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A complex web of education policy borrowing and transfer: Education for All and the Plan for the

**Development of Education in Brazil** 

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ABSTRACT.- This article analyses how Education for All policies were

transferred to Brazil and Latin America by means of ambitious educational

strategic plans such as the Plan for the Development of Education and the

promoted by the Federal Government of Brazil, and National Education Plans

the Latin American Educational Goals promoted by the Organisation of Ibero

American States (i.e. the international commonwealth of countries which

belonged to the old Hispanic and Portuguese empires). The analysis highlights

how a complex web of educational policy transfer and borrowing (Steiner-

Khamsi & Waldow, 2012) was fashioned by means of concatenate environmental,

cognitive and relational mechanisms.

Keywords: policy transfer; globalisation; Education for All; Brazil.

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Introduction

The Education for All Programme (EFA), coordinated by UNESCO and a consortium of

international donors, has induced a large number of countries to launch wide-ranging

educational plans addressed to foster enrolment, completion, performance, equity and

gender parity in primary education. In Latin America, a regional organisation —the

Organization of Ibero American States (OEI, in Spanish)— is also leading another

multi-national plan, in close alliance with UNESCO, which sets benchmarks for a

socially inclusive education at both compulsory and upper educational levels. A federal

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 2 country, Brazil has also implemented its Plan for the Development of Education (PDE) and National Education Plans with analogous goals and a very similar understanding of coordination between sub-national educational authorities. Remarkably, these two initiatives expect their final goals to be achieved some years after the EFA deadline in 2015 (SITEAL, 2010).

In Brazil, Education for All partially coincides with the Ibero American project of international regionalisation and ongoing changes in Federal coordination. Thus, in the country education policy transfer and borrowing has followed a very complex circuit as far as agents, issues and scales of policy-making are concerned<sup>1</sup>. The recent research findings on policy transfer and borrowing processes which are taking place internationally (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, 2012) are particularly helpful to make sense of this case study, and eventually shed light on the national appropriation of EFA goals (King and Rose, 2005).

The first section of the article will describe the establishment of Brazil's national plan and its convergence with the Ibero American 2021 Educational Goals. While the

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<sup>.</sup> Between 2009 and 2011 interviews were carried out with technical staff and politicians of UNESCO, OEI, the governments of the Brazilian Union and the state of Minas Gerais, as well as with members of several civil society organisations. These interviews took place in Belo Horizonte, Brasilia and Paris. On the basis of this information a sample of documents was identified in order to analyse the main discourse traits of 'hegemony' according to Norman Fairclough's (2003) method of Critical Discourse Analysis.

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 3 second part argues for a conceptualisation of the mechanisms of policy transfer, the following three sections report on the influence of different mechanisms in the making of Brazilian educational plans. This analysis suggests a conceptual discussion and some conclusions in the final sections.

### Borrowing strategic educational plans in a large federation

In 1988, the Brazilian parliament passed a democratic constitution that consolidated its political transition from authoritarian to democratic rule in many ways, not least by universalising social rights such as the right to education. This commitment was so strong that the constitution required the government to establish ten-year plans, supported by federal acts regularly reviewed by the parliament. In the nineties the main principles were concretized in the first National Educational Plan for the period from 2001 to 2011. This one has the country's EFA plan according to the Planipolis database created by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (2012).

In the 1990s, Brazilian educational policies were the subject of sharp tensions that transformed relations within the federation, and linked the actors who intervened in the national arena with the agendas, ideologies and potential allies that were being formed in international contexts. Due to its external debt and consequent monetary weakness, the federal government had to accept a Structural Adjustment Plan as a condition to apply for World Bank loans. This condition restricted the priorities of educational expenditure to expanding net enrolment in primary education. The Bank also implemented the FUNDESCOLA programme in order to improve school

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 4 management in the deprived North Eastern states, thus fostering promotion and graduation of students in primary education in the most vulnerable territories (World Bank, 2012).

By means of a multi-level scheme (FUNDEF), the federal government attempted to redistribute public resources among the different levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal. The FUNDEF (Fund for Fundamental —primary— Education) was aimed at equalising the budget per capita allocated for compulsory education in all the municipalities. Local governments had to show significant improvement in net enrolment rates in order to be eligible for this federal support.

At that time, the main teachers' union attacked this policy on the grounds that it neglected teachers' working conditions, conveyed too restrictive a view of basic education, and therefore, contradicted the spirit of EFA as proclaimed in Jomtien in 1990. Unionists and activists blamed the government for undermining the initial enthusiasm that EFA had triggered in the country, where the launch of the worldwide plan had coincided with a democratic transition after twenty-four years of military dictatorship (Frigotto and Ciavatta, 2003). Along these lines, in 2000 the Brazilian teachers' union (*Confederação Nacional de Trabalhadores da Educação*) joined other unions, INGOs and social movements in order to create the Global Campaign for Education, a global coalition that vindicated and monitored this broader understanding of EFA.

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When the left-wing government led by Inácio *Lula* da Silva took office in 2003, it decided to respond to these shortcomings by means of a more ambitious policy addressing the whole education system. In 2006 the new administration substituted FUNDEF with the Fund for Basic Education (FUNDEB). FUNDEB gained the support of the Global Campaign for Education because, instead of looking at primary education exclusively, the conditions of this new fund applied to early childhood, primary and lower secondary education, thus requiring sub-national authorities to widen their commitment to education. After a second victory in the elections, in 2007 the Lula government gathered all the programmes run by the Ministry into an encompassing Plan for the Development of Education (PDE) that took early childhood, compulsory and post-compulsory secondary and tertiary education into account (Ministry of Education BR, 2006). Following this, it promoted local and provincial conferences that eventually led to a National Conference for Education (CONAE, 2010) convened in Brasilia in 2010. This participatory meeting issued a long white paper that reviewed the former national plan as well as the wider PDE approved in the interim, and outlined the grounds for the new National Educational Plan for the next decade.

At more or less the same time, between 2008 and 2010, the Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI, 2010) drafted, consulted on and finally established the Ibero American 2021 Educational Goals for all Latin American countries. The OEI is funded through Spanish and Portuguese official development aid. Remarkably, this initiative emulated the thematic scope of all the educational programmes that the Brazilian PDE had already considered. The OEI 2021 Educational Goals envision

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 6 massive schooling and increased equity at all levels by the time the second centenary of the independence of most Latin American countries is commemorated. In addition to these grand objectives related to education *strictu senso*, the 2021 Educational Goals also aim at creating an Ibero-American research space where academic exchange would flourish.

In Brazil, two political coalitions were constituted in the arena of education politics. On the one hand, UNESCO, OEI and the federal government collaborated with the main civil society organisations to gather support for and to monitor their educational plans —namely, EFA, OEI 2021 Educational Goals and the PDE. The teachers' union changed its former opposition to the official policy into a qualified but explicit collaboration. Many governors and mayors from a variety of political parties joined this collective project. And the national branch of the Global Campaign for Education provided international legitimation. On the other hand, although they shared this mainstream consensus, some right-wing governors opposed the minimum salary for teachers, a policy supported by both the federal government and the teachers' union. The association of local educational authorities demanded management systems that controlled teachers more tightly. Furthermore, a network of firms interested in stressing their corporate social responsibility (named All for Education, TPE in Portuguese) started a widely disseminated campaign to promote education based on economic competitiveness and school effectiveness. Shortly after, TPE began collaborating with the Partnership for Educational Revitalisation in the Americas (PREAL), another

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 7 initiative for a Latin American education policy, funded by USAID, the World Bank and private corporations.

Nowadays, these two sectors share the expectation that each Brazilian school will respond to institutional, local, provincial, federal (PDE), Latin American (OEI) and world (EFA) educational goals. Education is a crucial axis of multi-level government in the country. All schools are required to elaborate and implement their own PDE following a model inspired by the school improvement projects piloted in the 1990s (FUNDESCOLA). In addition, they are committed to the benchmarks which are established for all municipalities, provincial states and the whole country, and measured by the Institute for Educational Research through the Index of Development of Basic Education (INEP, 2012). Thus, each Brazilian school must contribute to Education for all by 2015 as well as to Ibero American and National goals by 2020-2021.

The aforementioned ideological differences notwithstanding, so far both the federal government and the OEI have succeeded in imposing their own rationale and deadlines. Crucial to my analysis is the general acceptance of the causal beliefs embedded in both the logical framework of the PDE and the 2021 Educational Goals, because all the parties involved expected that significant synergies will be fostered between initial, primary, secondary and higher education. Doubtless, the validity of this claim will be revealed through the research and public policy analyses that universities and consultants will carry out in the following years. According to my interviews in Brasilia and Paris, difference in deadlines is neither a problem for UNESCO officers nor

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 8 for the coordination and monitoring teams of EFA, but a welcome piece of news that reports on mutually beneficial cooperation with OEI (see note 1).

### Borrowing and transferring education policies in different directions

By taking into account the ongoing transformations in international relations, a number of contemporary observers have convincingly noticed how intricate webs of education policy borrowing and transfer are being fashioned in many countries (Dale, 1999, 2005; Dale and Robertson, 2012; Steiner-Khamsi 2004, 2010, 2012). In contrast with the so-called Westphalian system where states have competed in war and peace since the seventeenth until the late twentieth century, the last decades have witnessed a new configuration of international relations established between heterogeneous social agents (states, corporations, NGOs, international organisations, social movements) with respect to a variety of topics including security, finance, health, trade, energy, climate change, international development, water management, and significantly, education. In this context, interests may be pursued simultaneously at varied scales of decision-making depending on the expected returns for local, national and/ or supra-national action. The agents may choose where they deploy their strategy, to what extent they adopt the ideas that have been proposed in many countries and forum, and which alliances they build within, across and above the borders of states.

My analysis draws on this strand of research altogether with a complementary conceptualisation of environmental, cognitive and relational mechanisms of policy diffusion (Tilly, 2001; Jenson, 2010). In the field of education studies, useful

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 9 conceptualisations distinguish coercive and ideological (Dale, 1999) as well as political and economic (Steiner- Khamsi, 2010) ways of policy transfer. Similarly, systems theory (Schriewer, 1989), political economy and network analysis (Steiner- Khamsi, 2004), as well as political and cultural analysis (Rappleye, 2012; Sobe, 2012; Waldow, 2012) have provided quite relevant clues to researchers involved in spelling out the processes of borrowing and transfer. By focusing on mechanisms I want to avail of this fruitful literature taking into account both the environmental mechanisms which frame the opportunities for action and the cognitive and relational mechanisms directly enacted by social agency.

Environmental mechanisms enrich the array of available opportunities by setting the scope of the policy instruments which are available in a given place at a given time (Tilly, 2001; Jenson, 2010). Thus, when they want to review the mainstream policies in a country, political actors draw on the hegemonic images of other countries and the guidelines drafted by international organisations (Schriewer, 1989; Takayama, 2008; Meyer, 2010; Rappleye, 2012). The search of references from elsewhere is not only motivated by curiosity or by a cosmopolitan drive, but also by the remarkable consequences of this very exercise for reflexivity. International organisations, mostly the United Nations, have been particularly successful in disseminating institutional 'scripts' that define ways of policy-making in accordance with human rights. Although governments sometimes only pay lip service to these principles, the point is that certain requirements underpinned by these 'scripts' have become indispensable for political players to become full actors in a specific arena of debate and competition. These

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 10 requirements normally consist of projections made of particular understandings of the allegedly best practices adopted elsewhere. By looking at their own reality through these lens, political actors have to reflect on their own position, shortcomings and challenges in order to either promote their proposals or question the prevailing policies.

In the end, a body of soft regulation is established so that governments become responsible for compliance with universal schooling, civic education, the universal franchise and the oversight of human rights violations. Whilst the international reach of these institutional arrangements correlated with socio-economic development some decades ago, recently these rules have been disseminated and accepted as soon as new countries signed international covenants and democratisation advanced throughout whole world regions regardless of other socio-economic characteristics (Meyer, Bromley and Ramírez, 2010; Ramírez and Boli, 1987; Ramírez, Soysal and Shanahan, 1997; Ramírez, 2006; Suárez, Ramírez and Koo, 2009). In this vein, Left-wing Brazilian civil society organisations attacked finance-driven educational reforms which were only targeted to increase primary enrolment in response to the conditions of Structural Adjustment Programmes in the nineties, by claiming that decision- makers were misreading the broader notion of 'basic education' as stated in the principles of Education for All in 1990 (Frigotto and Ciavata, 2003; Gindin, 2008). In the whole continent, governments and civil societies have been looking at the United Nations (Puntigliano, 2007) and the European Union (Grugel, 2004, 2006) —albeit in more or less rhetorical ways, so as to emphasise an alternative, assertive international stance in contrast with their former subordination to the United States.

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Cognitive mechanisms mostly revolve around the reinterpretation of educational quality and development. When projecting external images over their closer institutional context, political actors also avail of certain knowledge of education policy-making. International statistics and quality assurance systems have triggered a sort of data revolution that produces growing amounts of information about education policies. These sources are used for both basic and applied research as well as evaluation, and very often become the grounds of official targets. The resulting corpus of reports, policy briefs, statistical monitoring bases and international comparisons are widely used to figure out the possible alternatives and the underlying dilemmas in decision-making. This knowledge is instrumental to the alignment of professional practices with official expectations, the selection of the salient information about foreign education systems, and the importation of management (e.g. Public- Private Partnerships) as well as social policy (e.g. assertive action) devices to the field of education (Ozga, 2009; Sobe, 2012; Waldow, 2012).

Commentators of policy studies define these sets of ideas as 'theories of change' or 'programme ontologies' (Pawson, 2006). Actually, these theories are embedded in social and educational programmes. Their hypotheses entail causal beliefs on what changes are likely to take place if a policy is implemented. In a more general sense, these beliefs make quite formal assumptions about the nature of social reality and the ontology of schooling and education. So, in the same way as the Education for All programme relies on some empirical claims about the construction of educational

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 12 quality, the overcoming of inequalities and conflicts, the generation and transmission of skills, and the organisation of teaching and learning (EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, 2005, 2009), it is plausible to notice that the Brazilian Plan for the Development of Education and the Ibero American Educational Goals take for granted other assumptions about the synergies of encompassing educational policies simultaneously addressed to several educational levels (Ministry of Education BR, 2006a, 2006b; OEI, 2008, 2010).

Finally, relational mechanisms are enacted by means of both economic and political processes (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). A well-known economic process has consisted of conditioning international loans to the application of packed sets of reforms in a country. This was a common practice of the assistance provided by the World Bank when external debt afflicted many Latin American countries in the eighties and nineties, but has significantly declined afterwards. In fact, it is not welcome at all by most of the incumbent governments nowadays.

Coalition- building is a relational, purely political mechanism of policy transfer. In addition to the traditional pattern of negotiating who is in charge of government, recently coalitions are often built through networks of actors who are interested in particular areas of policy-making. Moreover, some actors are able to establish these alliances in a particular layer of governance while engaging in conflict in other layers. Thus, oppositional groups may look for international support to attack governments, but

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 13 governments may also avail of international certification to underpin their preferred policies (Steiner- Khamsi, 2010).

### **Setting the scope of policy instruments**

Both the Brazilian Plan for the Development of Education and the National Educational Plan(s) as well as the Ibero American Educational Goals have been designed and implemented in a favourable environment where similar policy frameworks were circulating internationally. After taking office, in 2003 the first priorities of the new Brazilian administration had to do with expanding and consolidating the previous schemes of conditional cash transfers and regional equalisation funds, but in a few years' time official interests broadened to pedagogies, school improvement and clearly defined benchmarks that insisted on the need to increase net enrolment rates across the school years —specially in secondary education, and committed official goals to improving material facilities, guaranteeing quality assurance and strengthening academic performance.

Although the federal government reformed education in this way due to its understanding of the main problems, and availed of the very reform to take political advantage, in fact this policy shift followed mainstream international guidelines. It was not only coherent with the almost contemporary launch of the Ibero American Educational Goals but also with messages that UN agencies were sending at the same time.

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To start with, ambitious educational planning reflected a wider concern with the alignment of quantity and quality. If public expenditure and enrolment can be roughly referred to as quantity issues, those other aspects which are more deeply intertwined with teaching and learning have been labelled as quality issues for the last three decades. Among them, in 2005 the EFA Global Monitoring Report was already reminding governments of a 'quality imperative' essentially consisting of several policy dimensions including learner characteristics, context, enabling inputs, teaching and learning dimension, and outcomes dimension (Global Monitoring Report Team 2005: pp. 35-6). Remarkably, in Brazil policy-makers and experts could easily download and read these ideas while they were discussing the Plan for the Development of Education —which was launched two years later. The OEI staff had also access to these ideas when drafting, circulating and discussing the blueprints of the Ibero American Educational Goals between 2008 and 2010.

In a similar vein, the UNESCO Regional Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC) gathered all the governments in the region in summits where the role of the teaching profession as well as pedagogic innovation, opportunities for lifelong learning and the social responsibility with education were discussed (PRELAC-UNESCO, 2007: 2). Remarkably, the drafting of the Brazilian programme and the ulterior discussion of the National Educational Plan in the National Conference for Education (CONAE) were coherent with these recommendations. These ideas also contributed to the core of the Ibero American Educational Goals.

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The UNESCO International Bureau for Education also posited a policy framework aligned with Brazilian and Ibero American endeavours when convening the 2008 International Conference of Education. That conference extended the notion of inclusive education from an interest in educating students with special needs due to their disabilities to a commitment to cater to students with all kinds of specific need caused by social inequalities. At the level of single schools this international organisation proposed a method of both pedagogic innovation and educational change ultimately based on overcoming social and cultural barriers to learning (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). But the official initiative aimed at scaling up a similar method to the whole of an educational system (Acedo, Ferrer, Pàmies, 2009). Once again international guidelines strongly resonated in the aforementioned reforms.

Finally, in Brazil since 2003 first the *Lula* da Silva administration, and then the current administration of Dilma Rousseff have underpinned their comprehensive reforms with a further vindication of Anti-Racist education which is also actively sponsored by the UN. Remarkably, for these years the Brazilian authorities have attempted to transform the prevailing ethnic order, whose origins date back to Atlantic slave trade, on the Durban Declaration and Program of Action on Racism (United Nations, 2009). Besides inviting Afro-Brazilian educators to have a say in the development of the school curriculum, these administrations have also used positive discrimination to increase the proportion of Afro-Brazilian students who enrol in higher education institutions.

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In a nutshell, the ideas which inspired the main developments in Brazilian education policies had been actively disseminated by international organisations at the same time as the PDE was designed, and were received by the Brazilian authorities in quite a positive way. The Ibero American Educational Goals set an analogous but tentative method of international coordination in that world region.

### Interpreting educational quality and development

When they were designed, both the Brazilian and the Ibero American educational programmes shared a handful of empirical expectations about the alleged virtuous causal circles that their very enactment may eventually trigger. According to the promoters, the PDE should trigger powerful synergies between early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education (Ministry of Education BR, 2006a, 2006b), while the OEI (2010) should contribute to the making of a knowledge society by matching educational with social reforms. These were not only statements on the mission of programmes but also causal beliefs about the likely outcomes of policies.

By making these claims, the federal authorities and OEI managed to fashion a political consensus across the board. The government of Brazil introduced these ideas even before the official launch of the PDE in 2007 (Ministry of Education BR, 2006a, 2006b), then insisted on their validity in proposing a white paper that the National Conference for Education (CONAE, 2010) eventually approved. At the same time, the Organisation of Ibero American States (OEI, 2010) opened its own consultation process

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 17 on the grounds that a very important power in the region such as Brazil had already taken a similar approach into account, then discussed analogous tenets with many governments, academics and civil society organisations, and finally condensed the whole package in a widely disseminated white paper.

A rapid reading of excerpts from Brazil's PDE and the OEI white paper shows how the belief in a large virtuous circle was worded in terms of teachers building on schools' 'internal and external factors' and 'educational changes' advancing the 'two (economic and social) agendas'.

The *evaluation* of the educational network is ultimately a type of self-evaluation.- (...) Institutional evaluation makes reference to the process whereby schools *analyse and reflect on their own practice so that they engage with both internal initiatives and interventions in other areas of the (educational) system in order to promote a high-quality basic education for all the population (...) Individual schools evaluate themselves to improve their own efforts; then, educational agents build systems to monitor schools that take diverse issues into account, mostly goals and outcomes, and the <i>internal and external factors* that condition decision-making and actions (Ministry of Education BR, 2006b: Vol I, p. 161)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2. [</sup>My translation, see the original text in Portuguese] "A *avaliação* da rede de ensino a auto-avaliação.- (...) A avaliação insitucional refere-se ao processo de a escola *analisar e refletir sobre sua prática, com vistas às iniciativas internas da instituição bem como à atuação das outras instâncias do sistema*, na promoção de uma Escola Básica de qualidade para toda a população (...) A auto-avaliação das unidades escolares, como atividade que se volta ao *contínuo aperfeiçoamento do trabalho escolar*, se caracteriza pela construção, pelos agentes escolares, de uma sistemática de acompanhamento do trebalho escolar, contemplando objetivos e resultados do processo de trabalho, *considerando fatores internos e externos* condicionantes de suas decioes e ações".

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Latin American education (...) has to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century *so that an education which is attentive to technological changes, information and knowledge systems, scientific development and innovation, and new ideas in the culture, may achieve balanced economic development that ensures the reduction of poverty, inequalities and other threats to social cohesion*. How can we face these challenges successfully? If educational progress and reforms reproduce the patterns of the last decades, a qualitative leap that bridges the current distance with developed countries is unlikely. Diverse approaches to the existing gaps are necessary, and new actors, institutions and strategies must enter the arena so that educational changes allow us to advance these two (economic and social) agendas in an integrated but innovative manner (OEI, 2010: 83)<sup>3</sup>.

These ideas were conveyed by means of 'apparent statements of fact'

(Fairclough, 2003). If decision-makers (at different levels) and teachers were expected to think that 'internal and external factors' and the benefits of 'educational changes' for the 'economic and social agenda' were real, the recipients of the message were actively encouraged to modify their practices so as to avail themselves of this potential. The concrete recommendation was to implement the multi-level PDEs in Brazil, and as far 3. [Spanish text, my own translation] "La educación latinoamericana (...) ha de enfrentarse a los retos del siglo XXI para que de la mano de una educación sensible a los cambios tecnológicos, a los sistemas de información y de acceso al conocimiento, a las formas de desarrollo científico y de innovación y a los nuevos significados de la cultura, pueda lograr un desarrollo económico equilibrado que asegure la reducción de la pobreza, de las desigualdades y de la falta de cohesión social. ¿Cómo enfrentarse a ambos desafíos con ciertas garantías de alcanzar el éxito? No parece previsible que si mantiene un ritmo de progreso de la educación y unos modelos de reformas similares a las vividas en las últimas décadas, pueda lograrse un salto cualitativo que acorte de forma significativa la distancia con los países más desarrollados. Hacen falta diferentes aproximaciones a los desfases existentes, nuevos actores e instituciones, y estrategias renovadas sobre el cambio educativo que permitan avanzar en el logro de ambas agendas de

forma integrada pero innovadora. (OEI, 2010: 83).

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 19 as the OEI was concerned, to design an ambitious national plan. The leap from fact to recommendation is an indicator of hegemony to the extent that this rhetorical movement totally overlooks any hint of discussion about the empirical validity of certain specific claim (Fairclough, 2003).

The cognitive side of policy transfer also endowed the Brazilian government and the OEI with new tools of time management. Basically, it strongly suggested that the final appraisal of either success or failure should be postponed until the total series of data would be available in 2021, when both planning periods would expire. This argument was really useful in responding to the doubts of UNESCO (2008) with regard to certain difficulties about the effective possibility of achieving EFA goals in Brazil by 2015. Since the main problems were truly universalising literacy and enrolling children who resided in the poorest urban slums and rural zones, the new deadline anticipated a sound reaction to potential critiques in the regional and global conferences that would evaluate EFA. At the same time, a trend of increasing average scores in the official index measuring the effects of PDE was producing good news (INEP, 2012), and PISA data also confirmed some signs of advance (OECD, 2010). In addition, for both the federal government and the OEI the open questions about the possible effects of the plans also extended the period for re-defining the goals and, if necessary, tackling any shortcomings.

### **Building alliances**

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The initiative of the Brazilian federal government transformed the field of relevant social relations because it built a pluri-scalar coalition gathering together international (UNESCO) and regional (OEI) organisations as well as provincial and local governments and wide sectors of the regional, national and sub-national civil society. In doing so, it strengthened the leadership of both federal and Ibero American reformers. In fact, the federal government managed to lead policy change at the same time as its political project became the very framework for educational debates in the country.

The Brazilian government emulated many other contemporary campaigns in education and social policy by carefully crafting the discourse that disseminated the objectives of its educational policy (Fairclough, 2003). Particularly, the Ministry coined and disseminated several catchwords that made reference to the outline of the general consensus. The similarity of these catchwords defined a common discourse, whose core was a multidimensional view of education closely associated with human rights. All the involved voices supported a wider understanding of education than just universal school enrolment, thus taking autonomy, diversity and a comprehensive reading of basic education into account. Across the ideological spectrum, an heterogeneous array of political actors including the left-wing Ministry of Education, a few centrist regional governments such as that of Minas Gerais (MG) and the regional project promoted by the OEI to the business-friendly All for Education, altogether supported a set of shared beliefs on the right of students to this multidimensional education.

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The notion of education that inspires the Plan for the Development of Education (PDE) (...) aims at *building autonomy*, that is, educating individuals so they are capable of adopting critical and creative worldviews (Ministry of Education BR, 2006b: 5)<sup>4</sup>.

Since the 1920s and 1930s, *integral education*, a wide-ranging view of school education including social and cultural tasks, was adopted by a number of political projects (SEDUC-MG, 2009: 3)<sup>5</sup>.

*An integrative approach is necessary*. In this approach all cultures in their diverse manifestations are present in the schools. Research and science must be a part of the curriculum and teachers' concerns. The wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity must be recognised. Everyone must be committed to innovation, above all through networks and work teams. This endeavour must be rooted in the region's identity; its capcity for imagination and innovation (OEI, 2010: 97)<sup>6</sup>.

*Integral education* has to do with the complete flourishing of the human being. This notion broadens the concept of education provided by the school, the family and the

<sup>4. [</sup>My translation, see the original text in Portuguese] "A concepção de educação que inspira o Plano de Desenvolvimento da Educação (PDE) (...) tem como objetivo a *construção da autonomia*, isto é, a formação de indivíduos capazes de assumir uma postura crítica e criativa frente ao mundo".

<sup>5. [</sup>My translation, see the original text in Portuguese] "Desde as décadas de 20 e 30 do século XX a *educação integral*, significando uma educação escolar ampliada em suas tarefas sociais e culturais, esteve presente nas propostas das diferentes correntes políticas".

<sup>6. [</sup>My translation, see the original text in Spanish] "Es imprescindible un *enfoque integrador*, en el que las culturas en sus diversas manifestaciones estén presentes en la escuela, en el que la investigación y la ciencia formen parte de los currículos y de las preocupaciones de los profesores, en el que se reconozca la riqueza de la diversidad cultural y lingüística y en el que la apuesta por la innovación de las escuelas y de los profesores, sobre todo en redes y equipos de trabajo, sea una de las señas de identidad de un esfuerzo que debe hundir su raíces en las fuentes de la identidad de la región: su capacidad de imaginación y de innovación" (OEI, 2010: 97).

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whole society. It favours the development of students through learning situations that stimulate participation, the acquisition of competencies and skills for adult life and to access social services. Integral education requires contact with learning environments (...) A contemporary demand, it emphasizes the kind of education that develops the necessary civic values and attitudes to deal with current opportunities and challenges. In this vein, integral education embraces competencies such as learning to live together, to participate in public life and to respect the environment (TPE, 2011: 113).

On the other hand, the discursive underpinning of these encompassing educational plans was expressive of a very general consensus in which diverse, partially contradictory parties could participate. In linguistic terms, a variety of hortatory styles conveyed this very general common ground that allowed for alternate agreement and discrepancy (Fairclough, 2003).

Brazilian authorities addressed their messages to the nation in order to use the plans as an opportunity to broaden public debate. In their view, the PDE was to construct the scaffolding of truly national educational policies that guaranteed the right to education in its broadest sense. But the teachers' union repeatedly signalled at further

<sup>7 [</sup>My translation, see the original text in Portuguese] "A *Educação integral* trata da formação completa do ser humano, amplia a concepção da Educação proporcionada pela escola, pela família e por toda a sociedade, além de favorecer o desenvolvimento dos alunos em situações de aprendizagem que estimulem a capacidade para convivência e participação, a aquisição de competências e habilidades para a vida adulta e o acesso aos serviços sociais. Está relacionada à expansão do contato com ambientes de aprendizagem (...) Uma das demandas atuais é pela Educação que favoreça o desenvolvimento de valores e atitudes e forme cidadãos capazes de lidar com as oportunidades e desafios da vida contemporânea. Neste sentido, a Educação integral compreende competências como aprender a conviver, participar da vida pública e respeitar o meio ambiente" (TPE, 2011: 113).

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 23 contentions by complaining about the official acceptance of the business-friendly All for Education (TPE) campaign. In the view of the union, this campaign not only might erode popular support for the PDE but mostly could threaten the public delivery of education.

The PDE offers a conception of education in line with the constitutional objectives of the Federal Republic of Brazil. This entails *building a national system out of diverse educational systems*, that is, the objective is multiplicity instead of uniformity (Ministry of Education BR, 2006b: 6)<sup>8</sup>.

However, *an extremely worrying aspect is the collaboration of the Ministry with All for Education (TPE)*, a lobby with no relation to the government's electoral platform but powerful enough to have influence. The Teachers' Union is concerned about changes in the Plan's principles , particularly the use of public resources to fund private schools and networks, which provides incentives for a market-centred view of education (CNTE, 2008: 3-4)<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>8. [</sup>My translation, see the original text in Portuguese] "O PDE oferece uma concepção de educação alinhada aos objetivos constitucionalmente determinados à República Federativa do Brasil. Esse alinhamento exige a construção da *unidade dos sistemas educacionais como sistema nacional* — o que pressupõe multiplicidade e não uniformidade".

<sup>9. [</sup>My translation, see the original text in Portuguese] "Contudo, *o fato mais preocupante sobre este aspecto advém da força da parceria do Ministério com a rede Todos pela Educação*, diga-se de passagem, alheia à plataforma eleitoral do governo, mas que tem se mostrado forte suficiente para conformá-la aos seus interesses (...) A CNTE, no entanto, não se exime em externar sua contrariedade e disposição em alterar os princípios contidos no Plano, que implicam em drenagem de recursos públicos a programas de instituições/redes de natureza privada; incentivo à concepção mercadológica de ensino (...) dentre outras questões".

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The reference of the Ibero American Educational Goals was the will to construct a community of the nations which had been part of the Portuguese and the Spanish empires some centuries ago. Educational and academic cooperation between these governments, as regularly stated in ministerial summits, eventually was to contribute to the making of democratic societies.

This initiative should not only reinforce education in national political agendas but also strengthen the *cohesion of the Ibero American community* based on common objectives to build just and democratic societies (OEI, 2008: 16)<sup>10</sup>.

In a different vein, the Programme for the Educational Revitalisation of the Americas (PREAL), actively supported by the World Bank and US Aid, as well as the business-friendly All for Education coalition issued quite a contrasting discourse to the extent that they mentioned private institutions as a key component of the public sphere. However, these voices were cautious enough to frame their controversial claims within a general concern for broad social involvement in education and support for cooperation.

PREAL ran a continent-wide programme to foster corporate social responsibility in the area of education. In its own terms, this goal was a part of a wider social movement.

The most well-performing countries in education show that improvement is possible; what is more, these cases illustrate how it can be attained in the short term. These

10. [My translation, see the original text in Spanish] "Semejante iniciativa ha de servir no sólo para reforzar la educación en las políticas de los países, sino también para *cohesionar a la comunidad iberoamericana* en torno a unos objetivos comunes y para construir sociedades justas y democráticas".

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countries also show that quality does not exclude equity, as they show it is feasible to achieve excellent results for almost all students (...) The first essential step of successful systems consists in defining a limited list of clear, measurable objectives, real priorities that target students' results. These objectives become the focus of attention and reference for further progress (...) successful systems recognize the need to involve all stakeholders in generating improvement. Achieving sustainable, long-term improvement is much more likely if there is consensus among the involved parties on the need for reforms and their specific nature. Furthermore, public policies must follow a specific direction for a number of years, even though governments may change, if the proposed reforms are to be successful. The opening of many spaces for dialogue and communication between all stakeholders is necessary to achieve this stability. All levels of government, teachers, principals, teachers' unions, students, parents and other key groups in civil society must be involved (PREAL, 2012: pp. 1-3)11

All for Education (TPE) stood for networks of public and private actors who were equally interested in civic participation associated with education and equity in the school system.

11. My translation. See the original text in Spanish] "Los países con sistemas educativos de alto desempeño muestran que las mejoras son posibles, que incluso se pueden lograr en periodos de tiempo relativamente cortos, que la calidad y la equidad no se excluyen mutuamente y que es factible obtener excelentes resultados para prácticamente todos los estudiantes (...) El primer paso que dan los sistemas exitosos es esencial y consiste en definir un número reducido de objetivos, claros, medibles y de la más alta prioridad, enfocados en los resultados de los estudiantes, pues centran la atención y proporcionan los puntos de referencia para el progreso (...) Los sistemas exitosos reconocen la necesidad de comprometer a todos los actores en la creación de la mejora. La posibilidad de lograr mejoras sustentables y a largo plazo en los sistemas educativos es mayor si se logra alcanzar entre los actores implicados un consenso político sobre la necesidad de reformar y la naturaleza específica de las reformas que hay que introducir. Además, para que las reformas propuestas fructifiquen, la política pública necesita avanzar en una dirección específica durante un cierto número de años, incluso a través de los cambios de gobierno. Para conseguir esto, se requieren múltiples espacios para el diálogo y la comunicación entre todas las partes: todos los niveles de gobierno, los docentes, los directores de escuelas, los dirigentes sindicales, los estudiantes, los padres y otros grupos claves de la sociedad civil (PREAL, 2012: pp. 1-3).

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Social organisations led by professionals from the private sector, notably entrepreneurs, represent a relatively new model. These organisations are concerned with education. They work with non-governmental programmes and put pressure on local authorities to improve the quality of education in their countries (...) While some of them work on programmes, others are more interested in political action, *all of them share a common focus on improving quality with equity in education*. These organisations were invited to join our network provided their composition was diverse, they were already participating in Latin American networks, they were concerned with collaborative learning, *they prioritised the mobilisation and involvement of the common citizen in the educational agenda of their countries*, and they were able to plan long-term actions to improve education (TPE, 2011: 149-150)<sup>12</sup>.

The ability to build coalitions around the Plan for the Development of Education (PDE) also endowed the federal government with a new instrument to foster cooperative federalism. As a federal state, Brazil is exposed to both competitive and cooperative patterns of coordination, but since the democratic transition a trend toward cooperation has been prevailing in regard to many fiscal and social policies. While a so-called

<sup>12. [</sup>My translation: see the text in Portuguese] "Um modelo relativamente recente na região são as *organizações sociais lideradas por profissionais do setor privado*, notadamente empresários, que se mobilizaram em torno do tema Educação e passaram a trabalhar com programas independentes do governo e realizar ações de incidência política para pressionar as autoridades locais para a melhora da qualidade educacional de seus países (...) Com perfis diferentes de atuação (algumas mais centradas em programas, enquanto outras trabalham com ações de articulação política), *todas as organizações têm em comum o foco na melhoria da qualidade com equidade da Educação*. Os critérios para convite de ingresso à Rede basearam-se em fatores como pluralidade de composição da organização (ser composta por diferentes atores interessados na melhoria da Educação), participação em redes ou articulação com outros pares na América Latina, preocupação com a criação de uma iniciativa de aprendizagem colaborativa, priorização da mobilização e o engajamento do cidadão comum na agenda educativa de seus países, e capacidade de planejamento de ações de longo prazo para melhorar a situação educacional" (TPE, 2011: 149-150)

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unified system has been designed and implemented in the areas of public health and welfare, the combination of the Fund for the Development of Basic Education (FUNDEB) and the Plan for the Development of Education (PDE) is helping to enact a similar scheme in education. The former has succeeded in inducing provincial and local governments to pay for school enrolment instead of diverting part of their budgets to alternative uses. The latter has created a set of benchmarks and indicators concerning school facilities, enrolment and academic performance (Arretche, 2010). Significantly, some provincial and municipal governments —normally those run by Centre and Rightwing parties, have been implementing educational plans which depart from the Federal goals, but nonetheless, despite some rhetorical distances, these alternative policies eventually rely on an extremely similar logic of multi-level cooperation in order to achieve common objectives (e.g. SEDUC-MG, 2012; OECD, 2010; Sarmiento, 2005; Ramos and Giorgi, 2011).

### Policy learning and 'political capabilities'

In short, by concatenating a set of environmental, cognitive and relational mechanisms a few years after the millennium an heterogeneous configuration of political players wove a web of educational policy borrowing and transfer around ten-year educational plans in Brazil and the whole of Latin America. Apparently, these initiatives were supported by a large political consensus. In doing so, their main promoters —the Brazilian Federal government and the OEI, were easily endowed with convenient concepts and recommendations inspired on the global framework of Education for All (environmental mechanism). But their actions were also crucial to pursue their interests in the midst of this international favourable conjuncture. They managed to diagnose the main problems and deploy the main strategies so that they were able to delay final considerations for a significant time lag (cognitive mechanism). And they also managed to build a complex coalition embracing local, regional, national and international political actors. Although

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 28 certain conflicts opposed some members of this coalition, the political actors who led the initiatives were able to instantiate a general consensus that was not altered by contentious episodes (relational mechanism).

This analysis of policy borrowing can be helpful for educational studies insofar as it highlights common patterns in varied areas of public policy (Tilly, 2001; Jenson, 2010). But its relevance is particularly significant in underlining the context rather than the content of borrowing and transfer. Even though the diversity of ideas that circulate the world of educational policy-making are supported by heterogeneous groups of experts, the introduction of policy studies in the field of education has convincingly proved that

whether borrowing takes place, and in what form it does so, depends on the borrowing context, not the place of origin of what is borrowed (Waldow, 2012: 417).

The intervention of political players in these contexts responds to a common pattern widely documented by the social sciences. These social agents are simultaneously enabled to act and constrained by their environmental conditions. To be precise, the presence of some political ideas contributes to put some issues high in the agenda, but it also empowers those players who are able to deploy some specific strategies. Thus, whereas the debt crisis favoured the role of financial institutions between the eighties and the nineties, later on Education for All has underpinned the strategic salience of the political actors who are able to settle complex arrangements of multi-layered coordination.

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These political actors have not only dealt with a given environment but have also asserted their own agency by elaborating on two critical 'political capabilities' such as expertise on education policy and coalition- building. If expertise is a cognitive mechanism of policy transfer, coalition- building is certainly a relational mechanism. 'Political capabilities' depend on the environmental, structural conditions created by the historical conflicts and competition that fashion a given institutional context over time. However, social agents endowed with new political capabilities may eventually become the crucial instruments of social change. These capabilities are created in a relational system where they function, but they can contribute to originate a new form of this system. In Saskia Sassen's words, these capabilities are collective productions and drivers of social transformation:

Capabilities are collective productions whose development entails time, making, competition, and conflicts, and whose utilities are, in principle, multivalent because they are conditioned on the character of the relational system within which they function. That is to say, a given capability can contribute to the formation of a very different relational system from the one it originates in (Sassen, 2006: 7-8).

The environmental triggers of educational policy transfer often enact a reflexive stance on a given country through externalisation and the configuration of specific social conditions of government, i.e. governmentality (Schriewer, 1989; Takayama, 2008; Rappleye, 2012). By looking outwards and then back home again when appraising the pros and cons of an educational system, political players face particular challenges. Simultaneously, the very connection between national and international conditions is

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 30 crucial to fashion some specific opportunities for action, that is, shapes some types of agency.

Expertise on educational policy travels throughout the world by means of a constant projection of national realities over global references defined by standard data bases and best practices (Ozga, 2009; Sobe, 2012; Waldow, 2012). These cognitive routes of policy diffusion, transfer, travelling or migration are extremely variable depending not only on who wants to adopt a policy but also on how this political actor does so, and whether she is completely or partially successful.

Policy transfer has an economic and a political face inasmuch as key political players draw on financial conditionality, networking or coalition-building (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). Once again the context is the determinant of empirical variations, and a political capability paves the way to the final outcomes. The capability to pattern social relations in certain ways such as coalitions between business, unions, sub-national and national governments and international organisations has been crucial for the reception of EFA in Latin America.

The prior analysis of 'political capabilities' takes into account the methodological importance of relationships within case studies. These relationships have clearly shown that case studies cannot be automatically identified with nation- states taken as homogeneous units. Conversely, researchers have to be aware of the coexistence and coevolution of states and other units of governance (e.g. international organisations and

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 31 networks) and processes of territorial (inter- and sub-national) transformations. With this complexity in mind, they have to scrutinise crucial connections occurring within each case (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012: 12).

#### Final remarks

This article introduces a case study in the politics of education which has important implications for the analysis of the politics and the rationales used by the main political actors to underpin their wide-ranging plans for educational development. In Brazil, not only international agencies and the federal government have invested a great deal of energy in these plans, but the civil society has also been very active in campaigning for Education for All (Verger and Novelli, 2011: 165). Although right now it is not possible to know whether this equilibrium will remain, or the underlying conflict will shift the direction of change, so far it is apparent that progress is significant at the same time as a new pattern of political alliance has been established.

The Ibero American (OEI) and the Brazilian plans for educational development posit another issue for evaluation and scientific enquiry. Since both of them rely on social synergies between the main educational programmes, it is also reasonable to ask whether these expectations are being met. Whatever the political consensus and conflict regarding the prevailing opinion in the coming years, the validity of results will nevertheless depend on the rigour of evaluations, and eventual findings will likely impinge on the causal beliefs of political players. Thus, the contribution of Education for All to educational development cannot be only assessed with regard to the statistical

(first submitted on April, 17th 2013; review issued on January, 14th 2014; second submission on February 2014) 32 trends that approach countries to benchmarks, but also has to be appraised with regards to the social changes triggered by the circulation of policy frameworks from international organisations to countries and world regions, as well as from countries to international agencies.

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