Globalization, Education and (Re) Institutionalization of Contemporary Childhood[1]

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In nowadays conditions of modernity, the complex, tense, opaque and intrinsically contradictory globalization process dominates all forms of social life, not letting us exactly know how it works, what its face is and even its definition is not consensual among the different social scientists. Nevertheless, we can state that it is unanimously considered that globalization is presupposed to have different levels of intensity, which are neither linear nor consensual; and those characteristics are also applied to the processes that are neither always intense nor fast. Santos (2001:91) supports the idea that "sometimes they are slower, more diffuse, and more ambiguous and their reasons are also more indefinite". As an example of that, we can mention the way children's rights have been, or not, applied, guaranteed and promoted all over the world. When we intend to correlate economic globalization, sustained by the neo-liberal economic consensus, and childhood, we will have to mention the loss of legitimacy and power of the national States in favour of the supranational and multinational agencies, such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Often, this subordination or difficulty in resisting to pressure is carried out by policies of structural adjustment, which represent a "conscientious and deliberate manipulation of the market forces in order to subordinate peoples and governments, leading to an economic genocide (Chossudovsky, 1997 cit in Hespanha, 2001:174), above all because, usually, education policies and childhood policies are the first ones to be affected.

According to Kaufman *et al*, (2002:4) globalization is a process that leads the Nation-States to be opened to a diversity of influences coming from abroad. These changes imply a decrease in the primacy of the economic, political and social national institutions, and because of that, they affect the daily live environment were children grow and interact. According to those authors, some of the globalization impacts on children are normative. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stands for the main example of the attempt to legislate and regulate childhood at the international level. However, there is a hiatus between the international terms and the local reality of millions of children.

We can surely state that in the last decades, there have been new coming and deep changes that never happened in our societies, above all at the level of the impacts. We are facing a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, where many dimensions are interlinked and interpenetrated (Santos, 2002), politically, socially, economically, legally, educationally and culturally. According to Tejerina (2003: 1 ff.) there have been significant changes in the fundamental mechanisms of the capitalist system reproduction, which has lead to deep tensions.

He sustains that globalization is a contemporary form of a new or renewed economy that dominates, or on is the way of dominating, the other productive forces. He states that the conversion processes globalization is generating are driving to the erosion of the traditional institutional forms and operate a strong and deep social restructuring, which in turn affects the social structure, which produces new social and political boosting mobilizations, namely the emerging of social movements carrying new values –which may include the movements in favour of the children's rights.

1 Globalization, unfulfilled obligations and the education part

The global fight for the conquest and/or preservation of values – such as solidarity, equality, equity, inclusion, democracy- undergoes a setback when we think about some groups, as children and the violation of their rights, as women, ethnic minority groups, the unemployed, male or female homosexuals, and farmers, among many others. We are "facing a slippery depreciation of the social rights in the countries where they seemed to be deeply strengthened, an endless delaying of their institutionalization in the countries where industrial capitalism has stretched out more recently, an insoluble inability to guarantee rights in countries that are being left behind by the economic globalization, and an inability to keep recognized rights" (Hespanha, 2001:175), as, for instance, the loss of workers' rights that have been conquered all along fighting decades.

According to Sarmento *et al* (2004), if we consider the inconsistencies of implementation of the children's rights, beyond their rhetorical claiming, we will acknowledge that it is by guaranteeing the fundamental existence conditions and breaking with the society structural relations that promote inequality and exclusion that the essential part of the childhood citizenship is gambled. In other words, and first of all, childhood citizenship is citizenship *tout court*

In that sense, the movement in favour of childhood citizenship (if we consider as a "movement" the theoretical and practical effort to fully extend the children's rights, promoted in the scientific and social intervention fields by NGO, technicians, professionals and other social actors, and also by collective initiative of the children themselves) is part of a set of actions aiming at an alternative and counter-hegemonic globalization, and a social reorganization.

Children's rights have been progressively adopted globally; however, despite all the positive changes promoting best living conditions for children, there are persisting factors of social inequality, based on structural conditions and social, cultural, symbolic and ideological representations subjacent to the age/generation (Soares and Tomás, 2004). As per the analysis of the reports the NGO have been presenting about childhood situation globally, namely *The Progress of the Nations* (1999) and *The State of the World's Children* (2000; 2003), we can see that in the last 50 years the childhood situation has improved, however, we can also see that globally children's situation is complex because, despite the major part of the indicators show that indeed the situation has improved, there are several showing that it has even set

back (*ibidem*). Despite the promises to grant further funds to education, the support from the supranational agencies (WB, IMF) has been decreasing systematically over the last years.

Child's right to education is stated in article 28 of the CRC; and in the last decades, mass public schools have been spreading, extending and enlarging; a universal model has been built, configuring education institutions, school *curricula*, pedagogic practices and dynamics, which represent the essential point of globalization in the "long term". The promotion of the education rights and their universalization, and the wide-spreading of the access to education without restrictions of social classes, races, genders, ethnic groups, geographical space or disability, though not completely carried out, have benefited from benchmarking progress. However, the education field represents a space of permanent tension between the reproduction of the social inequalities and the promotion of expanding policies of social rights, through education. The contradictions occur inside the regulating space of the agencies which control and audit education and in the inside tensions of the national education systems, in the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries (Sarmento, 2001).

At the level of the construction of the concrete education policies, the tensions occur in the wide-spreading of the neo-liberal policies, with the fast expansion of the privatizing orientations and the imposition of the market principles, by means of measures assessing schools, students and teachers, guided towards competition and result efficiency, together with, on the one hand, the inherent process of selectivity, segregation and social exclusion, and on the other hand, the search for a tough assertion of an education public space.

The hegemonic globalization essentially occurs by the influence of the market principles on education: "In the educational context (...), it is possible to identify a crucial and decisive structural effect that defines the specific neo-liberal form adopted by the globalization: commodification" (Morrow and Torres, 2000: 39). However, the tensions inherent to globalization in the education field become much less intelligible if childhood globalization is not taken into account, i.e., the re-institutionalization process of the contemporary childhood. Like "modernity" that created public school, created as well, a "contemporary idea of childhood", likewise the current stage of the modern times puts school and childhood under a process of redefining meanings and prescription.

2 Policies for Childhood and Public Education

Despite being usually subjected to differentiate intervention, education policies and childhood policies are mutually involved, if we consider the corresponding political decision-makers, the actors intervening in the concrete action, the programmes, projects and normative mechanisms sustaining them. The nature of this implication is political and symbolical at the same time.

The education policies and childhood policies are part of a more general scope of public space construction, where the fundamental options are rooted on the way the State is (inter)related with economy and the social structure. In that way, both are part of the social policy, which in turn vehicles conceptions of the world, and options according to ideologies

and interests (carried by them), guiding them in different ways. Simultaneously, the prevailing childhood conceptions, at the very moment of the policy decision-making, decisively influence the programmes of the education policy: which indeed is not exclusively generated by its own field –despite the autonomy illusion of the pedagogic space that is common to political decision-makers and teachers, as a combined result of the deep institutionalization of the school education and the effective "relative autonomy" of school faced with economy[2] - but constructed in the scope of what we may name as societal process of childhood symbolical administration (Sarmento, 2001). In that way, the analysis of the education public policies cannot do without taking into account the analysis of the ways how childhood social construction works (Pinto, 1997), questioning the social images and representations released socially, considering their plurality and complexity, and the fact that children's living contexts are structured around them in the contemporary society. The contemporary construction of the education policies is above all linked to the ways in which the hegemonic globalization has been operating the transformation of the public space and reshaping the State functions (cf. Beck, 1999). The analysis of the more incisive aspects of the evolution of those policies has been highlighting some constants, namely those insisting in moving the core of the education political agenda, from focussing on children and youth social inclusion and equality to focussing on objectives linked to competition and efficiency of the results. Mass school expansion – though, according to the figures presented at the latest International Conference in Dakar, about 350 millions of children all over the world still remain without attending school- being one of the most significant indicators of the universalization of the forms of controlling the youngest generations, corresponds, in our current modern times, not so much to the creation of a common national conscientiousness in the countries where it occurs, but much more to the generalization of the ways of transmitting culture, which are part of the "school form" (Vincent, Lahire and Thin, 1994).

But if the characterization of the educative policies has been productive regarding the analysis of the connections between the economic and cultural globalization, and the expansion and management of the educational crisis, the less focussed point has been the way that those policies are set up as *symbolic administration of childhood*. Indeed, the creation and regulation of public school carried out in modernist times, has resulted to be a way of constructing the symbolic mechanisms, through which the youngest generations were "shaped" to reach a social status. The childhood institutionalization goes together with the mass school institutionalization (Ramirez, 1991). The here-raised problem is about the childhood re-institutionalization that, in our present conditions, happens with a direct connection with the shifting direction and guidelines of the educative policies.

The conflicting situation that stands out in this humankind stage also affects the science and the way of practising science, resulting in a curious duality: "if it is true that some scientific trends continue to forget the fundamental problems, there are other ones that excel in willing to identify them" (Santos, 1994:244). It is the very point of Sociology of Childhood (SC), which attempts to give children and guarantee them spaces and times of visibility, the creation and the implementation of the "fourth time"[3] (Jenks, 1993), a time where children are

considered as active citizens and have hence the right to do "informed choices", decide about the organization of their everyday lives and influence and/or share the adults' decision-making (Soares and Tomás, 2004).

It is necessary to point out the growing scientific production about childhood and children, highlighting the decisive role the SC[4] has been playing in fighting for paradigm changing, where children are considered as social actors and childhood as a generational type social category, the critic acknowledgement of the childhood alterity (Sarmento *et al*, 2004), the un-construction of an abstract image of childhood, and even the denying of the idea considering children group as an homogeneous one, as the adult projection in miniature or as an imperfect adult eventually due. We are compelled to consider the different situations of the children in the different countries and inside their own country, that is why the designation of "childhoods" is more precise and consequently it is necessary to consider the heterogeneity of the children's social and cultural worlds, freeing the idea of childhood globalization by itself (Boyden and Ennew, 2001), that is to say that globalization has also implied a given homogenization of the ideas about what should be the "ideal childhood" and this has to be fought and changed very soon, namely the thesis about the "death of childhood" (Postman, 1983).

Through this agonistic metaphor, the modern idea of childhood is running out, with the precocious transformation of children into adults, as a result of the combined effect of the presumed "crisis of values", the market of products for children, the media and the associated "violence cult". As a consequence, this conception of the (idea of) childhood crisis entails a "devilization" of children, presented as early uncontrollable monsters (cf. Scratton, 1996), symbolized by the small murderers of the Manchester supermarket or by Lídia Franco case in Portugal. However, for the worshippers of the "death of childhood" thesis, the effective global degradation of the children's living conditions are less significant, which, among other points, is revealed by the fact of that children being, worldwide, the generational group more affected by poverty, disease, war, and natural calamities. Indeed, by ignoring the real existing conditions of children and taking as a factor (the child-youth violence, for instance) what is only a symptom of an excluding social situation, not only does the "childhood death" thesis darken the contemporary childhood structural situation, into a conservative ideological soup, but it leads to political guidelines deeply sanctioning the children's rights (for instance, such happens with the suggestion presented in some European countries by some political forces tending to low the imputability age of children).

3 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Emancipating Action

Since the end of the 19th century there have been various movements which have initiated actions, fights and protests against the hegemonic social, political, cultural, legal and economic mechanisms that have originated and/or maintained the generational inequalities. The most visible result of this is found in the formal recognition of a set of rights recognised to children. By this way, the expansion of the speech promoting the rights of the child has been penetrating

the social and political institutions. However, we are very far from an ideal situation, a full recognition and guarantee of those rights.

A "new social conscientiousness towards childhood" (Tomás, 2000) has emerged above all from the last century, due mainly to the legislative efforts to promote and guarantee -even though mainly only in the theoretical field- the rights of children, leading to the utmost target reached with the CRC (1989). With the international acknowledgement that all the children are subjects of rights, including those who cannot move autonomously, we can state that it is the beginning of a new era in the childhood history, or, in other words, a new childhood "has been built". Furthermore, in this new century, if some of the goals are not still reached, other challenges are looming because even facing a not very positive scenario about the world situation of children and the difficulties suffered by the different States in promoting those rights, there are voices uttering claims for other paths to be followed. According to Santos (2000:21), "in the world space-time, a Resistance culture is being developed in Post-Modernity and in Globalism Era".

After some decades, it is legitimate to ask whether the expectancies of the CRC, and all the other legal, sectorial, universal texts that state that there is concern about the well-being of children and young people and about the citizenship right, with the aim of covering a gap of the Convention, leading to International Conventions on the Rights of the Child, and the youth, which were fulfilled or, on the contrary, were not fulfilled. And as we will see herein, the answer surely points to some disappointment as compared with the referred expectancies.

There are several problems affecting children worldwide, as poverty, diseases, extermination and hunger. All over the world, millions of children are victims of hunger, and we can mention the death, in 1998, of five Argentinean children due to undernourishment or 12 million children (with less than 5) who died of curable diseases in 1998 (Unicef, 2000). The ill treatments, negligence, paedophilia and psychological abuses are other child realities. AIDS has entailed 11million orphan children in the Southern Saharan Africa (Unicef, 2003).

Moreover the trade in children in view of prostitution or pornography is another serious problem, which is damaging the childhood human rights and fundamental freedoms, and this may lead to state that it is a new form of modern slavery. Most of the children, affected by this situation, mainly come from the lower social classes (but it is a transversal phenomenon encompassing all the classes, and the social visibility is the point that makes the difference) and the main trends of this trade mainly flow from the peripheral and semi-peripheral countries to the central countries. The problem deepens in the peripheral countries as a result of poverty.

In many countries, the child situation worsens even more due to the external debt. For instance, the debt payment budget is higher than investment in primary education. However, we shall refer that the marginalization process of extended levels of the population, including children, "presenting a particular tragedy in the case of the peripheral countries, has also become visible in the central countries, above all since the 80's, though with different configurations, as it happens in the USA, where there has been a deep increase in the inequalities" (Hespanha, 2001:167).

In very realistic terms, school can do very little against social exclusion. However, aware

of school limitations to face something structurally rooted, emerging from the global society, and that cannot be coped but with changes in the regulation of the production and sharing of the wealth and in the public construction of full social integrating rights for all the individuals, we have the conditions to avoid the historical myths through which school has legitimized (in the name of the promise of equality on individual merit) the effective social inequality, confronting it with the active foreseeing of the realizable utopias, i.e. the implementation by the public space of school education of effective active citizenship rights for the sake of the pupils.

The community insertion of the educative action encompasses the interpretation of the educative practices in the field of the teaching institutions in social exclusion areas as a component of social policies, which reaches its utmost meaning in the following bi-polarized articulation: intervening for the sake of changing the social structures that promote exclusion (in a partnership work) and the school attendance of the specificity of the referred intervention, considering that the school is taken as an organization of (for) the children and youth and an institution that manages the interchange and communication of multiple knowledge.

Finally, this education dimension for the sake of the development only makes sense if the school populations are, more than target public or consignees of the educative action, considered active partners in their own emancipating process. This means to reject, understanding educative communities as problem-communities and having the perception of the possibilities and conditions of pupils' participation, often disjunctive and divergent.

Pupils' participation (art.12 of CRC) acquires, by this way, a multiple meaning: it is simultaneously a pedagogical mechanism, a symbolic necessity and a political process. As a pedagogical mechanism, the pupils' participation in the relevant decisions concerning the realization of the educative act embodies the guideline recognized by the pragmatic inspiration, based on J. Dewey's theory (1952), of the civic training by the practice of the democratic performance in the school context. The acquisition of civic behaviours is not a question of indoctrination, but something built while exercising the rights and duties of citizenship: democracy is learnt by practicing democracy. The fraud of the neo-conservative speech also lies in the fact of proposing to reinforce the power, the "discipline" and the adult control over children, which contradictorily projects the genesis of civic attitudes in authoritative and non-democratic institutions. However, the education of civility and behavioural socialization can only be successful if they occur in contexts where every one exercises civil rights with children ahead. *The school as a pedagogic organization* gains it's meaning by the participation of the actors that build it (Greenfield, 1993).

Active citizenship does not mean social conformity facing social structure, but the possibility to exercise the right to contribute to the social change and the progressive transformation of the society. In fact, the question is to move children from the margin to the centre of the discussion about globalization, education and everything affecting them.

According to Kaufman *et al* (2002:4), the programmes designed and implemented for childhood and that attempt to answer children's needs at the local, national or international levels are all the more efficient as the participation of children is allowed.

Those policies may be more effective if children participate in the debate on the nature of the changes and opportunities involving them. Pupil's participation, as a process of "conscientization" gets this way an unambiguous political nature (cf. Sarmento, 2001).

By promoting this participation, we will be probably giving a step forward in the fight against a distorted vision of reality, inspired in a neo-liberal model that does not work, searching for the utopia of a better world and a more democratic and fair school.

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2) Cf., Fritzell's classical study (1987) and Gordon's critic (1989).

3) The author contributes to understanding the complexity embodied in the acknowledgement of the children as citizens, through the conceptualization of childhood in fourth time. Cf. Jenks (1993);

Soares and Tomás (2004).

4) Finally, the globalization is a reflexive process, and considering that sociology is the social science that in priority deals with the social reflexivity problem; sociology and globalization form a "last-minute relationship" as designated by Giddens (1997).