carry out exploratory fieldwork, I was already quite familiar with the Lula government's policy agenda and the national debate on education. I was also well informed of Brazilian politics and the repercussions on education caused by the then recent historical power shift. This background preparation facilitated my entry as a researcher into a political-institutional context undergoing significant transformations since I had left Brazil three years earlier. Finally, my familiarity with the data sources (e.g. key policy actors, government agencies, social organizations, etc.) provided me with two important advantages: (1) ease of access and (2) time efficient data collection.³⁸

³⁷ On October 1st, 2007, I accepted a position as assistant to the Brazilian General Director of the Itaipu Binational, the giant hydropower plant built in the 1970s in partnership with Paraguay. There, I have been coordinating certain innovative educational initiatives linked to the Itaipu Technological Park (PTI) such as the Border Dialogues Project. In January 2008, I was appointed by the Minister of Education to the Commission for the Implantation of the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), which will be set up in Foz do Iguacu, Paraná, Brazil, on the border of both Argentina and Paraguay.

³⁸ During the 1990s, Brazil developed a comprehensive and rather sophisticated system of education indicators and statistics, evaluation results etc. However, the abundance of data is the more telling of the two intertwined phenomena: on the one hand, the increasingly performative character of public policy; on the other, the state's striking ability to incorporate new information technology to control and steer the education system from a distance. I discuss this in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

I decided to focus on the *national arena* of education policy-making despite the highly decentralized nature of the Brazilian *basic education* system. The legitimating factor that stimulates a critical analysis of the recent educational reforms from a federal perspective is the convergence of a set of political, economic, and social forces around a *national educational agenda*, to which state and local governments have been forced to align their education policies. The simultaneous establishment of national curricular guidelines and national assessments provide the central government with the necessary instruments with which to control and steer the education system from a distance. This reflects a worldwide tendency to treat education as a matter of *national strategic interest*, associated with a seemingly contradictory movement toward decentralization and devolution (Whitty *et al.* 1998; Apple, 2001; Dussel *et. al.*, 2000).

This study aims to contribute to educational research by drawing attention to the strategic role of the media in the construction and legitimation of national educational agendas and discourses. Therefore, the main criterion used for selecting who were to be interviewed was the degree of their involvement in education policy-making at the federal level. I decided to start with former and current MEC officials as one of the aims of my research is to comparatively examine educational policy under the Cardoso and Lula governments.³⁹ While my analysis mostly focuses on how the executive branch affects national education policy, I wanted to hear more than just the voices of political appointees.⁴⁰ Therefore, I decided to interview three lawmakers who have been active in

³⁹ As already implied, this research strategy was further complicated by the unexpected dismissal of the Minister of Education in January 2004, when a new policy team took over. A new shift occurred in July 2005 at MEC. Supplementary interviews with the current Minister of Education Fernando Haddad and his key aides were made in 2007.

⁴⁰ To date, all education officials at the federal, state, and local levels are appointed by the elected head of the executive branch – respectively the President, Governor, and Mayor. The only exception to this rule,

the educational debate: the Chair of the Education Committee at the House of Representatives, an influential member of the government coalition, and a member of the opposition linked to the former government.

In addition to the national education officials' views, I wanted to bring multiple perspectives of competing educational actors, journalists, and media experts to bear on my analysis. Therefore, I sought to balance, in the group of interviewees, the proportion of education officials, civil society organization representatives who have been notably active in the national education debate, and press professionals. I drafted a list of 50 people to interview. Due to time and resource constraints, however, I conducted a total of 36 interviews from the following categories: policy-makers (13); journalists and media experts (9); education specialists (6); social and education activists (5); lawmakers (3).

The larger subgroup of interviewees is made up of current or former national education officials, among them four out of the last five Ministers of Education: Murílio de Avellar Hingel (mid-1992-1994); Paulo Renato Souza (1995-2002); Cristovam Buarque (2003); and Fernando Haddad (2005-present)⁴¹. It must be stressed, however, that the above mentioned classification is somewhat subjective, given that many of the interviewees either belong or have belonged to more than one category. For example, all of the specialists interviewed have acted as education officials or in other appointed positions at some level of government (federal, state, or municipal). Likewise, two of the three federal representatives interviewed held office as state secretaries of education, and

though not in all states and municipalities, is public schools principals, who are elected by the school community (teachers, parents and students).

⁴¹ The only former Minister of Education who served during the period covered by this study who declined to be interviewed was Tarso Genro. He held the position for a year and half, from January 2004 to July 2005.

one was the leader of the main national teachers' union.

The pool of journalists interviewed is also quite heterogeneous, including reporters, editors and columnists, as well as press advisors.⁴² Some national press professionals also wear two hats. One prime example is the journalist Fernando Rossetti, who was well-known during the 1990s as one of the few full-time education reporters on a major newspaper (*Folha de S. Paulo*), but quit the position of daily reporter in 2000 to devote his time to social projects and training journalists and social activists. Another illustrative case is that of the journalist Gilberto Dimenstein, a member of the editorial board and an influential columnist of *Folha de S. Paulo* who has been actively involved in social and educational projects while working as a journalist. Another noteworthy example is the reporter Marta Avancini, who worked for *Folha de S. Paulo* and the *O Estado de S. Paulo* and then worked at the Brazilian UNESCO office, where she studied school violence.⁴³ These examples point to the fact that education reporters are often committed to social justice issues and believe that through the media they will have a greater impact. This can be confirmed by the fact that a number of the education activists interviewed started their careers as professional journalists.⁴⁴

⁴² Two of the nine journalists interviewed were chief public relations officials at MEC during the term of office of Paulo Renato Souza, and one was an image consultant of the former Minister of Education, Cristovam Buarque.

⁴³ During the interviews, most education reporters mentioned having been engaged in some kind of social activism alongside with their professional career. The norms and culture of journalism regard education as a second-class news issue when compared to more prestigious news sections such as politics, economics, and sports. The journalists I interviewed see themselves as socially critical persons and display a clear vision of their public role. They claim that their journalistic work is related to principles of social justice, and they are satisfied with their choice of area regardless of the low prestige of the field of education.

⁴⁴ Denise Carreira, former general coordinator of the National Campaign for the Right to Education and Geraldinho Vieira, founder and former President of the influential Children's Rights News Agency (ANDI).

By and large, interviewees were selected by the same criteria journalists use to choose their sources: position, academic credentials, and public visibility. The choice of informants, however, may suffer from a bias. As an insider in the *education policy community*, I knew quite well who had influenced policy-making during the Cardoso government and who have held the cards during the current administration. An important insight gained from my practical experience is that there is no necessary correspondence between the position held in the hierarchical structure of the public institutions and the amount of influence exerted on the decision-making process. At times the most influential people were not those who held the highest positions in MEC; some were even complete outsiders to the government bureaucracy or the policy-making process.

Two examples illustrate how this *ad hoc* knowledge helped me to choose key policy players to be interviewed. The first involves the sociologist Gilda Portugal Gouvêa, advisor to the former Minister of Education, Paulo Renato Souza. Although she did serve as his deputy on certain occasions, her discreet style kept her far from the public eye. To an outside researcher, she would probably be seen as a minor figure within the MEC hierarchy, whereas insiders such as myself were certain of her influence during the entire period in which she acted as the liaison between the Minister department heads and bureaucrats at MEC.⁴⁵ Moreover, she also played an important liaison role between the Ministry and other sectors of the government. Lastly, as a member of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and due to her personal ties to former President

⁴⁵ As a researcher, Gilda Portugal Gouvêa produced a thoughtful study on the formation of the Brazilian state, stressing the relative autonomy of state bureaucracy and its implications for the development of economic policies in the 1980s. See Gilda Portugal Gouvêa, *Burocracia e Elites Burocráticas no Brasil* (Bureaucracy and the Bureaucratic Elites in Brazil) (São Paulo: Paulicéia, 1994). Given this background, she played an important role in the initial discussions of the reform of the state during the Cardoso government.

Cardoso, her opinion carried great weight in policy decisions at MEC. She had been part of the MEC inner circle and had an unrivaled view of the decision-making process throughout the Cardoso government. In light of this, I knew that an interview with her was important for my research.

The second interviewee profile worth mentioning is of someone who exerted a great deal of influence on national education policy formulation, even without being part of government bureaucracy – the economist and education specialist Cláudio de Moura Castro, who had previously worked at the International Labor Organization, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. At INEP, I grew accustomed to seeing him talking with MEC officials, but it was the former Minister, Paulo Renato Souza, and his leading aides, who confirmed his active participation in designing certain strategic policies, such as the reform of technical and vocational education, secondary education, and national assessment policies. Moreover, he has also been influential in the national educational debate over the last two decades, his influence magnified by his being a permanent columnist of *Veja* magazine since 1996 and one of the most sought-after educational experts by the national press (see Chapter 4). Again, it was important to interview him, given his well-known public profile.

Last but not least, my interviewees have two important characteristics: all but two of the 36 are white, middle-class and well-educated. Also most of them have spent their entire careers in the South and Southeastern states of Brazil, the most developed regions in Brazil.⁴⁶ This is telling of the sheer racial inequalities and regional disparities in

⁴⁶ My interviews were carried out in three cities – Brasília, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro –, where the political, economic and intellectual elites are concentrated.

Brazil..⁴⁷ As for gender, my pool of interviewees has a more balanced composition than for race: 23 men and 13 women. The major difference in terms of gender is amongst policy-makers, perhaps because participation of women in top-level position at MEC, which was significantly high during the Cardoso government, decreased sharply in the first term of the Lula government.

The presence of few representatives of grassroots movements among my interviewees is noteworthy, and this might further undermine my call for a more participatory and democratic policy-making process.⁴⁸ Another important potential limitation in my interview sample was that I interviewed only one representative of black movements, which have become increasingly vocal in protesting about unequal access to education in Brazil (Telles, 2003).⁴⁹ In order to correct this shortcoming, I checked a large amount of popular press material targeting African-Brazilians, and conducted a broad literature review on issues of race and education, especially in terms of the current debate on affirmative action, trying to capture the voices from this important and related social movement.

Two aspects of the policy-making process and the larger political-institutional structure surrounding it have contributed to the invisibility of underrepresented groups,

⁴⁷ The Lula government appointed an African-Brazilian to a top-level position at MEC: Francisco das Chagas Fernandes, former teachers' union leader who was Secretary of Basic Education during the Lula's first term of office and who is now MEC Executive Secretary.

⁴⁸ I might have interviewed, for instance, a leader or spokesperson from the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), one of the largest social movements in Brazil and one very much involved in the struggle over education. However, I preferred to concentrate on representatives of large educational organizations, such as the National Forum in Defense of Public Schools and the National Right to Education Campaign, which represent a pool of organizations, instead of individual organizations.

⁴⁹ I interviewed the Franciscan friar, David dos Santos, founder of the Educafro Movement (Education and Citizenship of Descendants of Africans and the Underprivileged), who is responsible for a network of *pre-vestibular* training courses for poor and black students on the outskirts of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and Brasília. This initiative is sponsored by the Franciscan Solidarity Service (SEFRAS).

who lack formal political power: firstly, from an institutional perspective, in spite of pressures for decentralization brought about by the struggle for redemocratization in the 1980s, educational policy formation remains highly centralized at the national level, and this excludes groups with less influence and fewer resources; secondly, grassroots movements and nationwide organizations from the educational community – teachers’ unions, professional associations, social movements, and NGOs – tend to reproduce the power relations and racial hierarchies present in society as a whole. It is therefore quite rare to find black persons in leadership positions within national organizations. They are therefore largely excluded both from the educational establishment, as well as from social movements’ leadership outside the growing black movement. That said, it cannot be ignored that by taking an institutional perspective for selecting my interviewees I ended up excluding voices of subaltern and marginalized groups. Because of the elitist nature of national education policy-making, my interviewees are not more diverse or representative of class, gender, and race hierarchies. One thing I explored in the interviews was precisely how self-conscious policy-makers are of this elitist, unequal distribution of power circumscribing the educational policy arena. A second methodological step in my research is to compare and contrast policy actors’ perceptions with the dominant media’s frames on educational issues.

As discussed in the previous chapters, one must be aware that the seeming diversity of voices found in the media may be misleading since “a sheer presence is not in itself a straightforward measure of greater equity” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 187). Rather, the media impose “orderings upon voices and discourses.” Therefore, “one issue worth attending to is the social class, gender, and ethnic distribution of the range of voices

within mediatized [representations]” (p. 186). Even though most of my interviewees belong to the power circle, I brought in different voices and perspectives to my analysis by examining the content of a large sample of media texts, being particularly attentive to how the *silent voices* of dissent and dominated groups come through as they are appropriated, recontextualized, and re-presented by dominant groups and the media.

Interviews with policy actors

I made the first contact with prospective interviewees through brief e-mail messages. I started with a list of potential informants, whose e-mail addresses were obtained through a search of their public profiles, often made available by institutional web sites. In the first message, I introduced myself, explained my research project and requested an interview appointment. Most of the people contacted responded promptly and favorably. Follow-up communication focused on logistics, meeting time, date, and location. This ongoing conversation allowed me to provide additional information about my research, and, in a few cases, at the request of the interviewee, provide certain questions in advance. Surprisingly, journalists and education activists tended to be more cautious about the interview content than former and current MEC officials.

From my first message, I made it very clear that the interview content would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. I was a little concerned that by knowing in advance what I was particularly interested in, many interviewees would be inclined to frame their opinion through the lenses of the media, even when I was trying to get their

own perspective on the issues.⁵⁰ This proved to be a legitimate concern since on many occasions I noted their attempt to connect their answers to my research topic, making statements about how they considered the media as having a real effect on decision-making and education policy formation. For instance, one of my interviewees, afraid that we might run out of time without ever “*getting there*”, all of a sudden interrupted the conversation flow to propose straightforwardly: “Well, let’s talk about the media and education policy formation because I have something to say about this relationship”.⁵¹

Most of the interviews took place in formal and institutional settings during business hours. The place where the interview was conducted varied according to the category of the person interviewed. Journalists and social activists preferred to be interviewed outside their work places in more informal settings like cafés, hotel lobbies, home or even a bar⁵², while all of the education officials and lawmakers preferred to be interviewed in their offices. I figured out that state policy actors tended to perform an institutional discourse because of the authority they were invested with.⁵³ These more formal interviews with public officials also tended to be more subject to time constraints and schedule changes.

The political context and climate in which the interviews were conducted undoubtedly played an important role in the responses obtained (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

⁵⁰ Here I am referring to the media as an institution.

⁵¹ Personal interview with Gilda Portugal Gouvêa (São Paulo, October 2, 2003).

⁵² A notable exception was the powerful journalist William Bonner, editor and anchorman of *Jornal Nacional*, the leading Brazilian prime time newscaster, who chose to be interviewed at his commanding office at the *Central Globo de Jornalismo* – an imposing panoptic glassed office from where he could watch the *TV Globo* newsroom. His seat was strategically located in front of a huge open room where hundreds newsmakers strive to meet the deadline for evening edition. His solemn gestures, his assertive answers, and his unmitigated institutional voice left no doubt about who was in charge.

As mentioned before, I carried out my first group of interviews in late 2003, in the midst of a highly politicized debate over national education policies, which produced increasing friction between Lula government officials and former members of the Cardoso administration. Therefore, interviews with current and former national education officials made at that time echoed ongoing political tensions and skirmishes, even though most of those interviewed gave cautious responses to questions regarding differences between the educational policies of the two administrations, while others simply refused to answer, stating that it was too early to make any meaningful comparisons. A very different picture was captured in 2007, when I interviewed the current Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, and his leading aides, just after the launching of Lula government's Education Development Plan (PDE) (see Chapter 7). They displayed self-confidence and openly criticized Cardoso's education policies, claiming that the PDE represents a breakthrough in the history of Brazilian education reforms (Haddad, 2007).

The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours, with an average of one and a half hours. Given the interviewees' time constraints, I did not interview all of them at length.⁵⁴ Generally, I conducted semi-structured interviews covering a wide range of topics related both to education policy and the politics of education. Some interviews were more free-flowing and exploratory than others because the topics discussed diverged from those which had been proposed. All my interviews were audio-recorded.

⁵³ A striking piece of evidence of this pattern emerged when I was interviewing MEC officials in the first year of the Lula government. Some were still clearly struggling to find a balance between their former role as social and political activists and their new institutional position as state officials.

⁵⁴ As one should expect, it was not an easy task to gain access to some personalities who had justifiable time constraints and more urgent priorities to attend to. For instance, I had to agree to a 45-minute interview with the then Minister of Education Cristovam Buarque, in 2003, and the journalist William Bonner, with whom I would have liked to have had longer conversations. My interview with the current Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, in June 2007, also lasted less than one hour.

Before setting up the tape recorder, I explained a bit more about my research and obtained verbal consent from each of the interviewees, reassuring her/him that the content of our conversation would be used exclusively for academic purposes. I realized that this assurance was particularly important to current MEC officials, who were more concerned about sharing their opinions on sensitive current policy issues. As all my interviewees are in one way or another active participants in the public sphere, all interviewees agreed to have their quotes attributed to their actual name, unless they made an explicit “off the record” statement. This rarely occurred.

Most of the time, I felt that interviewees were comfortable talking to me. Actually, some of them seemed to be not only willing, but even eager to talk about their experience as education policy-makers. In some cases, I perceived that the interviewees saw our meeting as an opportunity to defend the legacy of the administration they took part in or to make a statement about their personal contribution to the development of educational policies. I also perceived this type of interview to be conducive to a kind of critical reflection that, though not incompatible, is rarely carried out alongside practical action (see Schön & Rein, 1994). The daily practices of policy practitioners and media actors seem to leave little room for this type of inquiry. One veteran reporter, for example, when questioned about which audiences he envisioned as a columnist and commentator in different media (newspapers, radio, magazines and websites), made the following statement:

You are asking me things I never stopped to think about before. To be honest, I needed to stop and think these things over more carefully and reflect about what really the kind of community journalism I do is.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Personal interview with Gilberto Dimenstein (São Paulo, October 22, 2003).

As already mentioned, prior professional relationships with most of the interviewees facilitated my access to them and favorably affected their willingness to share their thoughts and opinions. For many, I was a familiar face and a trustworthy colleague at MEC. Yet, to be seen as an *insider* during the Cardoso government possibly made access to current officials more difficult had it not been for my previous connections with the PT.⁵⁶ On the one hand, my closeness to the majority of respondents made it difficult to avoid certain misconceptions. For some I suspect I was not seen as a true researcher, but as a former member of “the INEP policy team.” On the other hand, this relational proximity encouraged me to ask sensitive questions that they might consider embarrassing or threatening were they to be raised by a completely unfamiliar researcher. Moreover, my familiarity with the political context and the functioning of MEC as a bureaucracy helped to ease the flow of conversation.

I became particularly aware of this while transcribing the interviews. I found a salient pattern in my performance as interviewer: when there was a more impersonal relationship with the interviewee (e.g., former Ministers of Education, lawmakers etc.), I tended to conduct a more formal interview, closely following my script of questions. When I had a personal and/or a previous professional relationship with my interviewees (e.g. journalists, social activists etc.), the interview followed an informal conversational style. In this more colloquial conversation, a clear pattern of exchange emerged where the interviewer/interviewee line was blurred. My experience seems to confirm Fontana and Frey’s (2000) assertion that “interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in

interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place". (p. 663)

As already noted, one of my purposes in interviewing key policy actors was to map out the issues they have regarded as the most salient in the national educational agenda over the last decade. Accordingly, I prepared a list of general questions designed to explore the actors' opinions on a range of education issues and capture their views on national policy-making arena. Typically, interviews with policy-makers, education activists, education specialists, and lawmakers began with general questions on current events in national politics and then turned to more specific issues regarding the role played by the media in defining the educational agenda and debate. Given my knowledge of my interviewees' backgrounds, I tried to explore each individual perception of policy contests in which they have been engaged as either protagonists or antagonists. During the interviews, I focused on the issues and the manner in which they were addressed by the interviewee, raising follow-up questions aimed at clarifying their account of particular events and outcomes.

Interviews with journalists covered both education policy issues and aspects related to the media and their profession. One aspect that I was particularly interested in exploring was the journalist's sense of professional discretion and agency. Do they have autonomy to choose an issue, select the sources, and frame it in a particular way? How do culture and the rules of journalism affect education reporting? Who are the main sources of education reporters? What are the criteria used in selecting sources? Interviews

⁵⁶ I first became engaged in public policies as an advisor to a PT representative, initially in the State Legislature of Paraná (1987-1990), and later in the Federal House of Representatives (1991-1994). Later, as

with journalists were typically started with some open-ended questions about their professional career, mostly aimed at the reasons that led them to cover educational issues. These background questions were intended to establish rapport and trust, pre-conditions to engaging in meaningful conversation. Next, I turned to a set of more specific questions on the media's education agenda and how educational issues tend to be framed.

After transcribing and reviewing the interviews, I sent them, by e-mail, to the interviewees, asking them to validate or to correct any passage they deemed unfaithful in relation to what they meant to say. A few made substantial corrections. It is important to mention that I treated interview responses as actively constructed narratives resulting from a collaborative interaction with interviewees who were invited and stimulated to share their understanding of policy issues and to talk openly about their perceptions and experiences as policy actors in the national educational arena.

Mapping out the Brazilian '*Mediascape*'

Given the main concern of this study – the role of the media in educational policy formation and legitimation – my investigation was from the start centered on news organizations that meet two basic criteria: a) to have national circulation or, at least, to address potential national audiences and; b) to have a national perspective on the coverage of educational issues. Furthermore, I wanted to integrate at least three news media forms into my analysis: a television network, a newspaper, and a news magazine.⁵⁷

I entered public service, I distanced myself from any party militancy.

⁵⁷ The decision not to include radio took into consideration the focus on national media discourse and the infrastructure of the radio medium during the period analyzed. Radio is mostly an extremely segmented medium, predominantly owned by local groups, despite a recent trend toward national networks (e.g. Rede

By analyzing different news media, I expect to gain a more comprehensive perspective on how education issues are framed in distinct media forms “due either to the modality of communication (e.g., TV or print) or differences in presentation that characterize a television news story, a news magazine story, or a newspaper story”(Neuman *et al.*, 1992, p. 35). Finally, I wanted to survey media forms that address different audiences. This is particularly important in a highly stratified society like in Brazil where the printed press has a very small readership compared to the diverse and large number of television viewers. My study therefore compares a more popular medium (television) with a newspaper and a news magazine which influence the middle-class and the political and intellectual elites.

I mapped out the Brazilian ‘*mediascape*’ in order to identify the leading news organizations in each modality. Following Bourdieu’s (1996) approach, two criteria would inform my final choice: economic weight (share of the market) and symbolic weight (prestige, credibility etc.). As the dominant medium of mass communication in contemporary societies, television networks “remain unique in their centralized symbolic force” (Gitlin, 2003, p. 296). Television’s edge is even more remarkable in Brazil, where the establishment of a private national network was supported by the State during the authoritarian regime as a strategic instrument for social control and national integration (Motter, 1994; Lima, 2004; Porto, 2001). As I was particularly interested in national representations and discourses shaping current education reforms, I had no doubt that my

CBN, Bandeirantes etc.). Undoubtedly, radio continues to be extremely popular and influential, particularly among social classes with less economic power and schooling. Community radio stations have appeared in the last ten years in Brazil. However, this space is quickly being colonized by religious and political groups. In any case, as my research design was focused on national media discourse, and the infrastructure of the radio medium did not fulfill this requisite during the period analyzed, I do not include radio in my analysis.

research should include at least one major television network. *TV Globo* was the obvious choice as the major Brazilian network, as it covers one hundred percent of the national territory and reaches all homes with television sets.⁵⁸

TV Globo is owned by *Globo Organizations*, the biggest media conglomerate in Brazil and a good example of vertical and horizontal integration in an age of media consolidation (McChesney, 2000; Lima, 2004).⁵⁹ Of particular interest to my research is the Roberto Marinho Foundation (FRM), named after the businessman who built *Globo Organizations*, which remains its main sponsor. This foundation has undertaken important educational initiatives, among them a distance learning system (*Telecurso 2000* [*Telecourse 2000*]) and a cable channel exclusively devoted to education (*Canal Futura* [*Channel of the Future*]), launched in 1997. Both initiatives have been financed and supported by private and public institutions alike.⁶⁰ Finally, *TV Globo* has itself been deeply involved in education reforms in Brazil, sponsoring national initiatives such as the massive campaign “*Amigos da Escola - Todos pela Educação*” [School Friends - Everyone for Education], which encourages volunteer work in public schools to compensate for the Brazilian state’s neglect of them.⁶¹

In the news magazine segment, *Veja* stands out both in terms of prestige

⁵⁸ This quasi-monopoly is confirmed by national audience ratings regularly reaching above 50 percent of viewers during prime time and by the station’s share of more than half of the advertising investment in television.

⁵⁹ The holdings of *Globo Organizations* include a national newspaper (*O Globo*), a weekly news magazine (*Época*), a publishing house (*Editora Globo*), a recording company, cable and satellite television operations, radio stations, an Internet provider, and a financial branch (Lima, 2001).

⁶⁰ Over the last few years, a number of states have contracted FRM to provide secondary education through distance learning, notably in the poorest regions of Brazil (the Northeast and the North), where the school system cannot accommodate all students.

⁶¹ In 2002, some 27,202 public schools were registered with the project, representing a total of nearly 14.7 million elementary level students. In other words, the initiative reaches practically half of the students at this level of education throughout Brazil (roughly 33 million). (See *Rede Globo*, 2002).

(symbolic weight) and circulation (market share).⁶² Published by *Abril Group*, the nation's largest magazine publishing company, it has a broad readership nationwide and great influence among opinion-makers, especially in terms of political issues. Although it maintains an editorial stance which is relatively independent from the government, during the 1990s *Veja* became militantly active in defending the opening of the Brazilian economy and neo-liberal structural adjustment, echoing the agenda of the Cardoso government. Besides its dominant position in weekly news magazines, what makes the choice of *Veja* more appealing is that over the last two decades its publishing house has also sponsored important initiatives targeting public schools. For example, *Nova Escola* [*New School*], the leading Brazilian educational magazine, whose "free" distribution to public schools has actually been funded by MEC; the collection "*Ofício de Professor*" [*The Craft of the Teacher*], a series of eight booklets providing "in-service training" for elementary school teachers; "*Veja na Sala de Aula*" [*Veja in the Classroom*], a program that consists of weekly teaching guides sent to secondary public schools together with a number of issues of *Veja*, which is intended to stimulate the use of the news magazine in the classroom; the Victor Civita Award, which since 1998 has distributed an award entitled "Professor Nota 10" [*Grade A Teacher*] to outstanding classroom teachers (Nova Escola, 2003); finally, the holding company controls one of the major Brazilian textbook publishers (*Editora Ática-Scipione*).⁶³ All these projects have been sponsored by the

⁶² Following an international trend of the printed press, the circulation of *Veja* has declined over the last decades and is now around one million, more than double that of the second largest news magazine (*Época*).

⁶³ The *Nova Escola* magazine is the best vehicle for educational book publishers and teaching material suppliers to reach their targeted audience (teachers, school principals and educational managers). Besides placing advertisements of its own products in the magazine, the Victor Civita Foundation also sells space to competitors. MEC buys 150,000 copies of every issue and sends them to public schools. The "Ofício do Professor" series, which has sold more than 50,000 collections to public and private schools, is sold for R\$ 39.00 (roughly US\$ 20.00). However, the former executive director of the Victor Civita Foundation,

Victor Civita Foundation (FVC), named after the Italian-born entrepreneur who built the *Abril Group*, a media conglomerate that has become an important player in recent education reforms in Brazil.

Finally, a more difficult decision was to choose one of the four ‘national’ daily newspapers (*Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil*).⁶⁴ Though Brazilian newspapers have a limited circulation in comparison to other countries, a fact that is usually linked to low income and high rates of illiteracy, they are very influential in the framing of public discourse and the shaping of the political process because they are read by political and economic leaders (Porto, 2001). *Folha* was chosen because of its large circulation and significant popularity among political and intellectual elites from São Paulo state. Moreover, it carries an important symbolic weight due to its role in the struggle for redemocratization during the 1980s. *Folha* also is more liberal compared to the conservative *O Globo* and *O Estado de S. Paulo*, the two other most influential national newspapers. It is important to observe that *Folha Group* also controls the top Brazilian online news site (www.uol.com.br).⁶⁵ The newspaper’s reach therefore extends well beyond its average daily circulation of 300,000.⁶⁶ Last, but not least, a

Guiomar Namó de Mello, claims that all products for public schools are provided at no cost. (Personal Interview, São Paulo, 3 October 2003).

⁶⁴ The *Correio Braziliense*, the dominant newspaper of the federal capital, could be added to this category. However, with a circulation basically restricted to Brasília, I categorize it as a local newspaper, even though it is influential among political elites and the state bureaucracy. Additionally, the once highly regarded *Jornal do Brasil* has faced steady economic decay over the last decade and today could hardly be placed in the top tier of the national press.

⁶⁵ Another important characteristic is that it remains a family business. It is worth noting that a few years ago The *Folha Group* and *Globo Organizations* joined up to launch a new financial newspaper (*Valor Econômico*), the leader in its segment today.

⁶⁶ The circulation of Sunday editions is usually double this figure.

recent study showed that *Folha* devotes more space to the coverage of education issues than any other Brazilian newspaper (ANDI, 2000 and 2005).⁶⁷

Sampling Media Materials

Once the three news media to examine had been chosen (*TV Globo*, *Veja* and *Folha*), the next challenge was to select a workable sample from thousands of news stories over a span of thirteen years (from 1995 to 2008), keeping in mind that qualitative research requires a thorough content analysis (Silverman, 2000). As already mentioned, at the outset I chose to focus primarily on news rather than entertainment programs, even though *telenovelas* (soap operas) and popular TV shows might have enriched my analysis. I also decided to exclude media campaigns conducted by MEC (e.g. publicity films for TV, radio spots, announcements in magazines and newspapers, etc.), which do constitute an important object of study. Furthermore, as promotional strategies and marketing have become so intertwined with educational policy formation and so central to MEC activities, it is not always possible to clearly distinguish publicity campaign materials from policy documents and vice-versa.

Based on these general criteria, specific selection criteria were defined to best suit each medium (newspapers, magazines and television). In the case of *TV Globo*, attention was paid to the *Jornal Nacional (JN)*, the network's main news program, broadcast at prime time from Monday to Saturday and watched by over 50 million Brazilians each

⁶⁷ In the 1980s, *Folha de S.Paulo* even had an editorial on education, eliminated in the early 1990s, when the Brazilian press underwent its first restructuring (see Souza, 2004; Lins e Silva, 2008). Since then, the communication media have successively cut back their staffs to face the more competitive environment

day. Besides being the “in-house newscast”, *JN* carries an enormous symbolic weight. It is the oldest news program on Brazilian television and has exerted a great deal of influence on the country’s politics as the favorite channel for governmental leads.⁶⁸

In order to select a feasible number of *JN* editions for analysis in my study two sampling procedures were used: (1) construction of a *random sample* utilizing the *composite week* method⁶⁹, through which a total of 64 *JN* editions aired were selected over a three month period from September 17, 1997 to March 11, 1998; from January 25, to July 1, 2002, and from January 6, to June 26, 2003; (2) definition of a *purposive sample* from a small number of news stories aired on *JN* from January 1996 to May 2008, directly related to the main issues I chose to study.

The *random sample* was designed to allow an analysis of long-term coverage, which enables one to observe both recurring patterns over time in media discourse despite a variation in the issues and how this relates to the broader social and political context. In contrast, the *purposive sample* provides an opportunity for the closer analysis of a media frame in particular issues at a specific moment. The following criteria were used to select the three half-year periods included in the first sample: (1) periods prior to the two last presidential elections (1998 and 2002); (2) the first six months of the Lula

created by the opening of the Brazilian economy and by the impact of new information technologies (see Chapter 2).

⁶⁸ Launched in 1969, at the onset of the most repressive period of the military dictatorship that took power with the 1964 coup, even the name, the *Jornal Nacional* [National News] seems to bears witness to its connection with the authoritarian regime’s ideology of national integration and security (see Motter, 1994; Porto, 2001; Lima, 2004). After redemocratization in 1985, the *JN* played a key role in legitimating the new power bloc. Although it has undergone important changes since the early 1990s, the *JN* continues “to privilege the points of view of the government and other powerful groups and institutions” (Porto, 2001, p. 180). Interestingly, this “pro-government bias” was not entirely overcome even after Lula’s election.

⁶⁹ This methodological procedure, largely used in communication research, consists of constructing a sample by choosing a different day of each week, beginning on Monday the first week, Tuesday the second week and so on throughout the period under study (see Hansen *et al.*, 1998).

Government. Since presidential elections are held in the months of October and November, I chose to include the first six months of the year in the sample to thus avoid “contamination” of the issue in the media due to the campaign climate preceding the presidential election.⁷⁰

The main criteria regarding the isolated news stories selected for more careful analysis were the prominence of the issue and its relation to the themes explored in this study. It is important to highlight the fundamental methodological difference in analyzing the two samples. The 64 random sample editions were analyzed from complete videotapes of the *JN* program, which last on average half an hour, including commercial breaks. Analyzing the complete program enabled an examination of its overall structure, how the “information flow” proceeds (Williams, 1992 [1974]), the prominence of the themes, order of presentation of the news stories, and how any story on education is framed and presented in relation to other topics (context). In contrast, the sampling of isolated news stories allowed only for an individualized analysis of each story – or of a series of stories on a given topic – disconnected from the context of the program in which it was exhibited.

By focusing on issues that garnered sustained media attention I gained a perspective on critical discourse moments (Chilton, 1987; Gamson, 1992). By and large, such media prominence is triggered by the occurrence of a critical or dramatic event such as a controversy surrounding a major policy proposal (e.g. a systemic school reform, social promotion etc.), the release of national or international evaluation results, a shooting or another violence-related accident in a school etc. It is important to keep in

⁷⁰ Regarding the 1998 election, I chose to construct a sample based on the fourth quarter of the previous year, when MEC launched the “*All Children in School*” campaign, accompanied by an aggressive media

mind that often what makes an event “*critical*” in the eyes of the public is its media portrayal. This is not without consequences. For one thing, as Pride (2002) has convincingly argued, “*critical events* rather than *performance trends* affect the collective evaluation of public education because critical events are more likely to stimulate competition among political activists over the meaning attached to real world happenings” (p. 160).

However, the media’s ability to dramatize events and grab the public’s attention should not be overstated. Rather than looking for instances of sensationalism of education issues as a manifestation of the *political spectacle* (Smith *et al.*, 2004), I focused on themes that attracted news coverage for their political significance from the viewpoint of policy actors and other stakeholders. That is, “the criteria for selecting those moments had to be brought to the news material from without, from a larger sense of political process” (Gitlin, 2003, p. 304). As Gamson (1992) noted, critical discourse moments are especially appropriate for studying media discourse. Nevertheless, this approach also presents an important shortcoming, as its isolated application may offer at best “a small series of snapshots of media discourse at irregular intervals instead of the more desirable movie” (p. 26). Thus, by combining an analysis of long-term media coverage with a closer look at critical discourse moments, I hope to compensate for the limitations of both approaches and build on their strengths.

Here I must mention that the videotape of part of the televised material analyzed was kindly provided by *Central Globo de Comunicação*, through the *Projeto Globo e*

strategy that became a central theme in President Cardoso’s reelection campaign.

Universidade [Globo and University Project].⁷¹ Moreover, this study would not have been possible without access to the Politics and Media Studies Center (NEMP) collection. Linked to the Advanced Multidisciplinary Studies Center of the University of Brasília (CEAM/UnB), NEMP provided the videotapes of the 64 editions of *JN* for the three six-month periods analyzed. NEMP began videotaping network newscasts and certain soap operas in 1993. However, lack of resources has prevented it from doing so regularly over the last ten years. Luckily, the *JN* file is one of the most complete, enabling me to obtain a representative sample for analysis.⁷²

Printed Press Sample

The methodological procedures utilized with the printed press differed in two fundamental aspects: firstly, I worked only with a *representative sample* of newspaper and news magazine articles instead of a random sample; secondly, my analysis covers a larger amount of print materials over a longer period of time compared to TV (from January 1995 up to September 2008). In order to select a workable number of articles featured over almost a decade and half one must be very careful. I decided to primarily focus on three genres of print materials: news stories, editorials, and opinion columns. The first two received special attention. My analysis thus discards cartoons and rarely

⁷¹ This project was initiated in 2000 to approximate *Rede Globo* and the academic community and may be seen as part of the network's efforts to gain legitimacy with a sector that has been harshly critical of its activities. In addition to ease of access to their archives for outside researchers, the *Globo and University Project* also promote visits by teachers and students to the network's studios and conducts lectures and partnerships with universities (Rede Globo, 2000).

⁷² Criteria for the composite week is flexible enough to allow that any issues '*missing*' from the NEMP archive may be replaced by the issue available for the following day. Thus, I was able to randomly select some 25 issues for each of the three half-year periods surveyed.

includes notes – a genre that has become pervasive and influential in contemporary printed and online press, notably in the coverage of political and economic subjects.

As stated before, the analysis of printed press centers on *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Veja*. Nonetheless, in order to conduct a thorough qualitative research, I carried out a broader survey that included other national newspapers (*O Globo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, *Jornal do Brasil*, and *Correio Braziliense*) and weekly news magazines (*Época*, *IstoÉ*, *Exame* and *Carta Capital*). I attempted to observe variations and similarities in frames of particular education issues between major national media institutions and to examine how they cohere with dominant discourses surrounding educational reforms. By taking this comparative perspective, my hope was to enhance my analysis both in breadth and depth.

This stage of the research was facilitated by access to clippings from major Brazilian newspapers and magazines organized and maintained by the Documentation and Information Center (CEDI) of the House of Representatives, which I used during my M.A. research.⁷³ I decided to utilize this secondary source, instead of directly researching the original issues of the newspapers and magazines. The use of CEDI clippings presented certain shortcomings, however. The foremost is the use of an antiquated index based on keywords. All articles making any reference to the subject of *education* were categorized under that theme. In practical terms, this results in an enormous number of clips from dozens of newspapers and magazines, only classified by the year of publication. My initial task, therefore, was to wade through folders full of clippings and dust, from the period of 1995 to 2000, to separate the material I was interested in.

Another important disadvantage to working with clippings rather than the whole

print issue is that it is not always possible to clearly identify the position the article occupied in the page on which it was placed. Thus, the analysis lost an essential element – the context in which the news stories were featured. Certain studies have demonstrated that the framing of a given subject or event may not be assumed only from an analysis of the content of a single news story, or even a series of news stories, but can only be fully apprehended by analyzing the composition of a number of graphic and visual elements that characterize the format of the printed press and the relation with other news stories featured in the same issue (e.g. Gitlin, 2003). In other words, we must be concerned with both content and form. For one thing, as Fairclough (1995) points out, “meanings are necessarily realized in forms, and differences in meaning entail differences in form. Conversely, it is a sensible working assumption that where forms are different, there will be some difference in meaning” (p. 25). Such a postulate corrects one of the major shortcomings in framing analysis, which puts too much attention to content while overlooking visual language (e.g., Porto, 2001).

This problem was minimized in this study due to the fact that a large proportion of the CEDI collection was compiled of full pages or even entire newspaper sections where education stories appeared. Thus, in separating the material to be analyzed, I gave preference to those news stories featured on a full page. During this initial search, I selected and photocopied approximately a hundred articles and news stories for each year. I followed Stuart Hall’s suggestion beginning a qualitative research with “a long preliminary soak” in the materials. According to this approach, the researcher uses “the preliminary reading to select representative examples which can be [later] more

⁷³ CEDI maintains a hard copy archive of newspapers up to August 2000. Since then, it has produced a daily electronic copy collection of clippings, which facilitates Internet access yet unfortunately does not

intensively analyzed” (quoted in Gitlin, 2003, pp.303-304). Different from traditional quantitative content analysis, my aim was not to measure coverage the media devoted to education issues, nor to code news stories according to pre-defined quantifiable categories and then investigate the occurrences of certain themes and frames.

I obtained an immense amount of material from my initial *on site* survey. My next task was to sort the data, separating items into key categories of content and genre (news stories, editorials and op-eds). I then made a qualitative content analysis for each selected article. I searched and analyzed samples of the print press from August 2000 to September 2008 through the Internet and access to printed editions.⁷⁴

Critical discourse analysis: an enabling tool

In this study I draw upon a variety of qualitative and interpretive approaches to analyze policy and media texts. However, I used two main analytical tools: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the strand developed by Norman Fairclough in *Media Discourse* (1995), and Johnson’s (1987) notion of “circuits of cultural production.” Both approaches draw heavily upon Marxist cultural theory, especially the school linked to British Cultural Studies and the work of scholars such as Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, and Stuart Hall. For education, the major work within this tradition is Paul Willis’ (1981 [1977]) *Learning to Labour*, which sheds light on the multiple forms of resistance and the contestation of working-class subcultures inside

provide the page number whence the material came.

⁷⁴ The major disadvantage of working with on-line issues of newspapers and magazines is the loss of visual elements of the printed version and the context in which the news stories are presented.

schools, and how such potentially oppositional subcultures may paradoxically reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities.

In Media Studies, the major contribution to critical Cultural Studies is the notion of “the active audience”, which points to viewers/readers’ agency to resist and contest “preferred meanings” encoded in any media text/product (Hall 2001 [1980]). By taking up the idea that media texts are open to multiple readings by an active audience, I do not subscribe to certain post-structural theories that celebrate the polysemic and fragmented nature of media offerings and claim consumer sovereignty and freedom of choice. Rather, I want to retain the emphasis of Cultural Studies on agency and contestation.

The dominant or preferred meanings are not an intrinsic property of media text – or policy text for that regard – that shapes the reader’s interpretation, but an ideological device through which “new, problematic or troubling events” are framed according to the existing “orders of social life, of economic and political power and of ideology.” As Hall (2001) puts it:

The domains of ‘preferred meanings’ have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of ‘how things work for all practical purposes in this culture’, the rank order of power and interest, and the structure of legitimations, limits, and sanctions” (p. 172).

In sharp contrast with formalistic and traditional approaches, which focus on the “internal analysis of language in abstraction from social context,” CDA is concerned with the “sociohistorical conditions within which the object of analysis is produced, constructed, and received” (Bourdieu, quoted in Fairclough, 1995, p.177). When applied to media texts, CDA is premised upon the assumption that any ‘mediatized re-presentation’ “is

always a selective recontextualization.” As already been mentioned, another important insight that CDA brings to Media Studies is how different voices are re-presented and ordered in news or entertainment programs. By taking such a perspective, one can avoid another pitfall in the framing analysis, which tends to neglect the construction of identities and how the media impose “ordering upon voices and discourse.” For one thing, as Fairclough (1995) has aptly noted, the diversity of voices can grossly mislead since “sheer presence is not in itself a straightforward measure of greater equity [and plurality]” (p. 187).

Two key-concepts must be called upon if we are to understand how the media can be effective in constructing and supporting dominant “maps of meanings”, through which people make sense of the world as well as of their everyday life: hegemony and common sense. Both concepts are related to Gramsci’s understanding of culture as a site of contestation (see Chapter 2). Thus, the mediatization of politics and education policy “can usefully be regarded as a domain of cultural hegemony which is constantly open to hegemonic struggle, a struggle for power within media institutions which will relate, if in possibly complex and indirect ways, to struggles for power in the wider society” (Fairclough, 1995, p.199).

Johnson’s (1987) notion of “circuits of cultural production” draws attention to instances of ideological construction of consent whereby the hegemonic project is secured. These key-instances are: production, circulation, and consumption or reception. It goes without saying that they all are open to contestation and challenge. This analytical device therefore provides one with a vantage point to contemplate how counter-hegemonic groups “can contest the prevailing structures of power and definitions of

reality” (Gitlin 2003, p.11). In this study, I primarily focus on instances of production and circulation. Given the focus of the analysis on policy formation and the production of media texts, I occasionally speculate in terms of consumption or reception. Johnson’s framework seems particularly suitable for analyzing media texts. However, I do not want to take the notion of the “circuit of cultural production” too far when applied to policy formation. For one thing, it might lead to a formalistic view of policy akin to ‘*rational models*’, “which conceptualize policy in distinct and linear phases (policy development or formulation, implementation and evaluation) (...)” (Taylor *et al.*, p. 25).

Ethical issues

As mentioned before, as a middle-ranking official at MEC during the Cardoso and Lula governments, I had the opportunity to become engaged with the policy-making process and acquainted with national and state education officials and policy actors. Such experience provided me with many important insights for this study, but also raises some ethical issues. Therefore, since the beginning, I have been aware of the risks of undertaking this research task. In this closing section, I want to briefly address some of these ethical issues.

Although I served for almost two years in an appointed position, I had no formal political ties with the Cardoso government. This is not an attempt to deny that I became an *insider* at the center of policy formation, with privileged access to senior officials and, to some extent, to the ‘closet’ decision-making process. Of course, being part of the INEP staff opened up an opportunity not only to be professionally engaged in policy-making at

the federal level, but also to build personal relationships, some of which have continued even after leaving my job. The social network established during my first period at MEC has also been more than instrumental in my choice of graduate studies and research.⁷⁵

It is precisely the fact that I so actively participated as a member of former Minister Paulo Renato Souza's staff that raised two ethical issues: firstly, to what extent could I use inside information in my own research? Secondly, to what extent could personal ties with former MEC officials undermine my ability to be critical in my inquiry and analysis?⁷⁶ Besides these questionings, I was aware that I could unwittingly take advantage of being seen by some of my interviewees as a trustworthy former collaborator (and the double meaning here seems appropriate), who would share their positions and opinions, particularly when it comes to criticizing the new government.

To address this concern during my fieldwork, I tried to clearly explain the major aims of my research project to former MEC officials with whom I had previously worked. Two additional considerations gave me further assurances that I should not be afraid of betraying their trust: firstly, most of them have pursued successful academic careers and were used to the kind of critical thinking required by any serious scholarly work; secondly, when I joined the INEP staff in late 1996, I did not disguise my previous

⁷⁵ Here a disclosure seems appropriate: when I decided to apply for a Ph.D. program, in 1999, I requested a recommendation letter from the former Minister of Education, Paulo Renato Souza, which was promptly granted. Similarly, I got a recommendation letter from Cláudio de Moura Castro, then serving as an education specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank, in Washington. Both have come to appreciate my work at INEP, which enabled them to make an unbiased reference.

⁷⁶ My personal relationship with some of the interviewees might, in fact, have inhibited me from asking more delicate questions. In order to avoid embarrassments that could compromise the interview, when interviewing the people with whom I had worked at MEC, I sought to restrict my questions to issues that pertained to public discourse. As a rule, this meant that I avoided questions on private activities made after these people left the government. For instance, I did not ask Paulo Renato Souza about his business as an education consultant, which could raise some serious ethical issues. I did, however, ask him straightforward questions on his term in office, especially on the use of communication to obtain political advantage when

political commitments and never felt discriminated against because of them.

Lastly, thanks to my involvement in national education policies in a government that vigorously promoted an ambitious reform agenda, I learned to mistrust two widespread explanations for the seemingly intractable problems facing Brazilian public schools: firstly, that the only reason the changes necessary to ensure the right to quality education for everyone do not take place is due to a lack of “political will” of the governments in power or a conspiracy of the ruling classes; secondly, that the striking inequalities of the Brazilian educational system are a byproduct of neo-liberal policies imposed by the “Washington consensus”, which became hegemonic in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s.

The left taking power in the central government in 2003 has been enlightening on both accounts. The initial mistakes of the Lula government, particularly in the area of education, serve as a reminder that good intentions and a volunteer spirit are not enough to “make things happen”. This realism, however, should not dampen our hopes nor paralyze our willingness to strive for transformations and social justice. On the contrary, if we want to be effective we first need a full understanding of how the *status quo* is enacted and maintained through discursive practices, which bear upon education policies. I tackle this complex issue in the next chapters.

he invested in the unsuccessful attempt to be a viable presidential candidate to succeed President Cardoso in 2002.

CHAPTER 4 - FORMATION OF THE DOMINANT EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

In a world where knowledge is the 'growth engine,' nothing can be more worrying than the quality of the education we are providing for our children and young people. By denying them minimal equal opportunities, we risk jeopardizing the legitimacy of the 'market economy'.

Antonio Delfim Netto⁷⁷ (2007, p. A2)

In this and the next two chapters, I intend to define the genealogy of the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil by unveiling its main ideological underpinnings. Based on the literature review, a critical analysis of education policy documents and mainly qualitative analyses of sampled media coverage of educational issues, I identify four main elements which blend together to form this discourse: (i) human capital theory; (ii) ideology of meritocracy; (iii) cultural deficit theory; and (iv) managerialism.⁷⁸ These ideological axes revolve around complex linkages and relationships between education and key institutions in a capitalist society: the economy, the market, social class and the State. The analysis of these relations has been the core subject of the sociology of education, particularly within the critical tradition which this dissertation follows (e.g. Apple, 1995, 2000 and 2001).

⁷⁷ Economist, former Minister of Finance during the Brazilian military regime and former federal representative, who, in recent years, has become an ally of the Lula government and a supporter of its economic policy.

⁷⁸ In his analysis of conservative modernization in the United States in recent decades and its impact on education, Michael W. Apple identified four groups under the umbrella of neo-liberal leadership: neo-liberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists, and the new professional and managerial middle-class (Apple, 2001). In Brazil, the forces behind the conservative modernization process have taken a different ideological shape over the course of the last seven decades. During the past fifteen years, the period covered by this dissertation, an alliance similar to the conservative umbrella described by Apple has been established. Each of the four elements making up the dominant educational discourse in Brazil intersects with the agenda of the groups mentioned by Apple, pointing to an emerging international consensus as a driving force of the current restructuring of education.

In order to unveil the contradictions of the hegemonic discourse,⁷⁹ disguised behind the dense fog of the bold rhetoric of “Everyone for Education” and “equal opportunities,” I critically consider the broader historical, economic, social and political context that gave rise to this discourse and laid its ideological groundwork during the eight years of the Cardoso government (1995-2002). I also map out the main groups gathered under the umbrella of the new education consensus that the Education Development Plan (PDE) consolidated after being launched in the first half of 2007. This plan redefined the educational agenda for the second term of the Lula government, representing a clear departure from the historical platform of PT, the leader of the governmental coalition. I discuss this shift in detail in Chapter 7.

The dominant discourse is unified and coalesced by its strong appeal to common sense, in the light of which education is seen as the great equalizer that will turn Brazil, one of the most unequal societies on the planet, into a modern, prosperous and fair nation. The new dominant discourse is impregnated with a redemptive vision of education that is deeply rooted in Brazilian social philosophy and political history⁸⁰ (Plank, 2001). The promise of social and economic changes frustrated by the authoritarian and conservative approach to modernization that has been the basis for Brazilian development since the 1930s was redeemed by the “revolution for education” utopia, which has been incorporated into contemporary political discourse (Buarque, 2006). At the concrete level

⁷⁹ I prefer to use the term “dominant discourse” instead of “hegemonic discourse” in order to avoid the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic binary. An assumption implied here is that there are competing, oppositional discourses represented and all too often misrepresented in the mainstream media and in the public sphere. Mapping out these dissenting discourses is way beyond the scope of my thesis.

⁸⁰ In his classical work on the historical formation of Brazil, *Raízes do Brasil* (Roots of Brazil), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda criticized the “pedagogues of prosperity” who promoted education as the door to progress. Referring to the “mirage of the literacy of the people,” he regretted: “so much useless rhetoric has been wasted to prove that all our ills could be cured overnight if elementary schools were widely available and people simply knew how to read and write.” (Holanda, 1969 [1936], pp. 123-124)

of educational policies, the dominant discourse presupposes the hegemony of economic rationality. In short, the primacy of the logic of the market.

The main question addressed here and in the following chapters is: *How do discourses disseminated and shaped by mainstream media frame the national education agenda and debate and concur to legitimize public policies?* In order to answer this central question, I must tackle two underlying issues: Which groups are empowered and legitimated by this dominant education discourse, and, on the other hand, which groups are disempowered and delegitimated by it? Which interests are best served? Although my focus here is on characterizing the dominant/hegemonic discourse, I am fully aware that there are competing discourses, which are ignored or undermined by the mainstream media. Moreover, teacher unions and social movements continuously resist and challenge the dominant discourse.

I also hope to provide some insights on a set of more specific questions regarding education policy formation: What are the historical roots of the dominant discourse, whose foundations were laid during the Cardoso government and which consolidated its hegemony during the Lula government? What are the main ideological and programmatic elements unifying this discourse? What policies and issues are comprised by this emerging consensus, and which are excluded from it (e.g. affirmative-action policies)? What are the implications of this attempt to reshape education as an arena of convergence and consensus, as epitomized in the “Everyone for Education” slogan? What are the consequences of the recent mobilization of the corporate elite around the “Everyone for Education” movement? What is the role of the dominant media in shaping, representing, and legitimizing this new consensus, as embodied by the PDE?

My main tasks in this chapter are to describe what I have been calling the current dominant educational discourse and to provide a historical and sociological perspective on how it has been shaped. I will mainly focus here on its economic underpinnings – the so-called human capital theory, according to which knowledge and skills acquired through formal education and on-the-job training are determining factors for the employability and productivity of individuals, and, as a result, for economic growth, as well as for shaping the income distribution framework. Secondly, I will examine the recent phenomenon of colonization in the field of education by economic thinking and the increasing hegemony of economic rationality in the formation of educational policies in Brazil. I will then provide an analysis of media samples which show a strong convergence between the preferred framing of the mainstream media in its coverage of educational issues and the main assumptions of the dominant discourse. Finally, I will briefly discuss the “ideology of competency” and the key role played by experts in producing and legitimizing the dominant educational discourse.

Human Capital Theory and the ongoing debate on inequality, economic growth and education in Brazil

For over three decades, intense discussions have been held in Brazil on the determining factors of inequality but with no consensus in sight (Pessôa, 2006; Souza, 2006; Schwartzman, 2004; Barros *et al.*, 2000a; Ferreira, 2000; Menezes Filho, 2001). In the early 1970s, when Brazil was under an authoritarian regime and experienced high economic growth rates – a period known as the “Brazilian Miracle” – the economist

Carlos Langoni (1973 and 1974) introduced human capital theory into Brazil to explain the apparent paradox of increasing income inequalities in a scenario of fast economic growth. Aligned with the conservative ideas of the then Minister of Finance, Antonio Delfim Netto, who made famous the thesis that it was necessary to let the cake grow first before sharing it, Langoni maintained that besides accounting for the persistence of income concentration in Brazil, the education factor actually exacerbated it. According to his thesis, the low schooling levels of workers prevented higher total earnings, despite the economic growth Brazil was experiencing. Thus, the labor market was seen as a mere “mirror” reflecting educational inequalities.

Paradoxically, Langoni (1973, p. 15) reached the conclusion that “the enhanced inequality observed during the period [1960-1970] is largely associated with the higher schooling levels of the labor force (...)”. In his preface to the book *Distribuição da Renda e Desenvolvimento Econômico no Brasil* [Income Distribution and Economic Development in Brazil] (1973), Delfim Netto happily endorsed the thesis: “Langoni proves that higher inequality rates are directly determined by market imbalances typically caused by the development process” (pp. 13-14). What this meant is that the human capital concept was used to justify the unequal distribution of the benefits of economic growth. The returns associated with education would arguably explain the increasing gap between an emerging urban middle-class and unschooled workers in a scenario of rapid industrialization and urbanization, processes that contributed to sprawling shanty towns and poverty belts around large Brazilian cities.

Santos (2002) provides an accurate rendition of the human capital theory’s main assumptions by stating that,

The original human capital theory particularly focuses on the supply side of people's qualities, assuming a competitive labor market in perfect balance. Income differences reflect differences in the productive capacity of people as a result of their education and training (...) The human capital model represents a micro-economic approach to income formation focused on the choices made by economic agents. Income is explained in terms of skills acquired at school and in one's job, which represent individual investment decisions throughout one's lifecycle (...) The main idea behind the theory is that the effect of education corresponds to the return of an investment. Workers are seen as rational individuals who seek to maximize their income during their lifetime through investments in their productive capacities. (pp. 203-204)

Since productivity and income depend on skills acquired through formal education, human capital would be the key element to explain both the performance of domestic economies and the income distribution framework in a given society. The most recent economic literature recognizes that the "returns of education" vary according to other features of the individuals making up a certain population (Santos, 2002). Another assumption confirmed by various empirical studies is that the rate of return on education tends to decrease as education and the average schooling of the population increase (Menezes Filho, 2001). What this means is that the value attributed by the market to educational credentials drops as the number of individuals with the same credentials increases, generating a phenomenon known as education inflation. It is the law of supply and demand, according to the economic rationale.

In an essay that would become famous, titled *Distribuição da Renda no Brasil: Um Novo Exame* [Income Distribution in Brazil: a New Analysis], the Brazilianist Albert Fishlow (1973), director of the Institute for Latin American and Brazilian Studies at Columbia University in New York, strongly rejected the thesis proposed by Langoni, arguing that the higher income concentration prevailing in Brazil had been caused by the

economic policy implemented by the military regime, designed to speed up the capitalist accumulation process, with the national state playing the role of inducing economic development, and was not just a result of “market imbalances”.⁸¹ He also suggested that the repressive policy adopted by the authoritarian regime and the lack of union freedom were factors that played a role in broadening the inequality gap. In relation to educational policy, Fishlow (1973) warned that “the emphasis placed on higher education to the detriment of elementary education can [could] enhance inequalities and slow down growth rates.” This forecast was confirmed in the decades that followed, when the Brazilian economy stagnated and inequalities increased.

More than three decades later, with a period of protracted economic stagnation along the way⁸² between the late 1970s and late 1990s, Brazil is still one of the most unequal societies on the planet – with a Gini index persistently around 0.60 – while intellectuals and politicians continue to hold heated discussions on the root causes of inequality and poverty. From a critical perspective, it is therefore quite disturbing to see that human capital theory has reemerged as the dominant paradigm to explain the “unacceptable stability of income inequalities in Brazil”, according to the conclusion of a recent study carried out by a team of the Institute for Applied Economic Research

⁸¹ For a reconstitution of the debate between Langoni and Fishlow, see Ferreira (2000) and Menezes Filho (2001). Both authors support the arguments of those they regard as the winners: the supporters of the human capital theory.

⁸² The so-called “lost decade” actually lasted almost a quarter of a century in Brazil. Pinheiro and Giambiagi (2006) make a persuasive comparison to characterize the situation of “semi-stagnation” faced by the country in recent decades: “In 2005, Brazil had a real *per capita* income that was only 9% higher than in 1980. During the same 25-year period, the *per capita* income increased by over 60% in rich countries, more than doubled in Chile, increased almost four-fold in Korea, and increased seven-fold in China.” (p. xiii)

(IPEA),⁸³ led by the economist Ricardo Paes de Barros (2000a). This study shows that “the select group made up of the richest 1% of society keep a share of the income exceeding the one kept by the poorest 50%” (p. 40). The study reached two disturbing conclusions: (i) poverty in Brazil is not directly associated with scant resources, but rather with an uneven distribution of available resources and; (ii) almost two-thirds of poverty rates, Brazil is associated with inequalities in income distribution, justifying the statement that “we are not a poor country, but rather a country with many poor people.” Given this paradox, the authors acknowledge that: “Inequality, in particular income inequality, has marked Brazilian history for such a long time that it has come to be accepted as a natural phenomenon” (p. 33).

However, in order to explain how such great inequality is produced and perpetuated, Barros *et al.* (2000b) resurrect Langoni's thesis and say that “the absolute and relative gaps observed in the schooling of the population largely explain the high income inequalities prevailing in Brazil” (p. 405). The authors go even further and claim the existence of “causality relations between expanded educational opportunities and income inequalities”, as evinced, in their opinion, by a strong correlation between schooling and income (p. 406). Educational heterogeneity would account for about 40% of wage inequalities. The authors admit that the labor market “can *generate* inequalities

⁸³ Linked to the Ministry of Budget, Planning and Management, IPEA is one of Brazil's most influential think tanks. Since the 1990s, its Social Studies Board, chaired by Ricardo Paes de Barros, an economist with a PhD from the Chicago University, has strongly influenced the definition of strategies and the design of policies focused on fighting poverty adopted by the Cardoso and Lula administrations. The economist Ricardo Henriques, who is a member of the IPEA core team in Rio de Janeiro, became an important policymaker in the Lula government, in the first year (2003) as Deputy Minister of the Social Assistance Ministry (which later on became the Ministry of Social Development and Combating Poverty) and, from 2004 to May 2007, as Secretary for Continued Education, Literacy and Diversity (SECAD) of the Ministry of Education. Here a personal disclosure is needed: in July 2005, the author of this thesis was dismissed from SECAD, allegedly for having criticized the communication policy of the Ministry of Education during

or *reveal* past inequalities”. In the former case, discrimination would explain the phenomenon (gender and race discrimination, etc.); in the latter case, the market would only reflect differences between workers (e.g. schooling, skills, experience, etc.). To explain the high rates of return on education in Brazil, Barros *et al.* use a tautological argument: Brazil experienced “fast technological progress associated with a slow education expansion,” leading to “a higher relative shortage of skilled labor with a corresponding increase in the market value of education” (pp. 415-416). The study suggests the need to promote a “fast and ongoing schooling expansion process as a strategic element for ensuring Brazil's equitable and sustainable socioeconomic development” (p. 421). A recommendation one can easily subscribe to.

The thesis that blames Brazil's persistent income inequalities on educational heterogeneity, which reemerged in the 1990s, has been endorsed and disseminated by a wide range of economists, many of whom have been very active as media intellectuals, shaping the educational debate (Ferreira, 2000; Menezes Filho, 2002 and 2006; Ioschpe, 2004 and 2006a; Henriques, 2004; Pessôa, 2006; Ferreira & Veloso, 2006a and 2006b). The new preachers of human capital theory and their followers are spurred on by dogmatic convictions based on ideological fanaticism: “we know for sure that education is the main factor explaining inequality and, therefore, poverty”, Henriques proclaims (2004, p. 66). “It is an absolute truth that investing in education generates economic growth,” assured the economist Naércio Menezes Filho to the *Época* news magazine (Freitas & Nunes, 2006, p. 38). “Education is somewhat like bananas: if bananas are in short supply, their price rises; if they are in abundant supply, their prices drop,” states the

the seminar “Education in the Brazilian Press: Information Responsibility and Quality,” held in São Paulo on May 18, 2005.

economist José Alexandre Scheinkman in an article published in the *Exame* news magazine, trying to explain the variation in the rates of return of education (Lahóz, 2000, p. 176). Scheinkman is a professor at Princeton University, and his CV highlights the distinction of having occupied the position once held by Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago. In an interview published in the prestigious yellow pages of the *Veja* news magazine, he reaffirmed his strong belief in human capital theory:

If we educated the percentage of the population with no access to education today, it would certainly begin to earn higher wages. Secondly, education-based wage differences would decrease. One of the main elements leading to inequality in Brazil is the fact that its large educational differences lead to huge wage gaps. These differences are high in Brazil because educated people are in short supply in the country, making this kind of labor more expensive. Lack of investment in education is one of the reasons why Brazil's pace of growth has slowed down in recent decades. (Iacomini, 1999, p.12)

It should be mentioned that most of the Brazilian economists who support this paradigm studied at the University of Chicago at some point. Therefore, they belong to the fraternity of the “Chicago boys,” which has strongly influenced neo-liberal reforms in Latin America in recent decades. As we know, the Chicago economics school was the center from which human capital theory was disseminated, based on the pioneering studies of Schultz (1963 [1973]) and Becker (1967 and 1975).⁸⁴ In line with supporters of human capital theory, Schwartzman (2004) observes that “there is strong evidence suggesting that differences in education are the main determinants of income inequalities, and countries with low schooling levels are usually marked by more pronounced social

⁸⁴ For a critical review of the path of this theory during the past four decades, see Levin (2001). For a strong defense of its validity, see Ioschpe (2004). For an insightful neo-Marxist analysis of the effects of class positions on the income, as opposed to the neoclassic human capital model, see Santos (2002). For

inequalities” (p.152). This circular reasoning raises a kind of ‘the chicken and the egg’ dilemma. After all, are societies more unequal because of their low schooling levels, or do they remain in such a condition as a result of being more unequal? The author himself provides an alternative perspective which challenges one of the main postulates of human capital theory:

In the absence of new work opportunities, expanding education can simply become a mechanism for distributing available jobs according to the educational credentials of their candidates, which in turn depend on the cultural capital and financial resources of the students and their families. A larger supply of educational opportunities can reduce the value of such credentials, but would not, in itself, lead to the creation of additional wealth (Schwartzman, 2004, p. 152).

Reviewing the debate held over the past three decades, the economist Francisco Ferreira (2000) gives due credit to Barros and his collaborators. After all, he goes on to explain, “during the 1990s [they] managed to eliminate, at least in academic circles, the aura of political incorrectness which for some time had been associated with the argument that the root causes of the Brazilian inequality lay in the distribution of education and in determining its economic returns, as initially suggested by Carlos Langoni” (p.143). However, Ferreira raises a core issue that supporters of human capital theory tend to avoid: “If education is the factor explaining so much of our income distribution, what is the factor which explains our education production and human capital accumulation process?” (p. 144). He goes on to suggest that consolidated inequalities result from a vicious circle “in which pronounced educational heterogeneity leads to pronounced wealth inequality that produces large differences in political power, generating, in turn,

sociological arguments against the dominant paradigm in the debate on inequality in Brazil, see Souza (2003 and 2006).

an educational policy that perpetuates the initial educational inequality.” With this tautological proposition, Ferreira intends to reconcile the two main theoretical assumptions of the academic debate on the determinants of inequality in Brazil, as can be inferred from the following passage:

What is being proposed, therefore, is a political-economic wealth distribution model whose main determinant is the nature of the educational system in which a class struggle leads to a balance between low efficiency and high inequality, as anticipated by some of the followers of Fishlow, Bacha⁸⁵ and Taylor. But a class struggle that does not take place in the car assembly plants of the *ABC paulista* region,⁸⁶ as many people thought, but rather in the design of our educational system, in differences in the priority attached to funding primary and secondary public education and to other items of the federal budget and, as a result, in differences between what is learned in the best private schools in large cities in the Southeast region and in public schools in their outskirts, in remote areas in the State of Piauí, or on the banks of small rivers in the Amazon region. (Ferreira, 2000, p. 144)

In the end, Ferreira reimports the distributive conflict to the heart of the educational system, where the contemporary class struggle would take place. With different ideological coverings, the resurgent human capital theory has once again established itself as the dominant model to explain Brazilian inequality, with serious implications for social and educational policies. Its reemergence was accompanied by an increasing colonization of the educational discourse by economic thinking and by a managerialist

⁸⁵ The economist Edmar Bacha is recognized as one of the architects of the Real Plan – the economic stabilization plan launched in 1994, when Fernando Henrique Cardoso was Minister of Finance, and which would become his main platform for president. Bacha was one of the main ideologists of the liberalizing reforms implemented during the Cardoso government. He is, until this day, seen as one of the most influential intellectuals linked to the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and, “comfortable with being called a neo-liberal,” he has been a strong supporter of the “capitalist shock” as a solution to the impasse faced in Brazil's development. (See Dantas & Caldas, “Choque de capitalismo vem aí,” [The Capitalist Shock is on its Way] (in *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 18 December 2005).

⁸⁶ An industrial belt located in the metropolitan region of Greater São Paulo where car assembly plants were concentrated in Brazil in the 1970s and where the historical strikes of metallurgical workers led by the

vision of the role of the State (see Chapter 6). These three main elements form the basis of the new consensus on education, which contradictorily conceives it as both the cause and cure for all social illness, from poverty and income inequalities, including pregnancy during adolescence to bad food habits causing obesity.⁸⁷ Entrepreneur Horácio Lafer Piva, President of the DNA Brasil Institute⁸⁸ and former President of the powerful Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP), accurately summarizes this vision of education as a universal panacea:

Education is the beginning, the middle, and the end. This is the most transversal issue in a society aiming to be civilized, democratic and prosperous. Do we want development, which boils down to growth with social justice? Without it [education], this is an impossible target. Is birth control a benchmark issue? Only if you educate the population. Has Brazil taken on the challenge of international inclusion? Competition presupposes education. Are crime rates soaring? Is health care poor? Is the social security system draining public money? Is there unemployment rate on the rise? Only education can tackle these problems (Instituto DNA Brasil, 2006, p. 7).

Therefore, education becomes sort of a bandwagon – a benign cause attracting an increasing number of supporters and adherents. Education is reconfigured as a converging and consensus-building field. After all, as President Lula said in his speech at the launching ceremony of the PDE, on April 24, 2007, “No other topic is as positive, mobilizing, and capable of uniting the country as education”. This explains why both

then union leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva were held. These gave him national visibility. In the next years, he would take a leading role in the organization of PT.

⁸⁷ A clear example of this approach can be found in a cover article in the business magazine *Exame* of April 2000. (See Lahóz, 2000)

⁸⁸ The think-tank created in 2004 by a group of corporate leaders from São Paulo with the mission of thinking about Brazil's future. Education is one of priorities on its agenda.

state and private groups are increasingly focusing on education as a source of legitimacy and symbolic capital.

The dominant thesis according to which the educational differential is the main determinant of Brazilian inequality was most strongly criticized by the economist Francisco de Oliveira (2003), who was once part of the PT's intelligentsia but left the party after becoming disillusioned with the economic policy adopted by the Lula government. What he said about it deserves to be quoted in full:

We have been recently witnessing a strange controversy around income distribution in Brazil. Objections to the notion that concentration constitutes an obstacle to economic development and boils down to a system of social injustice have been responded to with typical Brazilian dark humor – but lacking its literary quality – namely, that income concentration was brought about by improvements in education; the humor lies in the satirical idea that income distribution is better among illiterate people. Beyond the cynicism that this type of humor entails, one can clearly identify the obvious and usual attempt of technocrats to confound public opinion, which they deeply despise, suggesting that economic ‘arts’ are beyond the understanding of the public. This contempt in itself provides clear evidence that improvements in education were not as great as they were publicized to be. Second, it is a rather weak sophism to analyze income distribution from the point of view of education, instead of analyzing education in the light of income distribution, as any of head of household knows *how much* educating their children costs (and even more when there are plans to privatize higher education). (...) It should also be said that income distribution is not a variable that can be correctly studied using closed groups such as workers in the civil construction industry as opposed to workers in the car industry as samples: the true parameters for comparison are not between two categories of workers, but rather between these categories and their employers. Apart from not being funny, this cynical humor also lacks a scientific and historical perspective, let alone compassion, which is one of the elements differentiating human beings from other animal species (Oliveira, 2003, pp. 118-119).

Symptomatically, few analysts are willing to recognize that the extremely unequal framework of Brazilian society constitutes a huge obstacle to an equitable distribution of education. And one can easily understand why. According to Barros *et alii* (2000b)

“education expansion fosters greater equality and social mobility, as, because it is a ‘*non-assignable asset*’, education can be more easily distributed than most physical assets” (p. 405). Another advantage mentioned by supporters of human capital theory is that education “is an asset that can be reproduced and one usually offered to the poor population through public mechanisms.”

Given the huge inequalities prevailing in the Brazilian social scenario, supporting the cause of education legitimizes a public discourse in favor of equal opportunities. Education therefore lends itself to both the benevolence of the State and to private philanthropy. Initiatives such as the “Friends of the School” movement, sponsored by the largest TV network in Brazil (the *Globo* Network), and the “Everyone for Education” corporate movement ratify the myth of the “innate solidarity” of the Brazilian people (Souza, 2006), turning education into a stage for shows of voluntarism and private meritoriousness (Fitoussi & Rosanvallon, 1997). As an intangible good, education becomes a new manna that can be multiplied and distributed to everybody without taking it away from those who already have it. It is ignored that knowledge continues to be a scarce social resource, despite the democratizing trend which accompanied its transformation into a ‘commodity’ under contemporary capitalism (Souza [interview], in Greenhalgh, 2006). Therefore, the promise of educational equity can be used as an ideological partition hiding the true causes of inequality, which are to be found in the economic and social framework. This contradiction has been exposed by the furious reaction of dominant groups to the class and race-based affirmative action policy.

Therefore, education plays a key role in legitimizing the state and the *status quo* of dominant groups. The attempts of these groups to separate and isolate the struggle for

equity in educational opportunities from the struggle for structural reforms posing threats to their privileges is part of the tradition in Latin America, where the struggle for social equality is not concurrent with the struggle for political freedom (Weffort, 1989). Neoliberalism deepened this divorce by imposing meritocracy as the only acceptable equity model (see Chapters 5 and 8). The economist Antonio Delfim Netto exposed the true worries of the elite by stating that

In a world where knowledge is the ‘growth engine’, nothing can be more worrying than the quality of the education we are providing for our children and young people. By denying them a minimum level of equal opportunities, we risk jeopardizing the legitimacy of the ‘market economy.’ (Delfim Netto, 2007)

What more needs to be said to challenge the sincerity of the “Everyone for Education” and “equal opportunities” rhetoric that is so deeply ingrained in the current dominant educational discourse? The ups and downs of the economies of developed countries have no direct relation whatsoever with variations in the schooling of their population or in the performance of their education systems, although they are often blamed for them (Au, 2007; Carnoy & Samoff, 1990). The path of Brazilian economy provides strong evidence of this separation between education and economic growth: during the period from 1930 to 1980, Brazil experienced the highest growth rates on the planet and became the eighth largest economy in the world. Therefore, from the capitalist point of view, Brazil is a remarkable success case, but its conservative modernization could only be felt in the economic realm, as no reduction in inequalities was observed (Souza [interview], in Greenhalgh, 2006). The high economic growth rates experienced during that period cannot be associated with a fast process of “educational expansion” and, likewise, the

economic stagnation observed during the past two decades cannot be blamed on a crisis in the educational system. On the contrary, the average schooling of the population kept increasing, albeit slowly, without any strong impacts on the mood of the economy.⁸⁹

Since the 1966 publication of the famous Coleman Report, which would impel racial desegregation policies in the US educational system and would become a global benchmark for studies on equal opportunities in education, a large number of surveys carried out in many different countries have produced abundant empirical evidence of the strong correlation between school performance and the socioeconomic status of students. The school had less influence on learning success than we would like to believe. Although there is no lack of evidence that social inequalities give rise to major educational inequalities, the dominant discourse in Brazil says otherwise: according to it, educational inequalities produce socioeconomic inequalities, and the latter can only be corrected by eliminating the former. What gives us some hope is the conclusion reached by Schleicher (2005), based on a comparative analysis of member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), that “educational systems can associate high performance levels to a socially equitable distribution of learning opportunities”. Canada, Finland and Japan are mentioned as good examples. However, it should be highlighted that these societies achieved levels of social equity that are very distant from Brazilian reality. On the other hand, there is no other society as unequal as Brazilian society, which managed to achieve “a socially equitable distribution

⁸⁹ Ferreira (2000) subverts this argument by using counter-evidence that the redemocratization process experienced since the mid-1980s has failed to reduce inequalities in Brazil, suggesting that its persistence can be better attributed to “the educational policies adopted by both regimes and their tolerance toward the segmentation of the labor market into formal and informal, industrial and non-industrial segments, than to the repression of the proletariat that Fishlow referred to” (...) (p.143). What the author purposefully ignores is that the return to democracy coincided with an acute economic crisis marked by soaring inflation, with harmful effects for wage-earners.

of learning opportunities”. This is our present challenge, falsely represented by the dominant discourse.

The hegemony of economic discourse in the educational field

The resurgence of human capital theory as a dominant paradigm in the debate on inequality has been accompanied by the increasing hegemony of economic thinking in social policies in general and in the educational field in particular. This trend is not restricted to Brazil. On the contrary, it is part of the phenomenon of social and educational colonization by market rationality, which has been strongly stimulated in recent decades by international organizations and multilateral financial agencies, particularly the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the OECD. In his reflections on this phenomenon, Bernstein (quoted by Au, 2007, p. 78) observed the following:

Perhaps one of the most significant changes taking place in the agencies within the field of symbolic control is a change in the field membership of its dominant managerial agents. The extension of market rationality to these agencies by the State has led to the gradual replacement of managerial agents drawn from the field of symbolic control by dominant managerial agents from the economic field. Further, management training of agents indigenous to the field of symbolic control draws on the rationality of the mode of management of the economic field. The changes have the consequence of economizing the culture of symbolic control agencies of the State as those agencies and agents become subject to market criteria of effectiveness and rationality. (Bernstein, 2004, pp. 30-31)

In Brazil, this change has been more visible since the mid-1990s, precisely when deeper structural adjustment measures were taken by the state. It is not surprising, for example,

that three of the four last Ministers of Education had a strong background in Economics: Paulo Renato Souza (1995-2002), Cristovam Buarque (2003) and Fernando Haddad (2005-present). Actually, during the past thirteen years, the only period in which a Brazilian Minister of Education was not an economist were the 18 months of the short administration of a former mayor of Porto Alegre and now Minister of Justice, Tarso Genro (between January 2004 and July 2005). During the same period, key positions in MEC and agencies linked to it began to be occupied by individuals with a background in Economics, a phenomenon which began in the Cardoso government⁹⁰ and has increased during the Lula government, particularly since the current minister was assigned to the position, in July 2005. Today, the main architects of national educational policies are mostly economists.⁹¹ As examples of economists holding high level office we can mention the deputy Minister of Education, José Henrique Paim Fernandes, and the President of INEP, Reynaldo Fernandes, who is in charge of national assessment policies. The latter designed the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), the main innovation in the PDE (see Chapter 7). As President of INEP, he set up a team of advisors made up of young economists.⁹² Besides the fact that the inner circle that designed the PDE is mostly made up of economists, the plan was framed in an economic language, as seen by

⁹⁰ The economist Barjas Negri, a former minister of Health (2002) and currently Mayor of Piracicaba, in São Paulo State, was an important member of the team of the former Minister of Education, Paulo Renato Souza, who stood out as the main architect of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Primary Education (FUNDEF) created in 1996 and replaced by the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education (FUNDEB) in 2007.

⁹¹ Interestingly enough, the prevalence of economists at the highest levels of the Ministry of Education has led to a significant reduction in the number of women holding high-ranking positions in this ministry in the Lula government. This contrast is particularly sharp in comparison to the Cardoso government, when most secretariats of the Ministry of Education were headed by women.

⁹² Ironically, in his analysis of the management of the MEC in the second year of the Lula government, the economist Cláudio de Moura Castro, who very much influenced the design of national education policies during the Cardoso government, criticized the “hiring of staff and consultants with an ideological

the recurrent use of concepts such as “rate of exchange”, “stationary balance”, “maximization of outcomes”, “incentive structure”, and so on (see Fernandes, 2007).

Since the mid-1990s, economic thinking has impregnated the national educational agenda.⁹³ The managerialist vision became a dominant paradigm in the reform of the State and the educational restructuring carried out by the Cardoso government (1995-2002). It should be recognized that, given the history of clientelism and patrimonialism in public administration in Brazil – particularly in the educational sector – adopting managerial methods has been a remarkable advance. Administrative efficiency, which was often neglected by progressive educators, became one of the main ideals of the supporters of a “managed revolution” in the Brazilian educational system (Souza, 2005a). Clientelism and patronage are surely two of the causes of Brazilian educational underdevelopment, and fighting them is crucial to change the grim reality faced in schools (Plank, 2001).

The dominant discourse circulating in the mainstream media reflects the increasing hegemony of economic thinking and more clearly reveals the radical colonization of education by economic rationality. Educational coverage has been mostly focused on studies and analyses made by economists, who are now seen as the favorite experts to interpret and validate the results of national evaluations and to indicate the causes of success or failure in learning. Many of them are also regular columnists and collaborators of Brazil's main newspapers and magazines, writing opinion articles which

background which is less prone to applying empirical and quantitative analyses to public policies” (Castro, 2004, p. 108).

⁹³ This phenomenon is not restricted to the central government. The Municipal Education Secretariat of São Paulo, which was headed by Paulo Freire (1989-1991) under the administration of Luiza Erundina, today is headed by Alexandre Schneider, a graduate in Business Administration from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), one of the main disseminating centers of managerialism in Brazil.

reinforce the dominant discourse and the preferred framing of educational issues.⁹⁴

Today, the educational debate in the dominant media is usually between economists.

It should also be pointed out that the same phenomenon of education colonization by economic thinking observed in the MEC and other national agencies in charge of designing educational policies can also be felt in the field of Brazilian educational research – at least research with repercussions in the national media. In fact, the penchant of the media for quantitative studies is well-known (ANDI, 2000 and 2005). What has become more prominent in recent years is the emphasis placed on purely economist analyses which try to “explain” the causes of failure and/or the reasons of success at school based on mathematical models. The unsatisfactory scenario of the Brazilian educational system is characterized as a low-efficiency equilibrium which can only be reverted through changes in the “incentive structure” (Ferreira, 2000; Ioschpe, 2004). The current MEC administration has made a decisive contribution, based on the same economic logic, to reorienting surveys commissioned by the federal administration. The Education Observatory established by Decree n. 5.803 of June 8, 2006 and jointly managed by the Foundation and Coordinating Board for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and INEP, both of which are linked to MEC, provides a clear example of how deeply economic rationality has penetrated federal agencies in charge of promoting research. With the laudable objective of encouraging academic production and training projects for professionals with a postgraduate degree in education, the program funds research projects which, among others guidelines, can

⁹⁴ A non-exhaustive survey found that the following economists are actively taking part in the educational debate, and they are constantly present in the national media: Cláudio de Moura Castro, Ricardo Paes de Barros, Naércio Aquino Menezes Filho, Gustavo Ioschpe, Marcelo Néri, Fábio Giambiagi, Sérgio

contribute toward “stimulating the use of educational statistical data produced by INEP as inputs for deeper studies on the Brazilian educational reality.” Therefore, the Education Observatory constitutes a further step in this trend fostered by INEP itself, aligning educational research with the economic rationality that governs educational policies in Brazil today.

An obsession with figures and statistics is a well-known trait of the Brazilian media that can be more strongly perceived in its educational coverage (ANDI 2000 and 2001). This explains the huge repercussion of quantitative surveys, results of national evaluations, and indexes used to rank and compare schools. For the purpose of defending the conversion of MEC to this obsession with educational measuring and evaluating tools – which took place during the Cardoso government and is paroxysmal under the current federal administration – *Veja* used a unique and historically inaccurate argument:

The modern notion of democratic nations took its final shape in 1790 in the United States, after the first population census ever carried out. Based on a count of the population in the former British colony, the founders defined the percentages of representativeness of each region in the first Congress of the nation. Since those days, measurement has been a key tool of progress. Countries know where they are, where they must go and at what pace by periodically estimating the vigor of their industry, agriculture and the situation of their households. Only more recently, and not by chance, the general state of education began to be evaluated. Initially received with ideological scorn, the so-called *Prova* [Big Test] [National Course Examination for Higher Education] is helping to modernize Brazil. This is always a foreseeable and expected effect when a decision is made to face a problem by determining its size first (*Veja*, 2001, p. 7).

What are the effects of the hegemony of positivist-inspired economic thinking on state agencies in charge of designing national educational policies? The PDE makes two

trends in the educational area more visible: the attempt of the corporate sector to capture and drive the public agenda of educational policies, and the consolidated hegemony of economic and managerialist rationality (see Chapter 7). According to the educational discourse which has become dominant over the last decade or so, only what can be measured and compared is valid, according to the market logic guiding the decisions of public agents and the choice of consumers. *Veja* made this point very clear by praising the initiative of the Lula government to create the IDEB, allowing for a national ranking of public schools to be established. The headline speaks for itself: “*Educating is measuring, having targets and demanding compliance*”. The lead-in of this article deserves to be quoted at length:

Modern societies measure everything: from a country's level of wealth to the habits of its population. Indicators help to define economic scenarios to guide decisions to be made by enterprises and governments. Socioeconomic data shape public policies. Until the 1980s, Brazil was still a country not very fond of statistics and limited to figures produced at ten-year intervals by [population] censuses. As for Brazilian schools, they were clearly plagued by repetition rates similar to those registered in African countries. And that was all. It was only in 1990 that the first tool to measure the quality of education in Brazil was adopted, the SAEB [Basic Education Evaluation System] followed by a series of evaluations carried out under the Cardoso government. The Lula government intensified these measurements even more, finally allowing for classroom shortcomings at all education levels to be precisely identified. Last week, the Ministry of Education (MEC) announced a new ranking of elementary public schools – the most complete ever in Brazil. It is the most recent official measuring tool, the IDEB. Experts define it as an advance in relation to other similar tools: apart from providing an overview of the Brazilian educational system, it also sets, for the first time, objective targets for 46,000 public schools in Brazil. It is a "stick-and-carrot" system. Schools which exceed the target will be granted more funds. Minister Fernando Haddad summarizes its aim as follows: “to make our schools reach the standards of developed countries in fifteen years.” (Antunes & Todeschini, 2007, p. 82)

If “educating is measuring,” all educational phenomena can be reduced to a simple mathematical formula. This is the case of the rather complex equation involved in the IDEB, based on which the concept of “educational quality” is defined and operated. Therefore, the ‘ranking’ of Brazilian schools has become the main tool for fostering “accountability”. Market logic is applied to the educational system, according to the notion that competition induces improvements in its quality, since it is expected that students “will stay away from bad-quality schools, leading them to bankruptcy,” an idea that *Veja* has been defending since the beginning of the Cardoso government (*Veja*, 1995c). After all, “there is no solution to be found in the absence of competition,” as preached by the economist Cláudio Haddad⁹⁵ (1999), who left the financial market to work in the emerging and profitable Brazilian educational market.⁹⁶ In an opinion article published in the *Folha de S. Paulo* when the second term of the Cardoso government had just begun, he blamed the loss of dynamism and stagnation of the Brazilian economy during the past two decades of the 20th century on two factors that, in his opinion, were closely linked: “low human capital and an inappropriate incentive and punishment system”.

According to Haddad, the mediocre results of the Brazilian educational system should not be blamed on the “lack of resources”, considering that “spending on education consumes significant percentages of the budget in the three governmental spheres”. The root of the problem would then lie in the “perverse” combination of the absence of: (i) “measuring and comparing standards”, (ii) “individual performance targets” and (iii)

⁹⁵ Cláudio Haddad and the current Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, are not related.

⁹⁶ He is an associate and chief executive officer of the Brazilian Capital Market Institute (IBMEC), which, despite its name, is a higher learning institution with a solid reputation. It recently became a university with units in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, where it offers one of the most prestigious business MBAs in Brazil.

“competition among schools”. In praising “the efforts made by the [Cardoso] administration in recent years to create tools to measure the quality and efficiency” of education, he defended the adoption of a market-oriented approach:

Only an effective system of competition between schools, in an environment where efficiency is valued, can ensure the required improvements in higher [and basic] education for Brazil to grow on a sustained basis. Without competition, there is no solution in sight. (Haddad, 1999)

Sure enough, in recent years the domestic educational agenda has moved in the direction envisioned by such an economic approach, incorporating: (i) effective comparison standards; (ii) ranking of schools; (iii) a “stick-and-carrot” system which is “typical of a market economy”, (iv) accountability mechanisms and, as a corollary, (v) a competition system. For instance, the release of the scores of the National Secondary Education Examination (ENEM) by schools since 2006 has been highly useful for the marketing of private schools as they seek to attract more students and raise tuition fees by emphasizing their performance in the national examination. There is, thus, a clear movement toward the market-oriented approach supported by Friedman and his followers (e.g. Chubb & Moe, 1990). The PDE incorporates all of these elements, as will be detailed in Chapter 7.

In praising the mobilization of the corporate elite of São Paulo around the launching of the “Everyone for Education” movement, in September 2006, the experienced journalist Gilberto Dimenstein, a member of the editorial board of the *Folha de S. Paulo*, ended up by anticipating the deep inflection in the educational agenda that would mark the early stages of the second term of the Lula government. For Dimenstein, one of the proposals of the movement is to apply stricter external controls to schools

through performance evaluations. Dimenstein uses an economic metaphor which reveals the inspiration of those who conceived the initiative:

The idea is to make sure Brazil monitors indicators such as the number of children out of the school system, average class hours, knowledge tests applied to state and municipal school networks (SAEB, ENEM), parents and teachers organizations, in the same way the trade balance, job figures, the inflation rate, or petroleum production are monitored.

Once such indicators are established, the idea of the [Everyone for Education] movement is to keep society mobilized on an ongoing basis, stimulating the continuity of public policies designed to improve the quality of education and valuing good practices (...)

This is why the improvement-oriented Everyone for Education movement can only be compared, in the history of achievements in the area of citizenship rights in Brazil, to the abolition of slavery. (Dimenstein, 2006, p. C3)

Creating the IDEB meets the expectations of corporate leaders eager to adopt education indicators similar to those applied to measuring economic aggregates and monitoring the stock market. The ideas disseminated by the Everyone for Education movement are part of the new common sense, on which the foundations for the consensus embodied by the PDE have been laid (see Chapter 7).

The dominant discourse and the framing of education by the mainstream media

While the academic debate nurtures the controversy characterizing the complex relations between education, inequality and development, the dominant media have already settled the score in favor of the proponents of human capital theory.⁹⁷ Three

⁹⁷ An extremely rare example of the conflict between the dominant paradigm of the human capital theory and a non-economic alternative approach in the mainstream media was presented by *O Estado de S. Paulo* in its Sunday supplement “*Aliás – A Semana Revista*” (By the Way - the Week Reviewed) (November 12, 2006). Under the ambiguous front-page headline “Education is (not) Everything,” the supplement focuses

tenets prevail in the framing of educational issues by mainstream media: (i) firstly, technological determinism is the main inducer of the social and economic changes that gave rise to the so-called “knowledge society”; (ii) secondly, education is seen as a strategic resource for ensuring competitiveness in a globalized economy and; (iii) thirdly, the acquisition of skills through formal education equalizes opportunities and, therefore, is an individual responsibility. This paradigm became dominant in the mid-1990s, when deeper structural adjustments, liberalizing reforms, and the stabilization of the Brazilian economy made it clear to political and corporate leaders that education inefficiency posed a serious threat to the competitive inclusion of Brazil in the globalized economy. This largely explains the shift from the focus on strictly economic problems to the “cost of ignorance” (Ioschpe, 2004 and 2005; Salomão, 2006). This change was accompanied by the colonization of the educational field by the same economic rationality that formed the basis of structural adjustments (Chapter 6).

As seen above, education became more prominent in the national media in the mid-1990s, reflecting the activism of the Cardoso government in promoting a comprehensive agenda of educational reforms and the protagonism of organizations linked to the educational community and social movements mobilized around actions to defend the public school system and resist proposed reforms (ANDI, 2000 and 2005;

on the publication, the previous week, of a report prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) showing that Brazil had moved down one place in the international ranking of the Human Development Index (HDI), dropping from 68th to 69th position. On the central pages of the supplement, ironically located on the left-hand page, the economist Samuel Pessôa (2006) argues in an article that bad-quality education explains the Brazilian inequality; on the right-hand page, there is a long interview with sociologist Jessé Souza, of the Inequality Survey Center (CEPEDES) of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, who rejects the dominant economicist vision, where he is quoted as having said that “schools are not the beginning of the social competition process, as many people think.” He condemns the phenomenon of the acceptance of inequality as “only natural,” which legitimizes it “as if excluded people were to be blamed for it” (Souza [interview], in Greenhalgh, 2006). The groundbreaking book *A invisibilidade da*

Ricardo Filho, 2005). Excerpts from the extensive coverage of educational issues by the main Brazilian magazines and newspapers show a consistent framing pattern reinforcing two key postulates of human capital theory: (i) that the low quality of education has become a burden for Brazil, jeopardizing its capacity to compete in an increasingly globalized economy; and (ii) that in the emerging knowledge society and in the information economy, the employability and success of individuals are directly determined by their investments in acquiring competencies and skills valued by the market, turning education into a key asset.

The influential news magazine *Veja*, a fierce supporter of the neo-liberal agenda, provides a clear example of the dominant framing of the media in a long story published a few days before the 1998 Presidential Election, when President Cardoso won a second term. The title *Estudar vale ouro* [Studying is Worth Gold] suggested its central focus. Referring to a study carried out by IPEA (Institute for Applied Economic Research) on the Brazilian labor market, the article stressed that “what so far has been seen as only a common sense-based intuition is actually true: the more people study, the greater their chances to get a job, earn more, and have a successful career” (Granato, 1998). The economist Marcelo Néri, coordinator of the study,⁹⁸ is quoted as stating that “education is the engine of the country, and we need to invest even more in human capital”.

To show that the “educational abyss” is at the root of social disparities in Brazil, *Veja* stressed that 64% of all Brazilian workers failed to complete the eight grades of

desigualdade brasileira [The Invisibility of Brazilian Inequality], organized by Souza (2006), offers a comprehensive and insightful discussion of this competing approach.

⁹⁸ The economist Ricardo Paes de Barros is another coordinator of the survey and is quoted as endorsing the type of coverage prevailing in the media: “Even if education advances a lot, it will be insufficient to meet market demands created by technological progress” (Granato, 1998, p. 116).

elementary education, meaning that on average they only have seven years of schooling. The educational abyss is not produced and maintained by socioeconomic inequalities. It is exactly the other way around. This statement is corroborated by the fact that the survey carried out by IPEA suggests that workers with only high-school education are the ones falling into the highest unemployment rate category, those who “have a middle-level schooling and are not forced to subject themselves situations of underemployment faced by illiterate people or individuals with a lower schooling. However, they lack the necessary specialization to have good jobs, which are offered to college graduates or holders of a postgraduate degree”. As opposed to workers who did not invest enough in their education, “more educated Brazilians live in a country which offers them as much security in their jobs as the United States, Japan and England – countries with the lowest unemployment rates in the world” (pp. 112-113). The obvious conclusion is that, in order to enhance their employability, workers should invest in more education. The article provides concrete examples to be emulated, but it warns that selecting a profession is as important as schooling. Everything therefore boils down to the rational choices of individuals, who must prepare themselves to live in an increasingly competitive society. After all, “those who studied a lot and went beyond a college degree are living in the best of worlds”.

In the eight-page article, the importance of education is illustrated by a comparison between the wages of unskilled workers (bricklayers) and professionals who are valued in the financial market, with an MBA from Harvard. While the former earn R\$ 560.00 (US\$ 320.00) a month, the latter earn R\$ 10,000 (US\$ 5,714.28) a month plus a share of profits. A box included in the article suggests that its readers should “assess their

chances of getting a well-paid job” by filling out a survey form designed to score educational credentials, proficiency in English, knowledge of information technology, and social relationship skills. Everything one needs to be successful in the “knowledge economy.” The preferred framing of human capital theory can be clearly perceived in the following passage:

Brazil faces the challenge of speeding up the progress of education at a tough moment, which coincides with a radical change in the labor market brought about by new technologies. Apart from improving the schooling level of the generations entering the market, Brazil is being forced to recycle much of its existing labor – which faces the risk of becoming obsolete with the arrival of technologies that are eliminating jobs throughout the world. (Granato, 1998, pp.115-116)

This language could not be more identified with the dominant paradigm. Technological determinism is regarded as the main inducer of capitalist restructuring, leading to a dramatic reduction in jobs and to obsolescence among unskilled workers – creating the “structural ruffraff” mentioned by Souza (2003). Brazil must respond reactively and adaptively to this structural change: “recycling” the current labor force and increasing the schooling level of future generations. Or else the country will also become obsolete.

Another illustrative example of this perspective is found in the business magazine *Exame*, published by the Abril Group, who also publishes *Veja*. The cover story *Ignorância mata* (Ignorance Kills), coincidentally published in the week before the first round of the 2006 presidential elections, when President Lula won a second term of office in a landslide victory, is based on an unprecedented study of the World Bank on the quality of education in emerging countries. *Veja*, which is oriented toward the economic elite, warns that “in the knowledge era, the extremely low quality of Brazilian

education is now threatening the competitiveness of domestic companies”. In ten pages, an article titled *O preço da ignorância* [The Price of Ignorance]⁹⁹, written by Alexa Salomão, leaves no doubt: Brazil needs to improve its education indicators or else it will not ensure a place in the sun in the very competitive global market. This diagnosis, which echoes and magnifies concerns expressed by corporate leaders, is presented in an alarmist tone:

In the game of world competitiveness, which defines the success of enterprises and of the country itself, a low quality education system and the inability to produce professionals who can meet market demands becomes a deadly poison. This is evident in the difficulties faced by enterprises in almost all industries to recruit, on a large scale, their most precious asset – high-quality human capital. This is precisely one of the main challenges facing economies pursuing sustainable growth: ensuring the supply of a large number of skilled people. Many companies in Brazil remain for months with vacancies they cannot fill as a result of not finding sufficiently skilled workers – a cruel contradiction in a country with eight million unemployed people. (Salomão, 2006, p. 23)

The framing of *Exame* addresses the key concern of its readers – Brazil's entrepreneurial elite. It emphasizes the lack of skilled labor in Brazil because in its opinion it is jeopardizing the competitiveness of Brazilian corporations and keeping productive investments away from the country – a problem that is not new, “but has become much more serious as a result of the fast globalization of businesses since the 1990s.” Education indicators in Brazil are compared to those of three emerging countries which are perceived as “some of its [main] international competitors”: China, Mexico and Russia. Corporate leaders see the country's clear disadvantage as a serious threat: “I am worried about the low educational levels seen in Brazil – we are losing the competency

⁹⁹ This headline echoes the title of the book *Ignorance Costs a World: The Value of Education in the Development of Brazil*, by Gustavo Ioschpe. Published in 2004, this book, which presented a re-reading of

race in the globalized world,” stated entrepreneur Jorge Paulo Lemann,¹⁰⁰ summarizing the fear of the Brazilian economic elite. The widespread complaint of entrepreneurs is that the State is failing in its key role of training workers to develop the required competencies and skills for the new “knowledge economy”. The article compares a Korean factory worker – “educated in one of the best public educational systems in the world” – with a Brazilian factory worker, trained “by one of the worst systems”. The alternative devised by Brazilian corporations is to take on the “role of the State”, which is seen as an undue burden:

The answer is both the solution and the problem. By investing in educating the labor force, entrepreneurs ensure the human capital they need, but they divert attention and investments which, in an ideal environment, should be exclusively focused on their business. (Salomão, 2006, pp. 24-25)

Somewhat remarkable is the recent change observed in the discourse of Brazilian corporate executives who have historically remained aloof to the “educational lag” and insensitive to the state of neglect of public schools.¹⁰¹ Now, the low quality of education has come to be perceived as one of the main components of the so-called “Brazil cost” –

the theory of human capital, became a bestseller.

¹⁰⁰ A former banker and shareholder of Inbev, which became one of the largest beer manufacturers in the world after the recent acquisition of Anheuser-Busch, and of the Woolworth-style chain of stores *Lojas Americanas*, Lemann created a private foundation bearing his name to improve the management of the public educational system. A former Harvard student, he is also known for the generous donations he has made to his *alma mater*. The Lemann Foundation – created as part of a recent trend in Brazil of setting up corporate foundations and private think tanks involved in the educational restructuring process – is a partner of the National Council of Education Secretaries (CONSED) in supporting professional development projects for teachers.

¹⁰¹ A rare exception is the case of mega-businessman Antônio Ermírio de Moraes, of the Votorantin Group. Columnist for the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper during the two last decades, he has gained renown for insisting on the importance of education as a production factor, framing his view according to the human capital theory. His articles were recently brought together in a book called *Educação, pelo amor de Deus* [Education, for God’s Sake]. (Moraes, 2006).

a catchphrase forged by entrepreneurs in the 1990s to advocate liberalizing reforms and denounce barriers that created a hostile environment for businesses in Brazil: high interest rates, a high tax load, poor infrastructure, corruption, the inefficiency of the judicial system, and a complex set of labor laws. The perception that the low average schooling of workers and the shortcomings of the educational system should be blamed on the “Brazil cost” is much more recent ¹⁰² (Ioschpe, 2005; Moraes, 2006). In adhering to the mantra that “ensuring education is an obligation of the State”, entrepreneurs could be seen as being more concerned with their economic interests, since the lack of skilled human capital is seen to be seriously threatening their ability to compete in the global economy, however, seeing that they are now actually concerned with education is encouraging.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the leaders who have been “converted” into the movement in favor of education do not hide their uneasiness: “My friends may think I am becoming a belated socialist, but I am actually worried about the low educational levels prevailing in Brazil”, Lemann hastily justified (Salomão, 2006, p. 26).

To confirm the recent sensitivity of entrepreneurs to the education issue, *Exame* stresses somewhat exaggeratedly that “for different [corporate] organizations, education has become as important as the tax reform and bringing interest rates down”. The article ends with a brief reference to the establishment of “Everyone for Education”, “an

¹⁰² The space devoted to the coverage of educational topics and, particularly, the number of op-eds on education in the newspaper *Valor Econômico*, the leader in its segment, provide additional evidence of the increasing interest of entrepreneurs in the topic. As one would expect, most opinion articles on education are authored by economists and framed according to the human capital theory.

¹⁰³ The debate on education as a priority issue in corporate forums is a rather recent phenomenon in Brazil. The National Forum, an initiative linked to the National Higher Learning Institute (INAE) led by a former minister of Planning, João Paulo dos Reis Velloso, was a pioneering attempt to involve entrepreneurs in the discussion on a “a new education model for Brazil.” The strategy that was used to influence the paths of the educational policy was to establish a high-level dialogue with high-ranking Ministry of Education officials, both during the Cardoso and the Lula governments. The dominant paradigm which has been guiding the

entrepreneurial movement that defends reforms in the educational field”.¹⁰⁴ Launched one month before the presidential elections of 2006, this movement had a huge influence on the realignment of the educational agenda observed in the early stages of the second term of the Lula government (see Chapter 7).

The role of the experts in producing the dominant educational discourse

As we have seen, educational coverage in Brazil has by and large been dominated by official sources, particularly those linked to MEC (ANDI, 2000 and 2005). However, the unique way in which the mainstream media contributes to defining and legitimizing the dominant educational discourse cannot be fully understood if one does not consider the key role played by the omnipresent media *experts*, who are not necessarily people renowned for their knowledge of educational issues, academic credentials, professional experience, intellectual production or peer recognition. In general, the agents whom the media considers experts and authorities in this area are those referred to by Bourdieu (1996, p. 62) as “heteronomous intellectuals”, “people from the outside who have little authority from the viewpoint of values specific to the field”. For Bourdieu, heteronomy

interventions of this group in the debate is that of the “knowledge economy.” (See Velloso & Albuquerque, 1999 and 2004)

¹⁰⁴ Another recent initiative by entrepreneurs was the establishment of the Instituto DNA Brasil, presided over by the former president of the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo (FIESP), Horácio Lafer Piva. Describing itself as a multidisciplinary organization with the mission of “thinking about what Brazil will be like in the future,” the Institute created a Parliamentary Program with financial support from the Kellogg Foundation, inspired by a similar initiative launched by the Aspen Institute in the United States. The theme of the first program, which brought together a group of only 11 congress members of a list of 40 who were invited, was education (Salvador, Bahia – June 1-3, 2006). During three days, congress members, experts and members of the committee that conceived the Instituto DNA Brasil made a diagnosis of the Brazilian educational system and drew up a Charter of Principles and Propositions – Commitment to Improve the Brazilian Educational System. The minutes of the event were brought together in the book *O*

refers to “the loss of autonomy through subjection to external forces”. His realization that “in certain disciplines, media credentials are now taken more and more into account” should cause us some concern since, as he goes on to assert, “in every field, the influence of the journalistic field tends to favor those actors and institutions closer to the market” (p. 73).

The educational field has been particularly prone to the presence of *experts* from the outside who are “accorded an authority they cannot get from their peers”. This could be seen as a positive development, since one should expect a variety of point of views on an issue in which everyone has a stake. No one can deny that the debate on educational reforms is increasingly shaped by the language of journalism and popular media. But it would be naïve to assume that experts with high visibility in the dominant media represent competing views or oppositional discourses on the subject. Quite the opposite, as I shall argue shortly. The authority accorded to these “heteronomous intellectuals” is based on the legitimizing principles of the journalistic field: recognition by the public at large, as measured in terms of readers, listeners, or viewers. In short, “the new principle of legitimacy based on ratings and ‘visibility’” (Bourdieu, 1996, p.73).

Using the *field* concept, which is a core concept in Bourdieu's sociology, the researcher Geraldo Ricardo Filho made an insightful study on how education was shaped in Brazil in the 1990s, using the *Veja* news magazine as his source. In the book *A Boa Escola no Discurso da Mídia* [The Good School in Media Discourse] (2005),¹⁰⁵ he analyzes the role played by experts in defining and establishing the dominant discourse

DNA da Educação (The DNA of Education) (Instituto DNA Brasil, 2006), launched at the Education Committee of the Chamber of Representatives on March 29, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ I came across this thoughtful work when I was more than halfway through my own research project, which has many striking similarities with Ricardo Filho's research agenda and strategy.

and representations of education, epitomized in the dispute around the concept of what a *good school* should be like. The main contribution of the author, who is a History teacher in public schools in the state of São Paulo, was to shed some light on the intricate personal relations between experts elected by the media, policy-makers and journalists, which shape what he refers to as a *legitimacy network*. These experts circulate in academic, journalistic and political circles, reconverting their public visibility into symbolic capital to assume a leading role in the educational field, where the actual dispute around the project for restructuring the school system takes place. Ricardo Filho uses the *legitimacy network* concept to analyze and describe the relations between the media and key actors in forming and legitimizing what we refer to here as the dominant educational discourse.

The media *establishes* experts in different knowledge fields who, as a result of this visibility, gain public recognition and credibility, enhancing their symbolic capital and taking on a more than instrumental role in enacting and legitimizing the ‘knowledge discourse’ in their respective fields. The philosopher Marilena Chauí (2006) associates the power of the contemporary media with what she refers to as the ‘*ideology of competency*’, which assumes a particular form of knowledge discourse, whose “social, political and cultural effectiveness lies in believing in technical-scientific rationality.” She goes on to assert that “the ideological [competency] discourse can take the form of a social discourse because social issues *appear* as made up of and regulated by this rationality” (p. 76). The social effectiveness of this ideology therefore lies in its capacity to put on airs of scientific rationality while appealing to common sense. She goes on to assert that

The competent discourse determines beforehand who has the right to speak and who should just hear, apart from predetermining the locations and circumstances in which one is allowed to speak and hear and, finally, it defines beforehand the form and contents of what should be said and needs to be heard. These distinctions are based on a main distinction, namely, that which imposes a social division between those who have certain knowledge (scientific, technical, religious, political, artistic), who can speak and have the right to give orders to and command others, and those without knowledge, who should listen and obey. In other words, the ideology of competency establishes a social division between those who are competent, who have knowledge, and those who are incompetent, who should just do as they are told.

As a knowledge discourse, this ideology is based on the figure of the expert. The media not only feeds on this figure, but it also establishes it over and over again as a communication subject. (Chauí, 2006, pp. 76-77)

I am concerned here with the role played by education experts in producing and legitimizing the dominant discourse. This select group of experts is established by the mainstream media as agents who are authorized to, for example, explain and interpret official statistics, the results of national evaluations and the complex indicators created to rank public and private schools, such as the recently-established IDEB.¹⁰⁶ The increasing influence of the discourse of these *experts* has been accompanied by two broader phenomena: the “mediatization” of politics and, simultaneously, a shrinking public sphere for democratic discussion and deliberation. In the educational field, the discourse of media experts has led to a progressive devaluation and emptying of educational discourse, particularly among policy-makers, giving rise to the increasing hegemony of

¹⁰⁶ *Veja*, for instance, which strongly supported the neo-liberal reforms of the Cardoso government, continues to rely on educational experts who made up the *legitimacy network* during the previous federal administration to disseminate, analyze and validate initiatives of the Lula government, always seeking to emphasize affinities and continuities. This became very clear in the coverage of the IDEB. *Veja* made it a point to remind its readers that it was during the Cardoso government that a set of national evaluations were created and then, and only then, recognize the merits of the Lula government, which “intensified these measurements to an even greater extent.” To validate the “new measuring tool of the Ministry of Education”, *Veja* heard a former Minister of Education under the Cardoso government, Paulo Renato

economic discourse. The main argument is that education is too important to be left to the responsibility of educators.¹⁰⁷ Actually, educators are those blamed for the terrible situation faced in public schools today.

Reflecting on how to build the European educational space, Nóvoa (2002) recognizes “the agenda setting by the media” as a major influence on the educational debates being held in Europe and draws attention to the role played by experts in producing and disseminating an international discourse which fosters “uniformity of action and thought”, creating “the illusion of a single course for educational issues”. According to Novoa, the influence of this discourse has become paramount in different contexts because it crosses national borders, fosters a set of ideas and concepts “intended to be neutral and consensual” and – with the *imprimatum* of experts – proposes solutions for most educational problems faced by different countries. What he refers to as “the new planetspeak of the international expert’s discourse” is sort of a supra-national entity that ensures legitimacy for a particular rationality which is reappropriated in each political scenario and turned into a new common sense around the actions that need to be carried out in terms of educational reforms and policies. As mentioned above, comparisons with other countries and mentions of successful international experiences in the field of educational reforms have become recurrent in the Brazilian media (e.g. Lahóz, 2000; Weinberg, 2005; Freitas & Nunes, 2006; Salomão, 2006). Education is now in the benchmarking era, a phenomenon I analyze in Chapter 5.

Souza, and a former president of INEP, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, current Secretary of Education in São Paulo state. (Antunes & Todeschini, 2007)

¹⁰⁷ Today, towering figures such Paschoal Lemme, Lourenço Filho, Anísio Teixeira and Paulo Freire, among other great Brazilian educators of the 20th century, would find a hostile environment for their ideas and ideals at the Ministry of Education and other key education policy agencies. Although frequently

The not always subtle way in which the dominant media establishes *experts* in the educational field, turning them into spokespersons of the ideology of competency, is accurately illustrated by a long article featured by *Veja* called “*A grande revolução silenciosa*” [The Great Silent Revolution] (Corrêa, 1996). Published in the second year of the Cardoso government, when the educational agenda of the new government was still facing strong resistance, the article tried to show that Brazil was leaving behind a “phase of ostentatious solutions” and beginning “to solve the problem of education with simple ideas”. By and large, the list of “simple” solutions coincided with the educational agenda of the Cardoso government: more autonomy for schools; greater family and community participation; no more political appointments of school principals; strengthening of student councils and PTOs; professionalization of school management; improvements in the education statistics and indicators; and – as a key-element of the new educational policy – implementation of national evaluations to monitor the learning of students and the performance of state and municipal educational systems and schools.

Corrêa wisely selected two examples of educational reforms to confirm the effectiveness of applying “simple ideas”: the municipality of Angra dos Reis, a coastal town in the state of Rio de Janeiro run by the PT at that time, and the state of Minas Gerais, governed by the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), the main showcase for reforms supported by international organizations. The two experiences established elective processes to appoint principals in their schools, putting an end to political patronage, and empowered parents by strengthening their student councils. The brief reference made to Angra dos Reis leads readers to reach the conclusion that replacing

quoted in official policy documents, they would probably be seen as outmoded, as economic rationality has taken the center stage in education policy formation.

“ostentatious solutions” by “simple ideas” is, above all, common sense and that there is only one path to be followed, regardless of ideologies. But the main focus was on Minas Gerais, touted as a “national education organization model”. If for decades “governing education in Brazil was building schools” and talking about education was “mainly discussing the wages paid to teachers”, the agenda of “simple ideas” was mainly concerned with “ensuring quality education, and bringing repetition and drop-out rates down”. According to Corrêa’s logic, it can be inferred that the end results could be pursued and the means to achieve them (school facilities, teachers’ wages, etc.) neglected. It would suffice to create effective evaluation systems – “a key standard measure to know the actual situation [of education]” – something that was at the core of the reforms promoted by the Cardoso government.

But the main change praised by *Veja* is that “the time of ostentatious ideas, when education was a subject to be dealt with by educators, is over” (Corrêa, 1996, p. 49). Economists, with their sophisticated measuring tools, have been taking the place of educators, ready to apply pragmatic and managerial solutions. After all, as a recent *Veja* headline highlighted, “*Educating is measuring, having targets, and demanding their achievement*” (Antunes & Todeschini, 2007). In fact, the “success” of the educational reform in Minas Gerais, is confirmed by the economist Cláudio de Moura Castro, who was then working at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). *Veja* gives him credentials that leave no doubt as to his authority: “Living in Washington and regarded as the greatest expert on education in Brazil, Moura Castro has detected signs of interest in the experience of Minas Gerais even in Argentina, where he was recently asked to

provide information on the ‘Ministry of Education of Minas Gerais’”¹⁰⁸ (Corrêa, 1996, p. 50). Besides Castro, *Veja* described consultant João Batista Araújo e Oliveira and the physicist Sérgio Costa Ribeiro (who died in 1995) as sources from which “all the successful ideas in Minas Gerais flowed”.¹⁰⁹ Castro became a columnist for *Veja* in September 1996, when he began to write a monthly column on education.¹¹⁰ This was when the *legitimacy network* which *Veja* would rely on for one decade to endorse the educational policy of the Cardoso government was established (Ricardo Filho, 2005).

Only six months before from the presidential election of 1998, *Veja* resumed the “simple solutions work” motto to announce: “The Ministry of Education revolutionizes learning without any ostentatious projects” (Paiva, 1998). After highlighting that there is nothing negative left to say about education – which was debased as “a national scourge, a shame for the country, a factor condemning Brazilians to extreme poverty” – *Veja* proclaimed the great news all Brazilians were expecting: “Within four to five years,

¹⁰⁸ As the main architect of the educational reform implemented in the state of Minas Gerais in the early 1990s, Walfrido de Mares Guias, who was then Vice-Governor of the state then, became an influential figure in the Lula government. In the first term, he was Minister of Tourism. In the second term, he was appointed to the strategic position of Minister for Political Articulation, resigning six months later after being involved in a political scandal. In his private life, he is one of the main entrepreneurs in the education sector in Brazil, as the owner of the Pitágoras Group, which controls a private school network and private universities. After leaving the IDB and returning to Brazil, Cláudio de Moura Castro was made director of the Pitágoras Group, in the field of higher education, and implemented a partnership with the University of Phoenix in the distance learning area. Although he lost influence in the MEC, he continues to take an active part in the educational debate, using his privileged position as columnist for the *Veja* magazine, and his close ties with Mares Guia.

¹⁰⁹ The presence of these three intellectuals as *experts* in educational topics on the pages of *Veja* can be traced back to the 1980s, but this has increased significantly since 1995, precisely when the Cardoso government began, as documented by Ricardo Filho (2005). João Batista Araújo e Oliveira, who was then a World Bank consultant, was once the Deputy Minister of Education at the suggestion of Moura Castro. However, he would soon enter into conflict with the “inner circle” of Minister Paulo Renato Souza's team and was dismissed barely three months after taking up the position (Personal interview with Gilda Portugal Gouvêa – São Paulo, October 2, 2003).

¹¹⁰ During the Cardoso government, his column became a privileged space to endorse and support the educational policies in force; under the Lula government, Castro began to use his column as a bulwark of resistance against the educational agenda of the new administration, vigorously defending the national

Brazil will be reaping the positive results of a veritable silent revolution that is deeply changing primary education, namely the cycle from the first to the eighth grade.” To issue a “warranty certificate” to the statement that “the educational policy of the [federal] government took a major leap”, *Veja* mentions two experts – Cláudio de Moura Castro and João Batista Araújo e Oliveira. According to the former – “who is one of the most respected experts on education in Brazil” – “Today's educational policy is the most consistent in recent decades.” In the opinion of the latter, “this is the first time in history that we have seen education being managed as it is now” (Paiva, 1998, p. 95). Almost ten years later, the authors must blush when they read such politically engaged statements which lack all objectivity.

The meteoric rise of the young economist Gustavo Ioschpe provides another emblematic example of how the dominant media promotes individuals with a vision of the Brazilian educational system that is in tune with the dominant discourse to the condition of trustworthy *experts*. Author of the book *A Ignorância custa um mundo* [Ignorance Costs a World] (2004), which provides a comprehensive and competent selective review of the international literature that corroborates the human capital theory, he has stood out as one the most active and influential experts in the educational field in the past four years. The book received favorable reviews in the press and was awarded the prestigious Jabuti Prize in 2005. But a debate promoted by *Folha de S. Paulo*, where he had been a journalist in the past, was what gave Ioschpe his notoriety.¹¹¹ In its

evaluation policies adopted by the Cardoso government. For a detailed analysis of his prominent participation in the *legitimacy network* of the Cardoso government, see Ricardo Filho (2005).

¹¹¹ Besides the author, the debate involved the then Dean of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), Carlos Henrique de Brito Cruz, and the economist Ricardo Henriques, who was then Secretary for Continuing Education, Literacy and Diversity of the MEC. The debate, which was held on October 28,

dissemination of the event more than two weeks later in a large story occupying two-thirds of one of its pages, the newspaper overemphasized his academic credentials:

Aged 27, with a MA in International Economy and Economic Development from Yale University, the economist Gustavo Ioschpe has produced a daring diagnosis of the Brazilian educational system and proposed a national salvation program based on a revolution in education. (...) No less than 317 sources were compared for the purpose of establishing the weight of the educational variable in the development of countries, in particular Brazil. Gustavo Ioschpe derived his propositions from this complex set of empirical data. (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2004, p. C5)

Apart from his own book – which educational officials and researchers had to read as a result of its broad repercussions in the national media – Ioschpe began to regularly disseminate his proposals and opinions through two of the most prestigious press vehicles in Brazil: the *Folha de S. Paulo* itself, where he began to write articles in 2005, and *Veja*, which hired him as a columnist in 2006. He also became a contributor to the *Educação* magazine. As a result of the visibility he gained with his controversial articles, he established himself as a well-paid educational consultant and expert and has been invited to conferences and debates throughout Brazil.¹¹² It is hard to tell to what extent he has influenced the design of policies, but his ability to promote his ideas is remarkable.¹¹³

2004, was mediated by journalist Gilberto Dimenstein, a member of the Editorial Board of the *Folha de S. Paulo*.

¹¹² Through the World Bank, he provided consultancy services to the MEC on educational funding.

¹¹³ On May 17, 2007, Gustavo Ioschpe was the only person invited to a public hearing of the Education Committee of the Chamber of Representatives on the topic of education and economic development. Introduced as a “feature writer for *Veja* magazine, columnist of the *Folha de S. Paulo* and consultant in World Bank projects for the Ministry of Education,” he attracted twelve representatives to the hearing, which is a remarkable number and one which is only equaled when the Minister of Education attends a hearing. For almost two hours, Ioschpe repeated his diagnosis, insisting that the problem facing Brazil is not the lack of investment in education or the low wages paid to teachers, but rather the standard adopted for allocating resources. A curious fact that I had the opportunity to record as a hearer: he did not use the terms “equality” and “equity” not even once, but exhaustively repeated the terms “quality”, “meritocracy” and “academic merit” during his talk.

Ioschpe can claim credit for having been the first person to publicly defend different proposals that later on were incorporated into the PDE.¹¹⁴ I will mention only one highly relevant one: conditioning federal fund transfers to school (state and municipal) systems to the achievement of performance targets to be checked by an “objective and transparent index.”¹¹⁵

This proposal, which was included the *A ignorância custa um mundo* (2004), was insistently publicized in articles, lectures and debates. The IDEB incorporated the assumptions that Ioschpe had been publicly defending *in totum*. In an opinion article published in the *Folha de S. Paulo*, he proposed that fund transfers from the federal administration to states and municipalities “should be proportional to educational improvements in the federated entities, as measured by an objective and transparent index that would take into account reductions in repetition rates and a better performance in the national education evaluation tests” (Ioschpe, 2005). As a supporter of a radical performance-based approach, he went so far as to defend the point that “cities and states which fail to improve their performance in relation to the previous year should not be given even a penny”.

His proposal to create a performance index to be used as both a *benchmark* to measure the progress achieved by educational systems and as a criterion to reward improvements was detailed in a lecture delivered to members of the Parliamentary Program of the DNA Brasil Institute (Salvador, State of Bahia – June 1-3, 2006). On that

¹¹⁴ His multiple affiliations include the Everyone for Education movement. Born to a rich family from Rio Grande do Sul, Ioschpe has solid relations with entrepreneurial circles of São Paulo. His educational militancy is part of a recent trend observed in Brazil of members of the economic elite getting involved in public education policies.

occasion, Ioschpe once again insisted on the need to change the criterion adopted for allocating resources and proposed that educational improvements should be measured by “an index which takes into account quality (such as the SAEB or, preferably, the *Prova Brasil* [Brazil Test] and repetition rates”. Anticipating some of the main strategies of the PDE, his proposal was as follows:

This index, calculated on the basis of transparent results and free from subjectivity, would be disseminated nationwide by the Ministry of Education each year to show the results of the municipalities. Those showing more improvements year by year would receive a larger share of resources according to their improvements. The amount of resources allocated to each locality would also be announced publicly. Municipalities with worse or equal results would not receive any resources.

The key aspect of this mechanism is that it would be disseminated publicly. It would therefore allow the population – even the poorer and least educated population – to know the situation of education in their town, comparing it to the situation in neighboring towns. If the *Prova Brasil*, which measures the students individually, is applied, parents will be able to know the performance of their children and their school in relation to the average of the town or region. Thus, they would finally be able to clearly determine the quality of the education their children are getting and propose changes. (Ioschpe, 2006b, pp.113-114)

The similarities between the proposal defended by Ioschpe and the IDEB design are striking (see Fernandes, 2007). The difference lies in the degree of changes proposed. While he defends a radical approach, MEC preferred to adopt a “soft” accountability mechanism¹¹⁵, conditioning only a small fraction of federal funds transferred to state and municipal educational systems to the achievement of targets (see Chapter 7). Ioschpe belongs to a select group of media experts who are mostly economists, who have had a

¹¹⁵ The economist Marcelo Néri from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FVG) defended a similar proposal, suggesting that an educational target system should be adopted, making spending in the sector more flexible through fund transfers conditioned to performance evaluations. See Góes (2005).

¹¹⁶ Personal interview with Reinaldo Fernandes, head of INEP – Brasília, 26 June 2007.

huge influence on shaping the current educational debate, and whose inputs are taken into account in the design of public policies for this sector.¹¹⁷ As I will be arguing in the next chapters, the PDE incorporates various elements of the dominant educational discourse and enhances the convergence between the educational agenda of the Lula government and the postulates of economic rationality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided the historical and political context within which the dominant educational discourse has emerged in contemporary Brazil, drawing attention to its conservative trends. My exhaustive review of the debate on the determining factors of inequality have enabled me to show how human capital theory has lost “the aura of political incorrectness” – for having been used, in the 1970s, to justify the greater inequality seen during the period of forced capitalist accumulation under the authoritarian regime – and has become, in the 1990s, the dominant paradigm in the academic field. Under the hegemony of economic thinking, education is contradictorily seen as the main cause of and the only medicine available for poverty, income inequalities, and other social ills.

¹¹⁷ The economists Cláudio Haddad, Samuel Pessôa, Naércio Menezes Filho, Sérgio Ferreira and Fernando Veloso, all of whom are linked to IBMEC, have been playing a very active part in the educational debate on a particularly active basis, defending market-oriented reforms. Based on the assumption that “there is no solution without competition,” they defend the following controversial proposals, among others: the management of public schools should be transferred to the private sector, while the government would only provide resources (Haddad, 2006); teachers’ wages and promotions should be based on their performance, “as measured by the grades of their students” (Menezes Filho, 2006); authorization for private schools to compete for fiscal resources with public schools through a voucher program and their registration as charter schools (Ferreira & Veloso, 2006).

The perception that the “education lag” has become a heavy burden for the country, threatening its inclusion in the increasingly competitive globalized economy, has brought a new actor – the corporate sector, into the education policy-making arena, which had historically remained aloof to the neglect of public schools. Worried about the lack of skilled human capital affecting the competing capacity of Brazilian corporations, business leaders have begun to join those who have been pressing the state to improve the quality of education. The Everyone for Education movement, which I will be further discussing in Chapter 7, has emerged as a catalyst of the recent concerns of the entrepreneurial elite with education. The dominant discourse has reshaped the educational field as a space of convergence and consensus, epitomized in the idea that ensuring “minimum equal opportunities” is crucial to preserving the “legitimacy of the market economy” (Delfim Netto, 2007).

In the next chapter, I will be examining two other core elements of the dominant educational discourse: the ideology of meritocracy and cultural deficit theory. I intend to show that the educational system plays an absolutely crucial role in legitimizing a meritocratic system in a society marked by inequalities, such as that of Brazil. Cultural deficit theory maintains that the low quality of demand is the main cause of the drop in quality observed in Brazilian public schools, blaming poor families for the school failure of their children. The victimization of the middle-class is one of the strategies contributing to preserve the structure of privileges which challenges the essence of the meritocratic system. Particular attention will be paid to the more than instrumental role of the dominant media in promoting meritocratic ideology as the only model of equity that is consistent with an open, capitalist society.

CHAPTER 5 – THE IDEOLOGY OF MERITOCRACY AND THE ONGOING CONTEST FOR LEGITIMACY: THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

Education is Maria José's main investment of the monthly wage of R\$ 480.00 earned by her husband, a doorman in a closed condominium, she spent R\$ 200.00 to buy textbooks for her three children.

“Investing in education is the only thing we can do for them. What makes me feel even sadder is that I didn't make it past the fifth grade. And I can't even teach them anything. Don't they know that Brazil's future lies in education? They are taking away the future of my children and that of the country”.

***Maria José dos Santos**, mother of a public school student who has not been attending classes because of the lack of teachers. (*O Globo*, April 15, 2007: p. 3)*

In this chapter, I examine two others major strands of dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil: the ideology of meritocracy and cultural deficit theory. Both of them assign full responsibility to individuals and their families for their success or failure in an increasingly competitive society, of which the educational system is part and parcel. Over two decades after redemocratization, deep social exclusion and inequality still prevail in Brazil, challenging the very principle of democracy and threatening the “legitimacy of the ‘market economy’”. The mobilization of historically disenfranchized and marginalized groups, particularly after PT reached central power as a party embodying the utopia of social justice during the democratic transition, increased criticism of the meritocratic system and its excluding mechanisms. Meritocracy came to be perceived by subaltern groups as an ideological device to legitimize the privileges enjoyed by dominant groups and keep their powers unchecked. Education is at the core of this political contest for legitimacy, as I shall argue throughout this chapter.

The idea of a radically meritocratic society, where schools are assigned the role of making “takeoff” conditions equal, is as inconceivable and undefendable as a marathon where a handful of competitors – the more able ones, wearing the best running shoes –

begin in the middle of the route on a level track free of obstacles, while the remaining contestants start from different points along the path ‘inherited’ by the frontrunners as an initial advantage. The greater the handicap, the farther away from these frontrunners and, therefore, from the finishing line, is the point from which the least qualified and competitive runners would begin. Afro-descendants, for instance, who might also face the additional handicap of racism (Souza, 2003), would have “the worst starting point” reserved for them (Fernandes, 1978). The prizes for those who cross the arrival line would be, in principle, within the reach of all contestants, regardless of their highly unequal chances of winning. But only those who arrive first reap the greatest benefits of winning.

This metaphor leads us to the main issue addressed and discussed in this chapter: How has the meritocratic system managed to gain and retain legitimacy in such an unequal and stratified society as that of Brazil, which is devoid of the minimum equity standards for a ‘fair contest’? What role has education played in producing the “performance ideology” as a principle to make inequalities natural and legitimate, a more than instrumental notion for consolidating the primacy of a competitive society and a market economy?

Inclusion at the fringes: making the system work

The ideology of meritocracy is one of the main ideological underpinnings of the dominant discourse, based on which education is rhetorically promoted as a major opportunity equalizer and a powerful social mobility mechanism. It provides the notion

of fairness that is absolutely crucial for the system to gain and retain its legitimacy. Given the huge inequalities prevailing in the Brazilian educational system, one is tempted to ask: How could such a highly unequal social arrangement possibly be endorsed and sustained by all parties engaged in the broad contest for recognition and redistribution? One thing that we already know is that those from below must trust the system and perceive its rules and functioning as fair. That is not to say that its legitimacy has not been challenged and struggled over by subaltern groups. Quite the opposite, as the current debate over class and race-based affirmative action has shown. Disenfranchized groups challenging the meritocratic system are portrayed as antagonists of the legal equality principle, and, therefore, as enemies of democracy (see Kamel, 2006; Fry *et al.*, 2007). It suffices to say here that dominant groups have to continually win consent – in a Gramscian sense. In order to achieve this goal, two strategies have been employed: first, that which I refer to as “inclusion at the fringes”, a pragmatic strategy of “surrendering the rings in order to keep the fingers”; second, that of prizing and rewarding winners and blaming losers for their own failure and missed opportunities. The message sounds clear and bold: the losers are the lazy ones; the winners are the hard workers.

Inclusion at the fringes can be illustrated by the most eye-catching and successful educational policy adopted during the first term of the Lula government: the University for Everyone Program (ProUNI). Launched in 2004, this initiative created opportunities for thousands of low-income students coming from the public school system to have higher education through scholarships awarded by private institutions. In exchange for granting full and partial scholarships, private universities and colleges joining the program on a voluntary basis were exempted from federal taxes and social contributions

which were earmarked, among other fiscal benefits, to fund the social security system and the public health care and education systems. In part, the places created by ProUNI are reserved for black and indigenous students. Candidates who meet the program qualification requirements are selected according to their performance in the National Secondary Education Test (ENEM). The academic merit of students is ultimately taken into account, meeting meritocracy standards and deflecting criticism. With this program, the Lula government broke an old taboo for the left, a traditional opponent of privatizing higher education in Brazil. In fact, during the eight years of the Cardoso government (1995-2002), the private sector grew remarkably, and today it accounts for about 75% of all enrolments in higher education. However, at the beginning of the Lula government, the higher education market was not growing with the same vigor, and high student default rates haunted the sector. ProUNI was therefore received with relief by private institutions heavily pressured by high tax and social security debts.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, this policy made it possible to create about 100,000 places a year for low-income students who otherwise would have no chance of being admitted to Brazil's highly selective and competitive public universities.

Initially, ProUNI was challenged by leaders of the public university sector with the main argument that, by granting tax exemptions to private institutions, where the quality of education is usually poor, the government would be diverting public money that could be better invested in expanding the public higher education system, known to

¹¹⁸ Actually, as the government itself made it a point to emphasize, ProUNI came to straighten out a *de facto* situation, since the lack of enforcement of the existing laws had allowed fiscal benefits ensured only to non-profit learning institutions to be enjoyed by most private higher education institutions, even those profit making entities.

provide better-quality education.¹¹⁹ However, the overwhelming support to the program from powerful private groups and the dominant media would soon make the criticism disappear. On the other hand, the relatively low cost of places “bought” in the private sector – particularly as compared to the higher *per capita* cost in public universities – has been heralded by the government as additional evidence of how successful this policy is. From the point of view of economic rationality, it makes perfect sense. ProUNI is a rare example of “*zero attrition policy*”, since it meets both the interests of the private sector and aspirations of low-income sectors, excluded from the meritocratic competition for places in public universities. The increasing dissatisfaction of these segments, which began to challenge the elitism of public universities, dangerously jeopardizing their legitimacy, was precisely what forced them to change their admission policy. This is why a significant number of federal public universities took action before the passing of a federal law on this subject and adopted class and race-based affirmative-action policies or – as their adversaries like to refer to them – “quota policies”.

The success of ProUNI is confirmed both by the number of students directly covered (over 300,000 in only three years) and by its widespread impact on the basic education system as it dramatically broadened possibilities and aspirations for millions of low-income students for whom higher education was not a feasible objective. The huge increase observed in the number of students registering for and participating in ENEM, a voluntary test, bears witness to this fact. After ProUNI was created and MEC decided to

¹¹⁹ An element that contributed toward softening the criticism of ProUNI was the fact that the Lula government simultaneously launched a sweeping program designed to expand the federal higher learning network by creating new public universities and opening up new campuses linked to existing universities. Here a caveat is due: in January 2008, I was appointed by the Minister of Education to the committee responsible for the establishment of the Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana (UNILA), which will be located in Foz do Iguaçu, in Paraná, my home state. This university will admit students from all Latin America countries.

condition the granting of scholarships to the performance of students in the test, the number of students registering to take the test more than doubled, exceeding three million in 2005 and four million in 2008. This figure is higher than the number of students completing secondary education, suggesting that the possibility of being granted a scholarship has been attracting many students who had dropped out school and had postponed or given up their higher education for lack of means to pay tuition fees.

From the point of view of the political-ideological contest, the Lula government succeeded in the dispute to frame ProUNI as a progressive policy, promoting social justice by granting access to higher education to underprivileged groups. Given its broad support, President Lula has insistently mentioned this program as an example of his commitment to the democratization of education opportunities.

In the age of “mediated” politics, policy-making has largely become a “struggle over meaning” (see Chapters 1 and 2). A program waiving taxes in favor of private institutions in exchange for scholarships for low-income students, adopted by a leftist government, is open to competing interpretations. From a critical perspective, it could be seen as a neo-liberal, market-oriented policy. This label would probably be applied by influential social and political actors if this policy carried the signature of the Cardoso government. After all, ProUNI can be seen as a disguised “voucher” policy, since the government began to subsidize, albeit indirectly, private institutions via tax exemptions. The Lula administration, however, embodies the utopia of social justice and wisely used this symbolic capital to win the contest surrounding its meaning. The official framing, which has become hegemonic, attaches a set of positive values to this policy: democratization of opportunities, inclusion, and rewarding of efforts and personal merit.

The great political payoff of this program suggests that there is a huge incentive for policies designed to promote “inclusion at the fringes,” since their outcomes are quantifiable and can be achieved in the short term, without confronting the dominant discourse and challenging the privileged groups’ *status quo*. This does not diminish the social importance of this policy.

Competing and benchmarking: education as a reality show

A striking phenomenon that gained momentum in Brazil in the 1990s and is associated with the managerial reform of the State is the widespread dissemination of contests and prizes designed to encourage creativity, innovation and optimization of outcomes in public administration; in other words, to induce agents and institutions to constantly seek improvements in the efficiency and quality of public services.¹²⁰ For instance, the Ministry of Budget, Planning and Management created the National Public Administration Prize as one of the “strategic actions of the National Public Management and Red Tape Elimination Program”.

The educational area has been swept by the same wave. In recent years, many different prizes to stimulate innovations and improvements in classroom learning and the management of state and municipal educational systems have been created. MEC has been particularly active in creating national prizes, usually through partnerships with the private sector. During the Cardoso government, the Incentive for Primary Education Award (1995) and the Quality in Children's Education Award (1999) were created with

the aim of valuing teachers and recognizing them “as the main agents involved in the process of improving learning quality” (MEC, 2005). The first prize was supported from the outset by the Bünge Foundation, an organization linked to a gigantic transnational goods company of the same name. The second was launched in partnership with the Orsa Foundation, a member of a domestic entrepreneurial group operating in the cellulose, wrapping, and timber product industry.¹²¹ In 2005, with the Lula administration already in power, the MEC decided to unify the two prizes into the Teachers of Brazil Award, maintaining the private partners (Bünge Foundation and Orsa Foundation) and reinforcing its partnership with national representations of state and municipal education secretariats (CONSED and UNDIME). The new prize preserved the same features as those of its predecessors and each year is awarded to twenty innovative educational experiences developed by teachers in the initial grades of primary education (MEC, 2006). Another MEC initiative was to create the Innovation in Educational Management Award in 2006 with the aim of “recognizing municipalities and municipal education managers for their innovative initiatives and results” (INEP, 2007).

Enterprises and organizations of the so-called “third sector” have also contributed to the rapid proliferation of prizes awarded to public schools and their agents.¹²² The *Victor Civita Top Grade Teacher Award*, sponsored by a foundation bearing the same

¹²⁰ A similar phenomenon was observed in the private sector, where new initiatives have been launched to award prizes to socially responsible projects carried out by companies and organizations that make up the so-called “third sector”.

¹²¹ The website of the Orsa Foundation informs that the companies making up the group allocate 1% of their gross turnover to social projects (www.fundacaoorsa.org.br).

¹²² The National Council of Education Secretariats (CONSED), a collegiate agency that brings together Secretariats of Education from the 26 states of Brazil and the Federal District, led the initiative of creating a National School Management Benchmark Prize in partnership with the National Union of Municipal Education Managers (UNDIME), international organizations, and private-sector organizations, among

name, after the founder of the Abril Group, is an example of huge visibility regarded by the domestic media as the “Oscar of Education” (*Correio Braziliense*, 2000). Created to “identify, value and disseminate quality educational experiences planned by teachers in regular [public or private] schools”, the prize is widely disseminated by the magazine *Nova Escola*, “the main education magazine in Brazil”, as it describes itself. Published by the Victor Civita Foundation with support from the Abril Group, the second largest media conglomerate in Brazil, this magazine is distributed to all public schools in Brazil with financial subsidies provided by MEC through the National Education Development Fund (FNDE).¹²³ Official subsidies therefore ensure a “captive readership” (Apple, 2000) for an educational magazine published by one of the largest communication groups in Latin America, which owns two textbook publishing houses (*Ática* and *Scipione*) that together control about one third of the market in Brazil. On the three pages of its May 2005 issue devoted to announcing the deadline for registering for the award and its rules for 2005, one reads the following:

The Victor Civita Top Grade Teacher Award was created to pay homage to all teachers in the Brazilian educational system. People like you, who are seldom duly recognized for their achievements but nevertheless keep on coming up with creative solutions to arouse the curiosity, imagination, and pleasure to learn of your students. No matter how simple your work is, if it has produced positive results you should register it. You will win recognition throughout Brazil, besides receiving 10,000 reais in cash, a diploma, and the Top Grade Teacher Trophy, the “Oscar” of the Brazilian educational system. (*Nova Escola*, 2005, p. 21)

which is the Roberto Marinho Foundation, linked to the Globo Organizations. Created in 1997, it is already in its eighth year.

¹²³ According to information provided by the Abril Group, the magazine *Nova Escola* “is read by 80% of all primary education teachers in Brazil” (Abril, 2000).

Two aspects stand out in this text, which uses advertising language: individualization of the search for ‘creative solutions’ to stimulate student learning, and the symbolic and compensatory character of the initiative, given that the work of teaching is carried out by “people like you, who are seldom duly recognized for their achievements”. The rules themselves explain that “the achievement should be registered in the name of one person only”, even if it was developed by a team, as the award is individual.¹²⁴ The “Victor Civita Top Grade Teacher Award” was awarded at the Abril Theater in São Paulo in a dignified and glamorous ceremony similar to the Oscar Awards, a grand show that had nothing to do with the harsh reality faced in Brazilian public schools, to say the least.¹²⁵

The prizes sponsored by public or private institutions epitomize the political spectacle which has become part and parcel of education policies in so many different national contexts (see Smith *et alii*, 2004; Nóvoa, 2002). They are very effective, though, as “symbolic policy” aimed at attracting the media’s attention and providing short-term political and institutional gains. In this way, education becomes sort of a reality show. Competition is encouraged, winners are awarded prizes, and a huge audience has a good time. Schools are placed under continuous surveillance through national and international

¹²⁴ In 2005, ten teachers were awarded the prize, of whom one received the special Teacher of the Year Trophy and the prize in cash, amounting to R\$ 10,000 – a sum often equivalent to the wage earned by teachers in a whole year in many regions of the country. The winners received books published by the publishers *Ática* and *Scipione*, both of which belong to the Abril Group. The 50 teachers selected in the first stage received a citation of honor and a subscription to the magazine *Nova Escola*.

¹²⁵ The magazine *Nova Escola* made the following comment on the award ceremony of 2005: “Imagine being introduced by journalist Marília Gabriela [a famous talk-show host] in a big party, appearing on a TV show and being considered a benchmark in your profession. The ten winners of the Victor Civita Top Grade Teacher Award of 2005 experienced this thrill in the ceremony held on October 11 at the Abril Theater in São Paulo” (Bencini, 2005). The party was held to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Victor Civita Foundation and featured a show by the American guitarist Stanley Jordan and the Brazilian singer Mônica Salmaso.

evaluations. Education is going through the benchmarking era.¹²⁶ After all, as Viviane Senna, president of the Ayrton Senna Institute¹²⁷ puts it, “the price of quality is ongoing vigilance” (Senna, 2001). She welcomes “enthusiastically the way the media has been dealing with the performance indicators of our schools”.

National evaluations and the new media idols

With the implementation of national evaluation systems in 1996, MEC created “effective comparison standards” based on which it would be possible to rank public and private schools throughout Brazil. As many analysts have observed already, standardized tests providing comparison parameters are key elements for a market-oriented competition system (Apple, 2001; Whitty *et al.*, 1998). It is not by coincidence, therefore, that the proliferation of awards has been accompanied by another initiative designed to induce competition into the educational system as a whole: disseminating the results of national evaluations for each school, allowing for public and private educational institutions to be ranked.

This led to the creation of the IDEB (Basic Education Development Indicator), the cornerstone of the PDE, which became the new official tool to measure the quality of

¹²⁶ This concept is widely used in the business administration area to define an ongoing process of comparing products, services and managerial practices through which companies seek to absorb the practices of leaders in their field of activity and thereby gain a competitive edge. The term was recently incorporated into the educational field by international agencies and is being used to encourage countries to compare the performance of their teaching systems and learn from other countries. The use of entrepreneurial language reveals a certain trend toward the colonization of education by the economic rationality that has accompanied the dissemination of neo-liberalism in recent decades (see Chapter 4).

¹²⁷ Named after the famous Brazilian racing driver, who died in 1994, this NGO has become hugely influential in the educational area since the 1990s by developing partnerships with state and municipal learning systems and creating methodologies to “speed up the learning” of students affected by age-grade gaps.

basic education in Brazil, serving both to draw attention to “champion schools” and to issue certificates of “optimum and good” performance to state and municipal systems with the highest ratings.¹²⁸ The current Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, believes that the *Prova Brasil* and publishing its results for each school are major “advances” in the educational policy under the Lula administration as it is now possible to hold public agents accountable for the quality of education.

[It is] is praiseworthy to see that a process to evaluate the system, namely, the SAEB, began to be implemented [during the Cardoso government]. This is a praiseworthy fact that we acknowledge. But the idea of not publishing the results per system [and per school], blaming the political class for the quality of education, was a strong feature of the previous period that the *Prova Brasil* and IDEB have managed to eliminate, so public agents can be held accountable for the quality of the educational system they are in charge of. Even in those states where evaluations were carried out by system and by school, the data were not published, and the Lula administration adopted not only the rule of making a detailed radiograph of the system, but also of publishing the data and holding political agents accountable for the quality of the systems under their responsibility.¹²⁹

One can clearly perceive a line of continuity from the Cardoso to the Lula administrations in terms of centrality of evaluation processes. The national tests have also become an efficient tool to single out the best students, who have begun to win public recognition

¹²⁸ A personal comment is necessary here: when I was working on my first draft of this chapter, on June 20, 2007, I took a break to attend a ceremony at the Planalto Palace in which the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, and the President Lula, would be announcing a set of measures to complement the PDE, including the Municipality Free from Illiteracy Seal (awarded to 64 municipalities with a literacy rate in excess of 96% in the population aged 15 or more) and “Good Educational Performance” and “Optimum Educational Performance” certificates, which were awarded to states and municipalities with an IDEB equal to or higher than 5.0 and equal to or higher than 6.0, respectively. Homage was also paid to the 20 students who got the best grades in the National Student Performance Test (Enade) in 2006, who were granted CAPES scholarships for M.A. and Ph. D. programs. In his speech, President Lula highlighted the increasing participation of students from public schools in the National Mathematics Olympics in the past three years, and announced that a National Portuguese Language Olympics, one of the initiatives making up the PDE, would begin to be held in 2007.

and scholarships as prizes. This practice began under the Cardoso government and has been taken to extremes in the Lula administration. Celebrating and awarding prizes to winners is an effective way of reaching two strategic objectives: highlighting individual merit and talents while legitimizing the rules of the meritocratic contest in such a way that the losers will not challenge the result or withdraw from it.

The success of this strategy is confirmed by the perception of parents and teachers of public schools that “the student themselves are, above all others, responsible for the grade repetition rates and even for the terrible performance of Brazil in international evaluations” (Gois, 2002, p. C1). This was precisely what Araújo e Oliveira and Schwartzman (2002) saw when they interviewed parents on the responsibility for *‘failure at school’*.¹³⁰ Most parents of students in public schools blame their children for repeating years (63% in municipal schools and 54% in state schools). In private schools, less than one-third of parents (31%) blame students for repeating. The opinion of parents in public schools is corroborated by their teachers: 77% of them blame the students for repeating grades. Among teachers in private schools, 67% blame the students for failing. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the parents themselves do not want to see the continuous progression system (social promotion) adopted in the São Paulo State public

¹²⁹ Personal interview with the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad (Brasília, Federal District – June 22, 2007).

¹³⁰ In an editorial, *Educação & Sociedade*, one of the most renowned education journal in Brazil, strongly criticized the methodology and conclusions of this survey, challenging the credentials of its authors, who were described by *Folha de S. Paulo* as “two of the top Brazilian experts on the subject” (Gois, 2002). According to the editors of *Educação & Sociedade*, the perception of the parents reflects the penetration of the official discourse of blaming school failure on students, families and educators, shifting the focus from “the educational policy and its links with economic policy, the concrete conditions in the schools and of learning, the working conditions of educators, the school as a social institution structured according to the contradictions prevailing in society” (*Educação & Sociedade*, 2002, p. 6).

school system and want public schools to prevent students with a learning deficit from being promoted (Dantas, 2002).

The dominant media usually fails to emphasize the need to investigate the causes of school failure, particularly in the public school system, and prefer to tell success stories of “champion schools” and the saga of students with the highest grades in national tests (Weinberg, 2001b; Dimenstein, 2001). Every time the results of national tests are announced, students with the highest grades are focused on by the media and educational authorities. They become a kind of Andy Warhol fifteen-minute celebrity, and are paid homage to by the Minister of Education and even by the President himself. Their success stories are told as a fairy tale with a happy ending, and their studying habits and individual characteristics are over-emphasized. Invariably, personal efforts are portrayed as the ‘secret’ of their success. Outstanding students in public schools receive much more attention because of the alleged disadvantages stemming from their social background or shortcomings of the public system. The greater the difficulties and adversities faced by the ENEM and ENADE champions, the more emphasis placed on their individual efforts. Merit is highlighted by praising winners, and, through this celebration, the meritocratic ideology is reinforced. The official MEC publications serve the same purpose, as they emulate the coverage of the dominant media. The magazine *Revista do ENEM*, for example, focuses on the “champions” of the previous year and students of public schools who were granted a ProUNI scholarship as a result of their performance in the test (INEP, 2006a). Evaluations thus play a major ideological role: legitimizing a competitive, free-market-based society.

In 2001, MEC issued for the first time a list of top students in undergraduate courses evaluated by the so-called *Provão* [Big Test] (replaced by the ENADE in 2004). In its traditional *Letter to Readers*, *Veja* praised the initiative (*Veja*, 2001). The same edition covered the *Champions of the Provão* extensively, highlighting the profile of eighteen of the twenty students who got the highest grades and why they were the winners (Weinberg, 2001b). Serious studying is described as a common trait, while coming from a family with low income is recognized as “a difficult obstacle for those who opt for courses requiring more time and expensive textbooks, even in a public university, but not an insurmountable one”. However, the “champions” clearly have a middle-class profile: of the eighteen champions, sixteen are proficient in English and fifteen have a computer at home, facts that the story failed to take into account, preferring to emphasize that “universities are increasingly open and democratic, enabling most students to climb to a higher level on the social ladder”. This statement contrasts with the conclusion of the long text: “the figures also show that most of those who take the *Provão* come from middle-class families, are Caucasian, young and were born in the most developed states of the country” (Weinberg, 2001b).

Another illustrative example is provided by the experienced journalist Gilberto Dimenstein, feature writer for *Folha*, in an article called *Sempre estudaram em escolas públicas e viraram heróis* [They have always attended public schools and have become heroes]. Presenting what would be a scoop, he stressed the feat of seven students from public schools who managed to be among the twenty top students in courses evaluated by the *Provão* in the previous year (2000).¹³¹ The unlikely path of these students – who got

¹³¹ During the administration of Minister Paulo Renato Souza, the MEC often “leaked” information on national evaluations before the official announcement of their results, privileging the most influential

the best grades in competitive courses such as Journalism, Mathematics, Veterinary Science, Dentistry, Chemical Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering – is reported in such a way as to show that personal effort leads to success, regardless of any adversities. In drawing the profile of one of the winners, Dimenstein insists that the socioeconomic barrier is not an insurmountable obstacle. The tale goes like this:

Amos Luciano Carneiro, 24, born to a poor family and to parents who failed to complete elementary education and always attended public schools, passed the university entrance examination to study Chemical Engineering at Unicamp (University of Campinas) in the state of São Paulo. He could not imagine that after taking the *Provão* last year he would become part of the history of universities in Brazil. After overcoming the statistical probabilities of the Brazilian educational system, he was included in a list of heroes that will be published tomorrow. After passing a university entrance examination, a particularly difficult accomplishment for those who have attended public schools, Amos once again managed to overcome adversities: he got the highest grade – among all Chemical Engineering students from all over the country – in the *Provão* last year. As a poor student, he learned from an early age to attend libraries and studied, on average, five hours a week after his regular classes. The Internet became his main source of information. (Dimenstein, 2001, p. C3)

Academic success is invariably described as an individual achievement – further emphasizing the merit of students coming from public schools. The author recognizes, however, that “only a monumental resolve enabled him to contradict the foreseeable” – implying that most students from public schools are doomed to fail by the system itself. He concedes that “they are an exception, and, like heroes, their stories suggest the emergence and growth of a new movement in Brazil: the ‘*Collegeless* Movement’”. By establishing a direct link between students who passed a public university entrance examination after studying in public schools and the emergence of the *Collegeless*

Movement (MSU)¹³², Dimenstein draws attention to the mobilization that was brewing in the outskirts and poor neighborhoods of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the two largest cities in Brazil, which would gain public visibility in following years. In fact, together with other social movements, the MSU would play a major role in the struggle for democratizing public universities and adopting class and race-based affirmative actions. However, Dimenstein prefers to highlight an isolated initiative that is more intended to remedy the disadvantageous situation faced by poor students competing for a place in public universities – offering community courses designed to prepare students to pass the university entrance examination. Dimenstein says that this is a positive initiative, since it encourages the participation of students from the outskirts of large cities in meritocratic contests. “As centers of resistance to educational exclusion, these programs, maintained by volunteers, play by the rules of the game: they help students to take tests. *Briga desigual!* [Unequal struggle!]” (Dimenstein, 2001, p. C3).

Another illustrative example of the dominant framing of the media in its coverage of champions in national evaluations is provided in an article featured in *Veja* called *A receita dos bons alunos* [The prescription of the good students], about students who got the highest grades in the ENEM (Weinberg, 2004). The “hero” selected to illustrate the long article was the student Victor Manuel Romero, 19, who got the highest grade of some 1.3 million of students who took the national test the previous year. The text emphasizes “the difference between his story and that of the majority of students who usually get the highest grades in this type of contest”, stating that

¹³² The name chosen echoes the Landless Workers’ Movement (MST), one of the largest social movements in Latin America.

In general, the champions come from high-income families, have parents with a college degree, and attended the best private schools in the Brazil. With Romero the situation was different. His mother, a housewife, left school when she was in the sixth grade to work in a textile factory. His father, a commercial representative of a soap powder firm, earns about R\$ 2,000 a month. He struggled a lot to get a college degree belatedly (he graduated in Business Administration at the age of 45). Romero didn't study in a private school either. His family managed to pay for his primary education. After that, they were forced to enroll him in a public school. In recognition of the efforts of his parents, he said that he always studied 'like crazy,' more than three hours a day after his regular classes. Last year, he went to school in the morning and took a technical course in mechanics in the afternoon. "It was a precautionary decision. Should my father need me to do so, it would allow me to get a job more easily," he explains. In his free time, he learned Spanish, the language of his paternal grandparents, through a TV course. (Weinberg, 2004, p. 108)

The narrative reinforces the meritocratic principle. It is of little importance that, in the light of Brazilians standards, the profile of the family of the ENEM/2003 champion is a typical middle-class profile. The story of his life becomes the plot of an epic novel: a boy born to a modest family who, thanks to his individual efforts, has overcome socioeconomic barriers to become a "champion" in a national test. The article also mentions a survey carried out with 54 students making up a sample to define the templates of objective sections of the ENEM test (which also includes an essay), and it revealed the following profile: "80% of the students attended private schools, and the parents of 70% are college graduates with an income above R\$ 2,600 a month". That is, the overwhelming majority of high-achieving students have studied in private schools and belong to the middle-class. Moreover, the article fails to mention that about 85% of the participants in the ENEM test are public-school students, insisting that 'diligent' students get high grades, regardless of their social and economic background:

Surveys have shown that young people whose parents earn a fairly high income and have more years of schooling get more intellectual fuel and live a richer cultural life – key factors for a good performance at school. But the surveys also suggest that a combination of personal effort and investment in education can minimize, or even annul, the disadvantage of belonging to low-income segments of the population. (...) Like Victor, about 20% of the students who got the highest grades in the ENEM test came from low-income families (earning less than ten minimum wages a month) or were brought up by parents with little formal education (who completed secondary education at most). (p. 109)

The criterion for defining ‘low income’ distorts a well-known reality: over 50% of all Brazilian families earn up to two minimum wages (R\$ 750) a month, as confirmed by the profile of students who take the test (INEP, 2006b). Therefore, the income bracket of up to ten minimum wages a month includes the low middle-class segment. The presence of poor students in the list of champions in national tests is a key to legitimizing the meritocratic system, regardless of the severity of the iniquities involved. *Veja*, a strong supporter of neo-liberal reforms, calls for an even more selective and competitive educational system, which should focus on high-achieving students and leave the rest alone. The following excerpt is telling of such an elitist view:

The purpose of the ENEM test is to map out the quality of education, but it could also be used to single out individual talents, young people with an above average performance at school. Today, they are lost in the middle of large statistics. By detecting talents, it is possible to monitor and stimulate them in order to turn their potential into concrete achievements. This is something that is done in the United States, a country with a tradition of valuing individual talent. From the first grades of primary education Americans take different tests designed to identify particularly able students. Their talent is then refined through scholarships and special follow-up mechanisms in schools and universities. Brazil already applies certain tests to measure the quality of education, but none of them focuses on students with special skills as they should. The ENEM test should be used for this purpose. By doing this, Brazil would have a mechanism to track its best students and stimulate them as necessary to develop the ability to generate high-level academic knowledge. This is what all nations need to do in order to grow. (Weinberg, 2004, p. 110)

By describing the United States as a benchmark of the selective and meritocratic school system, implying that it owes its economic success to this system, *Veja* provides an example to be emulated by Brazil. However, a striking contradiction can be found right below, in a box called *O equívoco das quotas* [The mistake of quotas] juxtaposed in the middle of a long article about the ENEM champions. Here, *Veja* strongly criticizes a government bill submitted to Congress the week before which proposes the adoption of class and race-based affirmative action in public universities. *Veja* says that the bill “was almost unanimously criticized by experts” and adds: “Apart from challenging its efficiency, most experts worry that it might end up by jeopardizing the quality of higher education”. The ‘experts’ are mentioned to legitimize an editorial position completely against any affirmative action – which at that moment was being included in the national educational agenda to become a major ideological watershed in the following years. *Veja* condemns the bill *despite* recognizing that the “quota policy” produced positive results for Afro-descendants in the United States. The contradiction is clear: not everything that is good for the United States is good for Brazil. In the opinion of the leading Brazilian news magazine, instead of importing the “quota policy” for Afro-descendants and poor people, the government “should invest in the largest educational challenge, which was being postponed: that of improving the quality of the public system as a whole – this would be a truly efficient way to facilitate the admission of the poorest segments of the population into a university”.

This would become a mantra repeated by those against the affirmative-action policy. The ideology of meritocracy seeks to combine, in rhetorical terms, “possessive

individualism” with the promise of a fair and egalitarian society. After all, as *Veja* states in another attack on the adoption of race-based affirmative action,

The fact that there are a huge number of poor Afro-descendants in Brazil results from historical circumstances and not from a predisposition of Caucasians to prevent the social promotion of Afro-descendants in society – as opposed to what happened in the United States and in South Africa. (...) For a society to function perfectly, the best system to be adopted is one of distributing places in public universities and public jobs purely based on individual merit, regardless of the color of one's skin. (Zakabi & Camargo, 2007, pp. 85-87)

Cultural deficit theory: blaming the victims

Meritocracy coexists with a deeply-rooted conservative thesis in the dominant educational discourse: cultural deficit theory, according to which poor parents are not concerned enough about the education of their children, a major obstacle to improving public schools (Ioschpe, 2004 and 2008a; Pessôa, 2006). This is why so much emphasis is being placed on social mobilization campaigns carried out by both governmental and private organizations to raise the awareness of the importance of education. Examples of this are three national campaigns led by MEC under the Cardoso government: *Acorda, Brasil! Tá na Hora da Escola!* [Wake up Brazil! It's Time to Go to School] (1995), *Toda Criança na Escola* [All Children Should be at School] (1997-1998) and the *Dia Nacional da Família na Escola* [National Day of the Family at School] (2001-2002).

Outside the government, the “Open School – Voluntarism in Education” initiative deserves special mention. More known later on by the slogan “Friends of the School”, it was launched by the Globo Television Network in 1999 as part of its “Brazil 500 Years”

project. Seeking to take advantage of the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the “discovery of Brazil”, it was an initiative designed to foster a broad national mobilization around improvements in education, encouraging the participation of families and communities in school activities. The Globo Network relied on 107 affiliated broadcasting companies covering all Brazil to rival the mobilization actions led by the government. From the outset, the priority of the “Friends of the School” campaign was to “qualify demand as a strategic element for improving education” (CONSED, 1999).

Under the Lula administration, the rhetoric of holding families accountable and the appeal to social mobilization did not cool off. On the contrary, as I analyze in Chapter 7, one of the main components of the PDE is the mobilization civil society. In the speech delivered by President Lula when the Plan was launched, he demanded a “deep change in attitudes”, particularly of families, in relation to public education:

We must have the courage to say that most Brazilian families have a contradictory and paradoxical attitude in relation to education. All parents truly want their children to have a good education and to be successful, but very few of them develop close bonds with the schools their children are studying in. Without changing this attitude, we will not manage to implement a full and transformational national education project. (...) Public schools have councils for parents to participate in their activities. Apart from educating their children at home, parents must be present in their school, follow their performance, help their school, and also make sure the school is properly educating their children appropriately. Each father and mother should be an inspector and builder of the school their children are attending. They should be monitoring routine activities, supporting teachers, turning each school into a sacred community asset.

There is no doubt that, beyond the political rhetoric, there are elements of good sense in this presidential speech, demanding that families, especially parents of students attending public schools, take more responsibility for the education of their children.

This requirement is targeted to parents of students attending public schools. On many other occasions, President Lula has reaffirmed his conviction that the State cannot solve each and every problem and has said that restoring family values is an important element for solving the problems facing Brazil (Gois, 2004). The public discourse of holding parents accountable for the performance of the school of their children is framed according to a middle-class worldview, focused on the traditional family model. The material conditions in which poor families live in their daily struggle to make a living is often neglected by the advocates of cultural deficit models, who continue to insist that “a good public school begins at home” (Paraguassú, 2000).

Besides affirming that low-income families deride the education of their children and have no interest in it, blaming the poor for lower scores in national tests is another manifestation of the cultural deficit theory in public discourse (Avancini, 2000; Leali, 2000; Weber, 2000). In the 1990s, as each round of the SAEB showed that the performance of public schools was not improving and was even getting worse, high-ranking managers of MEC were quick to publicly announce that the problem was being caused by the entry into the school system of a large number of students “coming from the poorest segments of the population, with greater learning difficulties”. The thesis according to which democratizing education worsens its quality gained currency during the Cardoso government, whose main motto was increasing enrolment rates (Toledo, 1998; Falcão, 1999). The former Minister of Education, Paulo Renato Souza, stressed this repeatedly, saying that “the international literature shows that when large numbers of students enter the educational system, there is, initially, a drop in performance” (Rezende & Oliveira, 2000, p. 16). If a higher enrolment rate, “which brought poorer and less

prepared students to the school system”, served to justify the lower performance of public schools, how can the drop observed in the performance of private schools be explained, if the number of their students decreased? The senior managers of MEC could not answer this question (Gois, 2000b). As well as blaming poor students for this situation, their families were also blamed, using the argument that they influenced the performance of students more than the schools themselves (Paraguassú, 2000). Educational managers are seldom willing to recognize that the educational systems and schools failed to prepare to absorb students from the poorest segments of the population (Gois, 2000a).

In its different variants, cultural deficit theory sustains that education supply is determined by demand. Framed in terms of economic rationality, it evokes the power of consumers to demand that a product or service meet their needs and expectations. The sovereignty of consumers is, therefore, its core assumption. Its main postulate, in the Brazilian context, is that the scorn of poor families for education and their lack of skills to evaluate the quality of the education their children are getting are the main determining factors of the low quality of public schools. The economist Cláudio de Moura Castro helped to disseminate the thesis according to which the quality of public schools dropped when they admitted “low-class” children (Castro & Gusso, 1983, pp. 13-14). Poor families are satisfied with precarious schools and would have low expectations in relation to the education of their children. This interpretation has been popularized in recent years by other media intellectuals (e.g. Ioschpe, 2004; Pessôa, 2006).

A metaphor can be useful to show the persuasive power of this theory. A foreign visitor arriving at any airport in the main cities of Brazil will experience comfort and safety levels similar to those available in the airports of capital cities in the so-called First

World: impeccable facilities, efficient services, cleanliness and air conditioning.

Brazilians who can afford to travel by plane enjoy the same benefits.¹³³ A very different experience is that of millions of workers who depend on the public transportation system in large cities of the country to go to work on a daily basis and are forced to take poorly maintained buses and uncomfortable packed trains. Most bus and train stations around the country are dirty and poorly maintained. Airports and train and bus terminals are all public facilities in Brazil. However, the differences observed in the constructions and in the quality of these services could not be more striking. According to economic rationality, this is due to the fact that the former serve more demanding consumers with a high purchasing power, while the latter serve people with a lower purchasing power, who accept the precariousness of the public transportation system available to them.

The same logic is applied to public education and health care services. The “managerial State” is a provider that is sensitive to the preferences and requirements of “consumers”. It provides services according to the level required by the users. According to the supporters of the cultural deficit theory, the quality of public schools dropped when the middle-class migrated to private schools, leaving the poor to their own fate. Roughly speaking, the distribution of enrolments in primary schools reproduces a class division pattern: 10% of students attend private schools and 90% attend public schools. As Dávila (2003, p. 8) aptly noted, “since the 1960s, the most visible division in Brazilian public

¹³³ The recent and protracted crisis in the Brazilian air transportation system that began in the second half of 2006 and which continued through 2007, clearly exposed the ability of middle and high-income individuals, the main users of this service, to capture the public agenda and press the government to take action for the Brazil’s air traffic control system to return to proper safety and quality standards. The extensive coverage of the domestic media of the “chaos in airports” and the fact that two parliamentary investigating committees were set up in the National Congress to investigate the causes of the problem only confirm the power of these sectors to put pressure on politicians (e.g. Ioschpe, 2007b). There are no records in recent decades that any such investigating committee was established to investigate the “chaos in Brazil’s educational system.”

education has been based on social class: poor children attend a public school, and those who can afford to do so attend a private school”. For the supporters of the cultural deficit theory, the neglect experienced by public schools can only be reverted if the middle-class returns to them. This is why some of its proponents support a proposal to put an end to the practice of discounting expenses on education from income tax, which in their opinion would provide a disincentive for middle-class families to send their children to private schools (Ioschpe, 2004).

Deficit models in the educational coverage of the media

By and large, the mainstream media have often relied on deficit models to frame education issues, particularly to *explain* the persistent failure of public schools. In analyzing the causes of the public education debacle, the veteran journalist Clóvis Rossi, a senior columnist of *Folha de S. Paulo*, criticized the dominant perspective by stating that,

The education issue reflects the general scenario of obscene iniquity that has prevailed in Brazil for 500 years or more. Whenever universal access is ensured to a certain common good (in this case, education), a deteriorated product is delivered. When I was attending primary school, about 50 years ago, public schools were excellent because they were meant for a few select students (my God, I was from the elite and didn't even know it back then!). As they opened their doors to the lower floor, their quality deteriorated, as if the poor had no right to products of at least a reasonable quality. As they opened their doors more widely, their quality deteriorated even more, as evinced by two measurements disseminated the day before yesterday [ENEM and SAEB]. If parents are nevertheless satisfied, it is because Brazilians accept mediocrity. Or even worse: they celebrate it. If things continue the way they are, we will vegetate in it until the end of time. (Rossi, 2007a, p. A2)

Even in this critical approach, one that is seldom found in the domestic media, the main assumption of the cultural deficit theory is present. At least Rossi does not blame the users of public schools for their problems. The dominant discourse insists that in order to foster improvements in public education, it is necessary, first, to “qualify demand.” Parents who are more demanding in relation to the education their children are getting would require effective improvements. The responsibility for the quality of public education is therefore transferred to its “users.” Viviane Senna, one of the organizers of the corporate “Everyone for Education” movement, candidly embraces this perspective by arguing that

Both parents and governments see education as places in schools. There are surveys showing that parents are pleased with education because they consider it in terms of places. People’s demands must be qualified for them to press for improvements in the supply of education. (Senna [interviewed] in Pereira, 2006a)

As seen above, this theory is fed by the market logic, relying on the power and sovereignty of consumers. Senna made this underlying assumption very clear when she mentioned the example of PROCON¹³⁴ “through which consumers themselves began to demand better-quality products and defend their rights”. Education began to be seen as a mere product. The idea, therefore, is to induce ‘consumers’ to demand a better-quality product on the ‘educational market’. After all, as she states, “politicians are very sensitive to demand requirements”. The public sphere thus disappears, and citizens are replaced by the market and consumers. This discourse is therefore irreparably privatist. The existence of a qualified demand induces “providers” to offer a qualified education, or else they

¹³⁴ The agency in charge of defending consumer rights and enforcing the National Code of Consumer Rights (Law 8,078/90).

might disappear from the market (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The national evaluations and the ranking of schools have become key elements for consumers to make well-informed choices.

By supporting cultural deficit theory, Brazil's political and economic elites transfer to the poor the responsibility for the bad services they get from the state. It is a classical case of putting the blame on the victims. Low-income families, the main users of public schools, are blamed for the school failure of their children, who are not monitored and required to study properly at home. There are abundant examples of this framing in the educational coverage by the domestic media, which trusts in the “competent discourse” of *experts*. The most striking expression of this vision was provided by the economist Samuel Pessôa (2006) in an op-ed published by the prestigious newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*. In analyzing the causes of the low quality of public education in Brazil, he asserted that

The drop observed in the quality of public education, as a result of universal access, largely derives from the quality of its clientele. And this situation will only get better as generations succeed one another and incremental improvements are introduced in the homes where our children are raised. By ensuring universal access to primary education today, we are contributing to the existence of better parents tomorrow and, therefore, to the improvements of the school of tomorrow. (Pessôa, 2006, p. J4)

Curiously enough, there is a contradiction threatening the cohesion of the dominant discourse: in the last few years, mainstream media have begun to challenge the cultural deficit theory, which is invariably used by educational authorities to justify the repeated failure of public education. This change became more apparent in the coverage of the 2005 SAEB results announced in February 2007 showing that the performance of public

schools had dropped, particularly in São Paulo, the richest state in Brazil. *Folha de S. Paulo* published an editorial called “*O PSDB e a educação*” [The Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and education], strongly criticizing the party of former President Cardoso and challenging the official interpretation of these results:

The legacy of three state governments is a disaster and shows that the priority given by the Toucans¹³⁵ to education has not been enough to generate a consistent project. Since 1995, the state of São Paulo has been governed by the Brazilian Social Democratic Party, one that portrays itself as the herald of efficiency in public administration. Its leaders also stand out as supporters of modernization actions in the field of education as a requirement to ensure Brazil's inclusion in the global market. Despite this discourse, however, the quality of education in the state-run network has dropped sharply under the Toucan administration. (...). Paulo Renato Souza, a former Minister of Education in the Cardoso government, relies on conventional wisdom when he says that the fast absorption of a larger number of students by the school system is affecting its quality. As a matter of fact, having 97% of all children enrolled in primary schools constitutes an achievement whose price is a worse performance. (*Folha*, 2007a, p. A2)

The final sentence reinforces the official framing that there is an unavoidable trade-off between democratic access to schools and the performance of students in standardized tests. However, in the same newspaper Clovis Rossi further criticized the legacy of the PSDB and puts the knife further into the wound with a viewpoint that until very recently had been unanimously embraced by the mainstream media:

Everybody knows that education in Brazil is a disaster, as clearly reflected in every survey, test, evaluation or any tool used to measure it. In São Paulo, a state that during the past 12 years, two months and 13 days has been governed by the Toucans, who describe themselves as uniquely efficient when it comes to public administration, education might be seen as an even greater disaster if we consider the wealth of the State. The population of São Paulo is lucky, as it now knows who is to be blamed. Nobody. Oh, perhaps the parents. This is the conclusion one

¹³⁵ The tropical bird used as the symbol of PSDB.

has to reach after reading an interview with the former Secretary of Education, Gabriel Chalita, published yesterday in *Folha* about the utter failure of schools in São Paulo (all of them), as also revealed by this newspaper based on the results of tests. “No one is to be blamed for this problem,” says Chalita. At the only point where it seemed that he would do more than just to try to avoid responsibility, Chalita blamed the parents of students for “this lack of involvement of families in their children’s education.” Lack of involvement is an actual fact, and one to be regretted, but the responsibility of the State to provide quality education is a much more important and regrettable fact, as it has utterly failed to fulfill this duty for years. What happened to the so-called “management shock,” which was so much heralded by Geraldo Alckmin in the presidential campaign [of 2006]? Well, if we didn't have a good administration, the Toucans at least offer a shock treatment. A shock treatment of fingers pointing at each other. The Minister of Education during the Toucan administration, the present Federal Representative Paulo Renato, blames the secretaries of education, who in turn blame one another. (Rossi, 2007b, p. A2)

This harsh judgment of the Toucan legacy in the educational area came somewhat belatedly and lacks context and self-criticism, particularly on the part of a newspaper that endorsed the reforms and strategies implemented during the Cardoso government (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 1996). Mention should be made, however, of the gaps in the dominant discourse revealed by this text and, particularly, the uneasiness of leaders of public opinion with the clear, discrediting of the thesis that blames the poor for the low quality of education.

Silenced voices: invisibility and exclusion

The educator Esther Grossi, a former Secretary of Education of Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul state) during the first PT administration (1989-1992), reports an emblematic episode in *A Coragem de Mudar em Educação* [The courage of change in education] (2000), a book which tells us a lot about the false assumption that poor

families do not value education. Right after she was appointed to the position, in tune with a PT proposal to implement a popular and participatory administration, she visited communities on the outskirts of the city to hear what they wanted from the new municipal government in the area of education. At her first meeting, with a community of parents and students from the *Chácara da Fumaça* district, after introducing herself and saying that she was there to “hear what they expected from the Popular Administration in relation to education”, she was sharply questioned by a community leader:

Are you deaf, Secretary? (...) Are you still saying that you want to hear what we have to say? We have been shouting for a long time that we want our schools to educate our children. And you still haven't heard our cries? (Grossi, 2000, p. 32)

Puzzled and perplexed, she remembers that she did not know what to say in response to the incisive words of this father. But she learned a lesson that would deeply mark her stint at the Municipal Secretariat of Education. Interviews held later on with mothers of public school students in Porto Alegre confirmed, on the one hand, that they valued education highly, and, on the other, that they were deeply disappointed with the quality of the education available to low-income groups. The survey showed that there was a gap between the aspirations and expectation of parents and the opportunities that public schools were offering to their children. Grossi reports that,

When they were asked what they wanted their children to be when they grew up, they answered – a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer, a dentist. But to the question “But what do you think they will be as adults?” their reaction was: “They will be like us, cleaners and bricklayers, struggling to have a little bread at home to feed their children.” (p. 33)

What the experience of the former Secretary of Education of Porto Alegre suggests is not simply a problem of “communication” between lower income groups and political authorities and managers of educational systems. The problem is much more serious – exclusion and invisibility (Souza, 2006). Therefore, to say the least, the argument that the return of the middle-class to public schools is a prerequisite for recovering high-quality public education as it expresses its demands while lower income groups are passive and indifferent in relation to the low-quality education their children are getting, is cynical. In fact, it can be seen that the political system in general, and the educational systems in particular, have systematically ignored the yearnings of the low-income population. This “consistent frustration of their expectations” ends up by alienating groups that truly depend on public schools (Plank, 2001). Otherwise, when the State is democratized and allows historically excluded groups to participate in its management, as the experience of the participatory system in Porto Alegre seems to suggest, conditions are created to build public schools that respond to the needs of disfavored and marginalized communities (Gandin, 2002; Gandin & Apple, 2002; Apple & Buras, 2006).

Despite the success of certain local experiences, such as the Citizen School Project in Porto Alegre, there are few chances that the demands of the low-income population, such as of families living in *Chácara da Fumaça* or *Riachão das Neves*, located in a rural area in the state of Bahia, will be heard by those who are in charge of designing educational policies, even though the PT is now in charge of MEC. The dominant media, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, has not been an appropriate channel to “communicate” the demands of lower income groups to a political system that, as a whole, continues to discourage and prevent popular participation.

Ironically, it was up to INEP, then headed by another former Municipal Secretary of Education of Porto Alegre, Eliezer Pacheco, to provide more ammunition to supporters of cultural deficit theory by reinforcing the dominant discourse that the low expectation and demand on the part of parents in relation to the quality of education constitutes the main obstacle for improving public schools. This vision is clearly legitimized in the official interpretation of the results of the “National Survey on the Quality of Education: Public Schools in the Opinion of Parents” (INEP, 2005a). This was a survey was carried out in January 2005 with 10,000 parents of students in urban public primary schools throughout Brazil. According to the headline of the INEP press release, the parents gave “Brazilian public schools a score of 8”.¹³⁶ The apparent satisfaction of parents with public schools caused surprise and perplexity among high-ranking MEC officials, who resorted to the old and worn cultural deficit theory to explain the striking contrast between the opinion of parents and the results of national student performance evaluations. When commenting on the result of the survey carried out by INEP, the rather conservative *O Estado de S. Paulo* reproduced the official framing:

The evaluation of public schools by parents of students is much better than their traditional image. (...) The perception of parents that public schools are good contrasts with common images of schools lacking teaching materials or teachers and pupils plagued by learning problems. This difference can at least be partly explained by the profile of the parents of students and their expectations in relation to the schools. Most of them, 53.5%, earn less than two minimum wages a

¹³⁶ This official interpretation would last a long time in the selective memory of the media. When commenting on the results of the SAEB in an editorial, *Folha de S. Paulo* mentioned the complacency of parents as an obstacle to change the unsatisfactory quality of education in Brazil. The reference to the INEP survey supported this claim: “A survey carried out in 2005 with 10,000 parents showed that we are still far from having an environment in which better results are demanded. Parents are satisfied with the quality of the education their children are getting and gave the school infrastructure a score of 8.” (*Folha de S. Paulo*, “Universal e medíocre,” [Universal and mediocre] 8 February 2007, p. A2)

month. One-third of them failed to complete the eighth grade and almost 20% have less than four years of schooling. (Paraguassú, 2005, p. A15)

To corroborate this interpretation, the newspaper published a statement from the then director of the INEP Basic Education Evaluation, Carlos Henrique Araújo: “Families [whose children are studying in public schools] are poor, face difficulties to have access to good teaching materials and have low cultural capital”. Along the same lines, the President of INEP, Eliezer Pacheco, contends that “the results do not mean that schools are good, but rather that they are important to these parents. We have to consider the results in relative terms”.

In a story aired by Globo TV in its prime time newscast on the result of the survey (May 23, 2005), the framing of the cultural deficit theory is even more explicit. In the extract below, a rough description of the sequence of visual images is given on the left and the language that was used is presented on the right.

| IMAGES | LANGUAGE |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Close-up on the newscast anchorman</i></p> <p><i>Image of a bathroom with white walls covered in grafitti, a well-equipped classroom, students studying, a library with shelves full of books.</i></p> | <p>[ANCHORMAN: William Bonner] Ten thousand parents of students evaluated public primary schools. For them, the school facilities are fine, but teaching improvements are necessary.</p> <p>[NARRATOR: Voice covered] Parents of public school students are not displeased with the cleanliness of bathrooms and the quality of classrooms in public schools. They gave scores above seven to the school infrastructure, but criticized the lack of classrooms for information technology classes and gave a score of six and a half to the school libraries.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education believes that the positive evaluation of these parents has a lot to do with their reality.</p> |

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| <p><i>Caption: “Profile of the Parents”</i></p> | <p>Of the 10,000 interviewees, fifty-three per cent earn up to two minimum wages; seventy-three per cent never or seldom read a book. Over half of them have not completed the eighth grade. They compared the schools their children are attending today with those they studied in. Fifty-seven per cent said that the schools and the teaching provided are better now.</p> |
| <p><i>Close-up on the President of INEP</i></p> | <p>[SOUNDBITE 1: Eliezer Pacheco, President of INEP] - This observation is not surprising, as it reflects the aspirations of parents and the importance they attach to public schools as a key element for the social mobility of their children.</p> |
| <p><i>Close-up of a reporter in an empty classroom. The caption informs us that the image was filmed in Brasília, Federal District</i></p> | <p>[REPORTER: Giuliana Morrone] The survey also showed that these parents are worried about the school environment, where violent incidents have taken place, and that they are not satisfied with the quality of the education their children are getting. They want more for their children.</p> |
| <p><i>Caption: “Complaints of parents”</i></p> | <p>[NARRATOR – Voice covered] 96.25% want professionalizing courses; 92% want stricter controls applied to teachers who don't show up for classes; almost 20% complained that teachers rail at students.</p> <p>This expert in education warns that the positive results of the survey should be analyzed cautiously.</p> |
| <p><i>Wide take of an expert as she talks in off with the reporter taking on a professorial posture</i></p> | <p>[SOUNDBITE 2: Regina Vinhas Gracindo, Coordinator of Postgraduate Programs of the University of Brasília – UnB]</p> |
| <p><i>Close-up on the expert, with bookshelves in the background</i></p> | <p>- It is important, but it is only partial. A father who lives in one-bedroom home with nine people in it certainly wants his children to get a quality education, but his parameters for quality are based on his own experience.</p> |

This extract speaks for itself and clearly shows how the cultural deficit theory has been absorbed by high-ranking MEC officials and reproduced in mainstream media

framing. The story mentioned that the “positive evaluation of parents has a lot to do with the reality they live in” as a MEC interpretation of the survey results. The authoritative words of the expert give legitimacy to the official framing, which implies that poor families living in such precarious conditions would be pleased with school facilities with no more than minimal infrastructure. It reminds me the words of a famous Brazilian carnival choreographer, Joãozinho Trinta, who once said that “intellectuals love poverty; poor people like luxury”. This is not to say that poverty should be glamorized. Blaming the poor for their misfortune is as perverse as the many forms of the “glorification of the oppressed” which, as Souza (2006) aptly notes, “takes water to the mill of self-indulgence (a national sport in Brazil), of passivity and of the status quo” (p. 10).

Victimization of the middle-class: the new oppressed

The other side of the cultural deficit theory, according to which poor families are to be blamed for the bad quality of the education provided by the state, is to victimize the middle-class, portrayed as the new exploited class under a high tax burden. This is a characteristic feature of the dominant political discourse, particularly in the mainstream Brazilian media. The storytelling about the ‘new oppressed’ under the leviathan State goes like this: the middle-class is massacred by an ever-growing tax burden and, having no access to quality public services, it ends up paying twice, since it has to *buy* health care, education and safety from private providers because state-provided services fail to meet their needs and requirements. The alleged financial difficulties faced by middle-class families to pay their bills and bear a heavy tax burden is often mentioned by the

media, particularly at the beginning of each school year and on the eve of the deadline for submitting the income tax return. A couple in the living room with a calculator in their hands adding up bills to be paid has become a classical image on the main television newscasts in Brazil.

The existentialist pessimism of the middle-class seems to be getting worse, paradoxically, as a result of the perception that its relative position is threatened by minor social improvements brought about by a recent combination of economic growth and redistributive social policies. The economist Gustavo Ioschpe, a feature writer for *Folha* and a columnist for *Veja*, appropriately expressed the anxiety and fear of the educated elites in relation to the agenda of the Lula administration, which they perceive as favoring the poor. In a recent article called “*Neither elitism nor poorism*” he asserts:

The country is growing – not that much and with a lot of deception, but it is growing. Unemployment rates have been dropping. The trade balance has improved, inequality is falling, low-income segments of the population are earning more. And this is precisely the problem: while the middle and upper classes suffer and lose their hopes, most of the population sees improvements. If we were experiencing sustainable development, perhaps we could discard the concerns of the more educated sectors as elitism. But we are not. We are experiencing continuing underdevelopment. Although the poorest in the population are not aware of this fact, the measures which are bringing them joy today will bring them sadness tomorrow.

Higher social spending funded by a higher tax load will certainly bring poverty to everyone in the future.(...)

The fact that many NGOs and governmental programs are being set up to promote the social inclusion of young people living in the *favelas* [shanties] disguises what cannot be said: that the education they are getting will keep them in the outskirts for ever. All of the infrastructure set up by the representatives of the people to supposedly defend them constitutes the groundwork of their present and future poverty. (Ioschpe, 2007b, p. A3)

The most striking aspect of the reactionary rhetoric of victimizing the middle-class is to blame the “poorest segments of the population” for their exclusion, under the argument that they cannot recognize their own interests as a class.¹³⁷ Only the “more educated sectors” would be able to see that the distributive policies being adopted today to benefit the poorest will bring “poverty to everyone in the future”. Ioschpe aligns himself with the emerging neoconservatism in Brazil, which denies the possibility of social reforms and bets on the unintended and counterproductive effects of social well-being policies. In his classical analysis of reactionary rhetoric, Hirschman (1992) identifies three theses which are commonly used to discredit any attempt to promote “progressive” reforms and expand political and social rights: the *perversity thesis*, the *futility thesis* and the *threat thesis*. He goes on to explain this triad:

According to the *perversity thesis*, any purposeful action to improve an aspect of the economic, social or political order ends up worsening the situation it was meant to correct. The *futility thesis* suggests that any attempts to change social conditions are fruitless, that they will simply not be able ‘to make a dent’ in them. Finally, the *threat thesis* argues that the cost of the proposed reform or change is too high, since it threatens another precious previous achievement. (pp. 15-16)

The arguments of the perversity, futility, and threat theses have been widely used by those opposing class and race-based affirmative action (Kamel, 2006; Fry *et ali.*, 2007). Neoconservatism is ideologically tinged in the Brazilian context, as the “most educated sectors” see themselves as representatives of progressive ideas by advocating the meritocratic system as an equity model and defending social inclusion through education

¹³⁷ The presidential campaign of 2006 exposed a certain lack of conformity on the part of media intellectuals with the grassroots support for the reelection of President Lula, which would not be in tune with “public opinion,” as self-reflected by the media.

and not through assistance-oriented and redistributive policies, which they associate with a populist tradition (Ioschep, 2007b; Kamel 2004b; Azevedo, 2007).

Income distribution analyses persistently suggest that there is a prosperous “middle-class” in Brazil whose purchasing power is much higher than the average per capita income of Brazilians. The abyss separating the highest income percentile from the rest of the population has not decreased, despite the insistence of the media on the impoverishment of middle-class families. On the contrary, Pinheiro and Giambiagi (2006) suggest that no changes have been registered in the income distribution pyramid in recent years.

In 2002, the 10% of the employed population with the highest income received almost half (47.1%) of the country's total income, while those in the last percentile received 13.5% of the total income, almost as much as the 50% of the employed population with the lowest income. This is one of the main features of the very unequal income distribution pattern prevailing in Brazil, but it is a relatively little known fact. (p. 27)

However, the middle-class continues to complain, and increasingly louder. Under the Lula administration, it has seen itself as the main victim of a higher public spending with “assistance-oriented policies” (Kamel, 2004b; Ioschpe, 2007b; Azevedo, 2007).

Furthermore, the members of the middle-class do not usually see themselves as belonging to the privileged segments of society. On the basis of income criteria, people belonging to the 10% richest segment of the population could be classified as the country's economic elite, “considering the gap between them and the average citizen”. However, the self-victimization of the middle-class distorts the perception of who are the true winners and losers of the system, to such a point that “many of those who support the idea that there is

an exploiting and oligarchical ‘elite’ spuriously keeping much of the country's wealth are themselves members of this elite” (Pinheiro & Giambiagi, 2006, p. 29). Far from recognizing its privileges, the middle-class rises against the tax frenzy of the State together with the corporate sector while it mobilizes itself to preserve the so-called “entitled rights” – such as special and early retirement in the public sector, deduction of expenses on health care and education from income tax, and tuition free university education for their children.

A study carried out by the Ministry of Finance that was published in the third year of the Lula government (2005) gave rise to a controversy after showing the regressiveness of social spending in Brazil, particularly spending on the social security system, and pointed out the need to improve the focus of monetary transfer programs being implemented by the federal administration (Ministry of Finance, 2005). In terms of spending on education, the study showed that while most students attending public primary schools belong to the lower half of the income distribution pyramid, over 50% of the students attending public universities belong to the last quintile of this pyramid (p. 19). However, the Federal Government spends more on higher education than on basic education. Therefore, the middle-class keeps a major portion of the state transfers.

The dominant media is not alone in building the discourse of victimizing the middle-classes – the plural here is deliberate. The academic community – which is itself predominantly made up of individuals recruited from the middle-class – has provided its own contribution. To a large extent, the importance of the middle-classes has been under-emphasized by the social sciences, including Marxism. In part, this fact derives from difficulties to define and classify average income brackets, especially the petty

bourgeoisie (Santos, 2002). Oliveira¹³⁸ (1988) highlights the fact that the trend to turn concrete work into abstract work through the fast technological changes of the last quarter of the twentieth century is associated both with a decreasing number of factory workers and with a growing middle-class. Recent economic changes, which have given rise to the so-called fast capitalism (Gee *et al.*, 1996), reinforce the “structural trend of the expanded middle-classes under capitalism” (Oliveira, 1988, p. 288).

The oppression to which the Brazilian middle-class is subjected to is denied by its over-representation in the political realm and by the appetite with which it colonizes the apparatus of the State in the process of competing for well-paid public jobs (Carelli, 2004 and 2007). As a matter of fact, the historical formation of the Brazilian middle-class is directly linked to its privileged access to public jobs (Santos, 1979). As Oliveira observes (1988), “As quasi-subjects of the links between the economy and politics, the middle-classes and their ‘hard’ core, the intelligentsia, potentially have the virtue of replacing other classes in political relations, and, for this reason, they engage in ventriloquism” (p. 286). He goes on to add that “the middle-classes and the intelligentsia tend to replace the dominated classes in political relations” (p. 293). The “replacing” ability and the “ventriloquism” of the middle-class are manifested in the sense that they are natural

¹³⁸ Francisco Oliveira is one of the most fertile theoreticians on the deadlock of the Brazilian underdevelopment. In his classical book *Crítica à Razão Dualista* [A critique of Dualist Reason], he rejects the dualism of ECLALC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), a line of thought that was very influential in the 1950s and 1960s, and describes the singularity and specificity of the “Brazilian underdevelopment.” Based on this thesis, he argues that the “dualist” vision is mistaken because “modern” and “outdated” are two sides of the same coin, that is, constitutive elements of a specific form of capitalist accumulation (e.g. the old subsistence agriculture model financed modern agriculture and industrialization). In the essay *O Ornitorrinco* [The ornithorhynchus], he revisits the critique of dualist reason 30 years later only to see that, far from overcoming the dilemmas of underdevelopment, Brazil has generated an even more unshapely creature, reaffirming the thesis that conservative modernization is a specific form of “productive revolution without a bourgeois revolution” – a leap from an agrarian and traditional society to an industrialized economy. “Underdevelopment would then be a form of permanent exception of the capitalist system on its periphery” (p.131) His conclusion is pessimistic: “The capitalist ornithorhynchus is an incomplete accumulation and an unequal, unending society.” (Oliveira, 2003, p.150)

candidates to take the place “of dominant classes or of their political representation in controlling the State” (p. 285). The intelligentsia would therefore play two apparently contradictory roles: that of “translator of diffuse demands from the people” and of the “articulator of the interests of bourgeois elites”. A pitfall of this analysis is that it seems to ignore the actual interests of the middle-classes, describing them as irresistibly prone to ideological mercenariness.

For the purposes of the analysis being made here, what is of interest is the insight into the “translating and articulating roles” of the new middle-classes (Oliveira, 1988, p. 286). This insight is absolutely crucial to understanding the strategic role they play in defining the public policy agenda, particularly the educational policy agenda, by ensuring mechanisms to keep a significant share of the transfers made by the State (Ministry of Finance, 2005; Pinheiro & Giambiagi, 2006). Brazil has a political-electoral system that favors representation distortions and the autonomy of representatives in relation to their voters. The over-representation of the middle-classes in the legislative branch has become more pronounced in recent legislatures (Rodrigues, 2002 and 2006).

Another important aspect to be observed is the central role played by the new managerial and professional middle-class, as a result of having the cultural capital and technical expertise for this purpose, in developing accountability, measurement, social control, and assessment policies (Apple, 2001). Reflecting on the emergence of this phenomenon, Oliveira (1988) observed beforehand that “the modern and contemporary middle-classes are, *par excellence*, technical agents for managing forms of measuring, and this management constitutes in itself the act of building forms of measuring. This can be mainly perceived in state regulation and in its relations with different sectors of

society” (p. 285). This is so because the middle-classes embody a “formal rationality” that Oliveira describes as “building forms of measuring”. In the educational field, this role has become hugely important during the two last decades, with evaluation policies becoming the linchpin for restructuring national education systems. The middle-classes therefore play a key role not only in sustaining the economic model, but also “in managing general and particular capitalist regulation processes.”

At this point, one should consider the central role played by the State and the strategic position of the middle-classes in its apparatus, particularly in its inspecting and controlling roles. As Oliveira (1988) puts it,

In societies such as Brazilian society, the “otherness” of the classes is not even recognizable, since exactly the opposite happens: the state management permeates and absorbs the ‘other,’ namely, the dominated classes, annulling and reducing them to a subservient object of the subject which is now the state management itself. (pp. 292-293)

The gap between social classes, from the perspective of how the Brazilian educational system was historically organized, is absolutely huge. By and large, public schools serve a very homogenous social group. As the Brazilian education system is highly stratified by class, students are selected and sorted according to their socio-economic background. The well-off ones go to private schools and the have-nots go to public schools (Plank, 2001; Dávila, 2003). One result of such class-stratified system is that one group is never challenged to learn much about other economic groups. This segregation by income thresholds prevails from kindergarten to university. Attempts to change this framework have been fiercely resisted by dominant groups, as we will see in the ongoing controversy on class and race-based affirmative action.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how the ideology of meritocracy and the cultural deficit theory are two sides of the same coin – a currency with a wide circulation in the “market” of ideas and mediatic representations – structuring and sustaining the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil. This official discourse conceives education as an equalizer of opportunities, a source of legitimacy for a competitive and market-oriented economy and society. The “utopia of meritocracy” is fostered while the poorest segments of the population are blamed for their subaltern condition, allegedly caused by their conformism, lack of appreciation for education and lack of personal effort. Inequalities are seen as only natural. As Santos (1979) reminds us,

It would be a mistake to believe that the supporters of the ‘market’ as an allocator of resources and rewards assumed that a perfectly egalitarian society would emerge as the end result of its operation,. What they actually assumed was that the distribution of benefits in any society should reflect a differentiated distribution of abilities and talents. (...)

Associated with any meritocratic design, there is always the clear assumption that a natural inequality prevails between human beings and also a value judgment of such inequality in the ‘market’ which should not (or else an equivalent injustice would be committed) be transformed through political interventions under the pressure from ‘failed’ or comparatively ‘incompetent’ citizens. (pp.17-18)

The neo-liberal equal-opportunity model relies on and rewards personal merit, attributing “a differential value to human beings” according to their “objective performing capacity,” ignoring not only disadvantages at the starting point, but also power relations and a “permanent unequal access to chances in life and to appropriating scarce goods,” among which is education. Supported by Reinhard Kreckel's (1992) notion of the “ideology of

performance”, based on the “meritocratic triad” (qualification, position and wage), Souza (2003) mentions the increasing gap between the social roles of producer and citizen, which according to him would bring about, in a peripheral society such as Brazil, what he refers to as a “structural riffraff” made up of social subjects and groups deprived of “minimal conditions for competing successfully”. As he aptly notes, “the widespread internalization of this principle [of performance] leads the non-adaptation and marginalization of these sectors to be perceived both by the socially included and by the victims themselves as a ‘personal failure’”. (Souza, 2003, p. 171).

In the next chapter, I draw attention to the State and its key role in education in my examination of the fourth pillar of the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil – managerialism. As I shall argue, the penetration of this ideology has been particularly strong in the educational sector, reaffirming the hegemony of economic rationality (examined in Chapter 4) and the primacy of technical and managerial solutions to fix failing public schools. The managerial turn in educational policy in Brazil, which has been consolidated during the period covered by this dissertation (1995-2008), brought to the forefront the establishment of new centralized control mechanisms (curricular guidelines and parameters, national evaluations and tests, a national record of students and teachers, performance targets for each school, etc.). The intensive use of new information and communication technologies to enable the federal administration to effectively “control schools” scattered throughout the country, albeit virtually, creates conditions for “steering the system from a distance”.

CHAPTER 6 – THE MANAGERIAL TURN IN EDUCATION POLICY: SURVEILLANCE, CONTROL, AND POLITICAL SPECTACLE

The great problem of education [in Brazil] is not the lack of schools or money, but the bad distribution of resources. If the resources were used properly, they would be more than enough to eliminate illiteracy within ten years and to create excellent basic education in the country.

Paulo Renato Souza, Minister of Education in the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (*Veja*, 25 October 1995: p. 54)

The investments we are refusing to make in education now we will have to make in prisons at a later date. When you discuss education, you cannot discuss cost. Education means investment. Education is possibly the cheapest investment any nation can make.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in a speech at the launch of the Program “*Acelera, Pernambuco*” (Recife, Pernambuco state, May 13, 2003)

In the two previous chapters, I described in great detail the three constitutive elements of the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil, namely human capital theory, the ideology of meritocracy, and the cultural deficit theory. I made a rather extensive analysis of how these paradigms or meta-narratives are all too often employed in public discourse and in the mainstream media’s representations of education, schools, and the actors involved in the teaching-learning process (principals, teachers, parents, and students). What they have in common is a strong belief that only education can guarantee social mobility and equality within the framework of a capitalist system and a competitive society. The pursuit of good education is therefore seen as a family enterprise and the responsibility of individuals. The sole obligation of the State is to ensure “equality of opportunity”, thus leaving rational individuals to “make an enterprise of

themselves” and reap the benefits earned by their talents and undertakings in a meritocratic contest. Although shown in different guises by different political and social actors, according to their respective interests and class position, these three elements embody the same rhetorical and economic rationality that became hegemonic in education policy formation in Brazil during the 1990s.

In this chapter, I will expand my analysis in order to incorporate the fourth key element that has provided the ideological underpinnings for the dominant discourse around the radical restructuring of education in Brazil over the last two decades. The element examined here is the so-called managerialism, which is associated with the reform of the State and the redefinition of its role within the broader context of globalization, driven by the technological revolution and the capitalist restructuring in the last quarter of the 20th century. For many analysts, the managerial regime is the organizational incarnation of neo-liberalism, which represents an attempt to redefine relations between the State and citizens around a producer/consumer model (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Rosanvallon, 2000; Apple, 2001). When applied to public services, this model presents a series of limitations and pitfalls, as I shall discuss later on. Its core values are embodied in three market concepts: efficiency, competition and choice. I will particularly focus on how managerial ideology has impacted on and colonized the field of education, providing the rationality for the establishment of national testing and performance-based accountability mechanisms as the linchpin of the current education restructuring in Brazil.

The managerial regime seeks to reinvent the public, blurring the line between the state and private sectors (Apple, 2001). Its central assumption asserts that state

regulations distort the “natural” workings of the market, and, hence, that competition will stimulate service providers to meet social and individual needs more efficiently. Relying on the free market metaphor, new managerialism claims to be the very embodiment of public interest. In education, its emergence has not only led to the adoption of private management models, but also to growing interference by business corporations and private foundations, which take control of schools and replace the State in the provision of education. Behind the well-intentioned idea of partnerships, we see the dissemination of initiatives that are more at the service of the commercial and marketing goals of private sponsors than at the service of public education.¹³⁹ A particularly intriguing phenomenon in Brazil is the prominent role played by national media conglomerates in the education field. The two largest media groups in Brazil, *Organizações Globo* and *Grupo Abril*, are behind an extensive agenda of educational projects developed through their private foundations – *Fundação Roberto Marinho* and *Fundação Victor Civita*, respectively.¹⁴⁰ In the past few years, the largest media conglomerate in Spain, the Prisa-Santillana, has joined local groups in the dispute for the emerging Brazilian and Latin American ‘education market’, particularly the textbook market, new education

¹³⁹ Precisely as I am concluding this chapter, in the first week of August 2007, the Government of the Federal District of Brasília launched the School Partners Project, announcing that 700 businesses would “adopt” 350 public schools “to help improve the physical infra-structure and even carry out pedagogical projects.” This was how Governor José Roberto Arruda justified the initiative of going to businesses to solve the problem of the precariousness of school facilities: “We must be humble and recognize that, no matter how highly the government prioritizes education, we will not be able to solve all the problems alone.” Similar initiatives have been springing up throughout Brazil since the mid 1990s. (Adriana Bernardes, “*Parcerias em Educação*” [Partnership for Education], in *Correio Braziliense*, 1st August 2007, p. 24).

¹⁴⁰ Grupo Abril, which already controls approximately one third of the Brazilian textbook market, through the publishing houses Ática and Scipione, has just launched the “*Sistema de Ensino Ser – Formação Inteligente*” [The Being System of Teaching – Intelligent Training], which offers schools a package with full curricular content for all segments of basic education: Pre-school, Basic Education and Secondary Education. In a sense, this initiative is similar to the Core Knowledge project in the US. The basic difference is the salience of Grupo Abril’s commercial interests.

technologies, and teaching materials. I addressed this convergence between media and education in Chapter 8.

In the current Brazilian education debate, new managerialism is premised upon three major assertions: first, that the chief problem in education is not the lack of resources, but rather the inefficient management of education; second, that expenditure per student and teachers' pay have absolutely no correlation with the quality of education; third, that in order to improve public schools, it suffices to create the proper incentives, determine performance targets, assess results and reward or penalize schools and education districts according to their performance. The apologists of managerialism never tire of saying that Brazil does not spend too little money on education; it spends it badly. Therefore, the solution is to replace inefficient management, which leads to the wastage of resources and produces low-quality education, by a more effective managerial method, which, for the same amount of resources, will deliver quality education to society (Ioschpe, 2004; Moraes, 2006; Antunes & Todeschini, 2007).

The Brazilian media have been giving extensive coverage to studies that supposedly demonstrate that “good management in education is worth more than money.”¹⁴¹ This discourse is evidently appealing, especially to the middle-class, which feels that it is being doubly penalized: it bears a heavy tax burden and, if it wants quality education, it has to “buy it” from private providers (Azevedo, 2007). As shown in my analysis in the previous chapter, the middle-class's discourse of self-victimization has enabled it to keep its many privileges unchecked. For instance, all expenses on education

¹⁴¹ This was the main headline of the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo* (25 March 2007), based on a study undertaken by the economist Naércio Menezes Filho, who analyzes data from the National System of Evaluation of Basic Education (SAEB). (See Iwasso, 2007)

are tax deductible,¹⁴² and access to free public universities continues to privilege students from private schools and a middle-class background.

In this chapter, I will present a brief overview of managerialism, establishing, from the outset, a sharp distinction: while in the central countries, it emerged as a response to a perceived ‘crisis of the welfare state’, and, therefore, to “big government”, in peripheral countries its manifestation is directly associated with “small government” and its ineffectiveness as regulating agent and warrantor of the conditions for capitalist accumulation. In order to join the globalized economy, developing countries have come under great pressure from international organizations to promote structural adjustments and adopt a market-friendly “regulatory model”. After all, the confidence of foreign investors has become a matter of survival for any indebted nation that depends on attracting volatile capital. After this brief detour, I will focus on the context of the state reform in Brazil during the 1990s, highlighting its chief elements and implications for the ensuing restructuring of education. Then I will analyze the reconfiguration of the education field by managerial discourse and rationality, which overemphasize measurement, surveillance, and control over schools, teachers and students, leading to the emergence of the so-called “audit culture” (Apple, 2001; Strathern, 1999). Following the same pattern used in the previous chapters, I will provide instances of how managerial discourse is played out in the dominant media’s coverage of education issues. Finally, I

¹⁴² In February 1995, the second month of Cardoso’s government, *Veja* made the following criticism: “The biggest educational news this year is not good news for public education. The government has decided to increase the tax deduction for expenses on children’s education, whereby parents can deduct the amount spent on school fees. This deduction was 400 reais and will now go up to 1,500 reais. This measure appeals to families who have their children in private schools and tighten their budgets to be able to pay the fees. What we still do not know is whether the government’s priority is to give an indirect subsidy to private schools or to *safeguard public education, first and foremost.*” (*Veja*, “*Com a mão na massa*” [“Hands on”], 15 February 1995, p. 23).

examine the four constitutive elements of the dominant education discourse in contemporary Brazil, setting the stage to analyze the new Education Development Plan (PDE), launched in April 2007, which represents, according to my best judgment, the definitive consolidation and triumph of the dominant educational discourse (Chapter 7).

State reform, market, and globalization imperatives

The British researchers John Clarke and Janet Newman (1997), in their groundbreaking book *The Managerial State*, which claims to specifically analyze “the changes in the *British* welfare state”, conceive managerialism “as a cultural formation and a distinctive set of ideologies and practices which form one of the underpinnings of an emergent political settlement” (p. ix). While they acknowledge that the rise of the *managerial* state may be regarded as a “global phenomenon”, they also contend that, “the nature of change in specific nations cannot be understood simply in terms of global forces and trans-national economic retrenchment”. Such a critical stance should prevent us from embracing meta-narratives or grand theories that are prone to portray changes associated with capitalism restructuring and globalization “as cascading down from the global level of new economic pressures to the world of individual experience and action in a way which suggests simple and linear sequences of cause and effect” (p. xi). Clarke and Newman’s approach to analyzing managerialism is a good starting point if we want to fully understand its meaning in the developing world.

In countries of peripheral modernization (Souza, 2003) such as Brazil, the strong appeal of the neo-liberal, managerial discourse comes from a “spurious identification

between responsible fiscal management and liberal economic policies” (Paulani, 2003, pp. 31-32). The successful economic stabilization policies of the Cardoso government, closing a cycle of almost three decades when Brazil was plagued by rampant inflation, helped to give managerial discourse an aura of common sense, turning it into a “self-evident truth”. As the economist Leda Paulani observed, the neo-liberal model won hearts and minds by “managing to imprint its ideas in such a crystallized manner in the minds of the general population that it has become something that is no longer up for discussion” (Paulani [interviewed] in Billi, 2005, p. B-16). Its triumph represents the hegemony of economic rationality, which has crossed over to the social domain and the field of education. (See Chapter 4).

New managerialism is infused with the “there-is-no-alternative” pragmatism embodied by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In Brazil, the inevitability of the changes advocated by the neo-liberal project, and the “technological revolution” as the driving force of globalization, emerge as central elements in the contemporary political thinking of ex-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a distinguished sociologist turned politician. His more recent reassessments and reflections on the prospects for the integration and development of the Third World represent a remarkable departure from his influential formulation on the dependency theory, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Particularly revealing is Cardoso’s closing chapter in *The New Global Economy in the Information Age* (1993), a compelling volume that delves into the ‘information revolution’ underpinning globalization to question whether a national development project still makes sense, and, if so, what the role of the nation-state should be. Cardoso’s rather assertive views about the staggering challenges facing

developing countries in the context of the current global economy, which deny the once available option of a ‘dependent-associated’ development model, are articulated in a passage that is worth quoting in full:

We are dealing, in fact, with a crueler phenomenon: either the South (or a portion of it) joins the democratic-technological-scientific race, invests heavily in R&D, and endures the ‘information economy’ metamorphosis, or it will become unimportant, unexploited, and unexploitable.

So the South is in double jeopardy – seemingly neither able to integrate itself in pursuit of its own best interests, nor to avoid ‘being integrated’ as a servant of the rich economies. Those countries (or part of them) which are unable to repeat the revolution of the contemporary market, will end up in the ‘worst of all possible worlds.’ They will not even be considered worth the trouble of exploitation; they will become inconsequential, of no interest to the developing globalized economy.

On the other hand, the countries of the South that manage to find a way to join the contemporary revolution, even partially, will have another problem to face. They must define how they will integrate themselves (i.e., a selective policy of ‘opening up markets,’ implementing appropriate industrial policies, and education policies that make it possible for the masses to join the contemporary culture, science and technology policies capable of supporting economic growth, etc.) without being swallowed up by the globalization of the world economy. (...)

A future with dignity for the countries of the South will only be achieved through more education, a better state, enhanced productivity from its ‘human capital,’ and a great technological leap forward (information technology, new materials, environmental awareness, and new models of organization). (Cardoso, 1993, pp.156-157)

In this excerpt we can clearly see some of the elements that have featured so prominently in the political discourse of the Third Way: the inexorability of change; a rather conformist stance regarding the “currently dominant neo-liberal form of globalization [seen] as inevitable and irreversible”; a there-is-no-alternative logic that eliminates and discredits any (consideration of) other political alternatives; education touted as a panacea (Fairclough, 2000; Giddens, 1998). For Cardoso, the worst prospect for the Third World is not to cease to be a subject of exploitation, in “a classic relationship of

dependence”, but to be condemned to irrevocable exclusion. Such a somber scenario is drawn from Manuel Castells’ seminal work on globalization.¹⁴³ In a contribution to the same volume, Castells himself contends that, “within the framework of the new information economy, a significant part of the world’s population is shifting from a structural position of exploitation to a structural position of irrelevance” (Castells, 1993, p. 37). He metaphorically describes this downward spiral process triggered by the structural economic crisis of the 1980s, as the ‘*quartenization*’ of the Third World, a fate from which only few large developing countries, such as Brazil, China and India, might manage to escape by making themselves ‘exploitable’ on the global market. The second element in Cardoso’s intellectual outlook on globalization, which seems to emerge from his ongoing conversation with Castells, is a strong belief that the scientific and technical revolution, especially in the area of information technology, is the main driving-force of the emerging global economy.

The overriding influence of the globalization paradigm in Cardoso’s political agenda is witnessed by his government platforms in the two presidential elections he won, which attribute crucial importance to the reform of the State in order to meet the requirements of the globalized economy (Cardoso, 1994 and 1998). In his memoirs *The Art of Politics, the history that I lived*, where he reflects on his experience as President, he reiterates the conviction that “in order to join the globalization process in a more favorable way”, Brazil should abandon the national-developmental project whose foundations were laid by the caudillo Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s, and instead promote a radical restructuring of the State (Cardoso, 2006). And he hastens to clarify: “Not in the

¹⁴³ Particularly remarkable is Castells’ trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (1996).

sense of achieving the ‘minimal state’ of the neo-liberals, neither to maintain big government – although, both on the left and on the right, there were those who wanted that” (p. 448). Cardoso recognizes that, at the beginning of his government, what prevailed was the “preoccupation with privatizations, with breaking state monopolies and with the welfare and tax reforms” (p. 449). But he vigorously disputes the tag of neo-liberal. While he was still President, he declared that he laughed every time he was called a neo-liberal (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2001).

Nevertheless, his government saw the reform of the State as one of its chief missions, prioritizing privatizations, the opening of the economy, implementing deregulation and re-regulation. Managerial discourse is underpinned by three pillars: the economic imperative, technological determinism, and the rhetoric of citizenship (Nóvoa, 2000). Integration, at any price, into a globalized world, and Brazil’s wish to join the club of developed countries were the driving forces of the Cardoso government’s political project. The insertion of the country into the globalized economy was seen as the only way to return to economic growth and find a solution for the impasse of the national development project. The agenda of “social inclusion” would be pushed aside. The fate of the country and the fate of individuals came to depend on factors upon which political actors have little or no agency at all.

As mentioned earlier, in the central countries the emergence of the “managerial state” is connected with the fiscal crisis of the welfare state in the 1970s, which severely undermined the post-war social democratic settlement (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Rosanvallon, 2000). By advocating the dismantling of the welfare state, the main aim of the neo-liberal reaction is to combat big government. The rising cost of welfare policies

is seen as a drain on economic investment and innovation. Hence the priority given to privatization, tax cuts, public spending cuts and redesigning governmental agencies in order to reach the minimal state. In Latin America, on the other hand, the managerial reform did not take on as its main task the dismantling of the welfare state “for the obvious reason that we have not yet achieved it” (Weffort, 1989, p. 108).¹⁴⁴

In Brazil, for instance, it was only with the re-democratization and the 1988 Constitution that basic labor rights were extended to rural workers. Up until then, the social welfare system included only urban workers. The inclusion of domestic workers is even more recent. Thus, although the developmentalist movement has relied heavily upon the support of the State as an agent of industrialization and modernization, it has not advocated welfarism in the social sphere, going only as far as promoting the selective inclusion of certain categories of workers, through the subordination of the unions to the State, generating what came to be called “regulated citizenship” (Santos, 1979). According to observations by a number of analysts, the conservative modernization in Brazil, which within half a century transformed the country from a traditional rural society into the eighth largest capitalist economy in the world, prioritized economic growth and neglected the social dimension (Souza, 2003 and 2006).

However, it would be naïve to circumscribe the ‘success’ of conservative modernization to the economic field. As Weffort (1989) aptly observed, “the economic success of the Brazilian military regime also established the premises for significant cultural and political changes” (p. 91). The foundations of a new model of society and the

¹⁴⁴ “In developing countries, where, in the twentieth century, a developmentalist state emerged instead of a welfare state, the situation was much worse: individual and social rights often remained unprotected, and nepotism and corruption infiltrated the bureaucracy, which was marked by privileges and redundancies.” (Pereira, 1999a, p. 5)

economy were laid under authoritarian rule. After all, “in that period, the capitalist system achieved great popularity, and thus, greater legitimacy much more than at any other time in the Brazil’s history”. Therefore, the most lasting impact of the so-called Brazilian miracle was to have forged “aspects of a capitalist-type economic culture” associated with the emergence of a dynamic urban middle-class, which contributed to the generalization of the “capitalist ethos”, laying the ideological ground for the neo-liberal trend of the 1980s and 1990s. The bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in South America were receptive to the economic restructuring project of the neo-liberal agenda, as the case of Chile, one of the first experiments of this global model clearly demonstrates.

The managerial ideology under neo-liberal leadership reshaped the State in a great many different ways and generated very distinctive state forms in different nations. This variety reflects particular forms of State building, historical developments, and class structures. As Evans (1995) aptly noted, “states are not generic. They vary dramatically in their internal structures and relations to society. Different kinds of State structures create different capacities for action. Structures define the range of roles that the State is capable of playing”. (p. 11) He draws attention to two core functions of the State: promotion and policing. How these roles have been played out in education is a matter of great interest in the light of current trends toward performance-based accountability reforms in Brazil and elsewhere.

In Latin America, the *managerial* state came into being as part of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), led by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The set of macro-economic policies embodied by these programs, which have had significant consequences for education, is often referred to as the ‘*Washington*

Consensus' (Williamson, 1990) (See Chapter 2). It is important to observe that the reform of the State in Latin America took place in the middle of three intertwined crises: the economic crisis, triggered by the foreign debt crisis of the early 1980s, which helped to accelerate the collapse of authoritarian regimes in the entire region; the political crisis inherent to the process of the transition to democracy; and the crisis of the national-developmental model centered on the enterprise-state and based on import substitution. As a corollary to these crises, the bureaucratic system, which had never fully been consolidated and had been plagued by rampant patrimonialism and corruption, collapsed. In the beginning, re-democratization paradoxically exacerbated political clientelism and the greed of "rent seekers". As Clarke and Newman (1997) aptly pointed out, "In the light of contemporary critiques of bureaucracy, it is easy to forget that bureaucracy emerged as a progressive alternative to corrupt and oppressive systems of governance in which patronage, nepotism and corruption were endemic" (p. 5).

In the context of both developed and developing countries, managerialism brought about three major structural changes: a drastic reduction in the size of the State, achieved through privatization and deregulation; the expansion and strengthening of regulatory, surveillance and evaluatory functions; decentralization of policies and devolution of authority, accompanied by the creation of centralized control tools, which was particularly noticeable in the field of education (Whitty *et al*, 1998; Apple, 2001).

The "liberal revolution" led by Margaret Thatcher in Britain served as inspiration. In a tribute to her, upon the announcement of her retirement from public life in the spring of 2002, the influential *Folha de S. Paulo* (2002) devoted an editorial to praise the "values emphasized" by Thatcherism: "privatization, tax cuts, economic stabilization and

budgetary balance”. And it prophesized: “even the left has made concessions in its prescriptions when it is in power. (...) An important part of what has been done around the world inspired by Thatcherism is irreversible”. The rise to power of the PT in Brazil, consummated in that year’s presidential election, would come to confirm this prediction. Surprisingly, the newspaper’s editorial ended with a harsh critique of the social costs of the neo-liberal adjustment:

Thatcherism, however, cannot be dissociated from the idea of social exclusion, an effect that tends to be more pernicious in developing countries, where the economic environment is vastly different from that where the liberal model was forged. The size of the British Welfare State had no parallel in less developed countries. While Great Britain cut the fat, poorer countries cut to the bone. (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2002, p. A2)

Interestingly enough, the editorial makes no mention of the structural adjustment and the reform of the State in Brazil during Cardoso’s government, then in its last year. Neither does it question the high social costs of the neo-liberal policies implemented in Brazil and the rest of Latin America in the previous decade. The non-partisan stance taken by the newspaper with regards to the internal Brazilian scenario indicates a wish to maintain an equidistant position in the context of the then ongoing electoral campaign, which led to a historic victory of the opposition.

Reshaping State and redefining its role in education

The managerial reform in Brazilian public administration was set in motion during Cardoso’s first term in office (1995-1998). The economist Luiz Carlos Bresser

Pereira, who, as Minister of Public Administration and State Reform, was responsible for designing the Master Plan for the Reform of the State Apparatus (Brazil, 1995) and for its implementation, summarizes the managerial paradigm that inspired the process of the restructuring of the Brazilian State in the following general guidelines:

“(1) political decentralization with transference of resources and responsibilities to regional and local political levels; (2) administrative decentralization, through the delegation of authority to public administrators turned into increasingly more autonomous managers; (3) organizations with few hierarchical levels, no longer structured as a pyramid; (4) assumption of limited trust, but not total mistrust by citizens; (5) *a posteriori* control of results, instead of rigid, step-by-step control of administrative processes; and (6) administration based upon meeting the needs of the citizenry” (Pereira, 1999b, p. 119).

The managerial reform of public administration implied, on the one hand, a redefinition of the role of the State and its *modus operandi* and, on the other, the expansion of the possibilities of partnerships with the private sector, through transferring functions and services, which, up until then, had been a state monopoly. The Public-Private Partnerships law (PPP), passed during the Lula government, consolidated the new relationship between the State and the private sector. Another important component of the managerial reform has been the redesign of the State apparatus, where the main innovation was the creation of the so-called “regulating agencies”, thus enhancing the functions of regulation, surveillance and evaluation of public policies. In the last year of the Cardoso government, MEC actually formulated a proposal for the creation of the National Education Agency, an initiative that was eventually aborted. Inspired by the British “regulatory model”, the creation of these agencies in the different economic sectors that are subject to state regulation actually limits the space for public deliberation.

This is done to reduce the degree of uncertainty inherent to the democratic process (Przeworski, 1994).

This perspective is prevalent, for example, in the framing adopted by *Veja*, which has become a bastion of the neo-liberal project in Brazil. In a recent article on a controversy involving the Brazilian Civil Aviation Agency (ANAC), one of the ten regulatory agencies created in the last decade, *Veja* staunchly defends the “regulatory model” created by the Cardoso government, accusing the Lula government of plotting to undermine it in order to reduce the autonomy of the regulatory agencies.

First created in 1997, during Fernando Henrique Cardoso’s government, the agencies’ role is to ensure the proper functioning of strategic sectors of the market, such as the energy and electricity sector, balancing the interests of government, companies and consumers. Due to their independence from the Executive, they have always been targeted by the Workers’ Party. [...] Strong, independent, and technically competent agencies are crucial to attract investments to the country. They function as stability anchors, stimulating competition and protecting private investments from occasional official mood swings. As well as expanding the offer of services and helping to improve them, the agencies ensure that the sectors they regulate, many of which had previously been under state monopoly, practice fair prices to consumers. (Carneiro, 2007, p. 72)

The relations between the State and citizens are redefined around a producer/consumer model. The agencies protect the interests of private investors “against occasional official mood swings”. Reading between the lines, it can be seen that they protect capital from the risks and uncertainties of democracy, preventing voters’ moods from causing changes in the rules of the game when they produce power shifts. This “regulatory model” was put to the test after the PT victory. The independence of regulatory decisions, insulated in technical bodies, supposedly immune to political bargaining, thus follows the imperatives of the globalized economy. The ability of “market agents” to destabilize national

economies in face of the uncertainties generated by electoral processes has been amply demonstrated, as for example, in the case of Brazil during the 2002 presidential campaign. Neo-liberal pundits advocate that a “predictable environment” is the key to economic growth and prosperity. It has therefore become the State’s primary role to remove any hurdles that may inhibit private investment (labor regulations, environmental protection laws etc.). By adopting the regulatory model prescribed by international organizations, Brazil seeks to “face the challenges of globalization and the dynamism of contemporary production conditions” (Cardoso, 2006, p. 456). Thus, Brazil is trying to win the much-needed trust of the “market” by cajoling foreign investors.

The third important change associated with managerial reform took place in human resources management, with the introduction of performance assessments and the adoption of variable pay schemes based on performance and productivity. This policy was implemented in the so-called “public service careers”. In the area of education the strong resistance of labor unions has been able to prevent the implementation of merit-pay mechanisms. There have been many advocates of this policy, especially experts with free access to the dominant media (Ioschpe, 2007a; Castro, 2008). The Cardoso government actually created a Bonus for Teaching Activities (GED), for federal university professors. The Lula government incorporated the bonus into their salary, accepting a demand of university teachers. Paradoxically, proposals for performance-related pay are back on the agenda of MEC, albeit in a camouflaged manner. One of the 28 guidelines of the Target Plan Everyone for Education, launched in April 2007, recommends that all municipal and state systems implement “career, job and pay plans for all education professionals, privileging merit, training and performance

evaluation.”¹⁴⁵ As I show in Chapter 7, merit and performance have become keywords in the new language of the PDE.

The last component of the managerial reform that deserves closer examination is the emphasis given to the modernization of public administration through the incorporation of new technologies and the improvement of information systems (Petrucci & Schwarz, 1999). One of the main pieces of evidence of the ‘success’ of the managerial reform in Brazil, according to its own parameters, has been the fast technological modernization of public administration, which led to the emergence of several different forms of *e-government*. However, the modernization of the State took place in a selective manner (Oliveira, 2003). Some services, which serve the middle-class, have achieved first-world efficiency levels (e.g. electronic income tax system, airport structure etc.). It is undeniably impressive that, in just over one decade, in a period of tight fiscal policies, the Brazilian State was able to incorporate modern information and communication technologies, particularly in the citizen surveillance and support areas, such as budgetary management, people management, tax collection, electoral system¹⁴⁶, and, in the education area, national systems of information and evaluation.

In fact, during the Cardoso government, the creation of a comprehensive education information and evaluation systems was one of the main tools used in the strategy to improve Brazilian education (Souza, 2005a, p. 116). The intensive use of new information technologies expands the Orwellian powers of the State, which is particularly noticeable in the surveillance of educational institutions (Velho, 2007, p. 315). The

¹⁴⁵ Decree no. 6,094, of April 24, 2007.

¹⁴⁶ The use of electronic ballots, ensuring transparency and speedy vote counting, has made the Brazilian electoral system an international model.

emphasis given to evaluation and information tools together with a radical redesign of the INEP, subordinated to MEC, whose mission is to implement the national evaluation systems and to insert Brazil in international projects like the World Education Indicators (WEI) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), both under the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). The Minister of Education in the Cardoso government, Paulo Renato Souza, obsessively pursued a managerial model for education, advocating direct interaction between the state and society, “as can be found in the most advanced democracies in the world (...) explicitly avoiding corporate, party-political or clientelistic mediation” (in Souza, 2005a, p. xxiii). In his opinion, the success and efficacy of social policies in general, and of education policies, in particular, depends on “a solid partnership between government and society”, through the employment of three basic tools: “information, evaluation and communication”. Besides the intensive use of these tools, he attributes the “success we have achieved in the education field” to the adoption of

modern management methods, where strategic planning and teamwork were crucial; the formulation of a coherent proposal underpinned by an adequate diagnosis of the situation; a team that remained cohesive throughout the eight years of the administration; interactive and participative action with various social segments. These elements are characteristic of modern private enterprise management and are undoubtedly unusual in the public management of developing countries. (pp. xxiii-xxiv)

This managerial view of public decision-making represents an important departure from a clientelist and patrimonialist political system (Plank, 2001). Moreover, managerial efficiency has also led to significant rationalization in the use of the limited funds available for education, eliminating many plugholes through which resources allocated

for the maintenance and development of education were being diverted. However, the excessive confidence in technical-managerial solutions and centralized control mechanisms has stumbled upon persistent corruption, which consumes a significant portion of public resources, especially in local government (Oltramari *et al.*, 2004). The investigation carried out by the Office of the General Controller (CGU) demonstrated that “corruption is rooted in local power structures from North to South” (Gobetti, 2006). Nevertheless, critical analyses of the education reforms made by the Cardoso government often tend to overlook that problem, regarding the preoccupation with efficiency in educational management as another manifestation of that administration’s neo-liberal fervor (e.g. Silva & Gentili, 1999; Gentili, 1998).

Lastly, it is important to observe that the technical-managerial discourse is an assemblage of various models of reform and discourses, even though it not difficult to identify the dominant discourse used by international agencies as its matrix. However, the incorporation and re-articulation of the technical managerial discourse in the Brazilian context has produced a hybrid discourse that has co-opted a number of trends of thought, including some from the more progressive camp, which seek to obtain legitimacy by appealing to consensus and emphasizing social mobilization and participation (Souza, 2005). It is, thus, a discourse whose chief component is a strong pragmatism, evident not only in the primacy given to technical-managerial solutions, but also in the ameliorist approach of emulating “what works elsewhere” (Paiva, 1998; Gouvêa, 2003). When he boasts of the achievements of his administration, Souza claims responsibility for formulating of a “truly home-grown strategy for our nation’s education”, while, at the same time, he acknowledges having sought “international inspiration for certain policies”

(Souza, 2005a, p. 200). The dominant media insistently demand that Brazil should emulate successful education reforms from developed countries, instead waste time “trying to reinvent the wheel”.¹⁴⁷

The managerial turn in education policy

As already noted, the restructuring of education in Brazil under the auspices of managerialism is based on the assumption that the fundamental problem is not the lack of resources, but rather, the inequality of public spending on education, and, above all, inefficient management (Ioschpe, 2004). When he became Minister of Education in 1995, after a brief period working at the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), in Washington, the economist Paulo Renato Souza repeatedly expressed his view that “the paramount problem of education [in Brazil] is not the lack of schools or money, but poor distribution of resources. If the resources were used correctly, they would be more than enough to eliminate illiteracy within ten years and create excellent basic education in Brazil” (*Veja*, 1995d, p. 54). In fact, the education policies of the Cardoso government were constructed according to this vision.

The current Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, points precisely to this position to define what he believes to be one of the main differences between the

¹⁴⁷ The two main Brazilian weekly magazines offer two recent examples that are emblematic. In the third week of February 2005, *Veja*'s cover feature had the following headline: “*Veja* has been to South Korea and tells you how we can adopt the educational system that rescued the country from poverty and placed it in the First World”. The extensive article about the “Seven lessons of Korea for Brazil” is fourteen pages long (Weinberg, 2005). In the third week of April 2006, it was *Época*'s turn to publish an article on “countries that did their homework” in terms of educational reform. With the title “*Is it so difficult to copy?*” the magazine underlines: “International examples of success show that for Brazil to succeed, it needs a national educational project – which is not changed with each new administration” (Freitas &

education policies of the Lula government and those of Cardoso's government.

Questioned about the affinities between the PDE and the policies identified with the market-oriented approach, he mentioned as first significant difference,

the insistence of the neo-liberal agenda that the problem is not the level of investment, but bad management. We disagree with this vision. We understand that there are management problems, because some federated bodies [states and municipalities] make high investments in education per student without obtaining compatible results, but we also think that a country as big as Brazil, with the regional inequalities we have, must take the step of spending a higher proportion of its the GNP on education. The first point of disagreement: we need higher investment in education.¹⁴⁸

The rhetoric about education spending has changed significantly during the course of the Lula government. The three ministers of education in this period, Cristovam Buarque, Tarso Genro, and Fernando Haddad, have made public demands for more investment in education. The most vocal of them was Cristovam Buarque, who was even publicly reprimanded by President Lula and was eventually fired from the position at the end of the first year of Lula's first period in office. The attitude of the former Minister of Education in the Cardoso government, Paulo Renato Souza, was markedly different during his eight years in office. In his book *The Managed Revolution* (2005a) he was keen to mention that, although he maintained "good relations with the ministers in the economic area, which were firm, honest and transparent on both sides", he was never seen "arguing publicly with any government ministers". In other words, he never publicly

Nunes, 2006). The article, which is eight pages long, comes with the logo of the magazine's special coverage of the 2006 Elections.

¹⁴⁸ Personal interview, Brasília, DF, June 22, 2007.

demanded more resources for education, which, in his opinion, was equivalent to “playing to the public” (p. 202).

Rhetoric aside, education continues to be subordinated to economic policies and to the fiscal discipline of the structural readjustment. By and large, the macroeconomic policies have not undergone any significant change in the Lula government. The negative reflections on education are noticeable. It suffices to say that it took four years of lengthy negotiations, the entire first term of the Lula government, to obtain approval for the main proposal for the education area: the new Maintenance and Development Fund for Basic Education (FUNDEB). The resistance of the economic areas of the government to this new mechanism aimed at making public education funding more equitable was only overcome when President Lula, after much reluctance, stepped in as magistrate and determined that the Federal Government would provide 10% of FUNDEB’s resources, through progressive contributions, by 2010. Therefore, only in the last year of the current government will the new funding model for basic education be fully in force. The Federal Government will contribute with approximately R\$ 5.5 billion. This amount is insignificant when compared to the huge volume of resources destined, every year, to pay the interest on the public debt. In 2003, the first year of the Lula government, the Brazilian Treasury used R\$ 145.2 billion – equivalent to 9.49% of the GNP – to pay the debt. The figure has remained almost the same up to 2008.

The thesis according to which the problem of Brazilian education is not lack of resources but rather bad management, is fervently repeated by business entrepreneurs. Their main concern is that the unsatisfactory quality of education “will destroy the chances of growth and competitiveness of the country in the new knowledge-based

economy”.¹⁴⁹ Antônio Ermírio de Moraes, the business leader, who writes a weekly column in the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, in one of the most eloquent advocates of the managerial solution to improve education.¹⁵⁰ The young economist Gustavo Ioschpe, author of the award-winning book *A Ignorância Custa um Mundo* [Ignorance Costs a World] (2004), has become one of the main disseminators of managerial thought in Brazil. In a recent article published by *Veja*, he summarizes the ideas of his book and, using international comparisons, he attacks the four myths, which, in his opinion, are the greatest obstacles to identifying the “real problems of education in Brazil”: the myth that teachers are badly paid and, hence, the myth that education will only improve when teachers’ paychecks improve; the myth that the country invests too little in education and, lastly, the myth of the excellence of private schools, which allows the middle-class to sleep peacefully. His conclusion is peremptory: “Brazil will only cease to lag behind in education when it makes a correct diagnosis – and sheds those and other myths that haunt the country’s schools” (Ioschpe, 2007a, p. 99).

Souza recorded the achievements of his administration in a book whose title – *A Revolução Gerenciada* [“The Managed Revolution”] (2005a) – is a statement in its own right about the managerial vision that dominated the restructuring of education carried out during his eight years at the head of MEC. In his preface to the book, ex- President Cardoso claims that the book proves “what I so often said during my presidency: there

¹⁴⁹ *Exame*, one of the main business magazines in Brazil, devoted its cover feature in its edition of 27 September 2006, one week before the presidential elections, to a World Bank study on the quality of education, placing Brazil last of all developing countries. In an alarmist tone, the extensive article warns that, due to the low quality of education, the country might lose the race of competitiveness “in the knowledge society, considered the most advanced stage of capitalism”. The article discusses the declarations of some of Brazil’s most important business leaders, “anxious about the low levels of education in Brazil” (Salomão, 2006). (See Chapter 4).

¹⁵⁰ The articles published in his Sunday column throughout the past fifteen years have recently been published in a book (See Moraes, 2006).

was a silent revolution taking place in Brazilian education.” And he bemoans: “It is a pity that the revolution was silent. If we had been louder and had had the didactic and advertising ability to show and convince people of how much was being done, perhaps the foundations we built would have become more solid in the heart and in the will of Brazilian society so it would be able to defend them more effectively against occasional blows” (Cardoso, in Souza, 2005a, p. xvi). When he listed his government’s achievements in the educational field that he considered “irreversible”, Cardoso stated,

They may invent new samples or universes where to apply the *Provão* [evaluation test instituted in 1996], but it will be difficult to push aside the preoccupation with evaluation, no matter how much horror the corporate harbingers of educational backwardness may have of competition and evaluation. Perhaps we can pay university professors better salaries, but, God willing, not at the cost of leveling decisions that do away with the rungs of work and merit that individuals distinguish themselves by, and which every professor must climb.

There is no doubt that national evaluations, which became the centerpiece of the educational policies of the Cardoso government, are here to stay. Their paramount importance in the Brazilian education agenda follows an international trend a number of authors associate with the emergence of the “Evaluative State” (Neave, 1988; Pedró, 1988) and the “auditing culture” (Apple, 2001; Strathern, 1999). Under the Lula government, the centrality and scope of national evaluations expanded even further, ensuring the “irreversibility of the “evaluative culture” desired by Cardoso (see Antunes & Todeschini, 2007). The expansion of the evaluative role of the central government is a powerful tool to “steer the system at a distance”.

This strategy is consistent with one of the core tenets of new managerialism in education: “decentralization for better learning, centralization for better control”. How

can we decentralize, and, at the same time, bring about the Evaluative State? Recent international trends in education reform policy suggest that, “while devolving managerial and financial responsibility, the central government has maintained a significant measure of control over curriculum content and performance evaluation” (Whitty *et al.* 1998, p. 29). As Bauer (1988) aptly notes, “decentralization of various powers need not imply any reduction of the central political steering power” (pp.25-26). Although policy-makers are no longer so certain that expensive, large-scale evaluation efforts undertaken by prestigious education researchers can provide data on the overall effects of large educational interventions, governments throughout the world continue to support and sponsor this kind of evaluation. Here Brazil has become a paradigmatic case over the last fifteen years. In this thesis I contend that the managerial faith in centralized, national assessment and testing as a tool to spur and manage changes in a highly decentralized education system reached its peak with the PDE, which calls for more national testing and assessment (Chapter 7). One of the measures to be implemented in the forthcoming years is a national evaluation initiative to verify the literacy levels of children from 6 to 8 years old, affectionately denominated *Provinha Brasil* [Little Brazil Test].

Here a caveat is in order: Brazil, strictly speaking, does not have a ‘*national*’ education system. The provision of basic education is under the responsibility of the 26 states, the Federal District and around 5,560 municipalities. The Federal Government, however, does play an important role in developing nationwide policies, implementing certain national programs, and, as determined by a constitutional mandate, providing technical and financial support to offset regional disparities. FUNDEB has expanded the new funding formula, originally adopted during the Cardoso government, which

redistributes money allocated to education on the basis of number of pupils enrolled in municipal schools and state-run schools. As we have seen, over the last decades, evaluation and assessment policies have become the cornerstone of restructuring education in Brazil. National testing gives the impression that the Federal Government has the schools all over the country under its grip and surveillance. This explains its irresistible political appeal.

Reflecting on the American education context, Smith *et al.* (2004) aptly note that assessment policies have great symbolic value because they embody technical rationality and allow politicians “to give people a reassuring impression that they are doing something about the ‘crisis’ that threatens the state or nation” (p. 70). Test scores and comparative data on schools provide tangible evidence that there is a crisis of achievement and accountability, and, more importantly, that more assessment and testing is the only way to deal with the crisis and overcome it. The use of tests as a lever of change feeds the political spectacle, as it fits the media’s penchant for a simple, numerical description of seemingly intractable education problems. On the other hand, professional standards of the validity and reliability of tests and peer review of empirical findings are all too often undermined and sacrificed on the altar of political interests. A good example of this was the sudden decision by MEC to use ENEM to evaluate and rank schools, violating the ends for which this exam was created. The prevalence given to the political spectacle is also illustrated by how hastily national tests results are often published, with no prior revision or interpretation by a panel of experts. Ironically, MEC officials justify such an unorthodox approach, to say the least, as a requirement of transparency and accountability (more on this on Chapter 7).

Decentralization: rationality, opportunities and risks

One of the main components of the Cardoso government's education policy was decentralization. In basic education, strong "municipalization" was observed during this period. In fact, the participation of municipalities in the provision of basic education grew significantly. In 1995 municipal education districts answered for approximately one third of enrollments in elementary education. In 2002, the participation of municipalities had already increased to 63% of enrollments. The international literature on the restructuring of national educational systems in the 1980s and 1990s identifies decentralization and devolution as the driving force of global reforms, associating this tendency with the redefinition of the role of the State (Whitty *et al.*, 1998). Many analysts of the Brazilian educational reforms tend to borrow this criticism without acknowledging that, in the Brazilian and Latin-American context, these were banners in the struggle against authoritarian regimes. In this sense, as Melo (1996) aptly points out, "decentralization was understood as an essential dimension of democratization" (p. 11). Hence, when they attribute the progress of decentralization in the region *exclusively* to the efforts of neo-liberal governments, some authors award them an undeserved victory, and, by doing so, they downplay the role of re-democratization movements (e.g. Silva & Gentili, 1999; Gentili, 1998). Moreover, in the specific case of Brazil, it is important to consider that the provision of compulsory education has historically been the responsibility of states and municipalities.

In the education field, decentralization had at least one virtuous impact: it opened up the space for local innovations, including the Citizen Schools Project in Porto Alegre, which has become an international reference (Gandin, 2002; Gandin & Apple, 2002). However, it also produced harmful effects when it transferred responsibility for the management of public schools to local governments that had neither enough resources to provide quality education nor the management to efficiently administer the available resources. The PDE seeks to remedy this situation by providing additional money and technical assistance to municipalities, through consultants hired by MEC. There are, however, no capacity building strategies in the municipalities.

Those problems are severely aggravated by the perpetuation of a patrimonialist and clientelist political culture that sustains local power, and by the absolute absence of effective accountability mechanisms. As a result of the combination of these factors, corruption continues to drain a significant portion of the scarce resources allocated to education. Scandals involving the diversion of funds from school meals, FUNDEF (until 2006) and other federal education programs have been widely covered by the national media (Oltamari *et al.*, 2004). When questioned about the problem, paradoxically national education officials attribute the rise in the number of complaints about diversion of funds to greater control of the resources, to which the creation of the FUNDEF would supposedly have contributed (Souza, 2005a, p. 202).¹⁵¹

However, this argument is contradicted by the results of audits made by federal control bodies (the Brazilian Court of Accounts – TCU and the Office of the General Controller – CGU) and parliamentary enquiry commissions in the state legislative

¹⁵¹ Personal interview with Paulo Renato Souza, São Paulo, 7 October 2003.

assemblies, which point to an increase in “waste, diversion of funds and corruption”. In a cover feature entitled “*A national scourge*”, *Veja* drew a grim portrait of the administrations of the 5,560 Brazilian municipalities, conservatively estimating that at least 20% of municipal budgets get “burned in the fire of corruption” (Oltramari *et al.*, 2004). Even more distressing is the verification made by the control bodies that,

of all the federal funds allocated to the municipalities, the greatest casualty of the corruption plague is the money from FUNDEF, a fund whose resources are aimed at qualifying primary education teachers, improving their pay and helping to improve schools facilities. And here, the thievery is perfectly shameless. In Cansanção, a municipality with 32,000 people in the interior of the state of Bahia, CGU inspectors discovered that FUNDEF funds were used to pay for the mayor’s personal expenses and to buy a Mitsubishi automobile for the vice-mayor. A training course for the 570 teachers in the municipality was administered by a cereal trading company! On the official receipt for the services rendered, the cereal sellers confirm that they provided services in “*encino*” [NT: “teaching” - the correct spelling is “*ensino*”]. When considering what the municipality actually does with its education funds, it is not surprising that the illiteracy rate in Cansanção is 40% for the population over 15. And there are other signs indicating that [this kind of] abuse is reaching levels never seen before in Brazil. (Oltramari *et al.*, 2004, p. 76)

Faced with this situation, how did the central government react? In the Cardoso government, the rhetoric of social control exerted by local councils created for that end gained currency. Every program financed by federal funds now required the creation of a local council. Councils were established to monitor and control school meals, FUNDEF and the *Bolsa-Escola* [School Grant], among other programs. However, these mechanisms had rather limited efficacy, as they are subordinated to the political control of mayors and have no deliberating prerogatives. Another measure aimed at reducing the diversion of funds was to transfer resources directly to schools, a policy introduced by the

Cardoso government and maintained by the Lula government. Unfortunately, the social organizations at the forefront of the mobilization for more resources for education have not shown the same preoccupation with regards to improving efficiency in the management of the available resources. The emphasis on expenditure efficiency is regarded as part and parcel of the neo-liberal agenda, and is, therefore, summarily rejected. Nevertheless, studies on alternatives to increase public investment in education point to a rather unpromising scenario in the next few years, unless a vigorous resurgence of economic growth takes place. In this context, sparing and socially responsible use of the scarce existing resources will be crucial if we wish to make any progress to improve the quality and equity of public education.

Centralized control: steerage at a distance

Strengthening the centralized mechanisms of surveillance and control is one of the chief components of the new managerial model in education. During the Cardoso government, MEC prioritized the setting up of a sophisticated system of information and evaluation. Paulo Renato Souza (2005a), points to this as one of the main achievements of his administration: “The production of the system of information and evaluation, and the publication of its results are uniquely up-to-date and transparent for countries at our level of development” (p. 116).

The excesses committed in the name of technical and managerial efficiency have caused a number of fiascos in the Lula government. In the second semester of 2004, the Federal Government found itself on the receiving end of a wave of criticism of the *Bolsa-*

Família [Family Grants] program, the flagship of the government's social policies. The attacks unleashed in an editorial by the journalist Ali Kamel, titled *Bolsa Família, sem escola* ["Family grants, without schools"] (*O Globo*, 7 September 2004), primarily criticizing the government's failure to make effective checks as to whether the conditions to participate in the program were being met – chiefly, the requirement that the families receiving the benefit should keep their children in school. Kamel (2004a) accused the government of neglecting to control school attendance, the only way, in his opinion, of justifying the monthly stipend given to families living below the poverty line. This attack, launched less than one month before the municipal elections, had huge political repercussions, especially after it was aired on the country's main television news broadcasts.¹⁵² Two weeks later, Kamel (2004b) would attack again, this time questioning the effectiveness of the *Bolsa-Família* to combat poverty and criticizing its target of benefiting 11.2 million families, totaling 52 million people:

The government says that it is considering other criteria, besides income. It is a pity that, by this time, the government will have spent R\$ 9.5 billion on the program, most of which could be used to make a revolution in education, by more than doubling the budget for the sector. Education, I repeat, is the only thing that positively transforms the life of countries, families and citizens.

Two central elements of the dominant educational discourse are echoed in Kamel's criticism: the stress, albeit theoretical, on education as the only possible way out of

¹⁵² At that time, Ali Kamel accumulated the posts of columnist in the newspaper *O Globo* and Director-General of the Journalism Department of Globo Television Network, the main broadcasting network in Brazil. His political positions, therefore, influence the themes that get coverage and the editorial line of the company. Kamel has also played a crucial role in framing the debate on race-based affirmative action over the last few years in Brazil. He even authored a book-manifesto against the adoption of this policy, entitled *Não somos racistas: uma reação aos que querem nos transformar numa nação bicolor* ["We Are Not Racists: a reaction to those who want to turn us into a bi-colored nation"] (Kamel, 2006).

poverty, and, paradoxically, on the cultural deficit of poor families, which prevents them from recognizing the value of education and taking responsibility for keeping their children in school. According to his vision, which clearly expresses the emerging neoconservative social thinking in Brazil, the poor are second-class citizens – or sub-citizens (Souza, 2006) – who must be constantly oversight and tutored by the State.¹⁵³ Hence Kamel's insistent demands that the Federal Government should effectively monitor school attendance and the other conditions to take part in the *Bolsa-Família*.

In the face of the unabated criticism, the then Minister of Education, Tarso Genro, hastily announced the intention of implementing a sophisticated system of electronic control of attendance in schools throughout Brazil. The announcement of the initiative served to placate media criticism. Thus was born the *Projeto Presença* [Attendance Project], through which MEC would create a single national register of students, distribute magnetic cards and install digital optical readers in every school in the country to control attendance. They actually implemented a pilot project in public schools in the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre (RS). This project was short-lived, and the electronic control of school attendance was abandoned without much repercussion. However, the intention of establishing a centralized system has not been totally abandoned. One idea that is already at an advanced stage of implementation is the creation of the national register for the approximately 55 million students enrolled in primary education – an initiative which has had three provisional names: *Censo Escolar em Tempo Real* [School Census in Real Time], *CensoWeb* [Webcensus] and, finally, *@ducacenso*. More

¹⁵³ For a counterargument and refutation of the conservative thesis about the counterproductive and pernicious effects of redistributive policies, see Hirschman (1992) and Suplicy (2002).

realistically, the government has included in the PDE the goal of delivering electricity, by 2009, to approximately 18 thousand rural schools that still do not have this basic service.

Managerial discourse is strongly characterized by a reverence for technological solutions. In the past ten years, the promise to provide students in every public school in Brazil with computers has remained at the top of the government's list of priorities, constituting one of the goals of the PDE. The Lula government has joined the project "One Laptop per Child" (OLPC), led by American researcher Nicholas Negroponte, from MIT, whose goal is to develop a hundred-dollar laptop computer to be used in schools throughout the world. The Brazilian government has already announced that it intends to distribute the computer to 30 million students in the public education system. The first prototypes are already being tested in a number of public schools. While the "technological revolution" remains very distant from the reality of most classrooms in Brazil, MEC and institutions connected to it now use state-of-the-art equipment. Up until now, new information technologies have been more often employed in the surveillance and control of schools than in teaching and learning activities.

What is the legacy of the managerial reforms of the last decade? The development of centralized information and evaluation systems, the announcement of plans that mark "the beginning of a new century for education in Brazil", and the reiterated promises of computerization of public schools throughout the country paradoxically coming together with situations where even the most basic resources are lacking. A report broadcast by Globo Television, on *Jornal Nacional* on June 4, 2007, illustrates the abysmal distance between the official discourse and the reality of many Brazilian schools. The televised

images have a power that is hard to translate into words. Still, it is worth taking the risk of producing a pale caricature of what was shown in that edition of *Jornal Nacional*.

| IMAGES | LANGUAGE |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Close-up of the anchorman in the studios of JN</i></p> <p><i>External image of the canvas-built “facility”, in the middle of a field, surrounded by barbed wire.</i> [Map indicating the location of the municipality]</p> <p><i>The camera approaches and shows a group of pupils in a classroom. Shot of the teacher writing the name of the school on the blackboard.</i></p> | <p>[ANCHOR: William Bonner] Tonight’s edition of <i>Jornal Nacional</i> starts with the absurd situation that children in the west of Bahia are faced with as they try to attend classes in primary school. This report is by Dartagnan Nascimento and Giacomo Mancini.</p> <p>[NARRATOR: Voice over] In the distance, you see a cowshed. But the barbed wire fence is actually protecting a school. The Castro Alves municipal school is in the Água Boa district in the municipality of Riachão das Neves, in the west of the state of Bahia. Here, it is the sun that determines how the ten pupils in the first, second and third grades place their desks.</p> <p>The school doesn’t even have a bowl of water for the students. The teacher earns less than one minimum salary, and she is not complaining. She is worried that the children might be left with no school to go to. And, like any teacher for whom teaching is a mission, she has dreams.</p> <p>[SOUNDBITE 1: Arlete Oliveira, teacher] - If we at least had a little house, with a door, tiles. At least that [...] to teach.</p> |
| <p><i>Close-up of the reporter</i></p> <p><i>Shot of a pick up truck, with the back full of students, driving along a dusty dirt road</i></p> | <p>[REPORTER – Giacomo Mancini] As there are no walls, any movement outside draws the students’ attention.</p> <p>[SOUNDBITE 2: Arlete Oliveira, teacher] - They stop to talk about everything that happens outside.</p> <p>[NARRATOR – Voice-over] In the same municipality, forty km down the road, a pick-up truck transports teenagers riding unsecured in the back. And what’s worse: the driver is under legal driving age and has no license.</p> |

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| <p><i>Close-up of the driver at the wheel (out-of-focus shot)</i></p> | <p>[SOUNDBITE 3: Exchange between the Reporter and the Driver]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How old are you? - Me? Seventeen. - Aren't you afraid of having an accident and injuring the children in the back? - No. - How long have you been doing this? - [I started] this year. |
| <p><i>A distant shot of a yellow canopy under a tree. The camera approaches, showing a group of students</i></p> | <p>[NARRATOR: voice-over]</p> <p>The same pick up truck has just dropped the children off at the other school. That's right! Under this canvas canopy, in the shade of the <i>jatobá</i> tree, there is another municipal school: the Herculano Faria School.</p> |
| <p><i>Close up of the reporter with the "canvas school" in the background</i></p> | <p>[REPORTER: Giacomo Mancini]</p> <p>The school was set up in 1996 and has always functioned under the trees. The teacher, Elizângela, has been here for three years. She teaches 1st to 4th grade children.</p> |
| <p><i>Shot of the teacher, sitting, correcting her pupils' work</i></p> | <p>She has no desk and no proper student register. She records attendance in a notebook. And the students' work is corrected here, on the only bench left, and with her back to the students.</p> |
| <p><i>Shot of children sitting at desks and on tree stumps</i></p> | <p>The nine children who arrive first take the desks. Those who arrive later, including the pre-school children, have to sit on tree stumps, or share improvised benches. They write as well as they can. No one really learns as they are supposed to.</p> |
| <p><i>Close-up</i></p> | <p>[SOUNDBITE 4: Daniela Gomes, student]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It's too hot. You have a headache by the time you leave. You get earache because of the canvas roof. <p>[REPORTER]: Do you think you can study properly like that, under a canvas roof?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No! In a school it would be better. <p>[NARRATOR: voice-over]</p> <p>For the teacher, the saddest thing is not even having a wall where to put up her pupils' work.</p> |
| <p><i>Close-up</i></p> | <p>[SOUNDBITE 5: Elizângela Santos, teacher]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All schools here have [walls]. We are always under the |

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|---|--|
| <p><i>Shot of a pile of new desks.</i> <i>Shot of the municipal Secretary of Education at his desk in his office</i></p> | <p>canvas roof.</p> <p>[NARRATOR: voice-over] The municipality even has a factory that makes desks, but they have not been delivered to the children in the canvas schools. The head of the Municipal Education Department said that, when he took over his position, the two schools were already like that.</p> |
| <p><i>Close up of the Secretary of Education, with a tense expression on his face, being questioned by the reporter, who is not shown in this take.</i></p> | <p>[SOUNDBITE 6: Exchange between the reporter and the Secretary of Education] [SECRETARY]: There is a school. There just isn't a building. [REPORTER]: There is no school. There is a canvas roof. [SECRETARY]: There is a school there. There it is... it's working... [REPORTER]: Do you consider that a school? [SECRETARY]: I do because there are students there. There is a human being there. What are lacking are the physical facilities. What's lacking is the physical facilities. [REPORTER]: Do you honestly consider that a school? [SECRETARY]: I think there is a school there. Someone... There is a teacher and there are students there. It does not have the physical facility.</p> |
| <p><i>Frozen, juxtaposed shots of the two "canvas schools"</i></p> | <p>[NARRATOR: voice-over] He promises to have the classroom built by the end of the year, but until then, the children will continue under the canvas roof, under the hot sunshine, with no right to quality education.</p> |
| <p><i>Image of the anchor in the studio</i></p> | <p>[ANCHOR: William Bonner] The two spaces under canvas roofs are included in the Money Directly to Schools Program, the PDDE, of the Federal Government. The Municipal Secretary of Education of Riachão das Neves has confirmed that he has received the funds. He said that he bought equipment like a refrigerator and a stove, which will be put to use as soon as the walls are built.</p> |

By all accounts, it is remarkably unusual for a story like this to be aired on a prime time newscast on Brazilian television. Firstly it was very long (4'30'') for the standards of Brazilian TV news reports. But what is most unusual about this broadcast is

the critical framing and the focus given to the statements of teacher and students, whose voices are normally absent from the dominant media's coverage of education issues (ANDI, 2000 and 2005). Another aspect that is unusual in this piece is the reporter's incisiveness and insistence when he questions the Municipal Secretary of Education, who is held accountable for the existence of the "canvas schools." No mention is made, however, of the Mayor, the elected political authority that should actually be held accountable. At the end of the piece, the *JN* anchor informs viewers that the two "canvas spaces" shown are included in the Money Directly to Schools Program (PDDE), instituted by Cardoso's administration and maintained by the Lula government. The anchor is thus suggesting the co-accountability of the Federal Government, which, like the Municipal Secretary of Education, supposedly considers improvised facilities that "seem more like a cowshed" to be real schools, so much so, that it provides them with funding. Curiously, *Globo TV* does not make any connections between the "grim picture of education" in the backwoods of the country, and the PDE, announced a week earlier by President Lula, promising the start of "a new century for education in Brazil".

This picture, which is at odds with the official discourse, is part of the legacy of over one decade of managerial reforms. The responsibility for the existence, in the interior of the country, of students and teachers being subjected to such degrading conditions, lies with local governments.¹⁵⁴ In the Brazilian federative regime, the central government is responsible for allocating resources to correct regional disparities and for controlling educational results via national tests. It is rather ironic that, toward the end of the Cardoso government, the liberal media hailed the success of this administration's

¹⁵⁴ The city of São Paulo, the country's financial center, still has the so-called "tin schools", which are precarious and improvised facilities which are covered by zinc roofs.

education reforms, subscribing to the thesis of the “silent revolution” claimed by the former President himself (Souza, 2005a). Among the measures that contributed to produce this revolution, *Veja* focused on the rationalization of spending, particularly highlighting the following guideline from MEC: “Not a single cent shall be invested in building schools because it is not schools that are lacking in Brazilian education” (Amaral, 2001). In 2007, already in the second term of Lula government, in the interior of the state of Bahia, there are schools that do not even have a building, as shown in the *JN* news piece, in a rare example of non-official choice of material.¹⁵⁵

Simple, cheap and efficient: the ‘good school’ in the view of the dominant media

The main elements of the managerial discourse have featured prominently in the Brazilian media coverage of education issues over the last fifteen years. Some of the most influential media outlets in Brazil have undertaken an active, unabashed stance, advocating that efficient management is all that is needed to fix failing public schools, relying on the authority of *experts* to prove that “good management counts more than the bulk of money spent on education”. National evaluations and exams (ENEM, SAEB and *Prova Brasil*) provide empirical evidence, widely disseminated by the national media, supposedly proving that the quality of education does not depend on the amount of resources allocated schools or teachers’ pay, but rather, on managerial efficiency, the

¹⁵⁵ Lack of teachers, the precariousness of school facilities and teachers’ strikes in various states were frequently portrayed and discussed in the national media in the first semester of 2007. In the broadcast of April 24, *JN* did a piece on the closure of approximately 200 schools in the state of Pernambuco, due to serious structural problems. The state government took this extreme measure after the roofs of five schools collapsed. (*TV Globo, JN* – April 24, 2007).

leadership of schools' principals, teachers' commitment and effort, and the participation of families and the community. According to the framing of the dominant media, the *good school* has three basic characteristics: it is simple, cheap and efficient.

In 2005, the Lula government implemented two initiatives that, albeit unintentionally, decisively contributed to legitimize this discourse: it instituted universal testing in public schools that provide basic education (*Prova Brasil*) and started to publish the average scores obtained by each school in the ENEM. Hence, the Brazil suddenly had two indicators to rank public and private schools. This had already started to happen in universities in 1996, when the Cardoso government created the National University Exam (*Provão*), replaced, in 2004, by the National Students' Exam (ENADE), the main tool of the new National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education (SINAES). The innovations of the Lula government in the field of education evaluation do not stop there. With the launch of the PDE, in April 2007, the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) was created, combining the results of the national evaluations with promotion rates. The IDEB would soon become the official indicator used to compare and rank state and municipal education districts and schools. The PDE definitively ushers Brazil into the era of performance-based accountability policies.

The national tests have been more than instrumental to legitimize the education system as a meritocratic system (see Chapter 5). The students who obtain the best results in Brazil are celebrated by the national media as "champions" and "heroes" – living proof that individual effort pays off. The schools that stand out in the national evaluations are also the object of great attention from the national media. Schools' performances in the ENEM and the *Prova Brasil* are used by the media as parameters to establish the

national, state, and municipal ranking. Schools' individual results are published for public consultation on MEC and INEP websites..¹⁵⁶ MEC officials do not admit the intention of ranking schools, arguing that it is Lula government educational policy to give full transparency to all information about schools' performances, as a way of promoting accountability (see Chapter 7). By using a simple 0 to 10 scale, IDEB made it even easier to compare and rank schools and the state- and municipal education systems. It encourages the political spectacle (Smith *et al.*, 2004).

The wide coverage given by the national media to the results of national tests and to IDEB ranking invariably highlights two characteristics shared by the highest-performing schools: first, they deal with the problems of limited resources and the precariousness of the physical facilities and equipment that most public schools have to cope with; second, good performance is a result of the combination of three factors: the principals' leadership, good school management and the involvement of families and the community. A recent joint study by MEC and UNICEF, involving 33 schools that obtained grades above the national average in the *Prova Brasil*, identified these as determinants of the students' good performance (INEP, 2006).

Veja has been particularly vehement, declaring that, "despite their precarious material conditions", the public schools that follow this prescription "can offer high quality education." The publication of a research study commissioned by MEC and carried out by the Carlos Chagas Foundation, based on the 1999 SAEB results, led *Veja* to publish an article titled "*Viva a periferia*"¹⁵⁷ [Long live the outskirts], with a catchy

¹⁵⁶ Their respective Internet websites are: www.mec.gov.br and www.inep.gov.br.

¹⁵⁷ In the Brazilian context, the term "*periferia*" designates underprivileged communities in the poverty belts around big cities.

headline: “A study by MEC shows that there are poor schools offering high quality education”. Indeed, “excellent news for those who go to poor schools with no classrooms, no computers and sometimes without even a telephone line” (Weinberg, 2001a). Ten public schools were chosen, which function “as lonely oases in the middle of the poverty belt” of large Brazilian cities and which have done exceptionally well in the SAEB. “These schools are reassuring examples in face of the limitations of public education”, commemorated Paulo Renato Souza, then Minister of Education. The framing of the article adopts managerial discourse, pointing to good management as the solution for the quality deficit in public education. After all, the study supposedly proves that poor schools can obtain “even better results than rich institutions that want for nothing”. During the period studied, the dominant media’s representation of the ‘good school’ invariably emphasized the “simple, cheap and efficient” (Mizuta, 2005; Paiva, 1998, Corrêa, 1996).

Another illustrative example of the prevalence of managerial discourse in the media’s coverage of education appeared in the highly regarded Sunday edition of the *O Estado de S. Paulo* on March 25, 2007, under the title: “Good management in education is worth more than money, says a study”. The article, occupying a whole page in the main section of the newspaper, discusses the results of the study “Determinants of School Performance in Brazil”, by the economist Naércio Menezes Filho, who compared performances in the national tests (SAEB and *Prova Brasil*) with the municipalities’ education budget to conclude that there is no correlation between the estimated expenditure per student/year and the scores obtained in the standardized tests. Another conclusion of the study that defies common sense is the irrelevance of class size for

students' performance. Besides failing to see any correlation there, Menezes Filho holds that it is the number of hours students spend in the classroom, rather than class size, which counts. The bias in favor of managerial discourse is evident in the framing the newspaper adopts:

Good management of school resources makes more difference for students' performance than merely investing a lot of money. This statement, obvious to economists and managers, but still taboo in the education sector because it involves concepts like targets, objectives, evaluation and results, is one of the main conclusions of a pioneering study based on data from the National System of Evaluation of Basic Education (SAEB) and from the *Prova Brasil*, applied by the Ministry of Education. (Iwasso, 2007, p. A26)

What goes unsaid is the well-known discrepancy between the resources allocated to education and the amount effectively invested in the sector. The absence of reliable information on education expenditure is actually acknowledged by MEC, which, in order to fill this gap, assigned to INEP the task of creating an Information System on Public Budgets in Education (SIOPE), currently in implementation. This author is quoted, warning that the conclusions must be taken cautiously: "It is evident that money is important, but differences in management and how funds are allocated, are more important to explain the better results than merely the amount of resources invested". The study did not, however, investigate how the allocation of resources is made and was based solely on the comparison between the funds available and the performance in the *Prova Brasil*. The article uses the authorized opinion of several experts to corroborate the preferred framing, according to which "good management, rather than a bigger budget, is what determines good grades".

It is interesting to note that this article was published while MEC was elaborating the PDE, which would be officially launched one month later. There is a remarkable convergence between the “determinants of school performance” approach, based on the empirical evidence produced by the study, and the strategies to be adopted by the PDE. The alleged resistance of educators to concepts like “targets, objectives, evaluations, and results” is confronted with empirical data that supposedly prove the importance of good management. According to Iona Becskeházy, executive director of the Lemann Foundation, “the educators’ milieu still rejects the vision that education is a service that must be accountable for its results and be managed professionally”. The absence of any dissenting voices gives the impression of the existence of a broad consensus on what should be done and how to improve public education. This is the political milieu where the PDE establishes itself as “everyone for education”.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined in depth how the new managerialism has in so many ways, affected the restructuring of the Brazilian state in the era of globalization, especially in terms of the reconfiguration of its role in education. The rational/technical character of managerial knowledge makes the cherished promise of resolving the seemingly intractable problems faced by public schools. The diagnosis according to which the quality and equity deficit in public education is the product of inefficient management, rather than of insufficient funding, has conquered the status of common sense and is demonstrated by empirical evidence provided by the national evaluations.

The solution proposed by the managerial regime, based on private management models, is simple: it suffices to define targets, create incentives and demand results. Quantitative and evaluative managerialism technologies thus provide the leverage to boost systemic changes in education. The State's new role in education is twofold: auditing and policing schools and their agents (principals, teachers, parents, and students) and using national testing as its main tool.

One inescapable contradiction of the managerial project must have become apparent: the rhetoric of the autonomy of schools, the principal's leadership, and the participation of family and community which dominates the current restructuring of education, is at odds with the implementation of tighter control and accountability mechanisms that end up curtailing school autonomy and any discretion that principals and teachers may still retain. Even basic school responsibilities, like controlling students' attendance, educational monitoring, and the evaluation of students' progress are being hijacked and replaced by centralized information and evaluation systems. National guidelines and parameters emphasize the tendency toward a national curriculum (more on this on Chapter 8). Comparative school-by-school data have become, over the last three years, the centerpiece of the national education agenda. The managerial turn toward a performance-based accountability policy was effected with the PDE, which I shall discuss in the next chapter.

In the three previous chapters, I presented an extensive historical and sociological analysis of the formation of the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil, identifying its main elements and ideological underpinnings. In order to reconstitute the course followed by the main theoretical and political trends that converged to form this

hegemonic discourse, I have used my own professional experience of involvement in education policy formation since 1995 and an extensive review of the literature produced in Brazil and elsewhere on education reforms of the past two decades. Last but not least, I made a critical analysis of the national media coverage of education issues to show its increasing involvement in educational reforms and, also to illustrate the pervasive presence of the constitutive elements of the dominant discourse in the “preferred framing” of educational issues. These elements – human capital theory, the ideology of meritocracy, cultural deficit theory, and managerialism – appear veiled in the same economic rationality that lies at the heart of neo-liberalism. The dominant media’s educational discourse appeals to common sense, claiming to manifest *the* “consensus” on what must be done in education. In the next chapter, I contend that the PDE has embodied this consensus, developing the dominant educational discourse into policy. As the current Minister of Education rightly put it, “the PDE represents a new paradigm in the history of Brazilian education”. I hope to provide compelling evidence that this “*new paradigm*” fits into the performance-based accountability model, a global reform which emerged in developed countries two decades ago.

CHAPTER 7 – EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN: ENACTING THE DOMINANT EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE INTO NATIONAL POLICY

I am announcing it [the PDE] as the most extensive plan that has ever been designed in Brazil to improve the quality of the public system and to promote the opening of equal opportunities in education. In it I see the beginning of a new century of education in Brazil. A century which will ensure the primacy of talent over social origin and the prevalence of merit over family wealth. A century of an elite in terms of competence and knowledge, and not just an elite from the cradle and with a surname.

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

(Speech on the launching of the PDE – Brasília, DF – 24 April 2007)

I believe that the PDE represents a new paradigm in the history of Brazilian education. I believe that there is a pre- and post- PDE, and I do not believe that it is a program that dialogues with this [neo-liberal] agenda in the way certain critics say it is.

Fernando Haddad, Minister of Education

(Personal Interview – Brasília, DF – 22 June 2007)

The solution for Brazilian education is for it to be guided by business logic as it is necessary for it to have a logic of results.

Viviane Senna, Ayrton Senna Institute and the Everyone for Education Movement

(in *Folha de S. Paulo* – 28 June 2008, p. C1)

In the previous three chapters, I have examined the genealogy of the emerging dominant educational discourse in Brazil during the last two decades, highlighting the interplay, interactions, and contradictions between global hegemonic forces and the mediating practices of local actors in shaping national education policies. Analyzing a broad range of educational issues, I attempted to demonstrate the pivotal role played by the Brazilian national media in forging a new consensus in education, which naturalizes market solutions by appealing to common sense. As education is increasingly framed in terms of economic and market rationality, media framings have powerful, conservative implications for policies. Under the logic of the free market, schools are seen as factories

producing “products” of low quality, which undermines Brazil’s prospects in the global economy of the 21st century. The market metaphor brings to the forefront the idea that only competition between schools will spur systemic changes and ensure the quality of education. National evaluations have become the chief educational policy in Brazil over the last years, and the Lula government has gone a step further by establishing nationwide performance rankings for public and private schools. The belief behind this initiative is that well-informed parents will compare schools and make rational choices so that market forces and competition will improve the overall quality of education. Interestingly enough, such a major breakthrough toward a business-driven momentum in education policy has materialized under the leadership of a supposedly progressive government, committed to social justice and educational equality.

In this chapter, I analyze the Lula government’s Education Development Plan, which I shall refer to by its Portuguese acronym PDE. I contend that this all-encompassing policy allows us to closely examine the consolidation of a radical shift in the national educational agenda led by an administration that has attempted to gain political legitimacy and claim leadership over education reforms by aligning its new policy directions with global hegemonic models. By incorporating performance-based accountability mechanisms into the new set of national policies, the Lula government has appropriated and reasserted the educational restructuring agenda introduced by the Cardoso government, as part and parcel of the neo-liberal structural adjustment. The analysis developed in this chapter employs the critical framework assembled in the previous chapters, illustrating the dialectic interactions between the dominant media’s frames and education policy decision making.

In terms of elementary education, the Lula administration was effectively inaugurated on April 24, 2007, with the launching of the PDE. This deliberately provocative claim is corroborated by the grandiloquent statements quoted above by President Lula and his Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad. While disregarding their rhetorical overload – a salient feature of present day political discourse –, the paramount importance of this sweeping initiative as a *defining moment* of the current national educational agenda is undeniable. Actually, as I analyze in this chapter, the PDE consolidates a major turn in the Lula government’s education policy toward a performance-based accountability system. Furthermore, I contend that it embodies and brings into national policies a forged *new consensus* that was informed by and built upon the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil, whose major features and ideological underpinnings I have examined at length in previous chapters.

This upfront assertion is supported by the overwhelmingly favorable coverage and nearly unanimous enthusiastic endorsement granted to the PDE by the mainstream media, economists, education experts, politicians, business leaders, and public opinion shapers. Conversely, dissenting voices have been muted or largely dismissed in the public sphere.¹⁵⁸ Whether this plan will become a landmark of a new era in the long history of Brazilian education’s unfulfilled promises (Plank, 2001) is something that will only be answered in the coming years. There is at least a good reason to be very cautious and skeptical about the predictions of success for PDE: the widespread support of its adoption

¹⁵⁸ A rare critique of the treatment given out by the dominant media to the dissonant voices appeared in the Sunday column of the ombudsman of the *Folha de S. Paulo*, Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva. When analyzing the coverage that the *Folha* gave the teachers’ strike in the state of São Paulo, he concluded: “The *Folha* has treated the public school teachers who have been on strike in São Paulo for three weeks [in June 2008] with no good will at all. It has taken an editorial position against the strike, published aggressive columns against them, and, in the news reports, treated the subject as another obstruction to the chaotic traffic in the city rather than a serious public policy problem” (Lins da Silva, 2008, p. A6).

as the key education policy of Lula government's second term contrasts with the disappointing results of assessment and accountability-based reforms in other nations, where this "new paradigm" has been dominant for many decades (Linn, 2000).

In the contemporary age of the *mediatization* of politics and policy formation, it has become a common practice of governments, regardless of their ideology, to take a set of policies and projects already in place or being implemented, repack them, put on a new label, and resell them to public opinion as a brand new initiative. This advertising strategy, which mimics business corporation models, feeds the political spectacle (Fairclough, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2004). The PDE's assemblage followed this pattern of public policy formation, which has spread to all government areas during the Lula government.¹⁵⁹ This plan includes a set of 47 programs from pre-school to post-graduation. The component to be analyzed most closely here is the "Everyone for Education" Plan of Goals, which established a set of 28 directives and fixed performance targets for the state and municipal education systems. The states and municipalities that voluntarily join this plan may receive a supplementary budget and technical assistance from the Federal Government.

The establishment of performance targets linked to national standardized tests and the implementation of reward and accountability schemes are at the heart of the PDE.

¹⁵⁹ Certainly no other government has been more active in promoting national conferences in order to elaborate sectorial plans in the recent history of Brazil. This is partly explained by the importance which the PT gives to social participation in the formulation of public policy. Given the practical difficulty of reproducing on a national level the experience of participatory budget process, which has been developed in local administrations such as Porto Alegre, the Lula government has chosen to organize national conferences in various areas of public policy (human rights, the environment, culture, health, education, science and technology, etc.). Oddly enough, such a pattern was not followed in the elaboration of the PDE, which involved a small group of experts gathered around the Minister of Education himself. A National Conference of Education promoted by MEC took place in the first semester of 2008, when this policy had already been consolidated and was merely used to attend the previous demands of the teachers unions.

This policy has embraced and further extended the technical and managerial approach for school reform articulated during the Cardoso administration, which relied heavily on centralized national evaluation and data management to spur changes and ensure education quality. Not surprisingly, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, former number two at MEC during the Cardoso administration and current Secretary of Education of São Paulo state, welcomed the new plan, stating that she was very relieved “to see education back on track” (in Weinberg [interview], 2008, p.13).¹⁶⁰

The analysis developed here is grounded on a array of public statements, policy texts, promotional materials, articles featured in national media outlets (news stories, op-eds, editorials etc.), and personal interviews with two key visionary policy-makers of this policy: the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, and the head of INEP, economist Reynaldo Fernandes, who masterminded the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), a yardstick specially designed to set up measurable targets and gauge schools’ performance over a period of time (Fernandes, 2007).¹⁶¹

In this chapter, I characterize the political milieu within which this policy was enacted as the embodiment of the main elements that form contemporary dominant

¹⁶⁰ The ex-Minister of Education in the Cardoso government, Paulo Renato Souza, who, as a federal representative, was one of the main critics of the Lula government, became equally favorable to the PDE: “The initiative is positive and should be celebrated as an initial attempt of the present government to take a clear direction in its educational policy. What is more important is that for the first time the present government has decided that basic education will be its priority. This should be commemorated” (Souza, 2007).

¹⁶¹ The PDE was initially launched without a workable policy document or at least a blueprint presenting its epistemological and theoretical foundations, premises, strategies, targets and so on. This gap would only be filled at the end of 2007, when the document “*O Plano de Desenvolvimento da Educação: Razões, Princípios e Programas*” [The Education Development Plan: Reasons, Principles and Programs] signed by the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, began to be circulated internally at MEC. The text was later published in the form of a brochure as an institutional MEC text, with a presentation by President Lula. MEC produced an enormous quantity of promotional material to publicize the PDE, among which there is the leaflet “*Compromisso Todos pela Educação Passo-a-Passo*” [Step-by-step Commitment of Everyone for Education” (MEC, 2007b).

educational discourse in Brazil. In order to gain breadth and depth in my analysis, I approach the PDE from an international perspective, linking it to global educational reforms. I contend that instead of bringing to the forefront a “new paradigm” – as the current Minister of Education claims – the PDE has continued and deepened the education restructuring initiated during the Cardoso administration. Next, I contextualize its materialization as a by-product of a catalytic, emerging *new education consensus*, which has been played out in the mainstream media and is epitomized by the powerful business-driven movement *Todos pela Educação* – TPE (Everyone for Education). I then turn to dissenting voices challenging the PDE’s main assumptions, even though the Lula government has been very effective in committing social movements and teacher’s unions to certain targeted policies aimed at meeting their historic demands. As a corollary, contrasting public remarks of key education policy-makers from the two dominant Brazilian political parties (PT and PSDB), I intend to highlight the convergence in terms of strategies and policies for school reform, which is welcomed and reinforced by the national media. By doing so, I hope to provide a snapshot of the dominant education policy discourse at work in contemporary Brazil.

Shifting agendas and alliances to claim leadership over education restructuring

“I have been given a Ministry that is already in motion. Now I put my foot on the gas and turn to the left.” With this bold rhetoric, the elected senator Cristovam Buarque, a respected social reformer, ex-Rector of the University of Brasilia (UnB) and former Governor of the Federal District of Brasília, signed in as Minister of Education on

January 2nd, 2003, stressing the Lula government's political will to speed up and readjust educational reforms, presumably according to the PT's principles and commitments. However, in its first term (2003-2006), the Lula government was inefficient and erratic in the educational area, not carrying out its promised change of policy direction. There were three Ministers of Education in less than three years, accompanied by changes in agendas and priorities, frustrating the expectations of the educational community and PT militants. In the thirteen months he remained in the post, Buarque created considerable controversy when demanding more resources for education, but he failed to establish either of the movements he had promised: he neither accelerated nor changed the orientation of the policies he had inherited.¹⁶² Actually, the "*left turn*" never happened, and after his early departure, as I argue throughout this chapter, the Lula government ended up leaning toward the center in order to claim leadership over the restructuring of education.

In late January 2004, disappointed with the poor performance of his troublemaking Minister of Education, Lula fired him by phone while he was visiting Portugal and appointed Tarso Genro, former Mayor of Porto Alegre, the biggest city in the South of Brazil, where the PT has carried out an innovative educational experiment known as the Citizen School Project (Gandin, 2002; Gandin & Apple, 2002; Apple & Buras, 2006). The term of office of Genro was also brief. His priority task was to elaborate a proposal for university reform.¹⁶³ With an agenda directed toward higher

¹⁶² Ironically, the most lasting legacy left by Buarque was the construction of an exotic mosaic in homage to the educator Paulo Freire in front of the main entrance of the MEC headquarters in Brasília.

¹⁶³ This proposal, which absorbed a great deal of effort during Genro's stint, was sent to the National Congress in late 2005. The strong opposition of the private sector, whose interests are defended by a large parliamentary group, blocked the bill. The government seems to have stopped trying to get it approved, as can be seen in the example of other proposals which are strongly resisted by conservative forces such as the

education, his main success was the University for Everyone Program (ProUNI), which promotes the entrance of black and poor students into private universities, with scholarships subsidized by the Federal Government (see Chapter 5).

There was a second change of management at the end of July 2005, when Genro left the post to become the President of the PT in the middle of the political scandal called the “Mensalão”, when leaders of the party and assessors close to President Lula were accused of “buying” the support of members of the National Congress.¹⁶⁴ A young professor from the prestigious University of São Paulo (USP), Fernando Haddad, who had served as Deputy Minister of Education during Genro’s stint, was appointed to replace him as Minister of Education in order to ensure “continuity in the programs and the concepts elaborated during his administration” (Haddad [interview], in Azevedo, 2006). Although he had been a member of the PT since the beginning of the 1980s, Haddad had never been part of the central leadership and had never occupied important public positions. Until he became number two at MEC, his previous experience in public administration had included a discreet period at the Finance Department of the São Paulo City, under the PT administration of Marta Suplicy, and he had been an assessor of Guido Mantega, now Minister of Finance, at the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Administration, in the first year of the Lula government. It was in this period that he

project which introduces a quota of places in public universities for students coming from public schools, blacks and Indians.

¹⁶⁴ After completing the mission of presiding over the PT until the election of the new National Directorate, which took place at the beginning of 2006, he returned to the government to take up other important functions. At the beginning of the second term of the Lula government, he took over the strategic Ministry of Justice, a post in which he remained in September 2008, when this chapter was concluded.

engineered the bases of ProUNI, which would become the main educational achievement of Lula's first term of office.¹⁶⁵

If the conception of this innovative policy served to pave his meteoric trajectory to the post of Minister of Education, what was more surprising was his political skill in resisting the pressures from the PT itself, which wished to substitute him by a figure with greater political weight for Lula's second term of office (Gois, 2007b). While the parties in the broad governmental coalition grappled with each other in the dispute over posts in the new cabinet, Haddad mobilized a restricted group of assessors to elaborate the PDE, with which he would definitively win the support of the reelected President Lula (Junqueira, 2007; Aranha & Clemente, 2007). At a later date, in an interview to *Veja*, he recalled: "Another lesson I learnt from my time in Brasília is that often the best [political] survival strategy is to maintain silence and discretion. This was how I stayed in the Ministry" (Weinberg [interview], 2007, p. 15).

A descendent of Lebanese immigrants, Haddad had had a discreet academic career before breaking into the national political scenario as a new star of the PT. His ease and sudden popularity had already brought about speculation in the national media about his "electoral potential".¹⁶⁶ "He has written four books on socialist regimes, one of them on the educational system in the ex-USSR. In the 1990s he was member of the

¹⁶⁵ The national media also attributed to him the creation of the Project of the Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). This legislation was introduced in the Lula government to encourage private investment in infrastructure, with guarantees made by the State. (Junqueira, 2007)

¹⁶⁶ In September 2007, the newspaper *Valor Econômico* [Economic Value] ran an interesting report on the journeys of the Minister of Education around Brazil to publicize the PDE. Under the title "*Haddad cai nas graças de Lula e já incomoda [o PT]*" [Haddad falls out of favor with the PT and is now discomforting [the PT]], the text narrates the improbable trajectory of the son of a textile businessman who studied at the Universidade de São Paulo, the most prestigious university in Brazil, where he graduated in Law, obtained an M.A. in Economics and a Ph. D. in Philosophy, and then became a professor. 44 years-old, he is beginning to be seen as a possible candidate to succeed Lula in 2010. (Junqueira, 2007)

editorial board of the *Teoria & Debate* [Theory and Debate] magazine, an official publication of the PT, for which he wrote and made a series of interviews with left-wing intellectuals, later brought together in the book *Desorganizando o consenso* [Disorganizing the Consensus] (1998).¹⁶⁷ Ironically, as Minister of Education, as I shall argue in this chapter, he would take on the task of organizing a new consensus on education, which would be brought to life in the PDE. This consensus which would be supported by the business movement Everyone for Education, whose headquarters are situated on Avenida Paulista, São Paulo.¹⁶⁸

The system of performance targets and the demand for results

The introduction of a system of performance targets and the requirement of individual results for the state and municipal school networks and for every public school is the main innovation of the PDE. Its formulation, and, more especially, the efficient communication and marketing strategy set up to sell it to public opinion as the definitive solution for all the problems afflicting Brazilian education shows an extraordinary sense of opportunity and political mastery. The credit should be given both to the Minister Fernando Haddad, for his “ability to build consensus” (Aranha & Clemente, 2007), and to President Lula, for his courage in gambling on a new leader at MEC, going against his

¹⁶⁷ This book, published in the last year of the first term of Office of President Cardoso, brings together nine interviews with “left-wing” intellectuals”. In his presentation, Haddad reveals that the book came about as a counterpoint to the “media festival around the single way of thinking” which dominated Brazil, “interviewing the fraction of the intelligentsia who have not followed the new manias recently imported by the elites in their eternal and voluble path toward the conservative modernization of Brazil” (Haddad, 1998, p.12).

¹⁶⁸ Located in the city of São Paulo, Avenida Paulista is for Brazil what Wall Street is for the United States: a symbol of financial capital and economic power.

own party, and backing an ambitious long-term plan, which fixes performance targets for school networks and schools up until 2022, when will be celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Independence of Brazil.

The PDE was presented to the public as a complement to the Plan for Accelerated Growth (PAC), launched soon after the reelection victory. The aim of this plan was to increase public and private investment in infrastructure projects, thereby creating conditions to accelerate the growth of the Brazilian economy. When linking the two initiatives in his speech on the launch of the PDE, President Lula stated that “in order to reduce inequalities between people, the basic lever is education, and in order to reduce inequalities between regions, the basic lever is the large development programs, which increase the productive and social infrastructure”. And he continued: “no theme is as positive, as mobilizing and as able to unite Brazil as education. (...) Everyone is in favor of education.”

There is no motive to doubt the good intentions that inspired the PDE or the political commitment to social justice and educational equality of those who conceived it. When detailing its bases and principles, the Minister of Education proclaimed: “there is no way to build a free, just and supportive society without a republican education, based on building up autonomy, inclusion and respect for diversity” (Haddad, 2007, p. 6). The concept of “republican education”, which has gained wide currency in the Lula government, refers both to the enforcement of the constitutional right of everyone to education and the democratic principle of the equality of educational opportunities. Both are a long way from being adequately fulfilled in the present Brazilian educational system, and this is explicitly recognized by the Minister of Education when justifying the

new policy: “The reason of being of the PDE is precisely in the need to structurally confront the inequality of educational opportunities.” According to Haddad, the conception of the PDE “recognizes in education one side of the dialectic process which is established between socialization and the individualization of the human being, and the aim of education is the construction of autonomy, that is, the formation of individuals who are able to take on a critical and creative position in respect to the world”. Therefore the national education policy should promote “forms of organization favoring individualization and socialization and which are directed toward autonomy.” (p. 5).

The emphasis on the construction of autonomous and critical individuals as a corollary of the educative process – a conception clearly inspired by Paulo Freire – and the ideas and theories that support the PDE are consistent with a democratic vision of society and education. What should be questioned is the primacy given to economic rationality in the definition of the strategies and policies that guarantee educational equity in a scenario of rampant social and economic inequalities. My central argument is that the PDE fails to overcome the contradictions and tensions resulting from the disjunction between the neo-liberal economic policy implanted in Brazil by the Cardoso government, which has been maintained by the present government, and the education policy, which was conceived as an instrument of social inclusion and emancipation. It is necessary to recognize that the Lula government has made great efforts to improve the dramatic social situation created by the structural adjustments of the 1990s through redistributive policies such as a real increase in the minimum salary and the Family Grant Program, which has benefitted around 11 million families below the poverty line. These actions have been

helped by a favorable international environment, reflected in a healthy growth in the Brazilian economy in the last five years.

Although it makes a direct critique of the “fragmented” vision and the “managerial and fiscalist principles” that dominated the educational policy of the Cardoso government, intending to substitute them for “a systematic vision of education”, and an approach that overcomes “false oppositions”, the fundamental document of the PDE, which carries the weight and the signature of the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, fails to go any further than attempting to solve on a rhetorical level the latent tensions and contradictions that arise from the Lula government’s strategy of achieving educational equality without addressing the economic and social inequalities.

In the document “*O Plano de Desenvolvimento da Educação: Razões, Princípios e Programas*” [The Education Development Plan: Reasons, Principles and Programs], Minister Fernando Haddad attempts to demonstrate the coherence of the PDE’s strategies, ideologically demarcating the differences between its content and the educational policy of the Cardoso government. Here it takes on the tone of a political clash, uncommon in official documents. When criticizing the managerial and fiscalist policies of the previous government, Haddad points to five “false oppositions” which the Lula government intends to overcome through the PDE: the opposition between elementary education and higher education; the prioritizing of elementary education to the detriment of primary and secondary education; the separation between secondary education on one hand and vocational and technological education on the other; the lack of contact between literacy programs and the education of young people and adults; and finally, the opposition between normal and special education (Haddad, 2007, pp 8-9).

Rhetoric apart, the strategies and the key instruments envisioned by the PDE to induce systemic changes remain the same: responsibility of families, the school and its players; social mobilization in order to give greater value to education; and the centrality of national evaluations. The incorporation into the repertory of MEC policies of the concept of “accountability”, which has no equivalent in Portuguese, has been justly claimed by Haddad as the main innovation of the PDE.

Technical and Managerial tools for steering a decentralized education system

The accountability set up by the PDE takes the form of a pact between MEC and the state and municipal governments, which are responsible for the public education networks. Called “Everyone for Education Plan of Goals”, this legal instrument defines a set of 28 directives to be followed by the state and municipal education systems. When voluntarily joining the Plan, the states and municipalities commit themselves to carry out, among other, the following directives: to accompany each pupil individually through control of attendance and periodical performance evaluations; to implant career plans, positions and salaries for education professionals, privileging merit, qualification, and evaluation of performance; to fix clear rules, considering merit and performance in the naming and exonerating of school principals; to promote participative management in schools; to widely publish the results of the evaluations to the educational community, with emphasis on the IDEB (Decree no. 6.094/2207).

Clientelism has been pointed out as one of the root causes of the backwardness of Brazilian education (Plank, 2001). Here, the directives of the Everyone for Education

Plan are an important advance as they require from the state and municipal educational officials more modern managerial practices, substituting political criteria by clear rules which consider “merit and performance” in the naming of the school principals. The managerial vision can be seen in the recommendation that teaching systems link the salaries of the educational professionals to merit and performance. MEC is thus reintroducing a proposal that had been taken off the agenda in the first years of the Lula government as a result of a reaction from the teachers’ unions.

The Plan of Goals is anchored in the IDEB. The decree setting up the Everyone for Education plan determines that: “the quality of basic education will be objectively measured, based on the IDEB, which will be calculated and periodically published by INEP, from the data on school marks, combined with the performance of the pupils, figures from the school census and the Evaluation System of Elementary Education (SAEB), made up of the National Evaluation of Elementary Education (ANEB), and the National Evaluation of School Performance (*Prova Brasil*) [Brazil Test]”. The former will be made of a sample of schools and will take place every two years. The latter is universal, and will also take place every two years. With benchmarking, MEC adopted the International Program for the Evaluation of Students (PISA), of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Brazil has usually occupied one of the last places in PISA, but MEC has fixed the target of, by 2022, reaching the present average of the developed countries which are part of the OECD. Thus a powerful form of marketing was instantly produced, linking the PDE to the target of bringing Brazilian education up to the level of the most developed countries within 15 years.

Based on the IDEB, MEC selected 1,242 municipalities with the “worst quality indexes” (MEC, 2007, p. 7). “These municipalities will receive technical assistance to make a diagnostic and elaborate an Articulated Plan of Action (PAR), which aims at fulfilling the Everyone for Education targets”. The plan will also be the basis for the signing of an agreement or a term of cooperation between MEC and the municipality, enabling it to receive a supplementary budget. One of the most serious gaps in the PDE is that there are no legal mechanisms allowing the government to disempower local education authorities in case of repeated failures to achieve targets.

The logic of the IDEB is relatively simple. According to the economist Reynaldo Fernandes, the author of the mathematical formula used for its calculation, it is “an indicator of educational quality that combines performance information in standardized tests (*Prova Brasil* or SAEB), obtained by the students at the end of stages of schooling (4th to 8th grades of elementary schooling, and the 3rd grade of middle schooling), with information on school performance” (Fernandes, 2007). Thus the IDEB is a synthetic indicator, which combines two other indicators: a) the average score of the students in standardized tests (*Prova Brasil* and ANEB); and b) the average pass rate of the students in a grade or corresponding level. Framed according to economic rationality, IDEB utilizes a scale of one to ten. According to its mentor:

It has the advantage of being easily understood, easy to calculate, applicable in the schools, and explicit to the “exchange rate” between the pass rate probability and the ability of the students. In other words, the indicator makes it clear how much one is prepared to lose in the average score of the standardized test in order to obtain a specific increase in the average promotion rate (Fernandes, 2007, p. 8).

Conceptually, the IDEB was based on two premises: firstly, that educational quality can be accurately checked through standardized tests and information on school pass rates; secondly, that there is a trade-off between the performance of students in standardized examinations and the “pass rate level” adopted individually by the school networks and schools.¹⁶⁹ Following this logic, promotion to the next grade for social reasons, and the adoption of weak criteria for promotion will have a negative impact on the average ability of the students. On the contrary, the adoption of rigid pass criteria will tend to raise the scores in the standardized tests, but, as an unintended effect, will result in an increase in the failure rate. A good educational policy will, therefore, balance incentives for school managers and teachers to take measures that will both raise the level in standardized tests and increase the pass rates.

The IDEB was designed to orient such a policy, signaling the acceptable “exchange rate” between the pass rate probability and the (desirable) ability of the students; in other words, the indicator makes it clear “how much one is prepared to lose in the average score of the standardized test in order to obtain a specific increase in the average pass rate.” In the managerial vision of the economist who created it, the failing of students who do not reach the required ability is not only acceptable but also desirable, as a mechanism to “prevent students without the minimal knowledge from advancing in the system, which will hinder the development of those who are apt for the following grade” (Fernandes, 2007, p. 11). IDEB’s mastermind thus comes out against the established view

¹⁶⁹ The *pass rate* is defined as “the minimal knowledge and skills which, ideally, the students should acquire to pass” (Fernandes, 2007, p. 8, footnote 4).

of educators, according to whom repeating grades invariably tends to negatively affect learning, thereby compromising the prospects of success at school.¹⁷⁰

The extensive use of concepts like “exchange rate” and “incentive structure”, which run throughout the IDEB document base, show that this “indicator of educational quality” was formulated along the lines of economic rationality, as a tool to individually check the productivity and efficiency of schools and school systems.¹⁷¹ This can help to explain the welcome it received from business leaders and the dominant media: MEC had finally attended the demands for the establishment of quantitative targets and a reward schema based on evaluation of performance.

A new actor on the stage: business leaders tackle national education policy agenda

I have argued that the PDE epitomizes a major breakthrough in terms of giving educational policy in Brazil a business-driven momentum. Everyone for Education (TPE), headed by the heavyweights of the Brazilian GNP, was officially launched on September 6, 2006, on the stairs of the Ipiranga Palace, in São Paulo. It took place less than a month before the presidential elections and attracted great interest from the media as among its leaders were the captains of industry and finance Ana Maria Diniz (Pão de Açúcar supermarkets), Antônio Matias (Itaú Bank), José Roberto Marinho (Globo Organizations), Denise Aguiar (Bradesco Bank Foundation), and Beatriz Johannpeter

¹⁷⁰ See Fernandes (2007, pp. 11-12), especially Footnote 10.

¹⁷¹ Economic logic can be seen by the recurrence of certain terms and concepts: the word *performance* is repeated 41 times; the expression “exchange rate” occurs 25 times; and the concept of *incentive* is cited four times in just ten pages. By contrast, the basic IDEB document never mentions equity or equal opportunities. (see Fernandes, 2007)

(Gerdau Institute). It would thus be fairly accurate to describe the TPE as a very exclusive club of the Brazilian elite, uniting the owners of and heirs to some of the largest fortunes in Brazil, moved the good feeling of doing something worthy in order to create a better Brazil. The TPE has taken on as its mission the attempt to try to inculcate the “absurd belief that schooling is the cure for whatever ails society” (Berliner, 2004). On the official site (www.todospelaeducacao.org.br), the aim of the movement and the vision of how to solve the educational backwardness of Brazil are presented in an elitist language, which attributes to the poor a lack of appreciation for education:

The Everyone for Education plan is an alliance of civil society, private business and the public education administrators who propose the mobilization and commitment of Brazil, so that, by 2022, the Bicentenary of Independence, all children and young people will have access to quality basic education. The majority of parents are satisfied with a place for their children in a school where they will get a uniform and a school meal. Few know how to evaluate the quality of education offered to their children. Even fewer demand quality teaching from the schools and educational authorities. The Everyone for Education movement believes that Brazilian education will only improve when Brazilians become as demanding in terms of education as they are, for example, with the economy and soccer.

It is interesting to note that the representatives of the economic elite who always raised barricades against any public income redistribution policy that threatened the *status quo* are now forming a broad coalition, which, “through the influence of those involved” promises an educational transformation in Brazil that “can only be compared to the conquests of Brazilian citizenship with the abolition of slavery” (Dimenstein, 2006). Over the last few years, business leaders have become more concerned with and more vocal about education, ceaselessly harping on that the country needs better schools in order to catch up with the requirements of a globalizing and knowledge-based economy

(Chapter 6). Within this broad alliance, there are some conservative actors who seem more concerned about keeping children at school as a mechanism of social control, regardless the prospect of learning and progressing. Rampant urban violence exacerbates social anxieties (Kamel, 2004a; Ioschpe, 2007b; Azevedo, 2007). The new dominant discourse reconstructs education as a field of convergence and consensus. The TPE leaders have touted education as the great equalizer to erase the enduring and gruesome social and racial inequalities deeply rooted in Brazilian society. Ideologically, this discourse carries a role of the legitimization of the *status quo* as it transfers the debate about equity from the economic to the educational realm.

Even before it was officially unveiled, the PDE had won over the opinion shapers, seen in the profusion of favorable editorials and opinion articles published by the main newspapers in the months before it was launched (e.g. *Folha de S. Paulo*, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e; Villela, 2007; Moraes, 2007c, 2007d). These articles supported the general lines of the Plan presented by Haddad, who brought forward his main aim of improving student achievement through performance reward schemes and accountability mechanisms, relying on data-driven decision-making, testing, merit pay, teaching quality, and intensive use of technology.¹⁷²

The leaders of the TPE are in favor of the establishment of systems of incentives, awards and punishments, and tighter accountability methods. Their vision is embedded in a managerial discourse, which stresses State control over the curriculum, teaching, and outcomes. The TPE movement has championed the adoption of mechanisms of evaluating performance and rewarding success, and the PDE has put this agenda into

practice. The influential industrialist Antônio Ermírio de Moraes was one of the first to applaud the Federal Government on its intention to set up performance targets for public schools throughout Brazil. In his Sunday column in *Folha de S. Paulo*, he praised the emphasis the PDE gives to the evaluation of results: “This is a crucial point. It is no good increasing resources unless they are invested well. Brazil spends a lot on education, but it is badly spent. With the same amount of money more children could be given a better quality education” (Moraes, 2007c). The support from the business sector became virtually unanimous after it was officially announced.

On showing his support for the PDE, Ermírio de Moraes underlined convergence between the Federal Government proposal and the “policy of Governor José Serra [of the state of São Paulo] on choosing the area of education as the first to receive the system of evaluation of and awards for employees on the basis of the learning of the students. This is administration by results”. The PDE has renewed his faith in the business solution for the improvement of Brazilian education:

I can't hardly believe that we are finally entering the era of evaluation in the public sector. That's right. The time has come to use the notion of productivity in the same way as in private companies. Companies, because of competition, do not have the luxury of being unproductive: they go to the wall. Monitoring and evaluation, as well as the provision of resources should be used, in the public sector, to instigate productivity. This is a substitute for competition. Let us have faith and hope that this plan becomes reality, different to others that have appeared in the past. (Moraes, 2007d)

The PDE received a better welcome from industrialists, economists and opposition political leaders linked to the Cardoso government, than from PT leaders and party

¹⁷² The general lines of the PDE were presented by the Minister of Education on 15 March 2007 in a public ceremony presided over by President Lula in the Planalto Palace, Brasília. Thus it was only in his fifth year

militants. What explains this apparent contradiction is that the Lula government has made important concessions to the managerial discourse that had dominated the previous administration. In fact, the PDE strengthens the managerial vision prevailing in the Cardoso government. In the national media, the most powerful support for the PDE came from a habitual critic of the Lula government, the political commentator of TV Globo¹⁷³, Arnaldo Jabor. In the April 26 edition of the *Jornal da Globo* [Globo News], soon after the presentation of a report on the IDEB, Jabor made the following remarks:

Since colonial times, education in Brazil has been disdained. The Portuguese crown never wanted us to learn, and this tradition has remained. In the United States, the opposite: the parents who failed to send their children to school would be punished.

The novelty of this initiative of the Lula government is an administrative development: the rate of education cannot be measured by quantity but rather by quality; it is no longer a political statistic and education is being taken seriously. And this must be praised.

The poorest states will receive a higher budget – although the one billion reals that will be spent by the Lula government is little and will only be enough to attend 10% of the students. But, in addition to the money, greater care will have to be taken with the details.

In the town of Dois Córregos, in the state of São Paulo, teachers are well-paid, there is a good school meal, educational imagination. And the district was in fourth place in the national evaluation.

Minister Fernando Haddad says the right thing: we must finish with this industry of repeating grades, but without making the pupil pass without learning. This is the national self-deception of the false literacy and qualifications of students.

President Lula has done well to let this minister keep his job. He has a high level. Education cannot be negotiated. (TV Globo, 2007b).

in office that President Lula outlined his educational policy.

¹⁷³ In addition to its favorable coverage of the new educational plan, Rede Globo played an active role in the social mobilization led by MEC. On the initiative of TV Globo, on April 27, 2007 the thematic day “Friends of the School – Everyone for Education” was held in all the public schools in Brazil, with reports during the normal programs of the affiliated broadcasting companies, and the commemorations being highlighted in the main newscasts.

The PDE thus consolidated a strategic alliance between the Lula government and the Brazilian business elite with the clear aim of “saving education”. At the same time, the two main Brazilian weekly magazines evoked this salvationist discourse in their reports on the launching of the PDE: while *Veja* had the headline “Lula’s package to save education” (Weinberg & Todeschini, 2007), *Época* preferred to ask the question: “Is he going to save education?” (Aranha & Clemente, 2007). The symbiosis reached such a point that, as we have seen, MEC decided to appropriate the slogan “Everyone for Education”. *Época* made an interesting report on the genesis of the PDE:

The plan has made a leap in relation to the previous plans as the present Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, did not bring a personal political flag to the Ministry. Haddad first pragmatically tried to bring together the various interested groups in the area. As soon as he became Minister, in July 2005, he took part in a meeting with the Brazilian business elite, from which the Everyone for Education plan was born. It is an alliance between civil society, private business, and public administrators for a quality basic education. It was at this meeting that the idea of targets, a system in force in the majority of companies in the world, was born. “Various managers, teachers and specialists have helped to establish these targets”, says the Vice-President of the Itaú bank, Antonio Matias, member of the Everyone for Education coalition. “On adopting them, the government is seeking the same efficiency for public policies as that which companies are used to. (Aranha & Clemente, 2007, p. 38)

The confusion between the business initiative of the TPE, Everyone for Education, and the public policy instrument introduced by the government through Decree no. 6.094, of April 24, the Plan of Goals Everyone for Education Commitment, continued in the media and the public manifestations of MEC officials and business leaders to such an extent that the impression was given that MEC wholeheartedly supported the TPE proposal and that it had become MEC policy. The alliance between MEC and the TPE would be openly

confirmed by the Haddad himself in an exclusive interview published in *Época*, which belongs to the largest media group in Brazil, Globo Organizations:

ÉPOCA – The targets in the PDE carry the name of Everyone for Education, a group of business leaders. How did this approximation take place?

Haddad – Soon after I took over at the Ministry, I had a meeting with business leaders. This meeting sealed an understanding that the decision-making classes have to incorporate the debate on education. What interested us was the idea of quality targets, which they had completely absorbed. At the same time as this meeting we were launching the *Prova Brasil* [Brazil Test], which makes a radiograph of the performance of every school. And the link was there. It became clear that we needed a perspective to guarantee that children learn, not that they are just kept in school. (Haddad [interview], in Aranha & Clemente, 2007, p. 43)

In addition to sharing the motto “Everyone for Education”, the proximity established between MEC and the TPE was also revealed by an apparently “unimportant” incident, but one that says much about this odd partnership. In the first quarter of 2007, during the process of the elaboration and detailing of the measures which would be part of the PDE, a number of documents on the Math Olympics circulated internally at MEC with the electronic signature of the Itaú Cultural Foundation, an institution maintained by the second largest financial group in Brazil. Interestingly enough, Antonio Matias, Vice President of the Itaú bank, is one of the leaders of the TPE. Milú Vilela, one of the heirs of the Itaú Group, has become well-known in the last ten years as one of the most active social leaders linked to the business sector. She is at the head of the *Faça Parte* [Become Part] Institute, which encourages voluntary work in education and played an active role in the publicity and launching of the TPE. In short, the PDE creates a business-driven momentum in education reform in Brazil, whereby corporate leaders became MEC’s major partners.

When communicating the launch of the PDE, the homepage of the Everyone for Education Movement (www.todospelaeducacao.org.br) had the following headline:

“MEC launches a program in tune with the TPE”. In the text it was clear that the movement claimed the parentage of the main component of the Everyone for Education Plan of Goals:

The Minister of Education made an important step for the improvement of Brazilian education on March 15 with the launch of the Education Development Plan. The PDE has four main areas, and the main one of them, connected to elementary education, is called Everyone for Education Plan of Goals. The program contains 26 quality indicators, which will be connected to the non-obligatory provision of funds for states and municipalities. A good example of these indicators is the *Provinha Brasil* [Little Brazil Test], which will be given to children between six and eight in order to examine their literacy level. Participation in the plan will be voluntary. The program of targets demonstrates the determination of MEC to work together with society for a high-level quality education. “This is the way in which MEC is playing its role in the Everyone for Education plan”, stated Minister Fernando Haddad.¹⁷⁴

Since the launching of its manifesto in September 2006, the TPE has admitted its intention of not only influencing educational policies but of also commanding the national educational agenda. The alignment between MEC and this elite business movement, which was strengthened by the PDE, increased its political capital and reinforced its leadership position. On the other hand, the political choice of the Lula government of promoting a “preferential agreement” with the business sector, both in terms of economic and educational policy, threatens to distance its traditional bases, especially the unions and teachers.

¹⁷⁴ <http://www.todospelaeducacao.org.br/todospelaeducacao/ExibeBoletim.aspx>

Education accountability without political accountability: testing for political gain and spectacle

The current centrality of tests and assessments as key elements of education restructuring is a worldwide phenomenon (see Linn, 2000; Apple, 2001; Apple, *et al.*, 2003). In Brazil, the adoption of this approach for school reform is relatively recent in comparison to Anglo-Saxon nations, where assessment and accountability have figured prominently in education reforms in the recent decades. Linn (2000) documents five waves of assessment-based reform in the United States during the past five decades, pinpointing four reasons for the great appeal of assessment for policy-makers as an agent of reform: firstly, tests and assessment are relatively inexpensive compared with systemic, structural reform; secondly, testing and assessment can be externally controlled and imposed top-down; thirdly, testing and assessment policies can be rapidly implemented; and, fourthly, results are highly visible (Linn, 2000, p.4). The crude fact is that testing and assessment policies have proved to be irresistible for ambitious politicians avid for short-term (political) gains. Moreover, in the age of symbolic politics, testing and assessment policies are suitable for political spectacle (Smith *et al.*, 2004).

In the highly decentralized Brazilian context, this policy provides the general public with a sense that the Federal Government has state and municipal educational systems and every single school all over the country under its grip and within its sight.¹⁷⁵ Thus national standardized tests become the paramount tool to hold schools and their

¹⁷⁵ Each of the 26 states and the 5,564 Brazilian municipalities, plus the Federal District of Brasília, has its own network of schools. In general, the municipalities provide pre-school education and the initial grades of primary school, while the state networks provide schools for the later grades of basic education and secondary schools. There are a total of more than 210,000 public schools throughout Brazil.

agents accountable for results, narrowly defined in terms of test scores and promotion rates. The IDEB equation optimizes and operates such a managerial view of “education quality” (Fernandes, 2007).

The recent intensification of the use of tests as *the* lever for reform and accountability aimed at improving schools and student achievement, epitomized by the PDE, highlights two trends already detected in other nations: political interests and the time frame all too often collide with educationally sound decisions; linked to this, the political pressure for measurable results thwarts even the most basic technical and professional standards for test validity, reliability, fairness, and comparability, threatening the credibility of such a strategy (Smith, 2004). Paradoxically, this politically-driven agenda leads to the contradictory imposition of educational accountability without the equivalent political accountability. For one thing, politicians are prone to adopt unorthodox, quick-fix solutions even if this implies breaking the ground rules of the use of tests and their validity.

Writing on the US education system, where assessment policy coupled with accountability measures have become the linchpin of education restructuring since the 1980s, Smith and her collaborators (2004) note that,

When the state uses tests to enforce accountability or encourage school reform, issues of accountability clash with issues of validity and policy-makers clash with testing experts. In a political arena, policy-makers think of experts as just one more interest group. They may select psychometric experts for help with assessments, but they want them to reinforce policy aim and message, rather than to engage in open-ended inquiry. The very fact of appointing an expert functions as a symbol of rationality, whether or not the state pays attention to the substance of the expert’s report. That a policymaker fails to listen to psychometricians should surprise no one. Policy in the political spectacle is quite immune to demands for professional standards and technical rationality. (pp. 48-49)

In the current Brazilian landscape, a critical analyst can observe some of the same conflicts and contradictions at work. For instance, the thoughtless hurry with which the Lula government rushed to make extensive use of national assessment results for accountability purposes and performance reward schemes raises serious concerns related to issues of validity, reliability, fairness, and comparability. The decision to use the results of the National Middle School Examination (ENEM) in order to rank secondary schools illustrates the inappropriate use of a test for an end that is different from that for which it was originally designed. Specialists agree that the same test can be used for more than one function, as long as criteria of validity and reliability are observed, but they warn that more often “results from a test that is valid for one purpose can be wrongly used for other purposes” (National Research Council, 1999, p. 21). In my best judgment, the use of marks obtained by pupils in ENEM in order to rank schools falls into this category.

This examination was established in 1998, during the Cardoso government, as an instrument to reform secondary education. Its aim was to evaluate the profile of students when they finished basic schooling “in order to check the development of fundamental competencies in the exercise of citizenship”. In practice, MEC intended to set up an alternative selection mechanism to the *vestibulares*, admission exams used by Brazilian universities. ENEM was therefore conceived as a voluntary individual evaluation. The performance of the students on finishing secondary education is measured by a matrix of competences and general skills associated with curricular content (INEP, 2005b). By and large, educators and specialists agree that ENEM, which is inspired by constructivism, is

an innovative evaluation. Its main characteristics are interdisciplinarity, contextualization, and problem solving.

ENEM was designed to induce the school systems and the schools themselves to individually adopt the new curricular proposal formulated by MEC at the end of the 1990s. The former Minister of Education, Paulo Renato Souza, who was the mastermind of the reform and the creator of the ENEM, is quite frank when he recognizes that “the main aim of the exam is to signal to all middle schools in Brazil the content of the middle school reform and the skills and competences that, in the view of the Ministry, should be developed by the students by the end of basic schooling” (Souza, 2006). The Lula government kept the original characteristics of the test and extended the use of its results, and this led to a considerable increase in the number of students who took the test.¹⁷⁶ Souza credits the Lula government with the merit of reaching an increased level of participation in the exam on adopting it “as one of the selection criteria in order to have access to ProUNI, the program whereby poorer students gain free places in private higher educational institutions”. However, he believes that “in publishing the results, there was a serious methodological mistake when schools, and even systems of schooling, were compared by the ENEM results”. Souza continued:

This is an exam for students, not for schools, as it is individual and optional. A comparison of the performance of schools can only be made if it is universal, in other words, if all the students take a certain test, or if it is applied to a representative sample of the school. Neither of these occurs with ENEM, and therefore there is no scientific basis to compare schools or schooling systems. Sensationalism has taken over, and this is harmful for the true improvement of education in Brazil (Souza, 2006, p. A3).

¹⁷⁶ In its first year, just over 100,000 students took the exam. In 2002, in the last year of the Cardoso government, 1.5 million took it. In 2005 the number leapt to 3.7 million, and in 2008 just over 4 million.

It is ironic that this common sense critique came from the great inventor of national evaluations, who, during his stint, made the publication of the results a meticulously planned media spectacle in order to gain the greatest possible repercussion and political dividends. The wide coverage given by the media to the *Provão*, which began in 1996, was considered by Souza to be proof of the success of his policy (Souza, 2005a). More than a decade later, the results of the national evaluations still reverberate in the national media, as in 2006, when MEC began to publish the ranking of secondary schools, based on the performance of students in the ENEM.¹⁷⁷ This initiative was especially gratifying to the private schools, which began to use the performance obtained in the ENEM as a certification of the quality of schooling they offered and a marketing instrument to attract new students. Another advantage for private schools was that they could increase their fees and not be subject to parents' complaints. The ENEM ranking gave middle-class families a certain objective criterion through which they could select the "best" schools for their children. MEC policy ended up by giving a tremendous push the private education market by establishing a criterion of comparability, thereby fulfilling one of the essential requirements of "a true choice system" (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

The path paved by the Cardoso administration enabled the Lula government to "accelerate" national evaluations as its leading educational policy. The current Minister

¹⁷⁷ The *Folha de S. Paulo*, for example, devoted its main headline and a special right-hand page section to the 2007 ENEM results. The front page highlights the "secondary school ranking", listing "the best 10 [schools] in Brazil, and the "best 10 [schools] in the state of São Paulo". As the great majority of the readers of this newspaper belong to the middle-class, the newspaper devotes greater attention to the performance of private schools, emphasizing that only two public schools appear in the ranking of the best 20 schools in Brazil. "*Rio tem 8 dos 20 melhores colégios, aponta o ENEM*" [Rio de Janeiro has eight of the top twenty secondary schools, according to ENEM], in *Folha de S. Paulo*, 4 April 2008, p. A1 and pp. Especial 1-8.

of Education, Fernando Haddad, had no hesitation in affirming that what differentiates the approach of the Lula government from that of the Cardoso government is its courage to promote the results of the evaluations as an instrument of accountability.¹⁷⁸

The Lula government did not just extend the use of national evaluations for the purposes of accountability, but also took the initiative of establishing new national tests that had the same purpose. In 2005, it implanted the National Evaluation of School Performance, which became known as *Prova Brasil* [Brazil Test]. This new test would be even more providential for the formulation of the IDEB as the main monitoring instrument of the quality of schooling in Brazil until 2022, the year of the Bicentenary of the Independence of Brazil (Fernandes, 2007). Derived from the SAEB, an evaluation of a large-scale sample, inspired by NAEP and developed as from 1989, with finance provided by the World Bank, the *Prova Brasil* was set up by a personal decision of President Lula. It was quickly designed, and in practice it is an extended version of the SAEB, following the same methodology. The *Prova Brasil* met the main presidential requirement of producing “results for each school”. Heralded by MEC as the first evaluation “of a universal kind made by Brazilian public schools”, the *Prova Brasil* was in its first year only applied to urban schools with more than 30 students enrolled in the grades which were tested (4th and 8th grades of elementary schooling). Based on this criterion, 40,290 schools, accounting for around 75% of students in elementary public schooling, were selected. Private schools were excluded from this evaluation.

The conception of the *Prova Brasil* and the later use of its results in order to define the performance targets of the PDE show the prevalence of political interests in

¹⁷⁸ Personal interview – June 22, 2007.

professional standards and technical rationality. It can be initially criticized because of the inappropriateness of the use of a large-scale universal sampling evaluation methodology for an evaluation that focuses on individual schools. The comparability between the results of the two evaluations was the main argument to justify the use of the same methodology. This consequently resulted in confusion between two distinct types of evaluation: standardized norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests. According to Cohen (1996, p. 66),

Standardized norm-referenced tests are designed to sample performance within very broad domains – chiefly reading and mathematics – but to be independent of particular approaches to curriculum and instruction. That is partly because they were not designed to be useful to instruction, but to monitor performance broadly in a large population. In contrast, criterion-referenced tests are designed to cover specific curricula, and items are selected with an eye more to topic coverage than to the distribution of responses. They are intended to be useful to instruction, for they report on how much of a given curriculum or set of objectives particular students have learned.

SAEB clearly fits into the first category as its aim is to evaluate the proficiency of students in Portuguese and Mathematics. In addition to the standardized tests applied to a representative sample of students, research instruments are used that allow the so-called “factors associated with learning” to be identified. These range from students’ study habits to the characteristics of the schools, principals and teachers. The results of the SAEB, which takes place every two years, make it possible to make a diagnostic of the teaching networks and allow us to compare the performance according to type (private and public), geographical region, and state (26 states plus the Federal District of Brasília). With the *Prova Brasil*, it was possible to obtain results by municipality and school, except for rural areas, excluded from this evaluation. However, as a standardized norm-

referenced test, the *Prova Brasil* produces the same data and evidence that have already been obtained through SAEB, with the single advantage of providing results by school. There is therefore a clear overlap and redundancy between SAEB (sample) and the *Prova Brasil* (universal). Neither of them is intended to be useful for instruction, according to the distinction proposed by Cohen in the quote above.

The PDE foresees the implantation of another national evaluation: the evaluation of literacy in the *Provinha Brasil* [Little Brazil Test]. Behind the affectionate name there is a controversial proposal to make children from six to eight years-old take a standardized test to check their reading skills. MEC intends to use this test to see whether the pupils in the public network are really literate by the time they are eight. Faced by the negative reaction of many educators, who feel that their classroom autonomy is being hindered by the imposition of an external evaluation, MEC has backed off and agreed to allow the *Provinha Brasil* to be voluntarily adopted by municipalities and applied by the teachers themselves. The idea of making six-year-old children take a national standardized test shows the zeal with which the Lula government is applying the policy of evaluation and accountability. The centralization of the evaluation instruments from the beginning of the process reduces the autonomy of schools, clearly contradicting the discourse on the strengthening and democratization of school management.

The dominant media: manufacturing crisis and forging consensus

The publication of the results of SAEB/2005 and ENEM/2006, at the beginning of February 2007, resulted in a wave of negative articles in the media on public schooling, repeating what happened in 2003, in the first year of the Lula government. This helped to

prepare the political atmosphere for the announcement of the PDE as a response to the apparent calamity of Brazilian education. The depth of the lasting crisis weighing down on the Brazilian educational system could hardly be exaggerated. Even so, there were those who wished it would get even worse so that society would wake up and find a solution. “*A crisis, a deep crisis. Only this will save our education*”, is the mantra repeated by the economist Claudio de Moura Castro, quoted by *Veja* magazine in a front-page article denouncing the passivity of middle-class parents before the mediocrity of the private school system (in Weinberg & Pereira, 2008a, p.74).

In its attempt to awaken Brazilian society and the government to the dramatic problem of Brazilian education and to embrace the neo-liberal reforms it had been recommending with unabated ideological faith over the last decades, *Veja* mentioned the report *A Nation at a Risk* (1983) at least twice within a period of six months¹⁷⁹, alluding to the “similar diagnostic made about American education in the United States in the 1980s.” Paraphrasing the preamble of the famous report, to which its critics attribute the deliberate intention of creating a “manufactured crisis” in order to justify the neo-liberal policies that would follow in the Reagan government, *Veja* plunged in with the headline “The worst enemy of Brazil” in the *Carta ao Leitor* [Letter to the Reader] section where it highlights that “the preoccupation about the direction (or lack of direction) of Brazilian education” had always been present in the magazine since it had been launched forty years before (*Veja*, 2008a). When pointing out the “mediocre performance of Brazilian students in national and international tests”, *Veja* repeats the warning of *A Nation at a*

¹⁷⁹ Issues no. 2047, 13 February 2008 and no. 2074, 20 August 2008.

Risk: “education here in Brazil has reached the point to which (...) our worst enemy would have taken us if it had been possible” (*Veja*, 2008a, p. 7).

In order to “broaden the horizons to seek solutions”, in the same issue (February 13, 2008) *Veja* featured “two articles and an interview [which] go beyond the clichés and throw light on the Brazilian educational problem”. Far from shedding new light on the debate, the three pieces reproduce the opinions already familiar to *Veja* readers, as their authors are part of the so-called “legitimizing network” on which *Veja* depends for support for its framing (Chapter 5). In the first article, the columnist Claudio de Moura Castro, who had enormous influence in the educational policy of the Cardoso government, criticizes the establishment of a base national salary base for public school teachers, stating that “it is a fallacy to expect that merely increasing teachers’ wages will guarantee better teaching” (Castro, 2008). In the second article, the economist Gustavo Ioschpe evokes the human capital theory in order to defend educational improvements in Brazil. In the interview in the special yellow pages section, the Secretary of Education of São Paulo state, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, announces performance targets for public schools and the payment of a financial award to those who achieve their targets (more on this interview below).

The participation of the dominant media in the process of the discussion, formulation and legitimation of educational policies gained increased visibility and consistency with the advent of the PDE. The *Folha de S. Paulo*, which had vociferously criticized educational deficiencies as an impediment to the development of Brazil, published a series of editorials on the subject in the first semester of 2007. When discussing the results of the national evaluations, *Folha* made a number of concrete

policy recommendations anticipating what would be the internal logic and the main components of the PDE, in a passage that deserves to be quoted at length:

Basic education is worse than ten years ago and will only improve in an environment of stimulating excellence and evaluating results. On publishing the results of the SAEB (National System of Basic Education Evaluation), MEC presented society with a familiar diagnostic: the universalization of access to education has not been accompanied by an improvement in the quality of education. (...) Demanding better results should be the main preoccupation of parents, teachers and public administrators.

Nowadays there is almost no incentive or recognition for the most advanced schools and those in the worst situation become the target of special actions that attempt to recover them. The teachers who pass with the best results in the public competitions, for example, should be paid well and allocated to the institutions performing poorly, instead of choosing where they want to teach. (...)

Broad access to information, the rewarding of teachers and schools that perform well, the focus on the needs of the student, the increase in the time the student will remain under the responsibility of the educators, and the involvement of parents in the day-to-day running of the school are some of the paths Brazil needs to take in order to overcome the universal mediocrity of the education of our children.

(*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2007a, p. A2)

A few weeks afterwards, the Minister of Education presented the guidelines of the PDE, which put forward a number of the measures proposed by the *Folha*. As was to be expected, the *Folha* immediately supported the plan, emphasizing that it “was received positively, even by political adversaries of the Lula government” (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2007b, p. A2). Although it was favorable to the set of proposed measures, it ended up by making a restriction: “It is a pity that the government has not taken advantage of the PDE in order to launch an incentive mechanism to improve the quality of the schools already at or above the national average. Rewarding institutions that have good results can introduce into the system a healthy competition in the quest for excellence”. MEC seems to have been listening to this suggestion and incorporated the idea of rewarding schools

for their performance in relation to the IDEB targets. In fact, when the PDE was officially launched, the *Folha* could hardly disguise its satisfaction:

An alteration that took place between the March draft and the final plan was an increase of 50% in the budget for the Money Direct to the School Program (PDDE) in order to reward the public schools with improved performance. This was one of the five additional targets that this newspaper proposed. (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2007e)

Thus *Folha* saw that its proposal to financially reward schools according to their performance had been accepted. In a previous editorial it had included the basic targets of the Everyone for Education plan, even confusing the MEC policy with the TPE business movement (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2007d), and now it wanted credit for what it considered to be an important improvement in the PDE. In the same tone, *Veja* abandoned its traditional critical position of the Lula government and praised the new educational policy, which “promises to solve Brazil’s backwardness in a very simple way: by rewarding merit” (Weinberg & Todeschini, 2007). *Veja* saw in the PDE a strengthening and consolidation of the national evaluation policy started by the Cardoso government, highlighting as the main advance the establishment of a system of incentives and the requirement of results, whereby the schools that reached and passed their targets would be granted a higher budget (Antunes & Todeschini, 2007). The new orientation of the Lula government educational policy therefore coincides with the proposals supported by both the *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Veja*. Since its launch, the support from the national media has been constant, despite controversy over errors in the calculation of the IDEB. For the *Folha*, the IDEB “is the cornerstone of a national unanimity, the mobilization that will recover the quality of the poverty-stricken Brazilian educational system. So it should

remain” (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 2008, p. A2). Curiously, at the same time as it praises the virtues of the IDEB and the system of performance targets established by MEC, the *Folha* makes an appeal to common sense:

However, care must be taken: too much energy should not be spent on looking after the thermometer so that we can no longer see the fever. Statistics are a means, not an end. The challenge of quality public education, the necessary republican ideal in order to be competitive in the world market, will only be solved in the classroom, with well-qualified, motivated and well-paid teachers.

Dissenting voices: challenging the hegemonic discourse on education

Right from the start, the Lula government has attempted to open up space for the participation of social movements and popular organizations in the formulation of public policy, recruiting leaders and militants from these organizations to positions as directors and consultants, and this is particularly visible in education. However, the lack of dialogue in the elaboration of the PDE caused considerable discontent in the teachers’ unions and the social movements which support public schools. The main public demonstration was made by the powerful National Confederation of Workers in Education (CNTE), affiliated to the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* [Workers Central] (CUT), the leader of the Fourth National Education March, which attracted more than 12,000 demonstrators in the Esplanade of Ministries in Brasília. It took place a day after the launch of the PDE and became a protest against the national salary base put forward by the government.¹⁸⁰ The President of the CNTE, Juçara Dutra Vieira, stated that the

¹⁸⁰ The proposal which was sent by the government to Congress fixed the salary bases at R\$ 850. The teachers were asking for a base of R\$ 1,050 for middle-level teachers and R\$ 1,575 for those with

launch of the plan on the eve of the demonstration was “inopportune” as “it was an attempt to weaken the teachers’ movement”. He also complained that teachers’ voices were not heard in the elaboration of the PDE (Monteiro, 2007, p. A20).

The closed process of the elaboration of the plan also resulted in internal divisions in MEC, opposing the technical team responsible for the design of the new policy on one hand, and leaders of social movements and teaching organizations, who felt they had been left out of the process, on the other. However, the internal critiques gained no visible publicity, mainly because the national media did not give them any space, preferring to cover opinions favorable to the PDE. Another important factor that helped to silence the dissonant voices was the extensive marketing campaign set up by MEC to mobilize support of society. An agreement between the Brazilian Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (ABERT) enabled the PDE campaign to be broadcast free of charge. There was also an unprecedented centralization of all press releases at MEC and other connected bodies, under the pretext of giving out a unified message.

In spite of this rigorous centralized control of information, an official document was released by MEC in July 2007 presenting an explicit critique of the national evaluation policy, the cornerstone of the PDE. This is the reference document for the announcement of the National Conference of Basic Education, which was elaborated under the coordination of Francisco Chagas, the Assistant Executive Secretary of MEC and the ex-Director of the CNTE. Until May 2007, he was the Secretary of Basic Education. The document proposed that a conference be held as an instrument for national mobilization in favor of the quality and valorization of elementary education. Up

university degrees. After more than a year of discussions Congress approved the amount of R\$ 950, to be implanted gradually by 2010. This is equivalent to US\$ 575.

to this point there is a total affinity with the directives of the PDE. The divergence appears when the document identifies as an “aspect of extreme importance in national mobilization” the national evaluation policy,

understood as a continuous process contributing to the development of the educational systems, schools and the teaching and learning process, the result of a quality school linked to society. In this sense such a policy should not be reduced to centralized large-scale evaluation instruments but should help and encourage states and municipalities to set up their own systems, which take into account external evaluation and the self-evaluation of the schools. In order to do so, the indicators on school performance beyond the cognitive level of the students and on the pass and dropout rates should be analyzed. A broad conception of evaluation should ensure the link between educational systems through the National System of Education and institutional indicators such as political and educational projects; infrastructure, the time the student remains in the school; democratic management of the school; participation of the student body in school life; local systems of evaluation; careers; qualification and form of selection of the school principal; number of pupils per classroom; availability of educational material, etc. (MEC, 2007a, p. 5)

When defending a conception of evaluation that is not reduced to “centralized large-scale evaluation instruments” and which considers factors of school performance “beyond the cognitive level of the students and those on the pass and dropout rate”, the document that called for the conference comes out against the main pillars of the PDE: the intensive use of large-scale evaluation to measure performance targets, based on the IDEB, which includes just the scores in the standardized national tests and the pass rates. It is odd that such a strong critique of the evaluation policy appears in an official MEC document, especially during an administration that promotes a rigorous control of all

official publications.¹⁸¹ Even more interesting is the fact that this critique has the “imprint” of the CNTE.

In fact, in the public document “*Posição da CNTE sobre o Plano de Desenvolvimento da Educação (PDE)*” [“Position of the CNTE on the Education Development Plan”], where it criticized both the content of the plan and the way it had been elaborated, the CNTE proposed that there should be a tougher analysis of how “evaluation criteria described in the PDE”, would be applied, recognizing that “all the results of the Plan are directed toward this area” (CNTE, 2007a). Using cautious language and avoiding stronger critiques of the new educational policy of the Lula government, of which it has been an ally, the CNTE suggests the establishment, in elementary education, of an analogous commission to the National Evaluation Commission of Higher Education (CONAES), “in order to supply methodological help to the econometric formulations made by INEP”. The questioning of the official policy is light for a union which is noted for its combativeness:

Given the heterogeneity of the systems and the public schools, even with the support that MEC intends to give the states and municipalities that are in the worst situation in the IDEB, it is important to add other evaluation concepts that are not limited to the scores of the pupils and the pass and dropout rates. Educational policies, infrastructure, democratic management, qualification, health and professional careers are some of the elements that cannot be excluded from this process. (CNTE, 2007a, p. 4)

¹⁸¹ Three weeks after the announcement of the PDE, through MEC Edict No. 434, May 9, 2007, the Minister of Education set up the Publications Committee of the Ministry of Education, which is directly subordinated to the Executive Secretary of MEC, with the aim of “ensuring the uniformity of the procedures and the quality of publications.” The attributions of the Committee are: to define the editorial policy of the Ministry; to establish thematic priorities; to decide on the technical specifications of the publications; to elaborate the MEC Manual of Publications; to analyze, evaluate and emit reports on educational and institutional material, both the printed and audiovisual, which will be published or supported by MEC.

It is easy to identify striking similarities between the reference document of the National Conference of Elementary Education and the public statement of the CNTE. Both recommend a conception of evaluation that is different from that which is embraced by the PDE. The former defends the need to go “beyond the cognitive level of the students and the indicators on the pass and dropout rates” and speaks about “adding institutional indicators”; the second says that it is “important to include other evaluation concepts that are not limited to the score of the students and the pass and dropout rates”. The two documents closely agree when they list the indicators and the elements that should be part of a “broader concept of evaluation”. Paradoxically, the critique contained in the official MEC document is tougher than that in the CNTE statement. As the public manifestation of the CNTE appeared before the publication of the Reference Document of the National Conference of Basic Education, it can be inferred that this latter document developed from the former.

This is actually not a specific rhetorical slip as the entire document reproduces a discourse and a grammar that are out of tune with the managerialist and economic language which run through the PDE documents (e.g., Fernandes, 2007), resonating the discourse and the official policy of the teachers’ unions and the CNTE. I argue that the critique of the official policy of the evaluation contained in an official text was not the result of the sabotage of close assessors of the Minister of Education, which could characterize subordination and result in the dismissal of the perpetrators. It is more probable that the call for the conference, which was demanded by the CNTE, and which was finally held in the first semester of 2008, and the theme of the conference are part of a political strategy plotted by the MEC cupola in order to improve political relations with

the unions and social movements, which has soured as a result of the alliance with the TPE business movement, sacramented with the PDE.

The CNTE increased its critiques in the seminar entitled *Perspectivas para a educação brasileira: um olhar atento ao PDE* [Perspectives for Brazilian education: keep an eye on the PDE], which took place in Brasília on June 21 and 22, 2007. The “meritocratic logic” of the plan and the centrality attributed to the performance targets were pointed out as the main points of divergence. The CNTE, showing that it was ready to discuss the policy of educational evaluation, took the following position:

The evaluation process is important to measure and diagnose the problems that prevent an improvement in the quality of education; it is as if it were a compass for the administrator and the school community. However, by restricting the elements that form part of or react with the concepts of quality in education, any evaluation process or econometric indicator will be limited and will supply doubtful results. One classic example refers to the evaluations of students, which are predominantly quantitative, and which do not take into account the set of types of knowledge, skills and values which have been constructed in the school environment. The IDEB, though it is easy to understand and includes important elements that have been harmful to education (low income and high dropout and grade repetition rates), does not take into account crucial questions which will more efficiently measure the levels of quality in teaching . (CNTE, 2007c)

The critiques of the logic of the PDE in the documents of the National Conference on Basic Education hide a contradiction that goes way beyond the obvious heterogeneity of the allies that MEC won over in its successful attempt to establish a broad base of support for its new policy. On one side, the CNTE and its partners in the National Forum in Defense of Public Schools, which demand greater investment in education, democratic management of the public school and a national salary base for teachers. On the other side, the TPE, private foundations, media groups, and business leaders who demand “measurements, targets and corporate management practices in education” (Barros, 2008,

p. B2).¹⁸² Reconciling such antagonistic positions requires more than the proverbial skill of building up a consensus which has been attributed to the media (Aranha & Clemente, 2007). The introduction of a salary base for teachers answered a previous demand of the CNTE and helped to reduce the worsening in relations caused by the PDE. Other policies directed toward specific groups act as palliatives to calm down politically important players such as social movements and progressive educators who oppose the economic rationality of the PDE.

The CNTE openly criticized the especial partnership between MEC and the Everyone for Education business movement by asserting that its backers are ideologically very far “from the platform of the [Lula government] but have enough economic and political clout to be able to influence it according to their own interests.” And the critique goes on: “And having as a reference the explicit method and conception of the PDE, everything makes one think that its members joined those who directly formulated the Plan” (CNTE, 2007a, p. 3). This close relationship had already been publicly admitted by the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, in an interview to *Época* (see Aranha & Clemente, 2007, p. 43). However, he peremptorily denies that MEC has entered into a preferential alliance with TPE, which might alienate its historical allies:

¹⁸² On the occasion of the 7^o *Fórum Empresarial* [7th Business Forum], held on April 19 and 20, 2008 on the paradise island of Comandatuba, off the coast of Bahia, the most important Brazilian business leaders discussed the state of Brazilian public education together with governors and the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad. The President of the Ponto Frio Group, Manoel Amorim, represented the indignation of the group: “We pay very high taxes, and in return we do not receive quality education for our children (...) In the private sector, using our own product is a synonym of respect for the consumer and of confidence in the quality of what we do. I suggest that, in order to reach a quality education, every politician should put their children and grandchildren into public schools” (Barros, 2008, p. B2). During the Forum, R\$ 5.5 million was collected for the Ayrton Senna Institute, a private foundation which has been very active in promoting educational reforms together with states and municipalities.

There is not the slightest risk that this will happen as we have permanent interlocutors in the Ministry of Education who will always remain so and who work from the perspective of the content of educational practice. Uniting the efforts of all the sectors of society toward giving education more visibility and investment cannot oppose [different social players]. On the contrary, in this we must all be together. (Haddad, personal interview, June 22, 2007)

However the interests seemed to be irreconcilable. For the CNTE, the association between MEC and TPE helped to create a business-driven momentum for education policy in Brazil that tends to substitute the humanistic, civil and academic formation of social movements by the logic of the market. The CNTE believes that the influence of the TPE on the main content of the PDE will result in a drainage of public resources to programs from private institutions; an incentive for a mercadological conception of education; bypassing the control of public resources by public agents; the possibility of agreements with private institutions in the areas of pre-school and special education, thereby substituting public education in these areas; submission to a logic of meritocratic evaluation and ranking (CNTE, 2007a, pp. 3-4). Recognizing the financial and political power of the business movement for education, the CNTE admits that the PDE has become a new “trench of dispute.” The discourse of the dominant media, which is favorable to the TPE agenda, unbalances the dispute to an even greater extent.

Strange bedfellows: the emerging new education consensus

The ideological bases of the PDE are associated with the four main lines that form the dominant educational discourse in contemporary Brazil, which have been extensively discussed in previous chapters: human capital theory, the ideology of meritocracy,

cultural deficit theory, and managerialism. When the PDE borrowed from these paradigms the main elements that make up “that which is common sense,” it evokes and symbolically establishes a virtual consensus “on the diagnosis of the problems and the strategies to overcome them”, in such a way that any critique is soon discredited as it goes against common sense. As Haddad stated: “Whoever has any good sense will be inspired by what works well elsewhere” (in Weinberg, 2007, p. 11).

Veja – “the news magazine which best expresses its positions by making each page an editorial in favor of the free market” (Costa, 2008, p. 26) – recognized in the PDE a decisive step in the direction toward a system of requirements and evaluations which will, finally, bring about a meritocratic society. The reasons for its support of the new educational policy of the Lula government become clear in an interview with Minister Fernando Haddad, whose headline anticipates the frame to be adopted by *Veja*: “*Far from the dogmas: the Minister of Education says that Brazil needs more pragmatism and less ideology in order to improve education*”. When presenting the interview, the editor Monica Weinberg summarized the meaning of the PDE:

From the Office of the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, 44 years-old, there came a project for Brazil, which managed to have the rare quality of pleasing specialists from various ideological areas. The merit of the plan was to create an indicator [IDEB] that provides for a comparison of Brazilian schools so that the worst can be made to reach targets and the best can be rewarded. The principle, therefore, is that of the meritocracy, which has in other countries helped the educational system to reach quality levels. Haddad says: “Whoever has any good sense will be inspired by what works well elsewhere.” For these and other reasons, Haddad, who has been a member of the PT since 1983, has been criticized by the party militants. (Weinberg, 2007, p. 11)

The readers of *Veja* who are not familiar with the educational debate in Brazil would not have noticed that the framing of the interview with the Minister of Education has less to

do with the ideological convergence around the PDE and much more to do with the commercial interests of the Abril Group in the school textbook market. In fact, the previous month, the dominant media was involved in an intense discussion on the use of a textbook used to propagate “Communist ideology” in Brazilian schools. Once again the conservative journalist Ali Kamel, Director of Journalism at Rede Globo, led the way. In an opinion article in *O Globo*, he attacked the collection “*Nova História Crítica*” [“New Critical History”] by Mario Schmidt, which had already sold more than 10 million copies in Brazil. Kamel defined it as “a naive textbook, full of ideology”. And he finished off: “It scares you” (Kamel, 2007a). This was enough for the dominant media to unite to condemn the book, blaming MEC for the “ideological bias” in the choice of textbooks that are used in public schools throughout Brazil.

This campaign started by the conservative media, appropriately called “educational McCarthyism” (Costa, 2007, p. 30), sheds light on the commercial war between the large private publishers, with the growing participation of the international media groups (see Chapter 2). The Abril Group, which publishes *Veja*, accounts for about a third of the Brazilian textbook market. On attacking its competitors of propagating “soap box Bolshevism” in schools, *Veja* is promoting its own commercial interests (Antunes, 2007).¹⁸³

Indoctrination in Brazilian schools was the theme of a long cover article in the issue of August 20, 2008 issue, where *Veja* presents the results of an evaluation it made

¹⁸³ An excellent article which reveals the powerful commercial interests behind this campaign was made by the weekly magazine *Carta Capital*, which devoted its cover story to the story with the following headline: “*Livros Didáticos: Cifras e Ideologia*” [“Textbooks: Figures and Ideology”]. The introduction anticipates the critical view which will be found in the eight pages on the theme: “Behind the polemics on the book accused of preaching Communism, quarrels and manipulations in a 560 million real market paid for by the government”. See *Carta Capital*, 3 October 2007, pp. 24-31.

of 130 History, Geography and Portuguese workbooks and textbooks adopted by 2,000 schools in Brazil. The report, made by Monica Weinberg and Camila Pereira, denounces “a prevalent trend among Brazilian teachers to fill the heads of children with left-wing material”. The text, addressing middle-class parents, warns that “left-wing indoctrination runs throughout all the private and public education system (Weinberg & Perreira, 2008, p. 77). Teachers are accused of idolizing “arcane characters who have not made an effective contribution to Western civilization, such as the educator Paulo Freire, author of a method of left-wing indoctrination disguised as a literacy program” (p. 82). *Veja* wages war on what it classifies as a “hostile vision of the market and a sympathetic view of communism – an ideology of the 19th century, tested and a failure in the 20th century, and which, in the 21st century, survives only in North Korea, Cuba and in Brazilian classrooms” (p.78).

When interviewing the Minister of Education, the co-author of this report asked about the MEC policy on textbooks. The content and the sequence of questions show that the intention of *Veja* was to draw out of the interviewee statements that fit into the framing of its educational coverage, attributing the backwardness of Brazil to the corporativism of teachers and the left-wing ideology that has taken over in Brazilian schools. This framing can be seen in the content and format of the very first question:

Veja – *Do you agree with those educators who believe that schools in Brazil are giving a backward vision of the world to their pupils?*

Haddad – Yes, this does happen. One clear problem is the dogmatism found in certain classrooms in Brazil. This excludes from the school the diversity of ideas which should be supporting the school, as a principle, and restricts the vision of the world to that of the old left. And the world is not going in this direction. I always say that in a church or a political party people have the right to promote the ideology they want, but never in a classroom. (...) (In Weinber, 2007, p. 11)

On criticizing the “dogmatic view” that “still circulates in part of the academy”, Haddad performs a discourse which echoes the frame adopted in the *Veja* educational coverage. The only part of the interview where Haddad takes a position openly against the editorial line of *Veja* is when he is questioned on the government decision to set a national base for teachers’ salaries:

Veja – *The government has established a salary base for teachers, but international surveys have shown that a salary increase often has no effect on the quality of teaching...*

Haddad – We have put together evidence to show that in some of the poorest places in Brazil the lack of resources to pay teachers better, among other things, does in fact help to explain the low quality of education. Here we return to the financial question. However, I am aware that it is only possible to go forward if we some way manage to reward those who produce the best students. (...) (p. 15)

The idea of introducing into Brazil the system of *merit pay* – one of the directives of the Everyone for Education plan, is the latest fashion to confront the quality deficit in public education. This is one of the flagships most ardently defended by the dominant media and business leaders. Merit rewards for schools, teachers and even students is seen as the most efficient way to motivate the improvement of teaching. In practice, while Brazilian schools remain under-funded, the state and municipal governments divert the scarce resources that they should be using to support them all, in order to reward the top schools. Thus the policy of improving education is merely becoming a contest of the evaluation of results to gain financial prizes.

Four months after the publication of the interview with the Minister of Education, *Veja* devoted its yellow pages section to an interview with the São Paulo state Secretary of Education, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, ex-President of INEP and ex-Executive Secretary of MEC during the Cardoso government. The title and subtitle

appear to dialogue with the previous interview: “*Rewarding merit – The Secretary of Education of São Paulo says that Brazil must free itself from corporativism and give incentives to those who deserve them*”. Carried out by the same editor, Mônica Weinberg, the similarities between the framing and content of both interviews are astonishing. The chart below shows that –as the Minister of Education has it – “there is basically a consensus on the diagnosis of the problems and the strategies to overcome them”. *Veja*’s yellow pages show a striking discursive and programmatic convergence between two leading Brazilian education policy-makers, who have played a pivotal role in shaping national education policies during the period covered by this dissertation.

The comparison of the two interviews is not enough to allow us to affirm that the educational agendas of the do PSDB and the PT, the parties which have governed Brazil in the last fifteen years, have become identical. In practice, the educational policies implemented by the Cardoso and Lula governments have clear differences. But what can be seen is that the Minister and Secretary reply in a similar way to the appeal from *Veja* for a “deideologization” of the debate on the problems and solution for Brazilian education, producing a discourse that hides the true ideology (neo-liberal and conservative) behind the managerial and meritocratic logic of the PDE.

Figure I – *Veja*'s yellow pages: excerpts of the *new* educational consensus - 2007/08

| Education policy issues | Fernando Haddad Brazil's Minister of Education (*) | Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro São Paulo Secretary of Education (**) |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Approach to education reform | “There is a basic consensus on the diagnostic of the problems and the strategies to overcome them. (...) We need more pragmatism to overcome our clear weaknesses in education and reach the countries that are still a long way off. We began the race by establishing a halfway target.” | “What works in education is the disciplined application of a set of more basic measures, and not those with a festive showy effect, as some people prefer. (...) Today Brazil has a target for 15 years' time, and there is a consensus on the strategies required to reach it.” |
| Teacher training | “Traditionally the Brazilian university produces knowledge that doesn't interest the real world. (...) Brazil will have a greater chance of success not only when classes have a higher quality but also when dogmatism finally leaves the classrooms.” (...) “Education in Brazil also suffers from something still more basic: teacher training. We have a clear deficit of people who are really able to teach children.” | “Education schools are very worried about an ideological discourse on the multiple transformative functions of education. They have been less interested in scientific evidence on educational practices which have worked both inside and outside Brazil.” (...) “The lack of well-trained teachers to carry out their jobs is, after all, a chronic problem in the Brazilian educational system. We can only think about good education when we can untie this knot.” |
| Merit pay | “I am aware that it is only possible to advance in any way if we are able to reward those who produce the best students.” | “At the end of the month it is the teachers who deserve more money (...) those few who are able to provide quality teaching, despite the obvious problems.” |
| Managerialism | “The radiograph of each school overwhelmingly reconfirms that which is common sense: the best schools on the lists are those schools directed by a principal who is there by merit and not through political favors.” | “There is a common factor in all the top schools, and this should be noted by the rest: the presence of a competent principal, who has leadership qualities similar to those of a head of a large company.” |
| Performance-based reward schemes | “In the new MEC system, the schools at the top of the national ranking will gain financial autonomy. (...) If they have good results, they will have the right to control their own finances.” | “Only those schools that improve their figures will receive more money. (...) The bonus may reach the equivalent of more than three monthly salaries in a year. This will be for every employee in the school, from the cleaner to the principal.” |
| Discontinuity of educational policies | “With each new governor, everything changes direction and goes down the sink. As we need to advance so much, we can no longer restart from zero. (...) Ireland and South Korea, for example, both needed three decades to carry out a classroom revolution.” | “In an area like education, where the results are seen in the long term, the traditional sweeping under the floor that comes with every change of government is something to be fought against, as has been done in countries like Ireland and South Korea, which today are models of education.” |

* *Veja*, October 17, 2007, pp. 11-15** *Veja*, February 13, 2008, pp. 9-13

Conclusion

The seemingly broad consensus built around the PDE is neither grounded on a shared notion of social equality nor on a commitment to carry out certain tasks in order to achieve it. The frequently announced “revolution for education” lacks an indispensable condition for it to happen in Brazil; a genuinely republican and humanistic ethos that recognizes one’s neighbor as one’s equal, and someone who has the same rights and value (Souza, 2006). Equality was never embraced as a core value of democracy in Brazil. On the contrary, conservative modernism has produced “an unending unequal society” (Oliveira, 2003). In the absence of a feasible project for social transformation, what unifies the dominant national educational discourse is the belief in the redemptive power of education and the meritocratic Utopia. This is the triumph of neo-liberal ideology, which makes individuals responsible for their choices and believes that the market is the only legitimate mechanism of equity.

The educational backwardness of Brazil is “productive” both for social reproduction and for the maintenance of the structures of domination and power. It cannot, therefore, be exclusively attributed to the neglect of successive governments or to the lack of interest of the elites (Plank, 2001). The current Minister of Education, who has a strong Marxist background, is ready to concede that it is not possible to achieve education equality without facing the dreadful and enduring social inequalities:

I do not believe in an educational revolution disconnected from the social reality of Brazil. On the contrary, great transformations in the educational area generally take place at the heart of more intense social processes, the strengthening of a plan that addresses an agenda of basic rights, the exercise of citizenship, and therefore I resist using terms like this, for example, educational revolution. (Personal interview – June 22, 2007)

However, he does believe that the PDE represents a new paradigm in the battered history of Brazilian education, and it will bring about just the kind of transformations the country needs to meet the globalized twenty first century challenges.

The ongoing struggle for class and race-based affirmative action policies challenges the main assumptions underlying the dominant educational discourse. Human capital theory does not account for inherited inequalities that prevent subaltern groups from getting the education they need to improve their employability prospects and enhance their social and cultural capital. Instead of primarily serving the economy's needs for skilled workers, education should be more concerned about emancipation, equality, and social justice. Meritocracy is discredited as an ideological device employed by dominant groups to legitimize and keep their privileges unchecked. All forms of cultural deficit theories are confronted with the clear evidence that poor and black Brazilians do not have the same educational opportunities, which hinder their development as human beings equal in rights and dignity. Finally, managerial forms of social control that crystallize inequalities and threaten to undercut even the most basic social advancement, not to mention any kind of redistribution policies, are fought through different political and counter-hegemonic veins.

In the next chapter – the concluding one – I discuss the evolving public debate on education reforms in Brazil, which have been magnified over the last fifteen years by the dominant media's active role in shaping and framing. In the light of the restructuring of global education, I offer some insights on the prospect of current performance-based accountability policy and present my concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY

It would be very good if [Brazilian] schools could pay higher salaries to the good teachers, fire those who are incapable of working as teachers and thereby introduce an environment which is as competitive as that of a large company.

-- **Eric Hanushek**: “Education and money” (Interview)
(*Veja*, 17 September 17 2008: p. 23)

The sector of the production of educational material has grown so much that, just in 2007, two companies went public on the Stock Exchange.(...) The workbooks produced by private companies in the educational sector, as long as they are of good quality and written by specialists, can be an efficient educational tool.

-- **O Estado de S. Paulo**: “Textbook material in the public educational system”
(15 April 2008, p A3)

I cannot believe that the majority of Brazilian teachers, with their poor intellectual background, are able to offer the student the complete and multifaceted vision that the problems of educating citizens require. Education has become political propaganda.

-- **Gustavo Ioschpe**: “Neutrality as a duty” (op-ed)
(*Veja*, August 20, 2008, p. 87)

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the media has taken center stage in the educational debate and policy formation in Brazil over the last fifteen years. In this closing chapter, I address the following questions: What are the major implications of this structural shift toward a media-driven educational agenda? To what extent has the dominant education discourse enacted and legitimated by the mainstream media affected education restructuring and policies? What are the main contributions of this study’s findings to education policy and research? What insights can committed educators and social activists gain by critically considering the role of the media in education policy formation and legitimation, which might help them to be more effective in their struggle for democratic schools and social justice? From a critical perspective, what trends and

developments in education reforms can be anticipated by considering the new hegemonic alliance built around the PDE? In short, what comes next?

The first conclusion to emerge from this study is that the dominant media favors market-driven global models of society and educational reforms. According to the media discourse, the only acceptable regime for the allocation of public resources and the equitable distribution of opportunities and wealth in a capitalist society is the so-called meritocracy. When it comes to the school system, this discourse asserts that individuals are born equal and entitled to the same fundamental rights, but they have to compete for the best places and opportunities, be constantly tested and measured, sorted out and placed on different academic tracks based on their performance and abilities, and, as a corollary, be rewarded and praised for their efforts, talents and achievements. Handicaps and socially inherited disadvantages that individuals bring from the starting point are not taken into account. Chronic poverty and enduring social inequalities are deemed to be corrected by schooling itself. After all, according to the core tenets of human capital theory, income distribution is a proxy of education.

Given the troubled political history of Brazil in the 20th century, marked by coup d'états and breaks in the constitutional regime, swinging between dictatorship and democracy, it would be fair to say that the period under study (1995-2008) has unusual characteristics: for the only time since it became a republic in 1889 Brazil has experienced an extended period of relative political and economic stability and has made important advances in the reducing poverty and other social inequalities. Another characteristic of this period has been the unfamiliar alternation of power as a result of the 2002 presidential election, which resulted in Cardoso going into the history books as the

first democratically elected president in the last five decades who passed on the presidential sash to his successor. It is important to note that the arrival of the PT in central power was a definitive test for the consolidation of Brazilian democracy. Far from bringing about a political break, the Lula's presidency has guaranteed the continuity of the structural adjustment which was initiated by the Cardoso government. A number of analysts have thus suggested that, from a historical perspective, the two administrations should be seen as part of the same political cycle, which has been characterized by the opening of the economy and the Brazil's attempt to become a competitive player in the globalized world, beginning with affirming its regional leadership in Latin America.

Actually, the globalization paradigm first became widespread in political discourse in the 1990s and has been evoked with particularly bold rhetoric as a rationale underlying the urge for a sweeping educational restructuring, now perceived by powerful stakeholders as an imperative if Brazil wants to fulfill the requirements of the emerging knowledge-based economy. As this study demonstrates, the mainstream media offers a privileged vantage point to observe and analyze the enactment of a broad new "consensus" surrounding educational reforms. As a key economic, political, and cultural institution, the media have been very successful in framing educational discourse and shaping educational policies over the last two decades. In addition, private media conglomerates have played an active role in education provision and policy formation, supposedly to compensate for the State's neglect and society's indifference toward public schools.

The participation of the dominant media in both the debate and the formation of educational policies in the educational sector has been analyzed in this study from two

theoretical perspectives: the first focused on its economic function; and the second centered on its ideological role in winning consent and sustaining hegemony. As I have contended before, in order to understand the role of the media in contemporary societies, we must take into account that there is a necessary link between the material and the symbolic, between economic dominance and cultural influence. The separation of the ideological and economic functions of the media is therefore merely an analytical device. As Stuart Hall (1997) pointed out, “the media both form a critical part of the material infrastructure of modern societies and are the principal means by which ideas and images are circulated” (p 209).

Media-driven policies and the emerging educational market

The political economy approach enables us to establish a connection between the economic and commercial interests of those private corporations that control the major mass communication media and the educational agenda. A recent phenomenon mentioned in the previous chapters is the growing convergence between the entertainment and communication sectors and the emerging Brazilian educational market. In fact, the main national and transnational media conglomerates are investing heavily in the area of education, especially in three segments: textbooks, educational materials, and new educational technologies. For instance, the educational material market has been growing so fast that companies in the sector have been going public on the Stock Exchange to gain leverage for their businesses (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 2008). The powerful commercial interests behind the so-called “textbook war”, which gained

visibility in 2007, can be seen in the huge sums involved: through the national textbook program (PNLD), last year the Federal Government bought from private publishers 121 million copies, at a cost of R\$ 560 million. (Sousa, 2007, p. 24)

This expansion of the textbook market has been accompanied by two trends that can also be seen in other countries: the standardization and commoditization of the school curriculum. In Brazil, these two processes have been reaching public schools through the gradual substitution of textbooks by “apostilas” [workbooks]. What we call here “apostilas” includes manuals, booklets, commercial test guides, and all sorts of tutorial materials devised for intensive test practice and drills. Publishers of test-prep materials also supply schools with highly-paid consultants to “train” teachers how to use them. Actually, these pre-packaged programs were originally developed as instructional materials for “concursos vestibulares” [university entrance examinations]. Today, pre-packaged programs are sold by private groups as a complete “teaching system”, focused on basic skills. This trend toward the standardization of educational testing and content has meant the replacement of the regular curriculum by a test-driven curriculum.

The national standardized tests, which have become the chief agent of educational reform over the last two decades, have been more than mere instruments for the advance of the standardization and commoditization of the school curriculum, by providing parameters of comparability that orientate consumer choice and perform an essential function for education to operate with the rationality of the market. As Apple (2001), has cogently argued, this is a crucial prerequisite for the importation and functioning of market logic in education. Thus there is a clear convergence between the national policy centered on standardized tests and the media-driven educational agenda which favors the

commoditization of the curriculum by means of the adoption of workbooks and pre-packaged teaching programs. And it is exactly this direction that the debate on education and educational policies in Brazil are now following.

Setting up the educational agenda and forging consensus

When celebrating its 40th anniversary, on September 11, 2008, *Veja* promoted the seminar “*The Brazil We Want To Be*”, which gathered together in São Paulo the elites of the Brazilian political and business classes, together with well-known “media experts”, to discuss, among other themes, education, democracy, race and poverty.¹⁸⁴ The discussions resulted in 40 proposals presented by *Veja* as “the start of a rational, non-party and realistic discussion on the obstacles which still prevent Brazil from reaching its full potential for progress” (*Veja*, 2008, p. 111).¹⁸⁵ Heading the list of the 40 proposals, seven of them devoted to education, number 1 has presented with the headline: “*Meritocracy shock in education*”. And it is accompanied by the following explanation:

Merit is rewarded by promotion and a salary increase for those teachers who train more students who are able to reach a good position in international academic contests. This concept is unknown in Brazil, where teachers almost always receive a salary increase according to the years they have worked. In the absence of other factors, merely with the implementation of the meritocracy shock, the performance of the Brazilian students [in the PISA/OCDE] will be among the 43

184 Among the participants, special mention should be made of four national political leaders who have been mentioned as the main candidates to follow President Lula in 2010: Lula’s Chief of Staff, Dilma Rousseff; the Federal representative Ciro Gomes; the Governor of Minas Gerais, Aécio Neves; and the Governor of São Paulo, José Serra. The two former belong to the coalition which supports the Lula government, while the two latter belong to the PSDB, the party of ex-President Cardoso.

185 The proceedings of the seminar “*O Brasil que Queremos Ser*” [“The Brazil We Want To Be”] can be found at www.veja40anos.com.br.

best in the world, together with that of Israel and Italy, and not, as it is now, in 53rd place, beside Kirgizstan. (*Veja*, 2008, p. 112)

This proposal came out of a panel, in which the Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, the Secretary of Education for São Paulo state, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, and the economist Alexandre Scheinkman, who has occupied the chair formerly belonging to Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago (see Chapter 4), took part. It was carefully crafted and framed according to the dominant educational discourse, which *Veja* has vigorously voiced over the last two decades. The bold call for a meritocracy shock in the Brazilian education system¹⁸⁶ has been accompanied by another proposal that has been receiving growing support from the dominant media: “*Establishing mandatory curricula for primary education*”. The plural used in the headline disguises the support for a national mandatory curriculum, as the description of the proposal clarifies:

A point which the ten most successful countries in educational, social and economic terms have in common is the existence of a mandatory minimum curriculum in primary education [K-12]. Without a curriculum with well-defined goals, no country will progress. In the greater part of Brazil, this curriculum does not yet exist. (*Veja*, 2008, pp. 112-113).

The logical deduction is that if Brazil wishes to become a successful country in the educational, social and economic fields, all that is needed is to impose an compulsory curriculum in all schools in Brazil. As Michael Apple (2001) pointed out, national or state curricula, coupled with national or state tests, are “essential steps toward increased marketization” (p. 84). Therefore, the proposals put forward in the seminar “*The Brazil*

¹⁸⁶ This call reminds us of the “capitalist shock” and the “management shock”, mottoes in the respective PSDB presidential campaigns of 1989 and 2006.

We Want To Be” clearly point in the direction of a competitive and meritocratic market model. The same logic is contained in the complementary proposals of “*encouraging competition between [public] universities*” and “*financing the best researchers*”.

In order to avoid a one-sided view, it is worth noting that the meeting also made a call to “*invest in the training of teachers and teacher trainers*” and “*convince parents that they are part of the school*”, two proposals that appeal to common sense. The latter proposal is formulated according to cultural deficit theory, which, as we could see, is one of the main bulwarks of the dominant educational theory (see Chapter 5).

The set of proposals put forward by *Veja* to improve education demonstrates a strong belief that only competition – which should be stimulated by means of the establishment of goals, the evaluation of performance, and the rewarding of results – will enable Brazilian schools to improve teaching quality to the level required by the technological revolution and the global economy. This platform, which summarizes the agenda that *Veja* wants to be introduced throughout Brazil, suggests that there is a broad consensus on the free market paradigm for education that is supported by the main political and business leaders who were invited to “think about the Brazil” of the future. Ironically, the publication of this manifesto in favor market- oriented reforms took place only three weeks before the financial collapse which sank the global economy into an unprecedented downward spiral, from which it will probably take years to recover.

The ideological differences between the Brazilian specialists and political leaders who were present at the meeting were silenced by the dogmatism of the sponsoring news magazine, which is noted for its neo-liberal fervor. In order to legitimate its proposals, *Veja* announced that it was ready to take “the panels with the themes and conclusions of

the seminars for discussion in various Brazilian universities”. In order to ensure that this initiative would have an impact on the public agenda and policies in the near future, *Veja* committed itself to

periodically check, through reports and interviews, the degree of acceptability of each of the 40 proposals, submitting them to a test of reality, evaluating their feasibility and progress, and, who knows, effectively implanting a number of them. (*Veja*, 2008, p. 113)

This lengthy report of a single, exclusive meeting is justified for two main reasons: first, because of its highly selective audience, with plenty of powerful politicians, business leaders and media experts; second, for shedding light on the newly emerging educational consensus that has been partially enacted by the PDE, as I extensively analyzed in the previous chapter. However, the meeting sponsored by *Veja* made more explicit the market-driven course currently being followed by local, state and national education policies in Brazil. To a certain extent, the blueprint for improving the Brazilian educational system outlined in the forum “*O Brasil que Queremos Ser*” [“The Brazil We Want To Be”] may be seen as the corollary of the struggle over education restructuring since redemocratization, back in 1985.¹⁸⁷ In this sense, the meeting itself and its policy recommendations can also be seen as a raucous reassertion of political and ideological

¹⁸⁷ Oddly enough, as I was writing this closing chapter, on October 5, 2008, I figured out that on this day Brazil was commemorating the 20th anniversary of the declaration of the new Federal Constitution, which was the culmination of the long process of the transition to democracy (see Motter, 1994). The Brazil envisioned by the Democratic Constitution of 1988, which enshrined a broad set of social rights and fundamental guarantees, among which is that of the right of all Brazilians to education, has yet to become reality. The strengthening of the social movements and the political struggles which have taken place in the last two decades has greatly advanced the agenda of inclusion and promotion of citizenship. Education is at the top of the agenda of the social groups that fight for recognition and redistribution (Fraser, 1987). Moreover, the push for race and class-based affirmative action has been faced with fierce opposition from the dominant media.

influence by a media outlet that has been very effective in setting the public agenda and, therefore, can fairly claim leadership in the current educational debate.

It is important to keep in mind that *Veja* is not fighting alone in order to capture the national education agenda. The dominant educational discourse that is produced and disseminated by the Brazilian mainstream media favors an approach to school reform that emulates global templates for education restructuring and the adoption of market “solutions”. The establishment of performance-based financial incentives for schools and merit-based pay schemes for teachers has been nationally championed by the business-driven *Everyone for Education* movement and its allies as quick-fix solutions for low achieving schools all over Brazil. These worrisome trends gained momentum with the launching of the PDE, in April 2007, which forced municipal and statewide school systems to align their education policies to national standards, benchmarks, and performance-based accountability mechanisms. Rapidly improvised and ill-conceived performance-based financial reward schemes for teachers and even for high achieving students have been adopted by local and state governments, diverting scarce money from schools. Linked to this, municipal and state-run education systems have managed to raise test scores by narrowing curricula and replacing text books by prep-test packages marketed by private companies. Another technique used by the public teaching networks in order to raise scores in the IDEB has been that of altering the rules for promotion or simply making an administrative adjustment in the promotion rates. Distant from all this, MEC preferred to commemorate the improvement in the indicators in the IDEB of 2007, published at the end of August 2008. The official propaganda emphasized the importance of the achievement of going beyond the 2009 goals. Although it was favorable to the

quality indicator for primary education established by MEC, the national media began to criticize a supposed lack of technical rigor and even manipulation in the interpretation of the results (Araújo e Oliveira, 2008).

The new battlefield: pushing for a national curriculum

The state of São Paulo, the wealthiest and most populous in the Brazilian federation, which has been governed by ex-President Cardoso's PSDB since 1994, recently launched an educational reform that further extends performance-based accountability, nationally introduced by the PDE. After attracting negative coverage from the national media through the failure of the reforms implemented in the 1990s (see Chapter 6), Governor José Serra, who was defeated by Lula in 2002 presidential election, and who is ahead in the public opinion polls to be Lula's successor in 2010, decided to promote a sweeping change in educational policy, which would be put into practice in the second semester of 2007. This task was given to the experienced educational manager Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro, former Executive Secretary of MEC and President of INEP during the Cardoso government (1995-2002), who took over the State Education Department with the role of restructuring the state schools, which teach more than five million students.¹⁸⁸ When attempting to justify the fact that three of the four targets to improve teaching quality in the state network, which had been fixed in the Plurianual Plan for 2004 to 2007, had not been achieved, Governor José Serra said that the main factor was "lack of state curricular parameters" (quoted in Takahashi, 2008, p. C4).

188 The state of São Paulo has the largest public school network in Brazil, with around 5,500 schools, 250 thousand teachers and 50,000 other employees. In addition, each of the 645 municipalities in the state

The School Quality Program, launched in May 2008, follows the same conception as the PDE. It established the *São Paulo Education Development Index* (IDESP), a yardstick used to measure yearly progress against performance goals fixed for the schools in the state network (Castro, 2008b, p. A3). Each school received a kind of “league table”, indicating its position in the IDESP, the target to be achieved in the 2008-2009 period and a projection for the following years. Inspired by the IDEB, which was created by MEC for all of Brazilian schools, IDESP is an index that combines performance in standardized tests with promotion and dropout rates.¹⁸⁹ The affinities and similarities between the new educational policy of the São Paulo government and the PDE do not stop there: both adopted the results of the PISA as a benchmark to check yearly progress. In an op-ed published by the *Folha de S. Paulo*, the São Paulo Secretary of Education stressed the importance of the new yardstick to measure school performance:

Based on the IDESP, it will be possible for each school to improve its educational project, consider that different students will require different support or challenges, and give increased recognition and value to the importance of teachers’ work. We want our schools to reach the high-quality level indicated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCDE). (Castro, 2008b, p. A3)

However, in practice, the new policy goes in the opposite direction of the valuing of the teachers’ work and drastically restricts their autonomy through the imposition of a mandatory and prescriptive state curriculum. The São Paulo Secretary of Education classified as “ideological nonsense” the teachers’ complaint that the unified curriculum

operates its own network of schools, which are not included in these figures.

189 São Paulo is one of the few Brazilian states with its own evaluation system. IDESP is anchored in the school achievement Evaluation System of the State of São Paulo (SARESP), which uses the same methodology as SAEB (National Basic Education Evaluation System).

would hinder their freedom of teaching ([interview] in Weinberg, 2008, p.13). The new curricular proposal for the fifth to eighth grades of primary schools and for middle schools in the state of São Paulo greatly strengthens the movement in favor of a compulsory national curriculum for primary education, which, as we have seen, already receives support from the dominant media. The PSDB has thus appropriated the flag of the unified curriculum, which was supported in the “*The Brazil We Want To Be*” seminar. And this proposal has a great chance of becoming part of the party platform in the 2010 elections.

It is important to remember that during the eight years of the Cardoso government an important step in this direction was made through the establishment of the National Curricular Guidelines and Parameters (PCN) for Primary and Secondary School Education. Not surprisingly, one of the most frequent criticisms by the former Minister of Education, Paulo Renato Souza, of the educational policy of the Lula government is that it has ignored the PCNs although it has not adopted any new initiative to abolish them or substitute them with another curricular proposal. When being questioned on the omission of MEC in the area of curricular reform, the current Minister of Education, Fernando Haddad, replied:

I recognize the fact that we have been acting more slowly in the question of curricula than I would have liked. We had a long discussion on the elementary nine-year-long education. Today there are national guidelines for this. (...). The curriculum is being made more suitable. [National] guidelines both for elementary and secondary schools are being discussed (...). We must now extend the debate on curricula in Brazil, making the matrix of the national exams compatible with the guidelines and curricular parameters, clarifying the skills and competences that should be acquired at the end of each phase of basic education. (...) It is exactly this link that we intend to establish as what happens today is that there are very general curriculum guidelines on one side and very specific evaluation

matrixes on the other. And there is no dialogue between one thing and another. We therefore need to approximate INEP [responsible for national evaluations] and the Secretariat of Basic Education [responsible for the curricular guidelines] so that this link can be fully established.¹⁹⁰

As it had not proposed a broad reform of the national curricular guidelines and parameters established by the previous administration, the Lula government attempted to avoid an ideological dispute which could have divided the heterogeneous political coalition supporting it in the National Congress. Another factor that could have helped to keep polemical questions like the curriculum reform off the agenda was the two changes of Minister of Education during the Lula government's first term. The PDE also excluded the curricular question, which could bring problems to the "consensus" around the new policy and risk the support for the "Everyone for Education" business leaders' movement. The vision sketched out by the present Haddad suggests that the focus until the end of the present administration will extend the model implanted by the Cardoso government, through a more effective alignment between the directives and the national curricular parameters on one hand and the matrixes of skills and competences used in the national evaluations on the other.

The link between the national curriculum and evaluation policies supported by the current Minister of Education is similar to that of the global model of educational reforms. The present attempts of MEC are thus directed toward improving something that already exists. As a consequence, the content of the curriculum taught in schools will be increasingly determined by national evaluations. On strengthening the standardized tests as the main part of its educational policy and signaling that there will be a more effective

190 Personal Interview (Brasília, Federal District, 22 June 2007).

alignment between the curricular directives and the matrixes of the competences and skills to be checked in the national evaluations, the Lula government is in practice inducing the state and municipal systems to adopt a national curriculum.

When justifying the new educational policy which unifies the curriculum in the state public schools in São Paulo, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro added the following arguments:

Teachers will have a common curricular base for classroom teaching. They will have a firm guide with hints and suggestions. For each class there will be an indication of what the students need to learn. (...)
 This is vital as the public school teacher in Brazil faces daily challenges without a minimum reference to look to. Few Brazilian states are able to offer schools this material, in which the details to be studied in each subject are to be found. Experience shows that teachers with a didactic support of this kind can do much more in the classroom. Investing in the structured organization of a curriculum, as a number of successful countries have done in their education systems, is fundamental. (Castro, 2008a, p. A3)

What goes unsaid is that the unified curriculum favors the expansion of the market of educational material published by private groups, many of which are connected to the main media conglomerates.¹⁹¹ The so-called “education systems” standardize and condense the curriculum, providing teachers with ready-made lessons and students with interminable lists of exercises, formulas to be memorized and test-taking strategies. The substitution of textbooks by pre-test instructional materials is accompanied by the growing devaluation of the teachers’ work. Repetitive practice in test-drill workbooks is being introduced in São Paulo state-run public schools as an innovative teaching method

191 The Abril Group, which publishes *Veja*, and the Spanish media group Prisa-Santillana, which controls the Moderna publishing house, have a strong presence in this segment.

to close the learning gap and raise test scores. (See Castro, 2008a; Castro [interview] in Weinberg, 2008)

Even before the state government imposed the state-mandatory curriculum, the municipalities of the state of São Paulo had become a fertile ground for this kind of marketization of education based on the commoditization of the curriculum. The conservative daily *O Estado de S. Paulo* approached the subject in a recent editorial entitled “*Workbooks in the public network*”. A survey made by the newspaper showed that in the 645 municipalities of the state, almost 150 are already “buying educational material from the big private companies in the educational field” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 2008, p. A3).¹⁹² The authorities in the sector foresee that this figure should triple in the forthcoming years. The substitution of textbooks by workbooks began in the smaller municipalities (those with up to 100,000 inhabitants), and has now reached the middle-sized towns (those with up to 500,000 inhabitants). The municipal secretaries of education whom the newspaper interviewed justify this decision by saying that “standardized educational material made by private companies in the educational sector, in addition to including the minimum content that is required by the legislation, with colorful illustrations, educational suggestions and teaching recommendations, is easy to use and much more efficient in pedagogical terms” (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 2008).

The great appeal of the workbooks is therefore in facilitating the work of the teachers, who now become mere transmitters of the content that has been previously elaborated by the publishers of the classroom material. The private groups that produce the material offer a complete package of services to the municipal educational networks:

192 According to the same survey, outside the state of São Paulo, another 150 municipalities have already adopted the same policy.

in addition to the teaching material, they provide consultancy, teacher training programs, suggestions for themes to be developed in the classroom, school management systems, website development and teaching evaluation systems. In practice, this is a contracting out of the public schools, which have been handed over by the local authorities to the management of private companies. Many municipalities that adopted the “teaching systems” of private groups have signed contracts where the suppliers are paid according to a quantity based on a monthly amount for each student.

This kind of privatization has spread over Brazil with the complacency of the municipal, state and federal educational authorities, and thanks to the direct and indirect incentives of the national educational policy. Standardized national evaluations have become the main allies of the private groups to seduce mayors and local educational officials to support teaching methods based on the intensive use of pre-packaged programs. The IDEB has rapidly become a valuable marketing tool as it guarantees a “quality label” from MEC for the municipal educational networks that have achieved a high score in the national evaluations using the packages that have been commercialized by private groups. On defending the use of pre-packaged teaching programs, *O Estado de S. Paulo* remarks that “of the ten towns and cities in the state of São Paulo with the highest score in the IDEB, 7 have been using workbooks”. The editorial adds that the same teaching method has been adopted by the three municipalities in São Paulo that appeared in the UNICEF report on the 37 municipalities that achieved the best results in national evaluations. These selected municipal educational systems were presented as

example of good practice of school management.¹⁹³ Based on this empirical evidence, *O Estado de S. Paulo* supports the choice of the private “teaching systems”:

The workbooks produced by private companies in the educational sector, as long as they are of good quality and are written by specialists, can be an efficient educational tool. And they have the advantage that their use is not incompatible with textbooks and other teaching materials. (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 2008, p. A3)

The role of media experts

The economist Cláudio de Moura Castro, consultant of the Pitágoras Group¹⁹⁴, one of the most important groups in the educational area, has also made use of the national evaluations’ results to defend the use of workbooks in schools. The definitive proof of the advantage of this method is in the scores achieved in the EMEM and the *Prova Brasil* by the schools that have followed the private “teaching systems”.¹⁹⁵ In his column in the *Veja*, he defended this choice under the provocative title of “*Satanás Apostilado?*” [“Satan with Workbooks”], in which he argued that the private “apostiladores” [instructional materials publishers] did in practice play the role which the Department of Education should itself carry out in supporting the schools. Castro goes on to emphasize “five important services to ensure education quality” that are provided by

193 As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study was a basis for the definition of the 28 directives established by the “Everybody for Education” plan of targets, an instrument established by Decree no. 6.094, 24 April 2007. This is one of the main innovations of the PDE (see Chapter 7).

194 In the area of higher education the Pitágoras Group has been developing a partnership with Phoenix University.

195 The main private educational material companies (Anglo, COC, Objetivo, Positivo, Pitágoras and UNO) have their own schools and those they supply material for. Many of them act as franchises, supplying a complete kit for the schools which are part of their network. As a result of this, the most common analogy of the marketing strategy of these groups is with fast food groups such as MacDonalld, Bobs and Pizza Hut.

the private networks: the structuring of education; the integration of the curriculum; teacher training; a window on the world (“the only chance to have contact with new ideas and get to know the best school practices”); and the evaluation of teaching (Castro, 2007, p. 20). Teaching based on workbooks – which he believes to be “a Brazilian solution that has great merits and originality” – already educates 1.7 million students in the networks connected to those of the “apostiladores”. Castro laments the obstacles that prevent the model from being adopted in public schools:

If the networks reached the public schools, the benefits would be even greater as a large number of the teaching institutions and the teachers now have no contact and support from the secretaries of education. The idea is attractive, but there is an obstacle. The [private] networks are financed by the sales of their collections of workbooks and instructional materials. As the public school students receive their books from MEC few municipalities or schools will pay the costs charged by the book networks to acquire their collections. However, in the case of the São Paulo government, the schools can also directly receive the finance, instead of receiving the textbooks.

Though the national Brazilian scenario was already favorable for the dissemination of the use of workbooks in the public schools, the curricular reform that has just been adopted by the state of São Paulo gave a further push in this direction.¹⁹⁶ With its enormous political and economic weight – São Paulo is to Brazil what California is to the US – its educational policies have an influence throughout Brazil. As it is responsible for almost half of the Brazilian GNP, São Paulo is also the largest market in Brazil for textbooks and private “teaching systems.” The educational policy adopted by Governor José Serra, which has imposed a unified curriculum on the network of state

¹⁹⁶ It is interesting to note that Cláudio de Moura Castro is one of the main informal advisors of the State Education Secretary, Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro. He has carried out this function since the time she was the number two in the MEC hierarchy. Their identical surnames are a mere coincidence as they are not

schools and encourages the use of “structured educational material” – a euphemism for workbooks – tends to be copied by other states. A possible PSDB victory in the 2010 presidential elections would most probably raise the model of educational reform being implanted in the São Paulo state school system to a federal level.

Commercial interests and textbook policy

This thesis provides abundant evidence that the dominant media have been a crucial actor in the struggle over schools and curricula in Brazil. However, it would be grossly misleading to assume that the private media corporations are only motivated by economic interests, or that what is at stake are just new opportunities for profitable deals with schools. Surely, as I have shown, the educational agenda of certain of the major national and global media conglomerates is closely linked to their core businesses, even when disguised as philanthropic initiatives. Over the last decade, the growing Brazilian education market has attracted investors and foreign capital, especially in two key areas already dominated by private groups: higher education and textbook publishing. Marketization has advanced steadily in both segments, with the stimulus coming from governmental policies.

Despite recent efforts made by the Lula government to expand public universities and technical colleges, currently more than three quarters of Brazilian higher education students attend private institutions, by far the largest proportion amongst Latin American countries. The textbook publishing industry was first set up in Brazil as a private

related.

enterprise and has operated under market rules since then. However, two worrying recent trends require close attention: the increase in the concentration and consolidation of the publishing market in the hands of half a dozen business groups, together with the entry into Brazil of global players, therefore resulting in a growing participation of foreign capital in the sector. The dispute for the educational book market, where the biggest buyer is the Federal Government, involves the larger media conglomerates, among them the *Abril Group*, which publishes *Veja*, and the *Fundação Santillana*, the publishing branch of the Spanish media group, *Prisa*, publisher of *El País* newspaper.¹⁹⁷

The commercial textbook race hides an ideological war which has become more visible thanks to the involvement of the media groups in the dispute.¹⁹⁸ The sudden reduction of the number of private companies that supply books to the Federal Government shows the concentration process underway in the textbook publishing sector: “from 1985 to 1991 64 publishing companies took part in the PNLD, despite the fact that 84% of the supply of books came from just seven groups (Ática Brasil, FTD, IBEP, Nacional, Saraiva and Scipione). In 1998, the number fell to 25, no more than 12 publishers remained in the program” (Sousa, 2007, p 25). In 2008, just 5 companies were responsible for more than 90% of the books that were bought by the government, with *Editora Moderna*, of the *Prisa-Santillana Group*, holding 37% of the market, overtaking

197 The National Textbook Program (PNLD), through which MEC distributes books to public school students free of charge throughout Brazil, is responsible for 70% of the market. In 2006, the purchases made by the government represented a turnover of R\$ 616 million. (See Sousa, 2007).

198 In October 2007 *Carta Capital* news magazine devoted its front page to this subject, under the title: “*Textbooks – Figures and Ideologies.*” Two reports, totalling eight pages, described the intricate web of economic interests behind a market which is annually responsible for around R\$1 billion (Sousa, 2007; Costa, 2007).

for the first time the joint sales of the *Ática* and *Scipione* houses, which are controlled by the *Abril Group*, in partnership with the French media group *Vivendi*.¹⁹⁹

The lack of a proposal from the Lula government in the field of curricular reform, which has already been pointed out, does not mean that there has not been a dispute over the content taught in Brazilian schools. Very much the opposite: the national Brazilian media has prevented this subject from becoming the object of debate and public deliberation by accusing public schools of promoting ideological indoctrination. *Veja* has been at the forefront of denouncing the “ideological bias” of educational textbooks. The main target has been the best-selling textbooks, which are published by its rivals, *Ática* and *Scipione*.

Two recent *Veja* initiatives clearly show the attempt to not only determine the educational agenda but also the content taught in Brazilian schools: firstly an opinion survey on the quality of teaching and the role of the school and the teacher²⁰⁰; and secondly, an evaluation of the content of the most commonly used workbooks and textbooks in private schools in Brazil.²⁰¹ The results of the two surveys were front page material in the *Veja* on August 20, 2008. The title, language and “framing” all

199 The *ex-Minister of Education*, Paulo Renato Souza, at present Federal Representative for the state of São Paulo, has worked as consultant for the *Santillana Group*. His consultancy company, which was set up soon after he left MEC in 2002, provides two types of services: development of strategies to enter the Brazilian educational market for foreign groups that are interested in investing in the sector; and access for private Brazilian groups to international organs, funds and companies that are interested in developing partnerships and/or investments in the sector. In order to become the leader in the textbook market, the *Santillana Group* was also helped by Mônica Messemberg, *ex-Executive Secretary* of the National Educational Development Fund (FNDE), an organ linked to MEC which is responsible for the PNL. Since she left the position at the end of the 1990s, she has been working as Director of Institutional Relations of the Spanish group. (See Sousa, 2007)

200 Made to order by *Veja* and carried out by CNT/Sensus, this survey interviewed 3,000 people: parents, pupils and teachers, from 24 Brazilian states.

201 This evaluation examined 130 history, geography and Portuguese textbooks used in 2,000 private schools throughout Brazil.

demonstrate the clear intention of the magazine to shock the reader and awaken the anxiety of the middle-class parents. The cover photograph shows a typical white middle-class boy, wearing imported jeans and tennis shoes, writing on the blackboard: “*O insino [ensino - teaching] no Brasiu [Brasil] é ótimo*”. The crass spelling errors strengthen the headline: “*The mistakes are not his*”. Below, a single phrase points to those who should be blamed: “Brazilian students are the worst in the international rankings... but 90% of the teachers and parents are satisfied with their schools.” This special eleven-page article seems to directly question the parents: “*Do you know who is teaching him?*” In its attempt to denounce the mediocrity of Brazilian schools, *Veja* does not spare even its own reading public, the middle-class:

In general, with a few excellent exceptions we all know about, Brazilian parents from all social classes do not get involved as they should in the school life of their children. The poorest thank Heaven for the fact that the school gives their children a meal, security and free textbooks. Middle-class parents enthuse about sports facilities, cleanliness and the obvious tolerance of their children in terms of the academic requirements which are often adjusted in order not to force the rhythm of the less able. (Weinberg & Pereira, 2008a, p 72).

Once again the “cultural deficit theory” has been used to lower the expectations of the parents in relation to the education that their children receive in public schools. However, *Veja* is not interested in the fate of the working class and poor families. What is new here in this long report is the bold rhetoric with which *Veja* lashes out at the middle-class parents, with the intention of awakening them to the “abyss of a tough reality”: “teaching in Brazil is terrible, it is training students who will be unprepared for the competitive, ever-changing and globalized present-day world” (p 74). The infamous report, *A Nation*

at a risk (1982), was again evoked as a source of inspiration for the campaign started by *Veja*:

When a council of notable Americans made the well-known condemnation of the educational system of the US (“it seems to have been conceived as the worst enemy of the US...”), the opinion polls showed that the majority of Americans were fully satisfied with their schools. The commission could see further and sounded the alarm. Now in Brazil the same sense of reality and urgency is necessary, as writes Cláudio de Moura Castro, essayist, researcher and columnist of VEJA. “A crisis, a deep crisis. Only this can save our education.” (Ibid.)

With the intention of increasing the anxiety of the middle-classes and making Brazilian society aware of the mediocrity of the educational system, *Veja* used the results of the opinion survey and the evaluation of the contents of textbooks and workbooks to denounce “a prevailing trend of Brazilian teachers to fill the heads of children with left-wing propaganda”. And it also warned the middle-class parents: “Left-wing indoctrination predominates throughout all the private fee-paying system” (Weinberg & Pereira, 2008b, p. 77). In order to corroborate this denunciation, *Veja* interpreted the opinions of teachers on the role of the school and the historical personalities with whom they most identified. Out of a list including Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, Jesus Christ and Einstein, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire came out in first place, voted by 29% of the respondents as the personality with whom they most identified.²⁰² *Veja* deplores the support of Brazilian teachers for “arcane personalities such as the educator Paulo Freire, the author of an indoctrination method disguised as a literacy scheme, who have made no important contribution to Western civilization”. (p. 82).

202 Paulo Freire’s widow, Ana Maria Araújo Freire, released a public statement rebuking *Veja*’s cowardly attack on her husband legacy, stressing his commitment to a democratic and emancipatory educational project.

The reasons for such enormous disdain for the Brazilian educator who has gained international recognition and respect for his contribution to the construction of an emancipating educational project are very much ideological, and this can be seen in the following analysis on what the main mission of the school in the opinion of the teachers is. When given three alternatives – (a) educating citizens; (b) contributing to professional training, and (c) teaching specific subjects – 78% of the interviewed teachers chose the first. Although it is common sense that educating responsible citizens is a fundamental part of the school's mission, *Veja* suggests that, as they place this task before “teaching specific subjects” and “preparing children for the future”, the Brazilian teachers are betraying public trust and using their power to inculcate “anachronic ideologies and left-wing prejudices into [their students]”.

The teachers' main allies in their attempt to “bolshevize the heads of our children”, according to *Veja*'s accusation, are the most popular textbooks and workbooks used by Brazilian schools, which have a bias against the free market. In order to prove that the educational textbooks are propagating Marxist-Leninism in schools, *Veja* examined the content of best-selling books in private schools throughout Brazil and reached the following definitive verdict:

Almost 75% of them provide information distorted by ideological myopia, factual errors or both. These faults disturb the logical comprehension of the real world and inculcate in the students a hostile vision of the market economy and sympathy for communism. This is an ideology of the 19th century, which has been tested and which failed in the 20th century, and which in the 21st century only survives in North Korea, Cuba and Brazilian classrooms. (*Veja*, 2008a, p. 78)

The filter used by *Veja* to examine the content of the *textbooks* and *workbooks* only labels as “ideological” historical analyses and critical opinions that question the free market model and the capitalist system.²⁰³ In fact, the textbooks’ contents are measured against the neo-liberal worldview, which *Veja* does not consider to be an ideology. The “examples of errors in the textbooks” that illustrate the article leave no doubt about the ideological commitment of *Veja*. Selected passages from textbooks are highlighted as proof of factual errors and “information distorted by ideological myopia”.

But what can be seen in *Veja* – to use a bad pun [in Portuguese *Veja* means 'look'] – is a strong defense of the neo-liberalism which has been dominating its editorial line in recent years. Curiously, a history textbook²⁰⁴, published by the Scipione publishing company, part of the *Abril Group*, is presented as left-wing indoctrination because of the following passage: “Neo-liberal policies have increased social and economic inequalities throughout the world”. This statement, supported by empirical evidence, is categorically contested by *Veja*: “Falsification. Neo-liberal policies have taken almost 400 million Chinese citizens out of poverty. In Brazil and Chile they have created a middle-class majority” (Weinberg & Pereira, p. 84).

Another textbook on Brazilian history becomes the target of censure as it associates the increase in unemployment rates with the privatizations carried out during the Cardoso government. The official knowledge that *Veja* wishes to take to the schools reiterates the virtues of the free market: “The privatized state companies contracted more employees, increased their qualifications and their wages.” When the theme under

203 The evaluation of the content of the textbooks was made by *Veja* with the help of the following “specialists”: economists Maílson da Nóbrega (ex-Finance Minister) and Sérgio Vale; the philosopher Roberto Romano; and historians Antonio Villa and Octaciano Nogueira.

204 Radix Project, History, Editora Scipione: p. 243.

discussion is global warming, which raises the questioning of the environmental impact resulting from the capitalist mode of production, *Veja* has a ready reply: “If there is any hope of polluting nature less, it is in the creativity and the pace of the technological innovations resulting from the market economy” (Weinberg & Pereira, p. 84).

A global hegemonic neo-liberal project for education

This unyielding and unabashed endorsement of neo-liberal policies seems at odds with the current discrediting of unregulated global capitalism in the wake of the global financial meltdown in September 2008. All of a sudden, the free market advocates were begging and welcoming state intervention to ease the global financial stress, to rescue a bankrupt financial system, and to minimize private investor losses. In short, the well-known policy of “privatizing profits and socializing losses”. This does not mean that neo-liberalism will fade away at any time in the near future. The unfolding global economic crisis tends to cause deep fissures and to highlight contradictions within the hegemonic block, opening up new opportunities for counter-hegemonic movements around the world, particularly in the struggle over the restructuring of education.

However, there is no sign that the global hegemonic neo-liberal models of educational reform are being abandoned and substituted by democratic educational policies which address the ideas of freedom, equality, justice and social emancipation. In the Brazilian context, as this thesis has shown, the dominant media has, in the past two decades, played – and still plays – an active role in the promotion and legitimation of policies which are oriented by the principles of the free market, meritocracy, and the

sovereignty of the consumer. Whatever goes against the logic of the market is denounced as indoctrination.²⁰⁵

Another characteristic of the educational coverage of the mainstream media is the adamant search for global educational reform models which have supposedly been successful in the developed countries. A recent example was the *Veja* report on the *Teach for America* program, which was presented as “a successful initiative in an area in which countries like Brazil have only produced failures: attracting the most talented professionals to teach [in public schools] – though only for two years, the time the program lasts” (Pereira, 2008, p. 98). Entitled “*Mestres Brillhantes*” [Brilliant Teachers], the article examines the *Teach for America* program in a acritical way, stressing as its main advantages the partnership with large private companies which contract those coming out of the program, and the treatment given to the young teachers, who are “treated like CEOs of the classroom”. The recommendation for this policy is explicit: “In Brazil, where 22% of the teachers have never even set foot in a university, something similar could help to bring about the advances needed in education” (p 100).

The absent presence: Teachers’ voice

This brings us to the most striking absence in the dominant media’s educational coverage: the teachers’ voices. The fact that teachers and their representatives have been denied a say in the ongoing educational debate in Brazil is telling of two intertwined

205 When warning and mobilizing middle-class parents against the “ideologization of education”, the dominant media stimulated the appearance of initiatives like the NGO, Schools With No Political Party, which was founded four years ago in São Paulo. The movement for “Education without Indoctrination” was given extensive coverage in *Veja* on August 20, 2008.

trends: first, the devaluation of the pedagogical discourse of the educators which has accompanied the process of the colonization of education by economic rationality and thinking; second, the silence imposed by the media on teachers and the teachers unions leaders, who are invariably characterized as corporativists who are much more concerned with their immediate salary interests than the learning of their students. The teachers are presented as badly trained, unmotivated, incompetent and lazy. Added to this already long list of disdainful adjectives, *Veja* has, as we have seen, placed the sin of their being indoctrinators: “The ideologization of education, which is an adversary of intellectual exercise, might also be partly the result of the lack of training for teachers to carry out their job” (Weinberg & Pereira, 2008b, p 80). In general, the teachers only attract the attention of the media when they go on strike. This negative coverage reinforces the public perception that the teachers’ unions resist changes and boycott educational reforms. Ultimately, they are seen as being responsible for the failure of public schools.

When analyzing the coverage of the three-week-long strike by public school teachers in São Paulo, the *Folha de S. Paulo*’s ombudsman noted that the newspaper treated the teachers “with no good will” and made the following assessment:

It took an editorial position against the strike, published aggressive columns against them, and, in the news, it treated the subject more as an additional unnecessary obstacle for the chaotic traffic of the city than as a serious public policy problem. (...) For a newspaper to go beyond rhetoric it needs to invest in detailed reports on the problems which hinder the improvement of education. (...) No deeper discussion was made on the decree which started the strike. No attempt at an analysis was made of problems like the violence of students against teachers; the existence of necessary educational materials in schools, incentives for professional improvement, class size, problems of teaching loads and curriculum, access to Internet, field trips, quality of libraries, laboratories and art rooms. There was no diagnosis of the average salary conditions of teachers: the proportion which is salary and that which is bonus and extras, how the salary of

teachers in the state of São Paulo compares with other states in Brazil and other countries, how many hours a week they need to work (both inside and outside the classroom) in order to earn a salary which is minimally compatible with their training and the strategic importance of their profession. (...) Either education is a priority theme for the newspaper or not. There was a period, in the middle of the 1970s, when it undoubtedly was, in spite of a large number of errors. Now it no longer is. It should be. The strike has given a chance for it to be so again. (Lins da Silva, 2008, p A6).

This long passage suggests that teachers are treated as antagonists to educational reforms by the dominant media. According to media discourse, public school teachers are always motivated by their own interests. To a certain extent, this negative coverage of the teachers' strikes helps to make up a negative portrait of the category in the social imaginary, which clashes with the public discourse of the valuing of the teaching career voiced by the educational authorities.

The recent approval of the national salary base, which is one of the measures included in the PDE, accepts an age-old claim of Brazilian teachers. However, its implementation has been opposed by state and municipal governments, who say that they cannot afford to pay the national salary base. The struggle led by the teachers' unions for states and municipalities to follow the salary base law has come up against the indifference of the national media, which opposes this policy as it considers it to be a concession by the Lula government to corporativism.

This shows that, although it does not have the absolute power to dictate the educational agenda, the dominant media exercise enormous influence on the process of educational policy formation. Brazilian teachers can quite definitively not count on any sympathy from the media in their historic struggle for better working conditions, a dignified salary and the social value of their profession. On the contrary, the power of the

media has been able to mobilize public opinion and the government authorities against most of the teachers' demands.

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