CHANGING EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTIONS

A historical *and* sociological model

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Sociologias

Abstract

This paper aims to propose an analytical model to study educational change, specifically, the way educational conceptions change in contemporary societies.

The analytical frame of reference postulates the articulation of historical and sociological approaches in order to elaborate what could be called as the *social-political construction of educational conceptions process*. Educational conceptions are defined as cognitive structures incorporating ideas, beliefs and principles *about* the nature of education, their justification, aims and means of implementation. The author assumes the premise that three different but mutually entangled aspects of this process should be considered: (1) the intellectual production of educational ideas; (2) the political selection of these ideas in an institutional frame of reference characterized by power relations and domination; and (3) their contextualization in "local" organizations, like schools or other learning institutions. The joint dynamics of these levels are the steering base of historical educational conceptions, raising some of them to the category of "legitimate" or "official" definitions of education and relegating alternative ones to a illegitimate, excluded or devaluated status.

Key concepts: educational conceptions; educational change; educational and pedagogical controversies

1. Introduction

In this Paper I will develop some arguments in defence of an articulated historical and sociological perspective applied to the study of change in education. More specifically, I will propose some broad analytical elements in order to comprehend how educational and pedagogical conceptions change through the history of educational processes. This option is rooted in (1) some theoretical concerns about *temporality* and *historical specificity* as omnipresent dimensions of the social processes, and (2) on the importance of using the typical methodological procedures of history following a number of sociologists that use historical data as empirical raw-material for their research (Burke 2000; Mandalios 2002).

The importance of temporality as a crucial dimension in the analysis of social facts, justified the joint efforts made by historians and sociologists of education in order to achieve shared advantages (McCulloch & Richardson 2000). This is particularly visible near the researchers who have *cultural-symbolic* productions as an object of study.

From the side of history of education A. Nóvoa (1998), a Portuguese historian observes that after several decades studying the analysis of the *externality* dimensions of educational processes (emphasizing the long term transformations and permanencies), this research domain should care more about the *internality* dimensions of that processes. In other words, research should now be forced to a kind of a paradigmatic transition: from a *contextual* approach, the history of education should evolve into a *textual* approach, contributing to a better clarification of the discursive practices inside the social space occupied by the educational actors.

On the other hand, the history of pedagogical ideas has dominated for a long time the research in history of education and has been too much focused on the *very important* personalities' thoughts: intellectuals; philosophers; educational doctrines' founders, and so on. Without refusing this heritage, the "new history" of mentalities is now more concerned with the process of constructing and re-construct ideas in a space-time dimension. Due to this new trend, researchers are now more sensible to discursive practices, especially in conflicting historical moments. The "*traditional*" historiography

of pedagogical ideas is now giving hand to a history of education more concern with the "conceptual" or "epistemic" features in a knowledge/power structural context. In each *epocké* there are socially constructed categories of thought (e.g. "education", "teacher", "pupil"), with discursive and practical dimensions, by which the "educational reality" are interpreted by the agents. In this perspective, educational change analysis should pay attention to simbolic-discoursive universe, with its controversial and trivial moments, its rhetoric fashions and exclusions, its privileged or obscured *themata*.

From the side of sociology of education, the journey towards a more integrative approach has also begun some time ago. Pioneers of sociology of knowledge such us Max Scheler, Émile Durkheim, Karl Mannheim or Max Weber, refused an idealistic perspective of the cognitive products of human activity. According to them, the different "intellectual positions" or "knowledge styles" do not live in a social *vacuum*, but find its deepest roots in the historical and social realm. This means that we must treat the cognitive products of education as a socially constructed process (Maton 2000; Moore and Young 2001).

Adopting the analytical models of the sociology of knowledge and using the empirical data come from an history of pedagogical and educational ideas, a researcher could identified in the educational domain a continuous flow of philosophical ideas and doctrines, values and beliefs, a *palette* of scientific assertions and common sense opinions. In a general view, these different symbolic expressions could be considered as *educational conceptions*. In a *longe durée* time scale perspective it is possible to identified some historical moments in which specific educational conceptions raised out and gain a dominant status in an institutional order; but inevitably, we could also observe moments in which specific conceptions fall or decline, losing their prominent influence over the agents and their practices (Johannesson 1991; Bertrand and Valois 1994).

2. **The social and political construction of educational concept ions: the levels of analysis**

The theoretical reference model adopted in this Paper follows some of my previous works (Serra 2002; 2004) focusing on the social and politics construction process of

educational conceptions at a nation-state level. Understood in a generic way, it is (1) primarily a *social process of intellectual production*, related to the epistemic objects (theories, doctrines, conceptual forms, paradigms, etc), which define the nature, the content and the boundaries of what, in each historical moment, could be considered as the "official" education. Secondly (2), it is a process of *political selection*, in the sense that is a context for adopting or sponsoring some epistemic configurations and, explicitly or tacitly, a context of exclusion or devaluation of alternative ones. The selection criteria of the available educational conceptions are deep rooted in the political-ideological principles that prevail in the historical context. In turn, are of course incorporated in the educational systems missions or mandates themselves. Lastly (3), it´s should also be considered as a *local recontextualization process*, because has obviously to do with what happens in schools: the organisational dynamics of schools usually assimilates or accommodates the mandates prescribed and proclaimed by the State; but, sometimes, rejects and resists its normative coercion (see Figure 1).
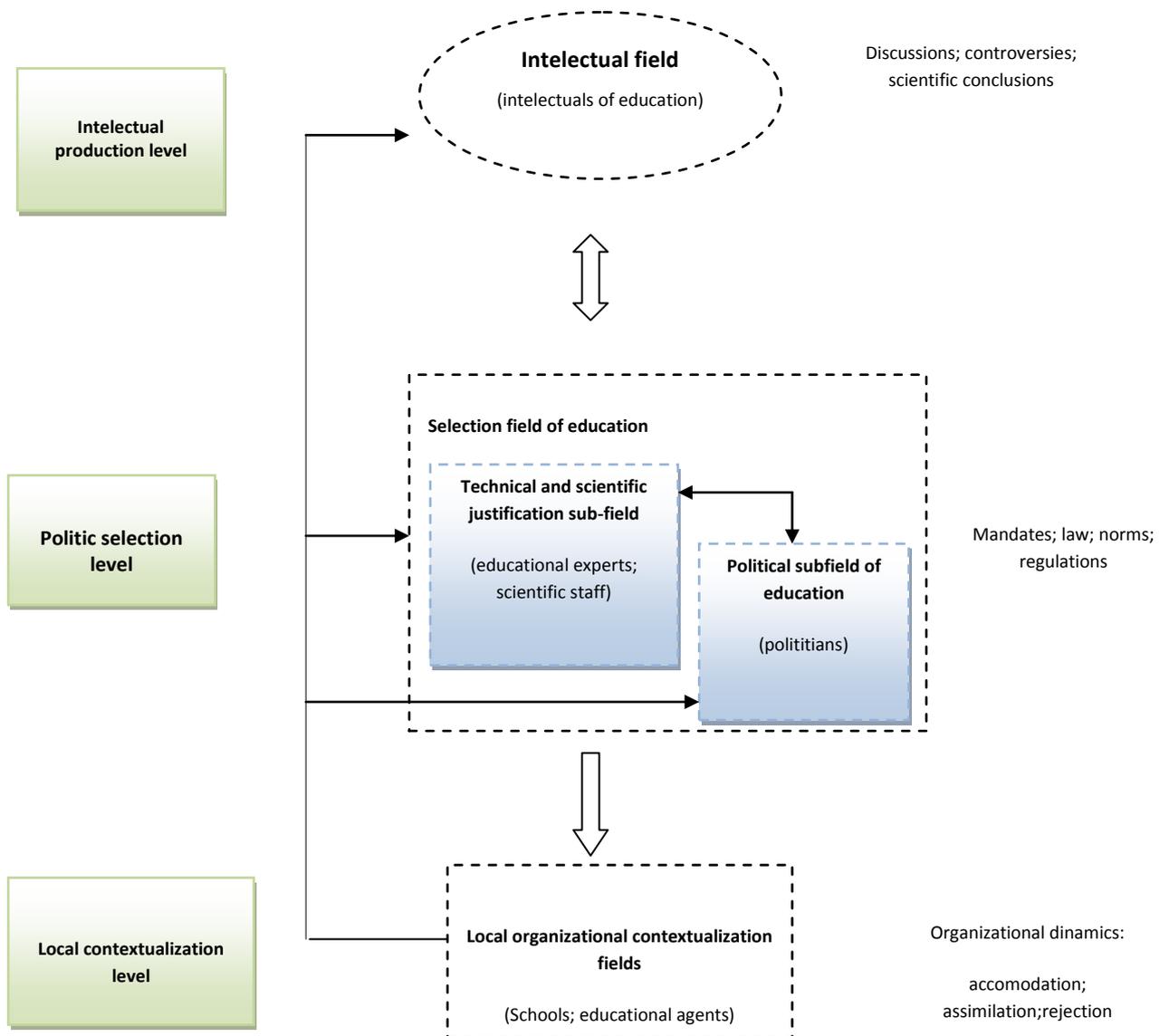
Figure 1 – the socio-political construction process of educational and pedagogical conceptions

In this context, the notion of *social field* seems to be a suitable conceptual construct. The field is a metaphor proposed by Pierre Bourdieu (1989), and has been developed on the educational domain by several authors (Bernstein 1990; Diáz 1995; Jóhannesson 1991; Ladwig 1994; Maton 2000; Tomusk 2000). The concept of social field presents some analytical advantages. It refers to a multidimensional space of social positions with no fixed borders. Social fields are crossed by power relations and

agents involved in conflicting strategies (Bourdieu 1984). The relations of force manifest also the attempts to impose the shape and volume of capital that is defined as legitimate, and in this sense implies dominant and dominated positions (Bourdieu 1989). Here I will assume the theoretical premise that, for each context or socio-political construction level of educational conceptions, will match proper social fields: the *intellectual field of education*; the *political selection field of education*; the *local contextualization organizational fields*.

2.1 The *intellectualization* of education and the educational conceptions

Similar to what had occurred in other spheres of social life, the gradual formalization and systematization of educational activity – culminating in the establishment of educational systems regulated by the state –, was also followed by an increased in the intellectual reflexivity. The theoretical investment on the educational issues had its germinal point in the common sense ideas about the better means to use in the process of cultural transmission. Gradually, some social agents that were somehow more devoted to such problems, not been satisfied with a trivial enumeration of procedures for practical use, began to provide a genuine educational theory whose assertions could explain, justify and guide educational activity.

Durkheim (1995) suggests that the Renaissance was the historical moment for the emergence of the great pedagogical doctrines. Thereafter, this new systems of ideas would become the intrinsic factors for educational change. Until that period the sphere of education had only showed signs of a spontaneous dynamic of change, due to the weight of habit and routine schemes. But after that it will gain new functional and symbolic impetus becoming the subject of a genuine intellectual elaboration. A brand new kind of pedagogical literature began to emerge based on philosophical reasons and principles that justify the striving for the renewal of educational practices. Rabelais, Erasmus, Vives, Montaigne, Comenius, among many others, form that newest intellectual vanguard which had only visible equivalent replica during the eighteenth century, period of the second major revolution in education.

So, it seems important to highlight the role of the specialized agents dedicated to the educational discourse and knowledge. Mainly since Karl Mannheim it become analytically evident the strong effects of the "intellectual" agents competing for the cultural and symbolic legitimacy (Maldonado 1998). In the educational domain, these agents have been responsible for the most systematic rationalization efforts of pedagogic and educational thought, articulating philosophic or epistemic models with the social reality (Diaz, 1995; Gimeno Sacristán 1998).

The role of the agents in the intellectual field of education as producers of specialized argumentation on education should be understood: (1) in light of the positions they occupy in the structure of this field (e.g. within a nexus of multiple forces); (2) in the light of their more or less authority *vis-a-vis* the consumers of the proposed discourses (3) in the light of their capacity to transform these discourses in mobilizing logics of action. Its authority takes the form of *prestige* or *reputation* and can manifest itself in the way how their opinions and judgments on the different issues are added to the stock of specialized educational knowledge. Such agents belong to different institutional domains (schools, universities, educational research centers, teacher training institutes, State departments, etc.), and work on the basis of different disciplinary frameworks (educational sciences, pedagogy, theory and curriculum development, etc.). Briefly, in the light of their, academic or professional positions, trajectories beliefs, the intellectuals of education develop discursive strategies (their *voices*) around some legitimacy principles (Johannesson 1991, 1998; Maton 2000). The notion of strategy here adopted shouldn't be understood merely in its general and dynamic view, a sense given by the organisational approach, but also on the strictly view bounded to the discursive production, stamped by Foucault in its *L'archéologie du savoir* (1999, 85).

Diáz (1995) points that the changes in the structure and functions of government in contemporary societies created the conditions to an expansion of academic and occupational opportunities that facilitated a relative mobility of functions and roles of the intellectual agents. The study of such changes could well contribute for the clarification of the historical development and consolidation of the intellectual field of education - its structural changes and internal conflicts for symbolic and intellectual

legimacy. It is in the context of this social field that the educational conceptions are produce in their more complex intellectual form.

The notion of *conception* points to such cognitive elaborations constituted largely by shared beliefs used to understand and give meaning to reality. A provisional definition of educational conception suggests a conceptual elaboration incorporating a relatively coherent set of ideas, beliefs and axioms about the nature of education, about its social and anthropological goals and about how it should be carried out. To the extent that it is an *elaboration*, the educational conception is interferential, obvious consequence of the multiple interactions between itself and its contextual environment (social, political, ideological, and epistemological).

Roland Meighan (1986) identifies the set of theories that we could find in an educational conception: 1) a theory related to the content and structure of school knowledge, 2) a theory of learning and the role of student, 3) a theory of teaching and teacher's role, 4) a theory of appropriate resources to the teaching-learning process, 5) a theory of organization of the teaching-learning situations, 6) a theory of the aims, objectives and education outcomes. The articulation of these various theories developed in relatively coherent epistemic systems has historically been associated with "schools of pedagogical thought", "educational and pedagogical theories", "curriculum models", "school ideologies," "educational paradigms" expressing themselves in historical oscillating movements, having a more or less regulatory impact on concrete educational situations. Several taxonomies of these symbolic configurations have been proposed (Houssaye 1988; Bertrand 1991; Bertrand and Valois 1994). Carvalho and Diogo (2001) also suggest that in the history of modern education five educational conceptions could be easily identified: traditional, behaviorist, humanist, social reconstrutivist and cognitive-constructivist, each of them having different historical sources, visions of the human nature, educational goals; learning and teaching approaches; curriculum models, and, of course, different school practices.

2.2 Power and domination in the educational sphere: the selection of educational conceptions

The relations between the realm of symbolic/cultural and that of power/domination since very long have been object of analysis in the social theory. To Foucault, knowledge, discourse and power have a *genealogical* dimension: the institutions of modern society contain diffuse nexus of knowledge / power, whose "truth regimes" can be properly revealed by a sort of "archeology" of epistemic kind, somewhere halfway between history of mentalities and sociology of knowledge (Foucault 1999). The radical impossibility for the epistemic dimension to live in a social *vacuum* has also been stressed, among others, by Pierre Bourdieu, for whom this dimension is permanently embedded in social fields crossed by power relations and symbolic struggles for the preservation or transformation of the social world (Bourdieu 1989). Also to Basil Bernstein (1990), the struggles occurred in the intellectual domain (most particularly in education), seek to obtain symbolic control, that kind of domain which, in the context of a given distribution of power and dominant cultural categories, is responsible to distribute specialized forms of consciousness.

The dimension of power that follows the production and dissemination of ideas and, in particular, their macro-sociological background, cannot therefore fail to be taken into consideration in the analytical field of education. Since the eighteen century, this institutional domain has been subject to political appropriation by the state, with different rhythmus and organizational designs depending on the specific national context (Petitat 1994; Archer 1986, Boli and Ramirez 1986; Castro, Berrio and Gutiérrez 1997). Subordinated to State political-ideological principles, their legal and regulatory frameworks and financial resources, education systems soon became, all over the world, a powerful instrument of conservative, reformist or revolutionary social engineering. Whatever has been its historical vocation, the nation-state educational apparatus established itself as a fundamental pillar for the fulfilling of the promises proclaimed by modernity.

The analysis of how the political and ideological mechanisms operate on the symbolic-cultural domain (and are in turn influenced by it) received a major contribution from

Alain Touraine (1973) and in the specific field of education, from Yves Bertrand and Paul Valois (1994). To all of these authors, the analysis of society should consider different levels or instances, not mechanically juxtaposed but mutually linked. In one pole of a *continuum*, there is the "symbolic-cultural" level, more "abstract "or" tacit" in its nature and, at the opposite pole, the "organizational" or "concrete" level. In the Intermediate position, we found the "political-institutional" level. An important step in the process of selection the educational conceptions occurs when certain criteria of symbolic interpretation and guidance of society are politically appropriate for the definition of the major orientations of education, or, what Roger Dale (1989) once defined as the "mandates" for education. According to the guiding framework defined by these mandates, policy-makers decide the basic goals of the educational apparatus, exerting a more or less pronounced selective effect on the products arising from those who think about education.

The inherent complexity of the selection process of educational conceptions from the intellectual field of education requires the clarification of the attributes of the *social field of selection*. Agents in this field are responsible for the selective transformation of the educational conceptions emerged from the primary context of discursive production.

This field includes two subfields: the *political field of education* and *the technical and scientific justification field*. This is a distinction based on the theoretical formulations of Bernstein (1990) and Diaz (1995).The first one is related to the major strategic decisions of educational policy. This is a field directly regulated by the state - politically by the government and administratively by the structure of public administration and reflects the struggle for official guidance of education. It is embodied by the political elite representing, in a given historical period, the forces who manage to ascend to a position of formal domain of the state apparatus. Includes the group of officers specifically appointed to the role of political orientation of the education system, as the minister of education and its direct political assistants.

Due to a greater or lesser degree of decentralization allowed in a given institutional context, this sub-field can still include, on one hand, relatively independent instances from the central education authority, with regional or local jurisdiction (Lundgren

1996; Popkewitz 1996; Bray 1999). On the other hand, the global orientation and coordination of the education system may be more or less constrained by the intervention of other domains of state sovereignty, namely the parliament, which may reserve to itself the power to regulate certain aspects of educational policy (for instance the definition of the basic features of the system as a whole). In this case, the opposing political forces have an important role to play.

The *technical and scientific contextualization field* involves the circulation of theories and practices between the context of its production and the context of reproduction – the field of teaching and learning practices. The public image of this field shows a complex array of working groups: innovation programs committees, educational reform committees, state interdepartmental groups, and so on. In the frame of the political guidelines, their mission is to give technical and scientific advice for legal and normative production. Directly regulated by the political field of education, this subsidiary field integrates a diverse set of agents, experts or scholars, most part of them with professional positions in the university departments of education, institutes for teacher training, schools from different educational levels, teacher's associations etc.

2. 3 The contextualization of educational conceptions in local systems of organized action

The next step points to the process of locating educational conceptions, bearing in mind its epistemic, political and institutional background. This analytical option allows to interpret the change in school organizations more as the result of a dynamic and contingent materialization of ideas than a series of fully calculated efforts that lead one state to another or as a *continuum* of adaptive decisions (Czarniwska and Joergues 1995).

The process can be described metaphorically as follows: the ideas and systems of ideas seems to float like a *noosphere* – in the sense given by Morin (1992; 1992a) – just to the point that some of these elaborations, by a *translation* movement, come to acquire substance, becoming quasi-objects or objects in a specific organization. This *objectification* or *densification* of ideas is revealed for example in the production of

language, spoken and written, in broadcast images, routines and rituals of the agents or in the density of physical objects; what Schein (1985), discussing about the levels of culture organization, designated as the artifacts and concrete creations (technology, art, patterns of behavior) which give visibility to the conceptual and invisible assumptions (values beliefs and ideologies). But the negotiation of meanings associated with new ideas or conceptions are not held in an educational setting of freedom and equality of all and each of the partners but rather in a potentially conflicting arena of arrangements and political forces.

As the critical and micro-politics approaches of school organizations have emphasized, in school life come into play: (1) the structural power relations and ideological control of the agents; and (2) the effect of the micro strategies and alliances that develop in order to expand the agent's freedom and their capacity to impose the meanings they perceive as more valid (Lourenço Delgado 1996; Sabirón Sierra 1999). School organizations are contingent local structures of collective action, produced and reproduced across time in a framework of "major social regulations". So, these orders should be seen as a complex set of partial and localized social regulations unsteadily articulated. As Friedberg (1995 181) points out, without a stable hierarchy defining a tie or an order between them could be established once for all.

This does not mean that one should not admit a relative predominance of certain type of regulations in concrete historical periods. In the case of education, it seems unquestionable that school organizations represent a local materialization of an organizational mediated educational system. The *systemic* functions determine and shape the processes, activities and educational outputs. But the constraints or balances resulting from macro-structures of power and control - education included - always deserve to receive "local" or "contextualized" explanations. The organizational frameworks of education should therefore not be automatically assumed as a homogeneous unit with well-defined borders, serving dutifully and mechanical the educational policy determinations. As a bit similar to what Giddens (1989) proposed to explain the process of differentiation of the space-time nexus within large social systems – schools should be seen as regionalized contexts of the educational system, with loose boundaries and complex and contingent internal dynamics.

From what has been said, it appears that the *incarnation* of the educational conceptions in the local social orders (Friedberg 1995), resulting ultimately in their institutionalization, also has its *dark* side. The economy of effort and the non-problematic situations creates, paradoxically, the space for new conceptions, virtually threatening to the institution and its *nomothetes*; routine enables creativity and divergence, rationality stimulates the irrational; the *status quo* order open flank to new and assertive forces. Without subtracting the importance of spontaneous processes of unofficial translation, it seems unquestionable that in the context of the historical development of education systems – especially those of political-administrative centralized tradition –, have predominated the official translations. In another words, as Mintzberg (1979) once called it, a change by *administrative decree*. As many studies have shown, the normative guidelines define by the State, when viewed from the level of specific organizations are object of a complex effect of *location*, opening "cracks, fissures, and contradictions "(Ball 1990, 16-17).

3. Some historical and sociological aspects of the educational conceptions

From a historical and sociological point of view, the conditions of emergence and consolidation of the education conceptions, within the limits of their relative autonomy, vary according: (1) to the different institutional contexts (2) to the nature of political and ideological function of political forces in power. In other words, if it seems to be important in this regard to identify the level of functional complexity of the state (the efficacy of the political and administrative regulation of social relations in the entire extension of a given territory; the variety of management functions; the position of the state with regard to the dominant mode of production, etc.), not less important seems to be also to identify the prevailing type of political regime, the conditions of access to power, or the stock of doctrines which inspire the political actors.

As some of the studies on the emergence of educational systems in various national contexts revealed (Archer 1984, 1986; Green 1990; Castro Berrio and Gutiérrez 1997), the historical development of the state apparatus has been closely followed by the consolidation of the education sphere as a system. It was only around this germinal

period that the analyst can observe the emergence of some educational conceptions with fully regulation capacity *vis-a-vis* the practices developed in the framework of national educational apparatus. On the other hand, we should not ignore that the specific nature of each political regime and its system of core values (national socialism, fascism, orthodox communism; pluralistic democracy, and so on) constrains the expression and paths of educational conceptions (see Rojek 1984; Hahn 1998; Houssaye 1998). Similarly, the same conditioning effect can be elicited by the various political and ideological agencies competing for power in the frame of pluralistic-democratic regimes (socialist, liberal, or social democrat) (Bertrand and Valois 1994; Houssaye 1998, Rein 1998).

How the educational conceptions suffer the impact of changes in the prevailing power structure in a specific social context? Let´s look only for two distinct cases: (1) the radical or revolutionary political transition and (2) the trivial oscillation of political forces in a stable democratic context. The first case can be exemplified by those historical situations in which totalitarian or authoritarian regimes give way to pluralistic-democratic regimes under direct influence of *coups d'État* or transition reforms more or less expressive. The second one can be observe in those situations in which a given politic period gives way to another one after elections or a referendum in democratic societies.

One way or another, any change in the structure of power has its effects on the selection process of candidates for the exercise of politic functions. For this reason, the politic field of education is filled with new agents committed to the doctrinal guidance that was then inaugurated. Defined and prescribed in this field the mandates that education should obey (whose formulas or principles derived from the doctrinal framework of the action programme of the ruling group or party) the agents allegedly more capable to develop or adapt new "versions" or "definitions" of the education in its various dimensions are in turn co-opted from the intellectual field of education (Bernstein 1990; Díaz 1995). These new versions are then subject to the effects of a complex evaluation, discussion and confirmation circuit, variable in its form and nature according to the institutional context in which they operate. Given its relevance, functionality or viability, they finally become a binding force when they are embedded

in legal discourse, prescribing – or at least inspiring – the practices. In its general configuration, these versions are conventionally recognized as the "educational policy".

These new cognitive products emerged from the intellectual field of education – and eventually ascended to a "jurisdiction" status due to the incidence of elective political field –, are subject to very different reactions by the agents positioned in the intellectual *forum*. Those committed to the inaugural guidelines on one hand tend to develop discursive strategies that will confirm their relevance and, on the other tend to depreciate the positions of his detractors. In this sense, they will try to do everything they can to dismantle and invalidate their arguments. By contrast, those who oppose them tend to denounce their impact, to devaluate the positions and arguments of those who support them, and to offer their own versions and conceptual projects for education (Jóhannesson 1991, 1998; Maton 2000). This dynamics, involving different positions *vis-a-vis* the educational policy, has its most visible manifestation in the *discursive conflicts*, *disputes and controversies* that take place in the mediated public space (newspapers, magazines, books and other media).

Some concluding remarks

Based on Berger and Lukmann (1986) and Gimeno Sacristán´s (1998) perspectives among others, I will argue that in the context of social practice educational conceptions will vary in its (1) more or less *symbolic volatility*, and (2) in the degree of institutional and functional differentiation that is capable to manifest. Saying it a little differently, the cognitive products of education can be analytically appropriate adopting a cross combination of a logic of *reflexivity* with a logic of *institutionalization* (see Figure 2)
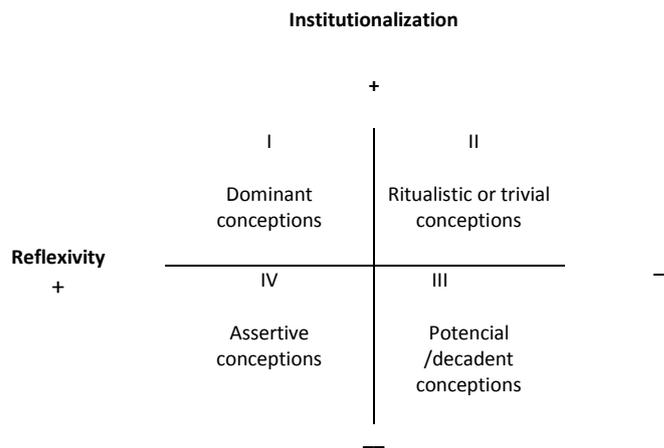
Institutionalization

+

I	II
Dominant conceptions	Ritualistic or trivial conceptions

Reflexivity
+

IV	III
Assertive conceptions	Potencial /decadent conceptions

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Figure 2 – The dynamic of change of the educational conceptions

The *institutionalization* is the process that reveals the different degrees of *visibility* or *objectivity* of educational conceptions. Thus, for example, a curriculum, a subject program, the teacher's and student's roles, a model for school management or, finally, a given pattern of interaction between the school and community are all elements that express a certain configuration practice rooted in cultural assumptions and paradigmatic key-ideas. Institutionalization involves then some degree of formalization, which is like a kind of movement towards "gaining shape" in a permissive or inductive power relations frame of reference. In turn, r*eflexivity* expresses the argumentative capacity around certain subjects or *themata*. It is the revealing sign that the agents are capable of explicitly think and debate the meanings of social life.

Let´s observe the four domains in the Figure 2 according to a clockwise motion. Quadrant I illustrates the institutional moments in which certain ideas, values and beliefs around education become victorious or hegemonic, without any room for doubt. The *repertoire* of symbolic and cultural elements available for the agents tends to be shared, making it particularly inspiring for them. The different perspectives or categories of understanding that emerge and are actively considered, do not gain contours of irreconcilable conflicting positions. So, the predominant educational conceptions have no serious opposition from others. Or, at least, they are still in a potential or in a latency state. In quadrant II are located that kind of conceptions that
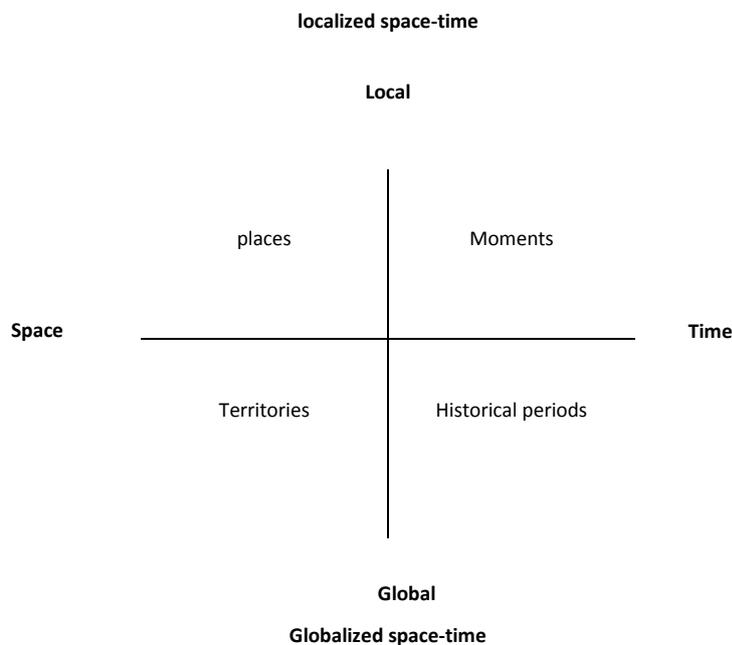
although institutionalized, begin to show a great deal of *routinization* and *trivialization*. They are quite densely updated by the agents in the organizational practices at a pre-reflexive level, with a high degree of ritualism and even inertia. Differently than described, Quadrant III represents both the place of the decadent conceptions and the place of those who are in the *larval* or *potential* stage; in each and every case showing a reasonable institutional bickering. In short, they do not provide nor sufficient epistemic clarity nor enough functional force to enable themselves to ascend to higher codification and institutionalization thresholds, resting therefore in an undifferentiated state. Finally, quadrant IV is intended to represent the moments of heated debate and intense controversy in the context of a weak formalization. We can witness the efforts and struggles of agents to impose new ideas, beliefs and values in the view of a greater institutional visibility. But, we could see also the difficulties of the assertive forces to penetrate effectively deep in the "crust" of more predominant conceptions. In a sense, the educational conceptions show a reasonable volatility, albeit their increasing institutionalization capacity.

The transformative dynamics of the educational conceptions points, therefore, to the incidence of a virtual or a real conflict between instituted and instituting ideas. The lessons from the history of education lead us to believe that in this process the dominant conceptions – hegemonic at the limit - may suffer the resistance of alternative ones. Insofar the dominant conceptions are suffering from axiomatic core erosion they tend to induce an internal differentiation with offensive and defensive epistemic dimensions.

From the side of assertive conceptions, and considering its early stages, they are in a state of marked generality and internal inconsistency. But in the vortex of intellectual controversies and disputes, and favored by particular historical conjunctures, such conceptions may gain increasing symbolic and practical importance: garnering supporters, enriching its discourses with contributions from sages and intellectuals. Expressing important internal differences, may eventually lead to applications in the school practice. Reversing the previous correlation of forces, they eventually raise to a dominant status. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this dialectical movement is the fact that the alternative cultural postulates can creep into the very heart of the

dominant conception, undermining it from the inside, and reverse it in ways not originally foreseen.

At a higher level of abstraction the educational ideas belong to a cognitive universe with different degrees of materialization in the space-time dimension (Figure 3): "territories" and "historical times" in the globalized space-time axe; "places" and "moments" in the localized space-time axe. These nexus of space and time does not have to be seen in its irreducible polarization, but rather as a *continuum* of multiple combinations. They identify the elements of what could be called the socio-historical cycle of the ideas' materialization (Czarniwska and Joergues 1995).

localized space-time

Local

places	Moments

Space ——————————————— **Time**

Territories	Historical periods

Global

Globalized space-time

Figure 3 – Map of the ideias space-time (Czarniawska & Joerges 1995)

In an ideal-typical weberian approach, the dynamics of this embodiment can be roughly summarized as follows: a specific idea, objectified in a certain place and time, starts its translocal circuit spreading over large territories and surviving for long periods or historical epochs. Then, returning back to a located time-space, could a specific idea or system of ideas eventually be incorporated into the action. This is virtually a continuous or circular process, always a replenished and reconfigured movement: ideas turned into objects, actions, institutions; objects, actions and

institutions giving then birth to new ideas. About these Victor Hugo once said that more powerful than the roar of mighty armies was an idea whose time had come...

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