# INFORMATION SOCIETY: GLOBALIZATION AND TEACHER TRAINING

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## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the information society, which establishes globalization and teacher training. Distance learning has been consolidating itself each year in our country. However, this statement does not completely eliminate a thread of distrust regarding this new teaching method. Distance learning has already had its quality questioned in the educational field in terms of the didactics applied and, above all, in the quality of the training of its students and tutors. Several discussions, both pedagogical and political, and even marketing, have revolved around this topic. This presence has been increasingly constant in pedagogical discourse, understood both as the set of language practices developed in concrete teaching situations and those that aim to achieve a level of explanation for these same situations. In other words, ICT has been pointed out as a defining element of the current discourses of teaching and about teaching, although it prevails in the latter. In short, attributing all the current issues relating to teaching work to the presence, or even to a mode of incorporation, of ICT also contributes to obliterating the political analysis of current trends.

**Keywords:** Information society. Globalization. Teacher training. Education.

## INTRODUCTION

Distance learning has been consolidating itself each year in our country. However, this statement does not completely dispel a thread of distrust of this new teaching method. Distance learning has already had its quality questioned in the educational field in terms of the didactics applied and, above all, in the quality of the training of its students and tutors. Several discussions, both pedagogical and political, and even marketing, have revolved around this topic.

In view of the context presented, the need for specific legislation for Distance Learning arises; such as Decree 9,057, of May 25, 2017, which revoked Decree No. 5,622, of December 19, 2005; and art. 1 of Decree No. 6,303 of December 12, 2007. As an example, let us consider Art. 4, which deals with educational activities in face-to-face environments, and Art. 9, which deals with the provision of elementary education in the distance learning modality. In both, we see the clear similarity between distance learning and face-to-face learning; which, at first glance, would be a huge educational advance. But not everything is a win-win situation.

Through a more in-depth analysis, we can easily perceive a bias towards educational and, above all, political fragility. When we talk about evaluations and defenses of distance learning coursework carried out in person at the headquarters of educational institutions, we automatically leave aside some of the differences in distance learning, which would be its pedagogical, geographic, attitudinal, temporal autonomy and, mainly: the leading role of students and others involved in the teaching-learning process. We perceive a setback in relation to the dynamics of distance learning, in favor of the interests of large businessmen in the educational sector.

More alarmingly, we highlight § 4 of art. 32 of Law No. 9,394 of 1996, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, as a backdrop to frivolously hide one of the greatest deficiencies in national education: the lack of teachers in several subjects. Decree 9,057, when in its Art. 9, highlights the provision of elementary education in distance learning in emergency situations, among others for students who are enrolled in the final years of regular elementary school and are deprived of the provision of mandatory subjects in the school curriculum, allows the shortage of teachers to be resolved with distance learning classes, deliberately taking advantage of an attribute of distance learning. Consequences?

Dismantling of public education; discrediting of teachers and the teaching profession and total subversion of the role of distance learning.

Given the problem, intriguing questions arise: Proximity between teaching modalities? For what purpose? To meet what demands? There is an urgent need for legislation in general to meet the real interests of society and our country.

In other words, from the perspective of "globalization" and "globalitarianism," a term coined by Ramonet (1999) to account for the kind of dictatorship of single-minded thinking that regulates ideological construction, schools must break with their current historical form in order to face new challenges. The aim of this paper is to analyze the determinations (concrete and assumed) and the meanings (hegemonic and in dispute for hegemony) of this reconfiguration, based on the discourses that introduce and justify current teacher training policies.

In the movement to reconfigure teacher work and training, another aspect seems to be the object of consensus: the possibility of the presence of so-called "new technologies" or, more precisely, information and communication technologies (ICT). This presence has been increasingly constant in pedagogical discourse, understood both as the set of language practices developed in concrete teaching situations and those that aim to achieve a level of explanation for these same situations. In other words, ICT has been identified as a defining element of current discourses on teaching and about

teaching, even though it prevails in the latter.

Currently, in the most diverse spaces, the most diverse texts on education have in common some type of reference to the presence of ICT in teaching. However, this presence has been attributed such diverse meanings that it does not allow for singular readings. Thus, although there is apparently no doubt about a central place attributed to ICT, there is also no consensus regarding its delimitation.

In short, the presence of ICT has been invested with multiple meanings, ranging from the alternative of overcoming the limits imposed by "old technologies", represented mainly by chalkboards and printed materials, to the answer to the most diverse educational problems or even to socioeconomic-political issues.

## Aspects of the information society

After the "end of History" prematurely announced by Francis Fukuyama a few years ago, what is revealed here is the deception of the "end of space" of a small planet suspended in the electronic ether of our modern means of telecommunications (...). In the absence of an "end of History", we are witnessing the end of Geography (Virilio, 1999, p. 15-17).

As a corollary of "globalization", it is important to highlight the so-called scientific-technological revolution as an undue conceptual extrapolation, motivated by technological determinism (Leher, 2000). Thus, technologies may not be seen as historical-social productions, being displaced to the origin of changes that, in turn, support the concept of "information society".

To characterize the simplifications that underlie this society, I resort to the analysis undertaken by Mattelart (op. cit., p. 73):

> The imprecision surrounding the notion of information will crown that of the "information society". The premature desire to politically legitimize the hic et nunc reality of the latter will justify the scruples of epistemological vigilance. The tendency to assimilate information to a term derived from

statistics (data/data) and to see information only where there are technical devices will become more pronounced. Thus, a purely instrumental concept of the information society will be established. With the social utopia of the concept, the sociopolitical implications of an expression that supposedly designates the new destiny of the world will be erased.

In terms of this instrumental rationality, it is possible to promote the decentering of the category "work" (Antunes, 1999) and even its "elimination", with the addition that this "does not mean the disappearance of human activity, which can take the form of the most diverse occupations" (Schaff, 1995, p. 42). It is also possible to announce a new, unipolar universalism, with the geoeconomic rearrangement of the planet around the values of market democracy. It is the techno-informational paradigm that, articulated with "globalization", allows reference to planetary society, based on the assumption of the absence of an identifiable center, borders and, even, leaders. Still according to Mattelart (op. cit., p. 172):

> The discourses that accompany the information society have established the principle of tabula rasa as law. There is nothing that is not obsolete. Techno-commercial determinism generates an amnesiac modernity and dispenses with the social project. Endless and limitless communication establishes itself as the heir of endless and limitless progress. (...) The very notion of complexity is perverted and transformed into an alibi. Any attitude contrary to this positivism is quickly labeled as technophobic or anti-modern.

In the "globalitarian" movement, choices are increasingly expressed through alternatives and exclusions. Impasses, such as those summarized by Eco (1977) in Apocalyptic and Integrated, acquire an updated version: plugged in or lost. In this substitution, in addition to the inversion of the movement, the relations between the terms, previously marked by "and", slide towards the single answer and the same fate. Without mediation.

In short, it is necessary to characterize the "information society" as an articulation of theoretical, economic and political enterprises.

And, when it comes to studies on technology and education, it is important to distinguish those that start from questioning them from those that assume such a society as a presupposition. Because it is precisely at the level of presuppositions and implicits that ideology operates in discourse.

## Globalization and teacher training in the face of ict and distance learning

International organizations have forced, through the establishment of "conditionalities" for the granting of credits and the application of sanctions for their non-compliance (Fonseca, 1998, p. 41), the incorporation of ICT as a central element of any educational policy that is attentive to the transformations engendered by the so-called scientific-technological revolution and the needs of the economy. In the words of Barreto & Leher (2003, p. 39):

"A brave new world emerges with globalization and with the technological revolution that drives it towards a virtuous future". (...) Based on this premise, international organizations and governments echo the same proposition: it is necessary to reform education from top to bottom, making it more flexible and capable of increasing the competitiveness of nations, the only means of obtaining a passport to the select group of countries capable of competitive integration in the globalized world.

In this movement, a new educational paradigm has been announced. The announcement is recurrent on the MEC website, whose formulation, it is worth emphasizing, took the discourse of international organizations to its ultimate conclusion, placing technologies in the place of individuals. This paradigm consists of technological substitution and instrumental rationality, is inscribed in "flexibilization," especially in the precariousness of teaching work, and is consistent with market logic: the greater the presence of technology, the less need there is for human labor. In other words, it envisions fewer and fewer teachers and more and more students, on the grounds that the performance of the latter

depends less on the training of the former and more on the materials used.

In the proposals of international organizations, "Internet access to 'universal knowledge,' which will necessarily have its source in existing knowledge monopolies, would solve not only the problem of the digital divide, but also that of the social divide" (Mattelart, 2002, p. 173). In these terms, the proposal for "technologies for all" is formulated as a way to overcome the so-called "digital divide." On the other hand, as Leher (1997, p. 138) states, the World Bank itself, in pointing out that the use of technologies is the "privileged instrument for inserting countries into the hegemonic flow of Time," also recognizes the impracticability of countries characterized by slow times (developing, peripheral, Southern) being inserted into the accelerated rhythm of central countries (Northern).

Thus, while new possibilities are touted, such as overcoming the digital divide, a kind of educational apartheid on a global scale is being instituted, based on its own reinterpretation. While the discourse deals with the democratization of access, social practices show that this kind of dividing line between the included and the excluded does not concern access or lack of access, but rather the ways in which it is produced and the meanings invested in it.

The simplifications and shifts that have characterized official distance learning proposals express the emptying of teacher training, progressively shifted to "in-service training" or even "retraining," since initial "face-to-face" training does not have the international funding allocated to ICT for distance learning, not even guaranteeing the right of access to technologies. In the virtual arms of public universities, in the current split training, ICTs are at the center, pedagogical considerations are on the margins, and fundamental issues are obliterated.

This hollowed-out training has also been marked by at least two important divisions. The

first concerns dichotomization: initial training versus continuing education, in a new guise. If, until the 1990s, the term "training" seemed to refer only to initial training, it now points to continuing education, the destination of almost all national and international investments. As Torres (1998, p. 176) states: "The very issue of initial training is being diluted, disappearing." At the same time, continuing education is restricted to "training," "coaching," and "retraining."

The second split corresponds to the modality: face-to-face vs. distance learning. In the face-to-face modality, current policies point to another split: teaching and research, disqualifying the so-called "European university model," which consists of the inseparability of teaching, research, and extension. And, with regard to ICT, the absence of specific investments and the meager budget allocation do not even guarantee the right of access. Meanwhile, in distance learning, among simplifications such as the mere transposition of classes to new media, access to ICT is restricted to the condition of users or consumers, and even this can be lost at the end of the process, given the material conditions of existence of the subjects in training and the remuneration they receive when they graduate.

Underlying these divisions is a way of objectifying ICT that does not involve analyzing the conditions of its insertion into pedagogical processes as a whole. Thus, for example, in initiatives that aim to enhance face-to-face processes through the use of ICT, such as in so-called "blended learning" courses, there is no resizing of teachers' workloads and remuneration to include the time spent reading students' texts in forums or discussion lists, responding to emails, etc. What the use of ICT, from the perspective of technological substitution, enables is precisely the opposite: processes of subcontracting, part-time work, and outsourcing.

In other words, the conditions necessary for educational appropriation of ICT are left out, since none of the groups are trained in working with them, which implies overcoming the

seduction of supposedly intrinsic attributes, such as attractiveness, and not privileging only the interaction of subjects with materials. The horizon needs to be greater interaction: discussion (of the information collected and the processes experienced) to compare different (individual) paths, aiming at the (collective) production of integrative syntheses that go beyond specific planned content.

The proposal for initial distance learning, under the motto of overcoming geographical distances and social inequalities, has undeniable affiliations. From a political point of view, it is part of a set of structural reforms, even though the technological contribution is incipient and, from a technical point of view, there is no accumulation as assumed in various official statements, such as: "The goals of the Distance Education Secretariat are, therefore, to bring to public schools all the contributions that distance education methods, techniques, and technologies can make to the construction of a new paradigm for Brazilian education."

The new paradigm assumes the reduction of technologies to distance learning tools, excluding precisely the ways in which they are appropriated in teacher training and work. However, the identification of ICT with its foundation also constitutes a kind of metonymy. It must be recognized that they are important because they function as one of the vertices of the triangulation that allows the State to be minimal in terms of investment and maximal in terms of education management: centralized curriculum (curricular parameters and guidelines), intensive use of technologies (specific programs), and unified external assessment (SAEB, ENEM, ENC, and, even more so, SINAES).

Undoubtedly, in this triangulation, ICTs function as a link, promoting the connection between the ends and even breaking the teaching-learning unit, making possible a discourse that highlights only the second element of the pair, by pointing to learning independent of teaching. But they can only do so based on a specific conception of knowledge, content, and training, founded on the notion of

competence.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper analyzes the theoretical and ideological constructs related to the precariousness of work and teacher training, considering the discourses that underpin current policies. To this end, it discusses: (1) information and communication technologies (ICTs) as a link between "globalization" and teaching work; (2) the way these technologies are inserted into the so-called "information society"; (3) the discursive materialization of such insertion; (4) the consequences of reducing technologies to distance learning strategies, highlighting the educational apartheid produced; (5) the key relationship between technologies and skills; and (6) the trends detected in the current context: skills-based training, emphasis on instructional materials, and the deterritorialization of schools, as well as counter-hegemonic proposals.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the words of Mattelart (2002, p. 9), the second half of the 20th century was marked by the "formation of beliefs in the miraculous power of information technologies." Even if, in principle, it seems naive, this latter movement is inscribed in a mode of objectification of ICTs inextricably linked to the concept of the "information society," to be analyzed in the following section.

Among the new discursive trends, "relexicalization" (Fairclough, 2001) deserves special mention. It consists of the use of terms historically associated with other activities and relationships as a strategy for legitimizing shifts in meaning, most often inscribed in the movement of "commodification" (idem, ibid., p. 255): "The process by which social domains and institutions, whose purpose is not to produce goods in the strict economic sense of articles for sale, are nevertheless organized and defined in terms of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods."

In the field of education, terms such as "consumers," "customers," "packages," "products," etc. have been recurring for some time. Currently, it is possible to verify that this recurrence has served to prepare the stage for the shift of education itself to the service sector, led by the World Trade Organization (WTO), under the terms of its GATS regulations.

Documents concerning teacher training, such as the National Curriculum Guidelines for the Training of Basic Education Teachers, at the higher education level, in teacher training and full undergraduate courses, explicitly state the commitment to reconfiguring work, with a view to the "information society":

With regard to the world of work, it is known that one of the decisive factors of production is now knowledge and control of the technical-scientific-informational environment, reorganizing the power derived from the ownership of capital, land, or labor. (Idem, ibid., p. 9)

With regard to teaching work itself, the "abandonment of the category of work in favor of the categories of practice and reflective practice" (Freitas, 2003, p. 1,096) has supported the use of expressions such as 'activities' and "teaching tasks." It is the discursive materialization of the emptying of this work, with the restriction of the teacher to the choice of teaching materials to be used in class, during which it is up to them to control the time students spend with these materials, conceived as commodities increasingly ready for consumption (Barreto, 2002).

The very designation "teacher" has given way to "facilitator," "animator," "tutor," "monitor," etc. And monitor, in its multiple meanings, can be a summary image of the precariousness of teaching work. Consulting the dictionary meanings of the word, it is possible to identify: (1) one who gives advice, lessons, who admonishes; (2) a student who assists the teacher in teaching a subject, generally in the application of exercises, in the clarification of doubts, etc., outside of regular classes; (3) an instrument that controls the operation of

equipment or a system; (4) a receiving device used to monitor the quality of video and/or audio during a broadcast or recording; and (5) a data output device on which information presented by a computer is displayed; the computer screen.

Taking the first and second meanings, if the teacher is placed as a monitor, who occupies the position of teacher? An explicit answer can be found on the website of the Secretariat of Distance Education, of the Ministry of Education (www.mec.gov.br/seed/linhas.shtm):

The lines of action of the Secretariat of Distance Education are based on the existence of a technological system—increasingly cheaper, accessible, and easier to use—capable of:

• Bring enormous educational and pedagogical potential to schools;

• Expand opportunities where resources are scarce;

• Familiarize citizens with the technology that is part of their daily lives;

• Provide flexible and personalized responses to people who demand greater diversity in types of education, information, and training;

• Offer means to quickly update knowledge;

• Extend educational spaces;

• And motivate professionals and students to learn continuously, at any stage of their lives.

In addition to semantics, there is a radical syntactic shift: it is the technological system, with its registered qualifications (price, accessibility, and ease of use), that occupies the position of subject capable of developing strategic actions. It is no coincidence that the reduction of technologies to distance learning (DL) proposals is also marked in the very name of the secretariat created to coordinate ministerial actions related to ICT.

It should also be added that, in the Houaiss Dictionary, the monitor is identified as "a person who organizes, administers, and guides classes of tele-students, promoting meetings, group studies, taking responsibility for enrollments, preparatory tests, etc." In other words, this meaning is not only legitimized but also established and documented in a reference work.

The third and fourth meanings point to an instrument aimed at control, a recurring term in the current "commodification" of pedagogical discourse. It is present in official programs and in research focused on them (André, 2004) also as regulation or management. This can be verified, for example, in the aforementioned Curriculum Guidelines, when explaining the most important task to be performed by teachers:

It is therefore urgent to incorporate the various information and communication technologies into the development of teacher training courses, preparing them for the noblest purpose of school education: the management and definition of ethical, scientific, and aesthetic references for the exchange and negotiation of meaning, which occurs especially in interaction and collective school work. Managing and referring to meaning will be the most important thing, and teachers will need to learn how to do this in real and virtual environments. (André, 2004, p. 25; emphasis added).

The above excerpt elucidates one of the apparent contradictions that underlie the relationship between technology and teaching. On the one hand, there is openness to the multiple, and on the other, the legitimization of the supposedly singular. Work is, at the same time (supposedly), expanded and reduced. Or, in broader terms, flexibility and democratization (supposedly) coexist with monopoly and control. After all, monitoring means watching, checking (something), with a specific goal in mind. In the new context, objectification and instrumental rationality, when combined, also serve to shift the discussion about specific goals in their multiple dimensions.

The fifth sense listed here accounts for the most visible aspect of the shifts that have taken place: the visualization of information on data

output devices. This is the core of the analogy: showing what processors and interfaces allow. Plugging devices into outlets and solving the expected problems. This has been the focus of training and capacity building promoted by national programs such as TV Escola and PROINFO.

Rejecting the analogy and reversing this situation requires the training of teachers in/through working with ICTs and therefore requires that they not be assigned the status of mere instruments for any purpose. Teachers who are not monitored by ICTs are also needed. After all, it is worth remembering that the monitor is, technically, peripheral.

To demonstrate that the solid core of the proposal to incorporate ICTs is skills, it is important to refer to the formulation of Labarca (1995), then a consultant to ECLAC (UNESCO), which starts from the following premise: the productivity of educational systems is low due to the intensive use of human resources and their corporatism, which protects the "teaching monopoly in the transmission of knowledge" (idem, ibid., p. 174). Continuing toward the purging of teachers, considered an expensive and inefficient technology, the author is quite explicit about the steps to be taken (idem, ibid., p. 175-176):

> Teachers are no longer the main repositories of knowledge and have become methodological consultants and facilitators of working groups. This strategy requires a reformulation of educational objectives. The development of key competencies (...) replaces the solid disciplinary training that had been the focus until then. The use of new educational technologies leads to the blurring of boundaries between disciplines, while at the same time redefining the role, training, and professional development of teachers.

In the same article, the author makes it clear that the proposals of international organizations do not change substantially for contexts in which access to ICT is more difficult. What is rescaled are the technologies themselves, with the use of printed materials, produced centrally and distributed to teachers, being advocated, provided they are accompanied by some type of variation around the instruction manual.

If, on the one hand, the notion of competence involves theoretical difficulties (Dias & Lopes, 2003), the assumptions made in competence-based training proposals are very clear: (1) teaching can be broken down into basic skills and competences; and (2) teacher training organized around these skills and competences corresponds to "desirable" teaching performance. In other words, it is the assumption that the whole (teaching work) is equivalent to the sum of its parts. Reductionism is inevitable, while sophistication can be greater, considering the new technological resources that can cooperate with competencies. It is in the articulation of reductionism and sophistication that the strategy of technological substitution is founded.

As for the clichés in circulation, it is possible to verify a significant shift from "you don't just learn at school" to "you don't learn at school," insofar as it refers to the trend of deterritorialization of the school. Not only is all the emphasis being placed on learning environments, but the texts already contemplate diverse "educations," materialized in the expressions "academic education" and "corporate education."

Returning to the starting point of this set of reflections, it is possible to affirm that the proposed deterritorialization cannot be thought of outside the parameters of the market and the assumption that schools must break with their historical form in order to face the challenges of "globalization." Rejecting this logic, the greatest challenge is to confront the attempt to erase the historical and social determinants of the school. In the words of Alves (2004, p. 218):

> Discussing the specific role of school today for various groups, their multiple differences and distances, becomes something pressing in this context (...) school is a unique and special space (...) a space and time to bring people together (...) it is necessary to recover the space of knowledge, which has nothing to do with the place of a certain technical competence.

What is at stake is not only competent discourse: "That which can be uttered, heard and accepted as true or authorized (these terms are now equivalent) because it has lost its ties

with the place and time of its origin" (Chaui, 1989, p. 7). It is, among other issues, the reduction of ICT to EAD, as a material form of "commodification". These are the contemporary clashes between the proposal of education as a commodity and its defense as a right and emancipatory practice.

## CONCLUSION

From a discursive point of view, it is important to highlight and analyze the shifts in meaning that have marked language practices, as manifestations of new hegemonic conceptions. The first of these, to the extent that it is more general, concerns the way in which inequalities and differences are being treated. "Globalizing" allusions no longer include expressions such as: First and Third World; central countries and peripheral countries, etc. The references become the countries of the North and the South, as if the issues that distinguish them could be reduced to geographic coordinates.

In these terms, it is possible to support the triangulation described in the previous section. It is possible to intensify the use of the workforce through a supposed technological revolution and even produce evidence of the efficiency of the means for the established ends, since guidelines and parameters define the skills to be developed through the materials produced for this purpose, which are evaluated at the end of the process.

It is possible to state that, ultimately, ICTs are positioned as a structuring element of a new pedagogical discourse, as well as of social relations that, because they are unprecedented, support neologisms such as "cyberculture" (Lévy, 1999). At the other extreme, what new technologies support is a form of assassination of the real world, with the liquidation of all references, in games of simulacra and simulation (Baudrillard, 1991). In between, they can constitute new formats for the same old conceptions of teaching and learning (Moran, 2004), inscribed in a movement of conservative modernization, or, even, in specific conditions,

establish qualitative differences in pedagogical practices (Barreto, 2001; 2002; 2003). In short, attributing all current issues relating to teaching work to the presence, or even to a mode of incorporation, of ICT also contributes to obliterating the political analysis of current trends.

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