

Teaching History Today: wanderings, achievements and losses

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RESUMO

Este artigo analisa tradições de debate sobre Ensino de História no Brasil desde a ditadura de 1964-1984. Ele discute as mudanças, permanências, conquistas e perdas na história da disciplina. Destaca a importância da cultura escolar, a necessária continuidade da escola como instituição e o diálogo com formas não escolares de ensino.

Palavras-chave: ensino de história; cultura escolar; formas não escolares de ensino.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes traditions of debate about the teaching of history in Brazil since the 1964-1984 dictatorship. It discusses the changes, continuities, achievements and losses in the history of the discipline. It emphasizes the importance of school culture, the necessary continuity of the school as an institution and dialogue with non-school forms of education.

Keywords: History teaching; school culture; forms of non-school teaching.

The teaching of history in Brazilian basic education was the object of intense debate, and political and theoretical struggles in the context of resistance to the educational policy of the Brazilian military and civil dictatorship (1964-1984). This involved reflecting on the status of historical knowledge and the pedagogical debate, as well as how to combat the social studies discipline, the devaluation of history, fragmented curricula, the training of professors in Short Licentiate courses and the content of the educational books produced at that moment, a process connected with the struggles against policies that undermined the teaching profession. The ending of the dictatorship did not mean that there were no longer any new and old difficulties to be confronted during the daily teaching of history.

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Some tendencies in this specific field were strengthened in this scenario and in its overcoming in general political terms. The growth of the publishing industry and of private schools in the different levels of teaching, at the same time as trade unions and other associative entities retreat, marked a certain inflection in the debate of educational policies related to the teaching of history since the 1990s, with the loss or pulling back of collective struggles. At the same time scientific research increased concerned with the teaching and learning of history; school culture, educational practices and knowledge developed in different places by teaching staff and other actors in the educational process, came to be increasingly valorized. This was an important conquest because it reaffirmed the concept that to teach history is not only to repeat and reproduce erudite knowledge produced in other spaces: school production also exists.

School cultures, gifted with specificities, maintain ties and permanent dialogues with other cultural spaces, ranging from the training of teachers in universities, continuous erudite production (articles, books, exhibitions) and the divulgation (educational books, courses) prepared in these spaces. In the 1990s various national events were held in the area of teaching history: “The National Meeting on Perspectives of Teaching History,” held for the first time in the University of São Paulo in 1988, and the “National Meeting of Researchers of the Teaching of History,” in 1993 in the Federal University of Uberlândia. These events came to be held every two years in different cities in Brazil, becoming important spaces for continual training and for the exchange of scientific and didactic experiences.

Academic production and publications about the teaching of history expanded, while many relevant issues related to teaching and history were raised by different agents and institutions, seeking to answer the questions emerging in this field of analysis.

Within the limits of this textual space we aim to critically reflect on the place, role, objectives and the importance of history in basic education, specifically in primary teaching. In the construction of the analysis, we will deal with new and old themes, paths and documents, curricular suggestions and textual productions, the fruits of public policies, social movements and experiences of teaching and research. We discuss the dimensions of the teaching of the history in contemporary Brazil, focusing on “new needs and possibilities of knowledge, without losing sight of what has been achieved in the area in the final decades” of the twentieth century.¹

In this debate it is important to confront some fetishes which have come to mark the debate about the Teaching Of History in the last three decades:

1. The fetish of 'New Objects' inspired by New French History: innovation derives from the exploration of themes never before navigated (burnt matches, discarded nappies, calluses on the vocal cords...). Without being problematized this fetish leads to teaching about possible exoticisms and to the loss of general questions of historical knowledge.
2. The fetish of the *dernier cri* (the last word or the most recent fashion), related to the previous one with a slight variation in the inspirational source – English, US, Italian, and Polish authors ... The history of the vanquished and the history of private life have gone ... The novelty of the argument emerges as something good in itself, without reflecting on its effective importance. And the same fields of knowledge share the risk of being discarded when they are no longer new: the oldness of New History...
3. The fetish of the cultural scholar isolated from other cultures (university, industrial, non-school, popular traditions). The school sees itself reduced to an island outside of history.
4. The fetish of Academia as the only place of knowledge: a consequence of this is the disqualification of teachers and students in primary and secondary education, as well as of society itself.
5. The fetish of law or of the state which saves everything, ignoring the intellectual and political wills of teaching, students and other social actors involved in the teaching of history.

The history of history as a discipline in school education in Brazil has been the object of various studies, both in the area of academic research and publications, and in the production of curricular directives, educational and para-educational books, and teacher training programs and projects. Analyses of production in the area of teaching and learning show recurrent concerns with the role of history as a school discipline; the curricula, criteria/modes of curricular organization and selection; educational and para-educational books; teaching practices and methodologies considered suitable, critical or formative. Cartographies of production² demonstrate that this field is controversial, inhabited by theoretical and political disputes, interests, consensus and dissensus.

In different contexts of the history of Brazil it is possible to measure the concern of the state with the institutionalization of history curricula and programs for basic education. In the specific case of the discipline of history,

onwards eighteen teaching programs related curricular reforms were identified between 1841 and 1951. These programs were organized by Colégio Pedro II in Rio de Janeiro, according to the directives of the various reforms that occurred during that period.³ The texts of the ‘prescribed’ curricular documents reveal objectives, political positions, and theoretical questions that configure not only the formative role of history as a school discipline, but also strategies for the construction/manipulation of school historical knowledge. This leads us to the first questions: is everything history? If everything is history, why are basic education schools given specific content selected and prepared in different places of production? Why in the different school realities in the daily curricular construction is other knowledge selected and taught? In what forms do history curricula, ‘prescribed and lived,’ operate in sense of *why*, *what* and *how to teach History*?

The answers to these questions are not simple. Certainly, they depend on our (teachers and researchers) political positions and theoretical and methodological choices. In the specific case of the area of history, the search for answers to these questions suggest in turn other questions: “what do history teachers do when they teach history?”; “what are the themes, the sources, the materials, the problems that we chose to make the measurements between the past and present lived by us?”; “how do we relate with the past when we teach history today to children and to young Brazilians?”.

As is well known the history taught is always the fruit of a selection, a temporal or historic ‘cut.’ Histories are the fruits of multiple readings, interpretations of socially situated historic situations. Like history the school curriculum is not a mere neutral set of school knowledge to be taught, learned and evaluated. As defined by Goodson, inspired by Hobsbawm, the curriculum is “always part of a selective tradition, a perfect example of an invention of a tradition.”⁴

Thinking of the places and roles, in the formative importance of history in the basic education curriculum requires that it be conceived as knowledge and social practice in permanent (re)construction, a field of struggles, an unfinished process. A history curriculum is always the product of choices, visions, interpretations; it is always the product of choices, visions, interpretations and concepts of someone or some group which at certain spaces and times has the power to say and to do. History curricula – whether they are products of public policies or the publishing industry, or are curricula constructed by teachers in the daily experience of the classroom – express

visions and choices, reveal tensions, conflicts, agreements, consensus, approximation and distancing.

From this perspective the place occupied by History, 14 years after the implementation of LDB (the Law of the Directives and Foundations for Education – Law 9.394/96) and 13 after the publication of the National Curriculum Parameters by the Ministry of Education is intimately interconnected with the educational purposes⁵ expressed in the educational policy implemented in the 1990s in the political context of the globalization of the economy, the development of new technologies and the consolidation of democracy in Brazil.

Furthermore, this place derives from the changes in education policy and in the teaching of history, achieved in the struggles of the 1980s and also after the enactment of the 1988 Federal Constitution. Some of the most important realities from the 1990s include: the extinction of the EMC (Moral and Civil Education), OSPB (Social and Political Organization) and EPB (Studies of Brazilian Problems); the third level Short Licentiate courses in social sciences were also gradually ended; and from 1994 onwards, the evaluation of school books for the first four years of primary school. This process was institutionalized, expanded and developed in a systematic form in later governments. Furthermore, following the 1996 LDB, teacher training programs and projects were developed by federal, state and municipal governments with an emphasis on the initial years of basic and primary education.

The text of the LDB, Law 9.394/95, highlighted directives that can be configured as responses of the state to the questions previously raised. In the form of a law, the official document expresses *what* culture and history the Brazilian state considered necessary to transmit to students through the obligatory subject of ‘history.’ The document reiterates the emphasis on the study of the history of Brazil, through the triad: “the indigenous, African and European matrices in the formation of the Brazilian people,” as shown in Paragraph 4, Article 26, of the LDB.⁶

The National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs), implemented in 1997, also answer these questions for us. First, it should be noted that the separation of history and geography was officialized at the national level for the initial years of primary education, after years of struggles and criticisms of its merger, predominantly in school curricula during and after the government of the Civil-Military Dictatorship (it is important to emphasize that the merger occurred before 1964). Thus curricular change had already been implemented in some states in the Brazilian Federation, such as Minas Gerais and São Paulo,

during the curricular reform of the 1980s. The structure of primary education, defined by the 1997 PCNs, put an end to Social Studies as a component of the curriculum, either as an area or discipline.

In relation to educational intentionalities, the role and the importance of the discipline, the document, like academic or political movements, reinforced the formative nature of history in the creation of identity, citizenship, the recognition of others, respect for cultural plurality and the defense of the strengthening of democracy.

In relation to content (*what to teach*) and to selected historical knowledge, the curricular document proposes its organization around thematic axes, divided into subthemes. For the first four years of primary school, two thematic axes were to be studied: I) Local history and the history of daily life, subdivided into two sub-areas: locality and indigenous communities; II) History of population organizations, subdivided into: population movements, organizations and struggles of social and ethnic groups, and historical and temporal organization. For the final years of primary school, the PCNs proposed another two thematic axes: I) History of social relations, culture and work, subdivided into: social relations, nature and the earth and labor relations; II) History of the representations and the relations of power, also broken down into two subareas: nations, peoples, conflicts, wars and revolutions; citizenship and culture in the contemporary world. Furthermore, the curricular document established transversal themes (for all disciplines): Ethics, Health, Environment, Sexual Orientation, Cultural Plurality, Work and Consumption. Many of these topics were on the agendas debated by social movements. Incorporating them in curricular horizons did not mean exhausting the continual capacity of reflective criticism and the right to speak in the educational process of those movements.

The choice of thematic axes through ample problematizations is the fruit of the intense curricular debate that occurred in Brazil in the 1980s, in a dialogue with European experiences. Exemplary of this is the debate that took place in relation to the SEE/Cenp Curricular Proposal in São Paulo state.⁷ This proposition constituted a search for a response to criticisms of the traditional curricular structure which privileged a linear chronological organization, through facts and landmarks of European history integrated when possible with the facts/landmarks of the history of the Brazilian nation, under the sign of the ideology of progress. This was a critical response to the 'French quadripartite approach (so well analyzed by the historian Jean Chesneaux and radically incorporated in Brazil), formatting and filling curricula and

educational books. The choice of thematic axes represented a type of insubordination of 'the empire of fact', 'a point for the location of meanings and the place where the achievement of history is interview,' as analyzed by Carlos Vesentini in *A teia do fato*.⁸ In this book Vesentini warns us that: "some facts are disseminated and imposed on the social scenario before the possibility of making any specific reflection concerned with their examination" (p.19).

Curricular organization based on thematic axes, intensely discussed since the 1980s, came to be a theoretical and methodological challenge, a critical posture given the plots of the production and the diffusion of historical knowledge.

The emphasis of the PCNs on the teaching and learning of themes and problems of the history of Brasil since the very beginning of primary education would run into old problems in many school realities. Among these can be included the fact that students would complete this phase of school without have contact with the history of Brazil. The former social studies educational programs generally finished the four year cycle of what was then called first level education (now primary school) with the study of regional, municipal and/or state history (the units of the Federation in which the student lived) in a tight and fragmented manner, losing sight of reflection on the local and the non-local (national and even global). For example in the state of Minas Gerais, children who were studying the Program of Social Studies of the State Department of Education⁹ and the school books prepared in accordance with the Program would reach the end of the fourth grade (now fifth year) without having a minimal notion of the history of Brazil. The same would occur with the study of geography.

Taking into account the fact that at that time a large part of Brazilian students did not go beyond the fourth or fifth grade, due to the high rates of absenteeism and repetition many finished or interrupted their education without meeting in the school space significant aspects of the history or geography of Brazil. Those who continued with their studies would usually reach the fifth grade (now sixth year) without a conceptual and thematic basis of the disciplines and without a minimal systematized knowledge of the history and geography of Brazil. The PCN curricular text, by proposing a broad theme for the last two years of the first part of primary education, in harmony with the previous debates and experiences, allowed teachers and students to problematize and understand important dimensions of the history of Brazil.¹⁰

By revisiting the problematic of the discipline of history in the final years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, another

relevant movement deserves to be registered and analyzed: the demands of social groups. As is widely known since the 1970s Brazilian society witnessed an intensification in a particular manner of the mobilization of women, blacks and indigenous peoples, amongst other groups, against racism, prejudice, marginalization and the various practices and forms of domination and exclusion. These movements won space in the middle of specific struggles in the field of culture, education and citizenship.

In this context, aiming to win significant victories in the constituent assembly process in the 1980s, and as a result of the 1988 Federal Constitution, various political projects were implemented, such as women's police stations, the demarcation of indigenous lands, affirmative action for the Afro-Descendent population, the implementation of quotas, projects for the insertion of black workers in the labor market and specific actions in the area of Afro-Descendent and indigenous culture and education. Debates in associative and cultural entities of history professionals, such as Anpuh, emphasized the importance of studies dedicated to Africa for the deepening of the history of Brazil.

In 2003 the President of the Brazilian Republic sanctioned Federal Law 10.639, dated 9 January, which ordered the obligatory inclusion in the school teaching curriculum of the study of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture and other measures. In 2004 the National Council of Education approved National Curriculum Directives for the Education of Ethno-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of Afro-Brazilian and African History and Culture, as well as CNE Resolution no. 1, dated 7 June 2004, which instituted the Directives. These propositions caused alterations in Federal Law 9.394, dated 20 December 1996 – the Guiding Law for National Education (LDB) –, adding two articles referring to the teaching of history:

Art. 26-A. In primary and secondary teaching establishments, both public and private, the teaching of Afro-Brazilian History and Culture hereby becomes obligatory. (Included by Law 10.639, dated 9 Jan. 2003)

Paragraph 1 – The programmatic content referred to in the heading of this article shall include the History of Africa and Africans, the struggle of blacks in Brazil, the Brazilian black culture and the black in the formation of national society, redeeming the contribution of the black people in the social, economic and political areas, related to the history do Brazil. (Included by Law 10.639, dated 9 Jan. 2003)

Paragraph 2 – The content referring to the Afro-Brazilian history and culture

shall be taught within the school curriculum, especially the areas of Artistic Education and Brazilian History and Literature; (Included by Law 10.639, dated 9 Jan. 2003)

Art. 79-A. (VETOED); (Included by Law 10.639, dated 9 Jan. 2003)

Art. 79-B. The school calendar shall include 20 November as National Black Consciousness Day. (Included by Law 10.639, dated 9 Jan. 2003)

Article 26-A, by determining the obligation to teach African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture, defines ‘what to teach’, and the ‘programmatic content’, ‘redeeming’ the importance of the study of the struggle of Africans and Afro-Brazilians, and of the history and culture of these peoples. The second paragraph stipulated that the content shall be the subject of all disciplines, especially Artistic Education, Brazilian Literature and Brazilian History.

Article 79-B of the General Dispositions of the LDB include in the school calendar the civic date of 20 November as the ‘Day of Black Consciousness.’ This is a reference to the memory (marking the day of his death) of Zumbi dos Palmares, one of the principal leaders of the fight of the slaves in Quilombo dos Palmares against the colonial slaveholding regime. The inclusion of the date in the school calendar was considered by leaders of social movements and by historians as an important counterpoint to the official memory of the nation. In the more traditional school calendar the 13 May was commemorated, the date of the *Lei Áurea*, the law that marked the abolition of slavery, an inherited fact that involved the idea of liberation as a gift and consecrated Princess Isabel as the Redeemer of the Slaves. It is important to note that this memory is also present in sectors of popular culture, such as *Congadas* and other artistic manifestations in which Princess Isabel appears as a character, along with Our Lady of Aparecida, showing affective ties and valorizing Abolition, which is not reduced to conservative ideology.

In the wake of the change in social policies, linked to the critical multicultural academic movement, came Federal Law 11.645, dated 10 March 2008. This altered Law 9.394, dated 20 December 1996, modified by Law 10.639, dated 9 January 2003, which established the directives and foundation of national education including in the official curriculum the obligation to teach the theme of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture. Alternations and modifications were made in article 26-A and its following paragraphs which came to have the following text:

Art. 26-A. In primary and secondary teaching establishments, both public and

private, the study of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture hereby becomes obligatory. (Included by Law 10.645, dated 2008)

§ 1 – The programmatic content referred to in the heading of this article shall include various aspects of the history and culture that characterize the Brazilian population, based on these two ethnic groups, such as the history of Africa and Africans, the struggle of blacks in Brazil, the Brazilian black culture and the black and the Indian in the formation of national society, redeeming their contributions in the social, economic and political areas, related to the history do Brazil. (Included by Law 11.645 dated 2008)

§ 2 – The content referring to the Afro-Brazilian history and culture and those of indigenous Brazilian peoples shall be taught within the school curriculum, especially in the areas of artistic education and Brazilian history and literature; (Text given by Law 11.645, dated 2008)

The modifications made in the LDB by Federal Law 11.645, dated 10 March 2008, neither annulled nor revoked the previous laws, but added the obligation to study the indigenous question – it is worth noting that the large-scale commemorations of the fifth century of Portuguese colonization in the Americas included monumental exhibitions which included Africans and indigenous peoples in the formation of the country at the same time that demonstrations by the representatives of these groups were violently repressed in Porto Seguro.

This complementary law referred to content, since various other aspects related to indigenous education had already been regulated. Research carried out in public and private school networks¹¹ have shown contradictions and difficulties of teachers in teaching this content. The theoretical, political and pedagogical reasons narrated by teachers are multiple. Nevertheless, there are some common points. First, the gap existing in the initial training. In 2008 a large part of the Teacher Training Courses in Pedagogy and History in Brazil still did not prepare teachers for the study of the themes in primary education. Added to this were difficulties in obtaining the relevant teaching material. Thus, a further consensus was produced: the need to implement and develop continuous training projects to overcome these theoretical and methodological gaps, as well as the revision of teacher training curricula and the increase of educational books and material in relation to these areas.

Evidently, this involves a necessary debate, that is perhaps even late. At the same time it is necessary to avoid its reduction to this isolated thematic topic, without critical reflection or articulations with other universes of

ethnicity and questions of knowledge. Thinking of Africans and indigenous peoples in formation of Brazil also means asking about the connections between these groups and other ethnicities, the formation of new hybrid culture and sociabilities, which, far from idealization, have very different characteristics from those observed in other parts of the world (absence of legal impediments for marriages, subtle forms of racism, violence, reduction of those groups to poverty, etc.). Africans and indigenous persons are not human realities of the past, they are in the present of Brazil as the action of groups and their descendents, and they were renewed through other waves of immigration and the survival dynamics of Amerindians, without forgetting the great importance of Africa in the world scenario and present and in various pasts. And a disturbing silence is manifested: the descendents of different Asian nationalities and ethnicities in Brazil and the multiple meanings of the Asian continent and their peoples in world history in the past and the present. In addition, Latin American and Europeans immigrants from the former Soviet bloc in Brazil. Therefore, it is not only 'indigenous, African and European matrices in the formation of the Brazilian people': national and other types of identities are an open history, they continue their permanent making and demand critical explanations.

Another change in educational policy also must be noted as it had implication for the place occupied by the teaching of history in the curriculum. We are referring to the alteration of the structure of Brazilian primary education. In 2006 the Federal Government, through Law 11.274/2006, altered the text of articles 29, 30, 32 and 87 of the LDB, expanding for nine years the length of primary school, along with the obligation to attend school from six years onwards. Article 5 of this Law stipulated that municipalities, states and the Federal District would have until 2010 to implement the obligation for nine years primary school. Since then new national curricular directives have come to be discussed under the ambit of the National Council of Education (CNE), and on 9 July 2010 the text of the Opinion and Resolution Project¹² approved by CNE and enacted by the Minister of Education were published.

The text of the new directives reiterated the definition of the three stages of basic education: pre-school education; free and obligatory primary education, with a duration of nine years, organized in two phases: the first five and the last four years; and secondary education with a minimum duration of three years. In relation to the curricular structure that had to be part of the national common basis, the teaching of history and geography are covered by Item C of article 14, which establishes as a component of the curriculum:

“knowledge of the physical and natural world, and the social and political reality, especially of Brazil, including the study of history and of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures.”¹³

This configuration reaffirmed the previous directives that were recurrent in curricular production and school historiography.

Among the various aspects, angles, and objects of directives deserving of careful reflection in the area of the teaching of history, is the “central focus on literacy during the first three years” as one of the objective of the basic education of the child, defined in Item II, Article 24.¹⁴

We question whether this privilege may not come to represent in practice the devaluation once again of the teaching and learning of history in the early years, after historic struggles and achievements such as the return of history and geography in the 1990s. Studies indicate that in many school realities there are still present pedagogical concepts and practices that rigidly separate the process of learning to read and write from history, geography and other knowledge that give meaning of human experiences of learning.¹⁵ Many educators still believe that first it is necessary to teach children how to read and write and only afterwards to teach and learn history.

The ‘focus on learning literacy’, however, cannot lose sight of the various dimensions that the process involves, since as Paulo Freire taught us, reading is reading the world:¹⁶ we cannot learn to read words without seeking to understand the world, the history, the geography, of human experiences constructed in various times and languages. This requires that we have another conception of the learning of the Portuguese language and history. As identified by Aisenberg,¹⁷ in her analysis of the relations between reading and learning in the history of Argentina, here too history classrooms in general *do not teach us* to read, rather we simply *use* reading. Some teachers from the final years of primary school, from secondary school, and even from third level, complain about the difficulties of teaching history to semi-illiterate students. To the question of many of them: ‘is it possible to teach history without first teaching them to read?’, we answer with another question: ‘is it possible to learn to read without history?’ It is necessary to teach children to read and write, teaching and learning history. Learning history is reading to understand the world in which we live and in which other human beings live.

The teaching of history plays a educational, formative, cultural and political role and its relationship with the construction of citizenship pervades different spaces of the production of historical knowledge. In the current debate in the area, what is evident is the concern with locating in the field of

history problematizing questions which relate to the time in which we live and other times, in a critical dialogue between the multiplicity of subjects, times, places and cultures. Therefore, the configurations of the history(ies) lived and taught by teachers between the four walls of the classroom and also outside the limits of the school, as well as the histories which students learn in these and in other spaces, is much more complex than many suppose. Curricular dimensions sometimes approximate, stay the same, or are distanced, in a real, dynamic, dialectic and therefore historical movement.

To reflect on the approaches to the teaching of history, we have chosen to analyze, even if synthetically, the principal vehicle for the diffusion of history in contemporary Brazilian society: the school books used in primary schools.

Certainly, one of the oldest public policies of the Brazilian state (it dates from 1929) and one of the most successful is the National School Books Program – PNLD), which involves the purchase and gratuitous distribution of books to students in the public teaching network. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, in accordance with the 1997 National Curricular Parameters, PNLD demands in the Public Notification for the Purchase of School Books for the initial school years, the inscription, evaluation and acquisition of distinct volumes for the two disciplines: History and Geography. However, this was not always the case.

The curricula stipulated by state and municipal departments of education in various parts of Brazil from the 1970s onwards, after the enactment of Law 5.692/71, contributed in a striking form to the dilution of the teaching objects of history and geography, with a strong seasoning of dictatorial morals and civics in the fusion called Social Studies presented in school books. In relation to the profile of Social Studies school books used in this historical period, and given to students in the first years of primary education in Brazilian public schools by PNLD, an important work carried out by MEC/FAE (Education Assistance Foundation) in 1993 needs to be considered. In the middle of numerous accusations about various problems with PNLD (implementation, distribution) and the serious aspects related to the quality of school books – identified by Brazilian and foreign educators and researchers –, MEC created a work group formed by specialists from various areas, indicated by the following entities: União Nacional de Dirigentes Municipais da Education (Undime – National Union of Municipal Directors of Education), Conselho Nacional de Secretários da Education (Consed – National Council of Secretaries of Education), Associação Nacional de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação em Education (Anped – National Association of Research and Post-Graduate

Studies in Education), Secretaria de Education Fundamental (SEF – Secretariat of Fundamental Education) and FAE/MEC. The commission was officially created in 1993 with the objective of defining parameters of quality and evaluating production for the initial years of school.

The commission for the area of social studies and other disciplines carried out their work between October 1993 and March 1994, and their report was delivered to the Minister of Education in April 1994. 80 social studies books were analyzed, corresponding to the ten titles most used and requested by teachers from FAE in 1991. The evaluators concluded that the works were characterized by “fragmentation, simplification”, and “did not stimulate the practice of investigation, of debate, of the development of creativity and criticism.” In some texts “the language is poor and the texts are similar to the pamphlets distributed in public squares” (p.72).

According to the evaluation the school books most used by Brazilian schools at the beginning of the 1990s were still marked by the objectives of the social studies discipline. They were ‘social studies’ books, despite the fact that the disciplines of history and geography had already been separated, as has been mentioned, in many states and municipalities in a gradual form since 1982. Some of the principal characteristics of the works were the ‘generalization and simplification’ of content. This hindered the perception and understanding by students and teachers of the object of history, which appeared to be subsumed, diluted and pulverized in social studies texts and activities. The body of specific historical knowledge and concepts and the object of the teaching of history at this level were not explained. The marks of social exclusion, prejudice and stereotypes, evident in the so-called traditional school history, were found in texts and images implicitly and explicitly. Moreover, according to the document, the books did not contribute to the development of oral and written languages, nor to the process of learning literacy.

The aforementioned document showed in a clear form how the content, images and activities of social studies books hindered the process of understanding social, historic, economic and cultural reality. Historic and geographic concepts, when they were dealt with were done so in a fragmented and naturalized form that hid the contradictions and did not allow the development of abilities and competences, such as criticism, creativity, reflection and comprehension.

Since then PNLD has been expanded and improved. In particular, attention should be paid to the permanent process for evaluating school books organized and systematized by MEC since 1995. Currently the National School

Book Program (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático* – PNLD) and the recent National School Book Program for Secondary Education (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático para o Ensino Médio* – PNLEM) have basically the same form, while the principle actions involved in the policy include: the release of Public Notification; Inscription of Publishers; Triage/Evaluation of Books; Preparation and Publicizing of Guides; Choice of books by schools; Acquisition; Production; Distribution and Receipt of books by public schools from different parts of Brazil.¹⁸

The characteristics of current history works for the initial years of school, after more than a decade of systematic evaluations, are different from those registered in the 1994 Document. They are published and can be found in the document “School Book Guide – PNLD 2010 – History”. In this text, in addition to the criteria, can be found the general conclusions about the evaluations of history books, the production profile presented (43 collections and 72 regional books) and the specific reviews of the 32 collections and 36 regional books approved (MEC, 2009). The improvement in the qualitative standard of school books is obvious – not only those of history and geography –, as demonstrated by the School Book Guide – published by MEC, which contain the results of the evaluations – and by studies and research.¹⁹

It should be emphasized that in the 2010 PNLD Evaluation Record – History there is a set of criteria available that help to diagnose not only the language of the work, but also the potentials for the development of capacities and competences in reading, vocabulary, the understanding of textual genres and the production of texts. In short, what are evaluated are the possibilities presented by history books (initial years) for historic learning related to the dominion of reading and writing in Portuguese. Therefore, the PCNs and Evaluations contribute decisively to the construction of a new profile for history and geography school books aimed at students in the initial years of school. It should also be emphasized that not everything is the school book, and that teaching takes place through multiple paths and the production of teaching materials, in a decentralized form linked to the specific realities of learning, should be supported and valorized.

In relation to history books meant for the final years of primary school, the evaluation published in the 2008 Guide, showed a tendency that has currently been consolidated. According to the 2008 Guide, the 19 collections could be divided into “four blocks according to the organization of content: thematic history (4 collections); integrated history (7); interspersed history (7) and conventional history (1 collection).” The evaluators concluded

That most of the collections inscribed in PNLD-2008 were prepared according to the curricular organization of content that covers at the same time the history of America, Brazil and General History, with half using the approach called Integrated History and the other half Interspersed History, which allows the conclusion that this is the current tendency of the area.

Three years later the '2011 School Book Guide PNLD – History, Final Years of Primary School' stated that 25 collections were evaluated, of which sixteen were approved and nine rejected. In relation to the guiding approaches, the Commission concluded that the curricular perspective dominant in the universe of the collections evaluated in the universe of the collections evaluated could be divided into two blocks: 94% of the collections prioritized the so-called Integrated History and 6% Thematic History. According to the Guide,

As Integrated History we have identified the collections whose groupings are based on the evocation of the chronology of the European base, integrating this when possible with the approach to relative themes of Brazilian, African and American history ... The organization around a proposal of thematic history occurs when the volumes are presented not in function of a linear chronology, but on thematic axes which problematize temporal transformations and permanencies without, however, ignoring the temporal orientation based on chronology.²⁰

We have shown that in the evaluations of history school books for the final years of primary school registered in the 2008 and 2011 PNLD Guides, the dominant curricular perspective in the universe of school books approved by MEC legitimates the so-called integrated didactic concept of history, with temporal and linear criteria based on the chronology of European history and articulated *when possible* with the History of Brazil, America and Africa.

This reveals the force of a conception of history and of curricular organization in our schools that tends to be conservative in the context of the revision and of historiographic and pedagogical criticisms. The group of authors/editors/works that chooses the proposed theme is a minority one, despite the suggestions and directives of PCNs and the institutional curricular proposals of various states and municipalities. This data is also shown in research about the choice, reception and use of school books at this level of teaching and also in relation to other widely used didactic sources, such as the famous *apostilas* (notes) in public and private school networks – also present

in some public networks in the form of *fascículos* (weekly installments).²¹ The *apostilas* used in the state network of São Paulo at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as well as being of bad quality (much below those of the best school books), also represent the extreme centralization of the production of these materials (standardization), excluding the teachers themselves in an important tasks and squandering public funds, since frequently better materials are offered by PNLD – and ignored in this case – without additional costs.

Representative indicators demonstrate that the dominant option/conception among Brazilian teachers is not the bias of ‘thematic axes’, but the ‘chronological’, either the ‘integrated’ or ‘interspersed’ version of the general history of civilizations linked to the history of Brazil, America and Africa. This leads us to ask two questions: how does teacher training occur? and what are the relations between the curricular option and the conditions of work in schools?

Once again this does not involve blaming the teacher or the school book for the choices or for any problems in the teaching of History. The school book is a useful source for school culture once it is not considered the place of *all history*. Submitted to a critical reading, with the interpretative help of the teacher and placed in dialogue with other sources of study – collections in museums and archives, non-educational books, literary and artistic production, for example –, it can contribute in a significant manner to the learning of history. In the 1980s Vesentini warned us that the ‘errors’ of school books were also present in historiography that was considered erudite (Vesentini, 1985). The counterpart of this conclusion is that the conquests of historiography can also be incorporated in good school books, depending on the ‘ingenuity and skill’ of the authors and their users (Silva; Fonseca, 2007). In the classroom they need to be expanded, complemented, criticized and revised. The teacher needs to have critical relationship, never one of submission to the history book, which like all texts, all sources, deserves to be questioned, problematized and widely explored with students.

Debates about the teaching of history in Brazil since the years of struggle against the dictatorship and previous movements and restlessness, contributed to the wide diversification in/of the concepts about this field of thought and work. An example of this can be found in the Annals of the last national meeting of the Perspectives of the Teaching of History, held in the Federal University of Uberlândia in November 2009. The field of the teaching of history as a curricular component, is no longer a bureaucratic creation repeating

previous solutions, including the most refined. The answers to its needs are now formulated in many ways, based on concepts of history, school, teaching and the world of each teacher, author, debater, researcher.

Notwithstanding the directive power and strength of the prescribed curricula, we need to be attentive to the fact that disciplines are not mere spaces for the vulgarization of knowledge, nor for the adaptation and transposition of the sciences in question, but are products of spaces and school cultures and are also inclusive. Teachers have some autonomy in relation to the demands of the state and the means of communication; it can question, criticize, and subvert knowledge and practices in the daily life of the school. Running through all the prescribed curricula and the experiences gained in history classes are various mediations between the subjects (students and teachers), knowledge of different sources (school books, original sources, print sources, texts, films, literature and others), and institutional, bureaucratic and communitarian practices in very differentiated contexts.

In this area the valorization of the role, autonomy, formation and the working conditions of teaching staff is indispensable. It is the teacher who plans courses, chooses the basic working material and the activities to be carried out, guide activities and evaluates the students. If the teacher develops a democratic practice of thinking and working, he or she will share tasks with colleagues who teach other subjects, as well as dialoguing with students, their parents and other sectors of society. However, the articulating role is the teacher's. This is what the teacher is trained, and continues to be professionally trained, and is hired and paid for – to work in the educational process.

For us the concept, that nowadays is very widespread, that the teaching and learning of history, as well as the educational process in general, covers any moment and any place, does not need to be seen as the abandonment of school as a disposable place. To the contrary, the school continues to be a space of enormous importance for widespread sectors of the population who do not have libraries, laboratories or computers at home – the majority of the population... Moreover, the school remains a place for multidisciplinary experience in relation to knowledge, guaranteeing opportunities for the presentation and resolution of doubts, as well as the presentation of the achievements of the students and teachers (Silva; Fonseca, 2007). A large part of schools continue to not reach their potentials. State, teachers, students and the community in general need to work for this limits to be reached and surpassed.

At the same time it is necessary to highlight the weight and importance

of non-school teaching, as represented in different artistic languages (Literature, Theater, Cinema, Music etc.), publications, games and other materials associated with information technology in the formation of a historic culture. It is very easy to discard this universe as mere ideology. Its qualitative and intellectual multiplicity has to be acknowledged (from Luchino Visconti's excellent films to some lamentable sites on the Internet), establishing reflexive dialogues with the content that this universe helps to consolidate as historical conscience. It is a universe that is still rather unexplored by school teaching in a systematic manner and the acknowledge of its weight will help to overcome confusions between these procedures and undesired consequences in relation to the formation of thematic and interpretative references.

So many decades of debate allow an infinite widening of the themes, problems and materials used to teach history. Now we need to guarantee classical resources and subjects to be linked to this liberty: teachers, class rooms, reading rooms and libraries. The challenges and perspectives for the teaching and learning of history converge towards assuring that it is an gratifying experiences for teachers and students in the different school realities. In this universe of the expansion of themes, problems and sources, we should be attentive to the fact that no one can learn nor teach everything, the work of selecting is permanent and in this the figure of the teacher possesses enormous importance (Silva; Fonseca, 2007).

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, researchers, educators, managers and teachers have a clear understanding that a school constitutes a complex space of political disputes, intellectual debates, historic sources and different proposals for knowledge. The school can constitute a democratic space where various possibilities of teaching and learning are present. In this sense the concept of history as a formative discipline points to the construction of new methodological possibilities and practices which potentialize, as indicated by other educational relations in the teaching of history, the process of learning to read in the first years of school. The teacher is not alone with knowledge. He or she relates with students who bring with them knowledge, values, ideas and attitudes. The historical awareness of the student starts to be formed before the education process and is prolonged throughout life, outside school, in different educational spaces by different means.

It is in the relations between teachers, students, knowledge, materials, sources and supports that curricula are actually reconstructed. Therefore, we have to permanently valorize in curricular action the voices of different

subjects, respect for difference, the combating of inequality, and the exercise of citizenship.

Teachers and students make history!

NOTES

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⁴ GOODSON. Ivor F. *Currículo: teoria e história*. Petrópolis (RJ): Vozes, 1995, p.27.

⁵ ARAUJO, J. C. As intencionalidades como diretrizes da práxis pedagógica. In: VEIGA, I. P. A.; CASTANHO, M. E. (Org.). *Pedagogia universitária*. Campinas (SP): Papirus, 2000, p.91-114.

⁶ BRASIL. MEC. *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*. Rio de Janeiro: Quality-mark, 1997.

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¹⁰ BRASIL. MEC. *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais: História e Geografia*. Edição citada.

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¹² BRASIL. MEC. CNE. *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais Gerais para a Educação Básica – Parecer 7/2010*. Brasília: *Diário Oficial da União*, 9 jul. 2010, seção 1, p.10.

¹³ BRASIL. MEC. *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais Gerais para a Educação Básica – Parecer 7/2010*, cit., p.66.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p.69.

¹⁵ FONSECA, Selva G. É possível alfabetizar sem história ou como alfabetizar ensinando história. In: _____. (Org.). *Ensino fundamental: conteúdos, metodologias e práticas*. Campinas (SP): Átomo & Alínea, 2009, p.241-266.

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