

## **Cartographic Representations of Teachers on the Web**

**Alexandre Guimarães**

Federal Institute of Goiás (IFG – Aparecida de Goiânia)

Reitoria:

Av. Assis Chateaubriand, 1568

Setor Oeste

Goiânia - GO

Brazil

CEP: 74130-012

**Leda Guimarães**

Federal University of Goiás (UFG – Visual Arts College)

Reitoria:

Campus Samambaia – Caixa Postal: 131

Parque Itatiaia

Goiânia - GO

Brazil

CEP: 74001-970

### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to raise issues about places, roles, dynamism and, mainly, representations of teachers engaged in Distance Education. It has been noted that the source visions for these representations are overly related to misconceptions about the images of teaching disseminated by the modernist practices in schools over the years. Through the analysis of pictures collected on the web, we discussed these visions from our own experience as teachers in Virtual Learning Environments.*

**Keywords:** Representations of teachers; license in Visual Arts; distance education

“The journey is not about covering distance or crossing borders, but breaking free from our own limits.”

Mia Couto

### **1. Mapping Out Conceptions**

During the first stage of Supervised Apprenticeship in the License course of Visual Arts at distance (Faculty of Visual Arts, Federal University of Goiás – FAV/UFG 2009), we conducted a survey to find out how important apprenticeship was for undergraduate students. As examples of their field experience, the following original statements were taken from a discussion forum (only emphasis was added).

[...] this experience serves as a barometer of the contact with students transmitting and sharing knowledge; (...) it is this historic and social process called education that allows theory and practice to meet in order to promote greater learning for both the teacher and the student.

I believe the apprenticeship in visual arts will make us practice what we are being taught.

Interdisciplinarity should not be a sum of disciplines, but the interconnection between content and knowledge. Thus, we may be researchers and learning conductors.

[...] because I see art teaching is more related to practice than to anything else.

The emphasis on “barometer”, “transmitting”, “the teacher and the student”, “being taught”, “learning conductors” and “practice” is not random. These terms illustrate the imaginary of teaching from a teacher-centered perspective, as if they had all the contents and strategies to promote learning.

The use of “barometer” is an evidence of the quantitative aspect of education, focused on the intensification of boundaries between academic records and the hierarchy between different areas of knowledge – a maintenance mode of order, away from perversion and on the right path (HERNÁNDEZ, 2011). “Transmitting” reinforces the imaginary of giving and taking knowledge, which sets “the teacher and the student” apart. The contents, “being taught” by “learning conductors”, sustain an elitist, discriminatory discourse that excludes those who are not able to take the lion’s share of all the intellectual scholastic work. From these conceptions, we came across the questioning on what visions represent the teaching practice. So, we browsed the web for images which corresponded to the statements given by the students in the exercise aforementioned.

## 2. Artist Teacher: The Creator

There are certainly many images that reinforce the idea of *transmission* and *conduction*, but we selected two pictures as portraits of the artist teacher, namely the teacher/conductor and the teacher/painter. If we consider the poetic and fluid aspects of teaching from a nonlinear constructionist point of view, mainly in art education, we could conceive the teacher as an “artist” and therefore his work as “art”. However, the idea of artist teacher under the scope of pedagogy might be misleading, as the contemporary image of the artist, being an inheritance from modernity, still bears remnants of an isolated, anguished subject of intangible ingeniousness.

Image 1 represents the teacher/painter: a giant subject, the biggest in the scene, holding a box (paint? knowledge?) and a brush. In the canvas (blackboard?), a lamp has been painted by the artist teacher – could it be the genius teacher? Could a blank canvas represent the student body, yet to be painted by the master?

As mentioned earlier, the exercise that led us to this discussion was done in the License course of Visual Arts at distance, which we find a soapy learning environment, in spite of being more distinguished and innovative than the traditional attendance course. Further access to the web was to map representations of teaching in such immaterial context. On the ground, mapping is regarded as a cartographic work, that is, a drawing that moves along with the transformations suggested in its background. Therefore, the trace of these two limits will tend to move and eventually melt into one:

[...] to learn how to sail on an ocean of uncertainty through the archipelagos of certainty that surround us; that we have to think like cartographers to create our own map, freeing ourselves from the static, but being sensitive to the transformative movements all around us.

[...] aprender a navegar num oceano de incerteza em meio aos arquipélagos de certeza que nos cercam, que é preciso pensar como cartógrafos para criar o nosso próprio mapa não se atendo ao estático, mas sensíveis aos movimentos de transformação ao nosso redor (NAKAO, 2005:19).

In this mainly virtual, interterritorialized environment, we have seen and visited places, displacements and conceptions of our teaching practices. Because the discourses created throughout existence are connected to our aesthetic perceptions (TOURINHO, 2009), the reflection about such representations helps us understand how these discourses (re)configure roles and also bring out excitement, disquiet and desirable changes on Distance Education – henceforth DE –, as well as in other modalities of learning.

In that way, to adjust our search field and draw out a “virtual cartography”, we dived into a hypertextual search at Google Images to find depictions of the terms “teachers”, “distance education”, “distance learning” etc. This search was outlined by a couple of questions: a) are these images and conceptions about the teacher the same as for distance education/learning? b) what similarities and differences can we find between our students’ statements, teacher pictures in textbooks, news and advertisements available on the Internet?

In Image 2-A, we see a manly figure of a Superman-like teacher carrying a book, a ruler, a square and a clipboard, coming out of a digital blackboard. In Image 2-B, there is a sort of frame-shaped computer screen and a hand inside pointing to a book (a metaphor for knowledge) that spills water or spreads light upon the planet (perhaps an appealing allusion to The Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo, in which the hand of God gives life to Adam). The pointer also sustains the apprenticeship students’ statements that the teacher/master indicates, directs and shows the path to knowledge.

In Image 3-C, we see another male figure, wearing with a suit, a tie, and holding a file under his arm, pointing his stick to the blackboard where it reads: “Distance Education: what to evaluate?” The image possibly represents an instructor of DE lecturing to an audience of students. The shape of the teacher image is figurative, yet schematic, whereas the student images are merely geometric. Could that be a representation of distance?

In Image 3-D, an inviting female figure comes out of the laptop screen and whispers to a student. The male figure is noticeably erect and sober, whereas the female figure is sinuous, which aggregates mystery and secret to the whole image.

Image 4-E shows a robust male figure, as described by socialist realism, holding the globe with strong arms resembling Atlas, who held up the Earth on his shoulders as interminable punishment. Instead, the figure hints more at Prometheus, who gave human kind fire – represented here by the digital media devices in the Earth's orbit. The yellow smudge on the background can be interpreted as an illustration of the sunbeams and heat. Image 4-F is another portrait of a woman, a digital image meant to interact with students, standing in for a “real teacher”. That is a resource commonly used in some distance learning courses. Visage and clothes are cold sober, resembling television anchors, and the fictitious figure divulges information on the artificially designed set.

Image 5-G shows once more the relation between human and divine, as the teacher/conductor holds his stick and conducts the learning process to a passive student sitting on a chair. His passiveness shows by his curved posture before the huge intimidatory book. The screen from which the arms and hands of the conductor come out, along with the gray clouds, are flat and floating, giving the composition a surrealist air.

Image 5-H pictures a young male figure wearing a cap and headsets, immersed in the computer screen and surrounded by technological paraphernalia (cell phones, mp3 players, guitar and television). This depiction explores the multisensory ability of teenage students to do various simultaneous activities. The background is a bedroom, a space where they can feel free to whether include themselves in the web or be absolute recluses. Data published on *O Estado de São Paulo* newspaper (04/12/2010) state that students in DE are in the vast majority adults who work and find little time to study, and that statistic truly matches the reality of our course, because students complain about the ineptitude to deal with technology, little contact with the latest devices and scant time to study on the computer, post content, browse the web or do online research.

From the eight images, seven are human representations, predominantly male teachers. This contrasts with the actual scenario of education in Brazil, where most of the teachers and students are women. According to the 2000 census, the 20-29 age group included 60% of graduated women (ALVES, 2010).

All the images show individual actions, and this fact has been studied by authors in DE. Belloni (2001) points out two main characteristics of the teacher engaged in DE: 1) the transformation of the individual teacher into a collective entity and 2) the partnership between teacher and student in the process of building up knowledge, i.e., research and pedagogic innovations represented by Image 3-D – although this partnership is the stereotypical “seduction” portrayed in the iconographic painting of Eve, the Serpent and Death by Hans Baldung. Still according to Belloni (op. cit.), many secondary functions are attributed to the teacher among the two traditional ones (content organization and student guidance), which makes hard to identify who the DE teacher is in reality: an “editor”, “author”, “education technologist” or “graphic designer”? Moreover: a teacher/designer or a designer/teacher? That author pinpoints the necessity of collaboration in DE, once the multiple functions, even being a blend of technology and intellectual edification, are connected to the syntagmatic axis of education that these new mediation instruments demand. Nevertheless, our selection of images does not show this “partnership”. The figure of the “conductor” and “transmitter” is always present, clearly demarcating the teacher as the agent responsible for defining the educational process, as shown dialogically in Images 6-I and 6-J. Image 6-K reiterates Image 2-B with a picture of a book on DE alluding to Michelangelo's painting, just now God's hand touches a robot's, analogous to Steven Spielberg's ET (1982).

In other representations of the teaching apparatus, hybridizations use the well-known school artifacts as support for the introduction of new technologies, e.g., superposed skins (Images 7-L and 7-M). In the first, a screen coupled to a chalkboard where it reads “DISTANCE EDUCATION”. In the second, the letters “www” refer to the World Wide Web.

José Carlos Souza Araujo (2010) debates the centrality of the blackboard on the school educational process. He defends that it is an indispensable resource for the classroom in the contemporary world: “despite electronic components [...]” (such as data show, smart boards and tablets) “[...] being used, the heart of the classroom is still the old blackboard” (pp.1-12).

The massive use of the blackboard dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, when public systems of elementary teaching were gradually consolidated and greater demands on classroom furniture and resources emerged. The images we have commented on expose this model of centrality.

Image 7-N is an archetype of materialized class environment where students sit, listen, receive input passively and ask for permission to address to the teacher, as indicated by their hands raised. That display of the actors in school shows the permanence of systematic mutual/monitorial teaching in the learning environment architecture, since furniture and resources are fundamental devices that ensure the successfulness of the method. In the same image, the male “teacher” speaks to an audience (students?) composed by 6 men and 4 women – even though (we reiterate) such proportion does not correspond to the Brazilian educational reality, neither in student nor in teacher chairs.

Image 7-O depicts a transmutative phenomenon of technology as a liberating power of Summerhill’s democratic ways. It is particularly interesting to note the book row behind the screen, which may give the reader the wings of freedom. The first image portrays hieratic standstill bodies as opposed to the second one, which is full of movement, fluidity and joy. Is that the promise of “new” educational technologies?

An infographic published in *Veja* magazine about the School and Teaching of the Future correlates with our discussion on visions of teaching and the technological apparatus. The graphic proposes an ultramodern school format and suggests a brand new layout for high tech vision learning, with interactive resources (available online) that reinforce the substance of virtual life. Will nowadays classrooms become obsolete?

Despite being quite arresting, Image 8 uses subtitles/tags to identify the students around the high tech semicircle so-called school and the teacher in its center. In that way, we go back to the initial debate: what imaginary and imaginable visions constitute the actions of teachers in distance education? From the students’ perspective, we (teachers) are still accounted knowledge carriers who transport and deliver (maybe share?) it. Our representations still model on attendance courses through images of chairmen and school masters wearing white coats and holding sticks, denoting the hygienist discourse of contemporary education. Some of these depictions are filled with iconic “future” allusions, as if we were in the Jetsons’ cars (HANNAH-BARBERA, 1962-1963) or even on Interprise (Star Wars, 1966).

The Jetson-like monitor, in his flying car, lays his eyes on the computer screen equipped with a webcam and a guided work/flight plan on a clipboard. Surely the word “monitoria” (monitoring) and the young male figure suggest what tutors should be like. We realize, though, a substantial difference in the representation of teachers and monitors: the former look older, wear suits and usually remain immobile, whilst the latter look younger and wear casual clothes and accessories, like the multifunctional subject in Image 5-H.

### **3. Floating Schools and Translearners<sup>ii</sup>**

As stated previously, teacher representations in both the “traditional” and the distance modalities carry an inheritance of the teaching subject, inaugurated in modernity. But why are these representations predominantly manlike? Why are pupils and tutors all young? What is the connection between technology and divine intervention? Why should technology come from above? Are there territories and borders in immaterialized space? Does the use of technological devices imply in new learning and teaching styles? Our experience has revealed migrations, duplicity and displacements among the roles of the social actors in education.

The contemporary world has allowed us to experience immeasurable attributions, hindrance and boundaries. On networks, online or in virtual interfaces, we are either encouraged to type what we cannot usually say or hindered from the impulse to express it intensely. Posting a smiley (☺) in a forum, for instance, might be interpreted in different ways, depending on the context: it can mean a smile, confirmation, goodbye or even good news. There is a symbolic (human) and technical (numbered) net between what is meant and what is actually seen that creates silence, which in turn constitutes a digital lexicon shared worldwide through the Internet.

In these new learning environments, borders are quite fluid, distance is reconfigured and roles become intricate. This congestion of meanings and relations may be noted in the difficulty in representing teacher work graphically. To whip up the discussion even more: do the various illustrations on this paper show such difficulty or the movements have not happened yet? In distance education, does teacher work remain impregnated with the desirable contemporary (yet traditional) teaching setting?

***Don't you Feel Yourself a Kind of Indefinable, Sometimes?***

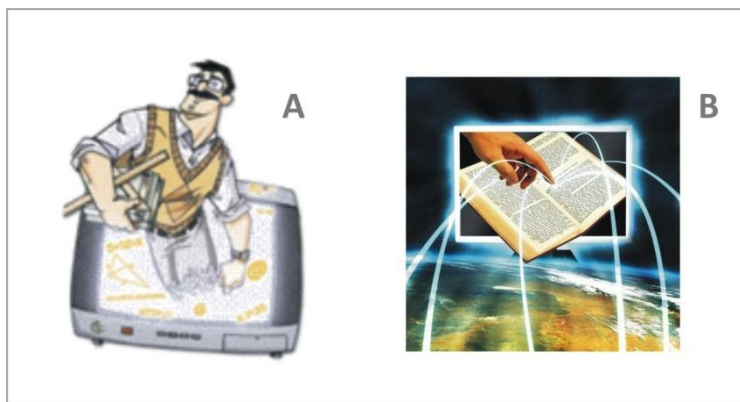
Mafalda's saying (QUINO, 1964) is worth considering when it comes to us, teachers, students, tutors and researchers if are to think of the imaginary frame of education and its subjects displaced in the floating school (Image 10). We can barely think of schedule-free schools, without living areas or walls. It is also nearly insane conceiving it without an active teacher. The idea of school is then reconfigured in this floating environment composed by rooms, offices, kitchen and patio, dismantling the conception of school as a temple of wisdom.

In what way is it possible to define who is supposed to teach or learn and what should be learned in a world of bits and pixels? What to expect from the teacher in attendance courses? The advances of new visual genres and technological innovations that allow us to access these genres have multiplied the currently available textual and visual information. Such recent communication means have created global cultures, and almost instantaneous visual movements and trends. Today, the inevitably ideological and visual messages of cultures easily break boundaries, which hitherto were strongly controlled by geopolitics, opulence and language. Traditional and local cultural products still remain, but they are unavoidably affected or changed by the access to global media (SMITH-SHANK, 2009).

In light of the foregoing, this reflection on images aims to create room for the perception of that which Nóvoa (1992) presents as an urgency to provide moments of interaction between private and professional domains and endow teachers with reflections that conduce them to apprehend their constitution, retention and effectiveness in the job.

**Figures**

**Image 1: Artist teacher. Source: Google Images. Access in June 2009**



**Image 2: Source: Google Images. Access in June 2009**

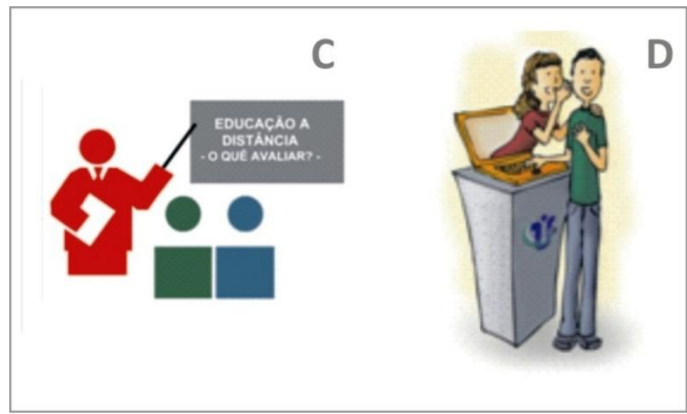


Image 3: Source: Google Images. Access in June 2009. C: “Distance Education: what to Evaluate?”



Image 4: Source: Google Images. Access in June 2009

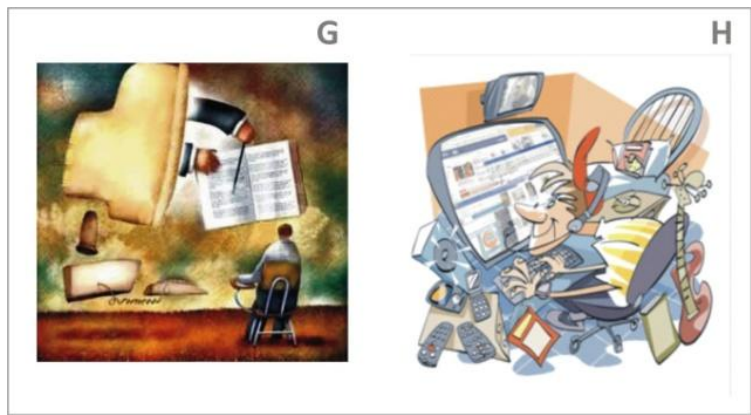


Image 5: Source: Google Images. Access in June 2009



Image 6. Source: Google Images. Access in June/May 2009. K: “Distance Learning”.



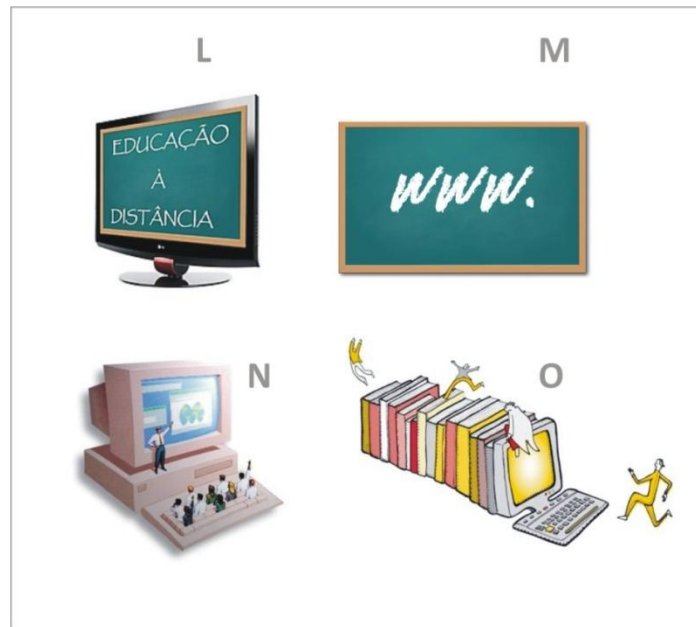


Image 7: Source: Google Images. Access in May 2011. L: "Distance Education".

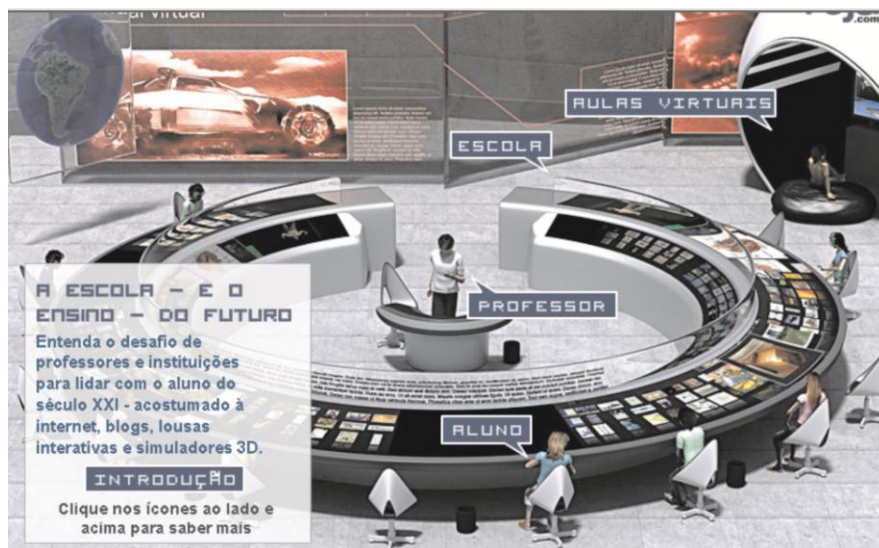
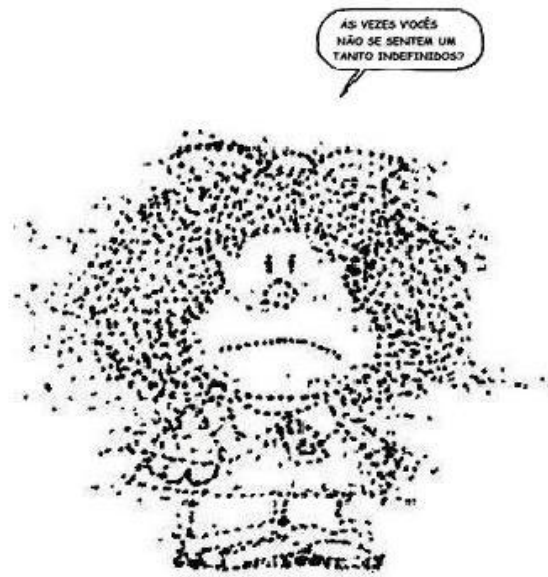


Image 8: The School of the Future. Access: <http://blogoato.fisica-interessante.com/2009/03/escola-do-futuro segundo-revista-veja.html> in September 25 2009



Image 9: Source: Google Images. Access in May 2009. "EaD: Distance Learning"



**Image 10: Mafalda. Source: Google Images. Access in May 2011. She says: “don’t you feel yourselves a Kind of Indefinable, Sometimes?”**

---

<sup>i</sup> Summerhill is an English school founded in 1921 by Alexander Sutherland Neil. It is a pioneer among the democratic fashion schools, serving primary and secondary education. Pupils are free to choose if they want to attend lessons or not, which fosters discipline and respect to classmates and teachers. According to Neil, excessive time is wasted on forcing students to attend classes before the appropriate age, when their interests and activities do not match sitting behind a school chair and repressing their liveliness and desire to see the world for themselves.

Source: <http://www.webartigos.com/articles/22651/1/DIFERENTES-MODELOS-DE-ESCOLAS-NA-ATUALIDADE-ESCOLA-DA-PONTE-Portugal-E-SUMMERHILL-SCHOOL-Inglaterra/pagina1.html#ixzz1LaGVbKJk>. Access in May 5, 2011.

<sup>ii</sup> This heading is the title of Alexandre Guimarães’ Master’s thesis in Visual Culture, co-author of this text. The investigation focused on the VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) of the License course of Visual Arts of the Faculty of Visual arts at the Federal University of Goiás. Some notes on the role and profile of teacher work were made, as well as outlines of their representations, displacements and tensions on the Internet were regarded methodologically under the light of virtual ethnography.



**References**

- ALVES, J.E.D. Revolução feminina: as mulheres à frente na educação. Publicado em 23 de julho de 2010 no site <http://www.ecodebate.com.br>. Acesso em 05/05/2011.
- ARAÚJO, José Carlos Souza . Entre o quadro-negro e a lousa virtual: permanências e expectativas. Disponível em <http://www.anped.org.br/reunioes/29ra/trabalhos/trabalho/GT04-2277--Int.pdf>, acesso em 05/05/2011.
- ANDRADE, Fábio Santos de. Diferentes modelos de escolas na atualidade: Escola da Ponte (Portugal) e Summerhill School (Inglaterra). Disponível em <http://www.webartigos.com>, acesso em 05/05/2011.
- BELLONI, Maria Luiza. Educação à distância. 2ª edição. Campinas, SP: Autores Associados, 2001.
- COUTO, Mía. O Outro pé da sereia. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2006.
- GUIMARÃES, Leda; LOSADA, Teresinha. Novos e velhos tremores: o ensino de artes visuais na modalidade EAD. In: MARTINS, Raimundo (org.). Educação e Visualidades. Goiânia: FUNAPE, 2008.
- HERNÁNDEZ, Fernando. A cultura visual como um convite à deslocalização do olhar e ao reposicionamento do sujeito. In: TOURINHO, Irene; MARTINS, Raimundo (org.). Educação da cultura visual: conceitos e contextos. Santa Maria: Editora UESM, 2001, pp. 31-49.
- NAKAO, Jum. A costura do invisível. São Paulo: Editora Senac, 2005.
- NÓVOA, A. Formação de professores e profissão docente. In:\_\_\_\_\_ (org.). Os professores e sua formação. Lisboa: Nova Enciclopédia, 1992.
- SMITH-SHANK, Deborah. Cultura Visual e Pedagogia Visual. Trad. Gisele Dionísio da Silva. In: MARTINS, Raimundo; TOURINHO, Irene (org.). Educação da cultura visual: narrativas de ensino e pesquisa. Santa Maria: Editora UFSM, 2009, pp. 259-266.
- TOURINHO, Irene. Educação estética, imagens e discursos: cruzamentos nos caminhos da prática escolar. In: MARTINS, Raimundo; TOURINHO, Irene. Educação da cultura visual: narrativas de ensino e pesquisa. Santa Maria: Editora UFSM, 2009, p. 141-156.