

*A Comparative Study of Non-Traditional Student Teachers' Social Representations
in Brazil, Sweden and Germany*

Patrícia Lana Pinheiro, UNESP-Marília, Brazil

The European Conference on Education 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

It is common to hear that teachers play an extremely important role in society. This statement motivated this doctoral research, whose theme was defined after extensive literature review. There is a lack of educational comparative and international studies that deal with the perception of (future) teachers about what being a teacher is like. In particular, it was noticed the lack of studies in comparative education between Brazil and Sweden, as well as the absence of these studies when it comes to higher education. The objective of this research is to investigate and compare the social representations of non-traditional student teachers on the teaching profession in an educational and compared context between Brazil, Sweden and Germany. The non-traditional nomenclature is used to describe students who were usually deprived from higher education, who have been changing the university scenario because of the mass education phenomenon, and who are the first in their families who enter university. Germany student teachers were included in the investigation because Germany is the largest economic power in Europe. The theories that guide this research are studies in international and comparative education and the theory of social representations of French tradition. The discourse of the collective subject theory guides the analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews performed in English, Portuguese and German. Here, we present a partial result of the investigation: the similarities and differences among the social representations about being teachers by non-traditional student teachers in Sweden and Germany.

Keywords: non-traditional students, social representations, teaching, Brazil, Sweden, Germany.

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

From the globalization phenomenon on, it is common to see the same trends followed by different countries (STROMQUIST, 2002). Globalization is closely related to neoliberal principles, which became very prominent in the 1990s as a way to reconstruct the economies of the countries around the world after the economic recession of the 1970s and 1980s. These principles argue that the State should be minimized, that financial resources must be used in the most efficient way, that modernization happens through the decentralization of powers and the privatization of companies, and that the development depends on the educational level of the workers, in a way to promote competitiveness and a quest for quality.

The investment in education as a way to promote development is not a new issue. The theory of human capital was a hot topic in the 1960s, a period of strong intellectual movement as well as of modernization post-Second World War. This theory was heavily criticized, but returned in the 1990s as one of the supports for the market in order to justify the need of investment in education.

Hence, the market rules started to govern the policies of different areas in several countries by means of recommendations of big international agencies, such as the World Bank. The quest for qualification led to reforms in higher education in the 1960s and 1970s as well as in the 1990s as a way to prepare more people for the labor market. It was necessary to provide more places for those who were looking for a higher education (HE) degree, as well as to create mechanisms to promote more equality of opportunities by widening the access to HE. It has changed the HE student body, that started to be composed by non-traditional students, and has also changed the functions and the identities of the higher education institutions (HEIs), formerly recognized as places where knowledge and critical thinking used to be constructed, and nowadays seen as places of mere instrumental knowledge (BRON, THUNBORG, 2012; SGUISSARDI, 2008).

There are several definitions for non-traditional students, and all of them refer to students who have a very different background from the elite traditional HE students, because they come from lower class strata of the society, or may have immigrant backgrounds or any disability. Here, beyond these characteristics, they are considered as those who are the first in their families to enter university (BRON, THUNBORG, EDSTRÖM, 2014). Despite the efforts of providing equality through widening the access to HE, the inequalities remain and the non-traditional students still choose professions that have a low status, such as teacher training.

It seems contradictory, because HE should be a way to change their lives and they still choose professions that will not reward them as a very qualified job for the labor market, although teaching is still seen as a very important profession. Hence, it is relevant to understand why it happens, mainly because it has been a borderless trend, because Brazil, Sweden and Germany have experienced the expansion of HE in very similar contexts, and because there is a lack of studies that correlate these three countries.

Expansion of HE in Brazil

Brazil is a federative republic of 26 states and a Federal District, whose current president is Dilma Rousseff. It is the fifth largest country on Earth, and has a population of about 200 million inhabitants. It is a country of deep contrasts: poor and rich people share the same areas, but not the same opportunities. This difference in life conditions becomes materialized in some bad consequences, like the increasing violence, the remaining number of about thirteen million people who still do not know how to read and write, and the disgusting results in educational standardized tests.

As one of the ways to minimize these inequalities, the market rules influenced laws and reforms to promote the expansion of HE. First, it is important to explain how the educational system is governed. It is decentralized among the states, HE sector is responsibility of the Union, and the most important educational law is the law number 9.394/1996.

The first big HE expansion in Brazil happened in the 1970s after the HE reform of 1968, regulated by the law 5.568/1968. It happened in a period of intense resistance of student movements against the dictatorship, that gave powers to the Federal Council of Education, which worked according to liberal ideologies supporting private HE. In 1963, there were 39 HEI in the country; in 1971, there were 419 private HEIs in the country; and in 1974, there were 57 universities, of which 32 were public. It means that for the first time in the history of the country there were more enrollments in private HEIs than in public ones (BARROS, 2008).

The end of the dictatorship in 1984 coincided with the period of economic recession, which affected the HE sector. In the 1990s, as a way to recover from the economic crisis, the neoliberal ideologies resurfaced, and again the market rules, through documents written by large agencies like the World Bank, regulated other educational laws. These documents recommended, for example, the diversification of HEIs, the no need to conduct research in HEIs – what is a typical recommendation from an industrialized to a developing country –, as well as the right of education to become a marketable good, that is stated on the decree 2.306/1997. Thus, HE became a billionaire market in Brazil: in 1999, from 1,097 HEIs, 196 were public, 379 were private non-profit HEIs, and 526 were private for-profit HEIs. In 2009, from 2,270 HEIs, 248 were public, and 1,583 were private for-profit HEIs (SGUISSARDI, 2008).

In 2001, a program called Fund for Student Financing (FIES) was created and stipulated in the law 12.260/2001. This program aims at financing undergraduation students in private HEIs with public funding, facilitating their access to HE, in a way to give them more opportunities. According to the same thought, the program University for All (ProUni) was stipulated in the law 11.096/2004 and in the decree 5.493/2005, in order to give full or partial scholarships to undergraduate students of private HEIs, which in turn receive benefits from the government. (MANCEBO; VALE; MARTINS, 2015).

A bit against the HE privatization, a program for the expansion of federal universities was created: the Program of Support for Re-structuration and Expansion Planning for Federal Universities (REUNI), stipulated in the decree 6.096/2007, which aims at increasing the number of students in HE, as well as at the flexibility of the curricula

and at creating distance education. This latter modality was stipulated in the decree 5.622/2005, and the number of enrollments within a period of ten years – from 2000 to 2010 – increased from 6,000 to about 900,000. From these enrollments, about 750,000 were in private HEIs.

The last policy concerning HE access and that has an explicit bias of affirmative action is the law 12.711/2012, that guarantees quotas in public universities for students who come from low social strata and who finished school in public schools. They can also declare their color and background, and can be considered as non-traditional students. The quota policy states that all universities and federal institutes have to reserve the half of their places to these non-traditional students.

Anyway, the number of private HEIs in Brazil is far larger than the number of public ones, and this marketing of the HE leads to some important discussions. The first one concerns the level of quality of the education that is offered, because there is a large demand of contracting teachers, without many criteria of selection, and also because many students arrive at the HE level with many deficiencies from basic education, that cannot be simply fixed (DOURADO, 2002). The second one takes into account the questioning of the functions of HEIs, which have not been seen as a place of formation of critical thinking and knowledge anymore. Instead, it has been transformed into a place of instrumental knowledge (SGUISSARDI, 2008; BRON; THUNBORG, 2012).

Expansion of HE in Sweden

Sweden is an industrialized and a low populated country, with about nine million inhabitants. They country charges high taxes from its citizens, but gives them a very good feedback offering them a high quality of life, with almost no violence and with a wide range of public free or very affordable services including health care and education.

Sweden has a large HE tradition, differently from Brazil, where universities were created in the twentieth century. The first large expansion of the Swedish HE sector also happened around the 1960s and the 1970s. After the Second World War, there was an expansion of the educational sector in general, because of the baby-boom generation. It was also a period of economic reconstruction, with the belief of investment in human capital through education (AAMODT; KYVIK, 2005).

In 1977, there was a remarkable educational reform, and after that the number of enrollments in HE increased (BRON; THUNBORG, 2012). There was another expansion in HE in the 1990s, also according to the neoliberal ideas, which guided the educational policies. In 1993 there was another educational reform, and as the expansion in Brazil, in Sweden there was a promise of not only to provide more equality in opportunities for all by widening the access to HE, but also that it was necessary to have more skills to enter the labor market (AAMODT; KYVIK, 2005).

In the school year of 1991/1992, there were about 143 thousand students enrolled in HE in Sweden. In 2000, there were about 257 thousand (KIM, 2004), and it does not stop growing: from 2010 to 2011, the government authorized ten thousand places in HE in Sweden (BRON; THUNBORG, 2012). The massification of HE brought non-

traditional students to the student body. Moreover, since 2001 the HEIs have been supposed to have 10% of their vacancies designed to these students (BRON; THUNBORG, 2012).

However, despite the widening of the access, it is still possible to see inequalities in HE. Working-class students remain underrepresented, and for any reason they still choose to enroll in low status programs, such as teacher training (BRON; THUNBORG, 2012). The number of non-Swedish background does not stop growing either. Another issue is that, as it happens in Brazil, the instrumental approach of HE transforms the very nature of HEIs as a place of critical thinking and knowledge construction (BRON; THUNBORG, 2012). This approach may also frustrate those students who do not get a job when concluding their studies, what may contribute to the high rates of drop-off, because they may stop believing in the university as a good place for the formation they were aiming at.

Regarding the widening access, one possible conclusion is that

while Sweden has been successful in widening access, on its own it is not sufficient to obtain real equality for certain sections of society such as young men from working class backgrounds [...]. One reason for this may be that education, including higher education, is viewed instrumentally by public policy, the labour market and indeed by the students (BRON; THUNBORG, 2012, p. 108).

Expansion of HE in Germany

Germany is the most populated country in Europe, with about 81 million inhabitants, and it is also Europe’s strongest economy, which is export-oriented. The German educational system is very complex: it is decentralized among the 16 states (*Länder*), and it is divided into three main school types: *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*. Each of these types leads to different possibilities of upper secondary education, as well as to different kinds of HEIs:

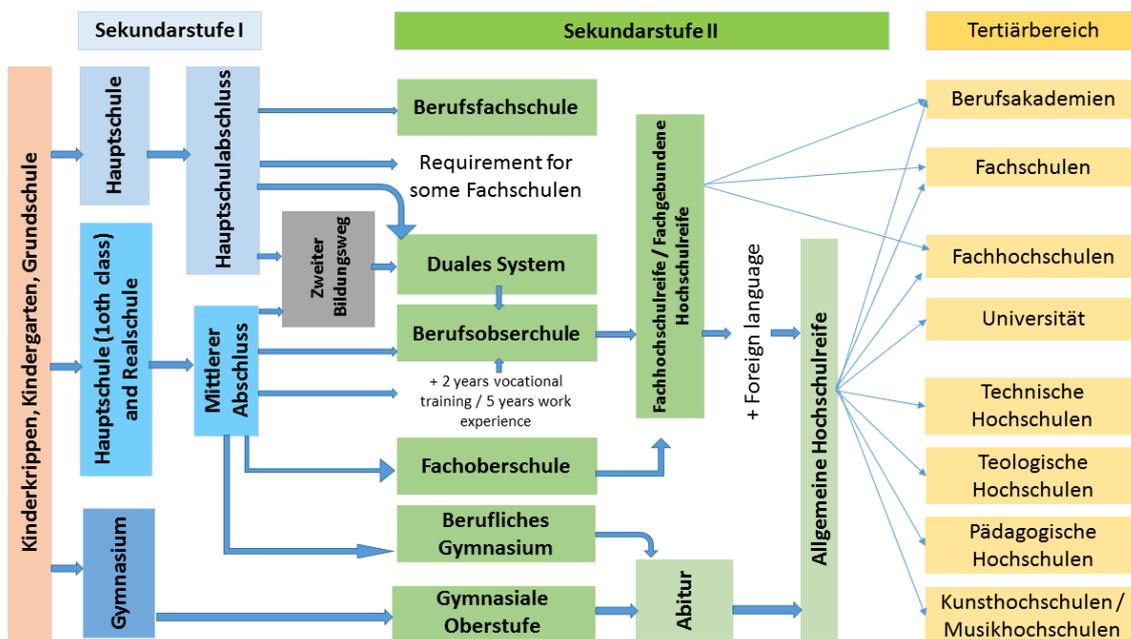


Figure 1: German educational system.

As in other countries of Europe, Germany – especially Western Germany – presented a large expansion of its educational system after the Second World War, mainly because of the baby boom generation. Around the 1960s and 1970s, this generation was ready to enter HE, given that the access to this level depends on secondary school leaving certificates and on the grades of the students. However, with so many students, there was a lack of teachers, and the 1960s were a time of heavy intellectual development. Thus, it was necessary to expand the HE system, also under the argument of investment in human capital in order to promote more development to the country with more qualified professionals in the labor market (DE RUDDER, 1999).

The HE expansion from the 1960s was also a way to promote more equal educational opportunities to the citizens. In order to do it, educational reforms and advertisements were performed, in a way to convince parents to let their children study for a longer time. Parents started to believe that children would have a better future than theirs by continuing their studies. However, despite the efforts towards a more democratic education, which permitted the entrance of non-traditional students in the secondary and in higher education levels, it was common to see lower strata families still more interested in vocational education (DE RUDDER, 1999). Even nowadays, it is possible to see inequalities in HE due to facilities in the access, because the treatment given to non-traditional students is different from those who entered university after concluding *Gymnasiale Oberstufe* (SCHÖMER, 2014).

In 1960, there were about 79 thousand students from West Germany enrolled in the first year of HE. In 1993, this number was of about 170 thousand, what can be explained by the rise in the number of students after the reunification in 1991 (ERTL, 2005). In 1995, there was a decline in the amount of HE enrollments – they were about 166 thousand. This is one of the differences between HE expansion in Germany and in other European countries, and it probably happened because of some reasons: the overqualification of the population; the lack of places for these people in the labour market; the attractiveness of vocational education; and the divided educational system, that imposes barriers to HE access from the beginning of secondary education (ERTL, 2005).

After 1999, the number of enrollments in HE started to grow again, but the main factor for this increase is related to the role of applied sciences HEIs (*Fachhochschulen*). In 2003, about 200 thousand students were enrolled in HEIs. From 1999 to 2003, there was a rise of about 25% in the enrollments in the *Fachhochschulen*, whilst in universities and similar institutions this increase was of about 10% (ERTL, 2005). Moreover, it is necessary to emphasize that the recent increase in HE in Germany is considered low in comparison to this increase in other European countries.

The theory of social representations as discursive practices

It is not a simple task to define the meaning of the social representations, particularly when they are referred to as discursive practices. In a very general way, they can be considered as symbolic images that are built and shared within a community, by familiarizing what is not familiar. Also in a general way, discursive practices are the

discourse in action produced by a discursive community, and like the social representations, they consist of what is accessible from reality to the individuals.

Both social representations and discursive practices rely on communication to exist, combining language, thought and interaction for meaning production. According to Moscovici (2007), the beliefs constructed by the individuals must be considered in a collectivity, because they rely on what is common and has already been accepted by this collectivity. These collective and shared beliefs are forms of knowledge about concepts, objects or people oriented to communication and to the comprehension of the social and material context within which we live (MOSCOVICI, 2007; SPINK, 1993).

The social representations are iconic, because they are like images, and they are also symbolic, because they produce meaning. They function as a version of reality, and depend on memories to exist. The process of their construction occurs in a cycle, in a movement that comes from the social, goes to the individual and comes back to the social, in an unconscious way. When a certain thing comes back to the social and when it is shared by the community and becomes familiar, it turns into a social representation. It comes from the social because all the representations and discourses circulate in the collective memory and in the discursive memory. Then it goes to the individual because the cognitive processes as well as the individual memory are important to recognize the new social information. This new social information anchor in the collective and in the individual memories. When it is recognized, it is objectified because it receives a name, and then it goes back to the social. Once it is shared and accepted, it becomes a social representation.

There are several similarities between the social representations and the discursive practices: they are crossed by ideology, they produce meanings in certain circumstances, they rely on memories to exist, they depend on communication and interaction to exist, they are materialized in texts, and they guide the actions of the subjects of a determined discursive community, which produces the discourses (MAINGUENEAU, 2007) and the social representations.

The discourses exist in a discursive memory in the same way that the social representations exist in a collective memory. Subjects have an illusion that what they say has never been said before, what is not true. The meanings are constructed in the relation with the exteriority and concern the contextual conditions. Thus, the meanings do not depend on the intentions of the subjects (ORLANDI, 2007). As it depends on the exteriority, the discourses are never neutral, even when they appear to be so. This is the reason why the discourses do not serve merely for communication, whose relations are intrinsically connected to relations of power.

All the discourses, in order to be produced, follow some regulations, known as discursive formations, that determine what can be said or not from the positions where the subject¹ is when enunciating something. This subject belongs to a discursive community, that is a “place” in which discourses and texts² are generated. These discourses are regulated by discursive formations, which spread the organization and

¹ The subject is the individual when crossed by the ideologies that exist in the discourses when he/she enunciates.

² According to Maingueneau (2007), the discourses can only be analyzed when materialized in texts.

ways of life of the discursive community by means of the discourses that this community produces. For example, the discursive formations may be related to economy, in cases of discursive communities such as companies, or they may be scientific, in cases of discursive communities such as universities. In this article, the discursive community is composed by non-traditional students enrolled in teacher training formation, and the discourses that they produce are ruled by discursive formations that are closely related to the nature of the discursive community they belong to.

The discursive formation can be described as a way people organize themselves, as well as a specific network within the discursive memory for the circulation of the discourses (CHARAUDEAU; MAINGUENEAU, 2008). The discursive formations rule what the subjects can enunciate in determined conditions, and are in a very close relation with the discursive community, to which these subjects belong. According to Maingueneau (2007), the concept of discursive practice covers the concept of discursive formation, because the discourse simultaneously acts and refers to a certain thing, leading to a junction of the world and the discourse.

Hence, the world is accessible to the subjects by means of the discourses, as well as the world and the reality are accessible to the individuals by means of the social representations. Because of this and of all the similarities mentioned above, the social representations can be considered as discursive practices. As they are discourses, the methodology chosen to analyze the data is the theory of the discourse of the collective subject, that is explained below.

The theory of the discourse of the collective subject (DSC)

The social representations can be analyzed in very different ways, and the theory of the discourse of the collective subject is one of them (LEFÈVRE; LEFÈVRE 2003). Similarities and differences are noticed when the data are analyzed, and then they are grouped into one synthesis-discourse that responds for all the participants, which represents the meanings constructed and shared by a collectivity.

The DSC combines qualitative and quantitative methods. The former are related to the discursive nature of the social representations in the narratives, and the latter are related to the categorization of the social representations as well as to the number of participants. This methodology comprises some steps:

1. The conductions of the interviews, that must be open or semi-structured, in a way that the interviewee does not feel limited when answering the questions;
2. After transcribing the interviews, the most relevant excerpts, in which the social representations are found, are selected and receive the name of key-expressions (E-Ch);
3. After the selection of the key-expression, the researcher must give a name to the meaning found on them, and these names are known as the central ideas (IC);
4. Once the key-expressions are selected and the central ideas are named, it is possible to analyze how the anchorage (AC) happens, stating that the E-Ch are the social representations shared by a community, and that the IC anchor in the collective memory to produce new meanings;

5. Lastly, the E-Ch, IC and the analysis of the AC are grouped into one single discourse – the synthesis-discourse, which represents a collectivity, despite being written in the singular.

Data analysis

The analysis conducted in this research is small-scale and interpretative. In Sweden, ten non-traditional students in Stockholm took part in the research. There were three men and four women. Four of the participants are Swedish with a Swedish background, other four are Swedish with a non-Swedish background (from Denmark, Finland, England and Lebanon), and two are foreigners who went to Sweden as adults (one from Argentina and another one from Sri-Lanka). They were interviewed in January of 2015.

In Germany, three non-traditional students were interviewed in Hamburg in March. They are all women. One was born in Kazakhstan, but went to Germany when a child. Another one was born in Germany, but has Turkish background, and the other one is German with German background. In Sweden and in Germany these non-traditional students are the first in their families to enter university, and they all take teaching practice classes.

In Brazil, five non-traditional students who entered teacher training programs for children education by means of social quotas were interviewed in May and June of 2014. However, these interviews will have to be redone because the participants at that time have not had taken teaching practice classes yet.

The semi-structured interview was divided into three different axes: previous experiences, the option for teacher training, and opinions about the profession. The students were also free to talk about anything they wanted, because fruitful information can rise from this free conversation.

For this article two narratives were analyzed: one from Germany and one from Sweden, showing very preliminary results (only where it was possible to find common answers). The interviews in Sweden were conducted in English and in Germany, in German. The E-Ch in German will be translated into English. The names of the participants will be hidden and transformed into codes: the first letter shows the country (B for Brazil, S for Sweden and G for Germany), the second letter if it is a woman (W) or a man (M), and the next two letters represents the person (Jn, for example). Thus, a complete code would be: GWJa, or SMJn.

Expectations

IC: Hard/Tiring

E-Ch: GWKa:

I think it's very tiring in the first years.

SWSa:

I mean it's very... when you get home you're tired, and you like sleep for 3 hours.

Synthesis-discourse: I think teaching is good because it's fun and because it's nice to work with different people.

Value

IC: Very important

E-Ch: GWKa:

It's important because it deals with education, and education forms a society. But it can't be a basic education, it must be something more, because the next generation will be formed.

SWSa:

I think it is one of the most important ones. Because no one teaches you, like stuff about life, and about animal language, and math, and like natural sciences (...) and social sciences, different cultures and how you're supposed to work in a society.

Synthesis-discourse: It's a very important profession, because education is fundamental for different kinds of information, and also to form society and its new generations.

Final considerations

Comparing Brazil, Sweden and Germany may lead to thoughts that that these countries are not comparable. However, there are many commonalities among them regarding education: they have been affected by global economic trends, they have a decentralized educational system, there was an expansion of the HE system in the three countries and because of this, there are problems with inequality in HE.

The preliminary results between Sweden and Germany show different social representations about the profession, in the point of view of non-traditional students. So far, there are two different synthesis-discourses that cover negative and positive aspects of the profession: it is hard and tiring, and it is very important to the basis of the society.

References

- Aamodt, P. O. & Kyvik, S. (2005). Access to higher education in the Nordic countries. In: David Palfreyman (Eds.). *Understanding mass higher education: comparative perspectives on access*. London & New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Barros, C. M. (2008). *Ensino superior e sociedade brasileira: análise histórica e sociológica dos determinantes da expansão do ensino superior no Brasil (décadas de 1960/70)*. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação). UMEESP, São Bernardo do Campo,
- Bron, A. & Thunborg, C. (2012). Higher education and lifelong learning in Sweden. In: M. Slowey & H. G. Schuetze (Eds.). *Global perspectives on higher education and lifelong learning*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bron, A.; Thunborg, C.; Edström, E. (2014). Ethnicity and class matters: experiences in Swedish higher education. In: F. Finnegan; B. Merrill; C. Thunborg (Eds.). *Student voices on inequalities in European higher education: challenges for theory, policy and practice in a time of change*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Charaudeau, P. & Maingueneau, D. (2008). *Dicionário de análise do discurso*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Contexto.
- De Rudder, H. (1999). Access to higher education in Germany: the career of an issue. *Higher Education in Europe*, vol. XXIV, No. 4.
- Dourado, L. F. (2002). Reforma do estado e as políticas para a educação superior no Brasil nos anos 90. *Educ. Soc.*, Campinas, vol. 23, n. 80, 234-252.
- Ertl, H (2005). Higher education in Germany: a case of ‘uneven’ expansion? *Higher Education Quarterly*, 0951–5224, Volume 59, No. 3, 205–229.
- Kim, L. (2004). Massification in a uniform system of higher education: the Swedish dilemma. In: Ingemar Fägerlind & Görel Strömqvist (Eds.). *Reforming higher education in the Nordic countries: studies of changes in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden*. Paris: UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Lefèvre, F. & Lefèvre, A. M. C. (2003). *O discurso do sujeito coletivo: um novo enfoque em pesquisa qualitativa*. Caxias do Sul: Educs.
- Maingueneau, D (2007). *Gênese dos discursos*. Curitiba, PR: Criar.
- Mancebo, D.; Vale, A. A.; Martins, T. B. (2015). Políticas de expansão da educação superior no Brasil: 1995-2010. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, v. 20 n. 60 jan.-mar.
- Moscovici, S. (2007). *Representações sociais*. 5. ed. São Paulo: Vozes.
- Orlandi, E. P. (2007) *Análise do discurso: princípios e procedimentos*. 7. ed. Campinas, SP: Pontes.

Schömer, F. (2014). Non-traditional students and barriers to participation in German universities. F. Finnegan; B. Merrill; C. Thunborg (Eds.). *Student voices on inequalities in European higher education: challenges for theory, policy and practice in a time of change*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.

Sguissardi, V. (2008). Modelo de expansão da educação superior no Brasil: predomínio privado/mercantil e desafios para a regulação e a formação universitária. **Educ. Soc.**, Campinas, vol. 29, n. 105, 991-1022.

Spink, M. J. P. (1993). O conceito de representação social na abordagem psicossocial. *Cad. Saúde Pública* [online]. 1993, vol.9, n.3 [cited 2010-05-13], 300-308.

Stromquist, N. P. (2002). *Education in a globalized world: the connectivity of economy, power, technology and knowledge*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.