

THE STUDENT'S REALITY AS A PEDAGOGICAL TRADITION IN DISPUTE IN SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY (1920-2020)

A REALIDADE DO ALUNO COMO TRADIÇÃO PEDAGÓGICA EM DISPUTA NA GEOGRAFIA ESCOLAR (1920-2020)

LA REALIDAD DEL ESTUDIANTE COMO UNA TRADICIÓN PEDAGÓGICA EN DISPUTA EN LA GEOGRAFÍA ESCOLAR (1920-2020)

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Abstract : This article analyzes, based on didactic materials and selected curricular documents from the last 100 years (1920/2020), the pedagogical dimension of the student's reality as a primary element of geography teaching throughout its history. The student's reality is understood as a discursive element whose meaning is in dispute for different conceptions of teaching Geography. As a result of the article, it was demarcate four important moments of the discipline in Brazil: hegemonization of modern School Geography and the student's reality as part of the renewal of teaching; dimension of the real in the temporality of Social Studies; critical renewal based on theories of learning and the notion of totality for the apprehension of the real; the analysis of geographic principles in the context of the BNCC and reality according to the spatiality of the phenomenon. Thus, it is concluded that the sense of student's reality moves through the political and epistemological moments of School Geography.

Keywords : geography teaching, signifier, hegemony-pedagogy relationship, epistemology of learning.

Resumo : O artigo analisa, a partir de materiais didáticos e documentos curriculares selecionados dos últimos 100 anos (1920/2020), a dimensão pedagógica da realidade do aluno como elemento primaz do ensino de geografia ao longo de sua história. Entendemos a realidade do aluno como um discurso cujo sentido está em disputa por diferentes concepções de ensino de Geografia. Como resultado do artigo, demarcamos quatro momentos da disciplina no Brasil: hegemonização da geografia escolar moderna e a realidade do aluno como parte da renovação do ensino; dimensão do real na temporalidade dos estudos sociais; renovação crítica baseada nas teorias da aprendizagem e noção de totalidade para a apreensão do real; análise de princípios geográficos no contexto da BNCC e a realidade em função da espacialidade do fenômeno. Assim, concluímos que o sentido de realidade do aluno transita pelos momentos políticos e epistemológicos da geografia escolar.

Palavras-chave : ensino de geografia, significante, relação hegemonia-pedagogia, epistemologia da aprendizagem.

Resumen : El artículo analiza, a partir de materiales didáticos y documentos curriculares seleccionados de los últimos 100 años (1920/2020), la dimensión pedagógica de la realidad del estudiante como elemento primario en la enseñanza de la geografía a lo largo de su historia. Entendemos la realidad del estudiante como un discurso cuyo significado está en disputa por diferentes concepciones de la enseñanza de la Geografía. Como consecuencia, demarcamos cuatro momentos destacados de la disciplina en el Brasil: la hegemonización de la Geografía Escolar moderna y la realidad del estudiante como parte de la renovación de la enseñanza; la dimensión de lo real en la temporalidad de los estudios sociales; la renovación crítica basada en las teorías del aprendizaje y la noción de totalidad para la aprehensión de lo real; el análisis de los principios geográficos en el contexto de la BNCC y la realidad según la espacialidad del fenómeno. Así, argumentamos que el sentido de la realidad del estudiante transita por los momentos políticos y epistemológicos de la Geografía Escolar.

Palabras clave : enseñanza de la geografía, significante, relación hegemonía-pedagogía, epistemología del aprendizaje.

INTRODUCTION

This article analyzes the pedagogical dimension of student reality as a primary element in the teaching of geography throughout its history. We start from the theoretical-methodological assumptions of Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory to discuss student reality as a 'floating signifier' throughout the history of school geography. With this, we mean that the sense of 'student reality' has never been closed aprioristically, being constantly the target of disputes among different academic and political groups acting in different academic, theoretical and pedagogical conceptions for geography teaching.

According to Viñao (2012), it is common, when addressing the history of school subjects, to turn to research on schoolbooks, since one field helps understand the other. Thus, we listed as empirical material for analysis some of the main textbooks and reference works that deal with the teaching of geography in different historical moments for this subject throughout the 20th century and in the first two decades of the 21st. We also selected some curricular documents, as we identified a certain attempt by different academic and political groups to suture such reference and didactic works to these curricular documents, seeking to hegemonically fix a discursive sense for this school knowledge through normative acts. We took as an initial assumption of this text the notion that 'student reality' takes on different guises over time – or, to stick to the Laclauian approach, is filled with specific meanings depending on the political groups and on the demands present in the field of disputes that are internal to school geography – to fix different curricular senses. This set of flotations of meanings, whose sense is suspended and open to multifaceted equivalence relations, Laclau (2013) calls 'floating signifiers'. Hence the perspective adopted here, when we proposed to deal with student reality in its different political-pedagogical conceptions throughout the historiography of this subject.

The text is organized into four moments. The first will be dedicated to understanding how the idea of 'student reality' is one of the discursive practices of the movement for the renewal of geography teaching in the first decades of the 20th century. To this end, we will develop an overview of this historical moment of the subject, in which, according to Vlach (1988), it was the first time that school geography was thought of from a method based on pedagogical principles that redefined the role of the teacher and the student within the teaching-learning process. Along these ways, the first part of this article will be dedicated, then, to understanding how the signifier 'student reality' is filled by the didactic-pedagogical senses of modern school geography, especially considering the

teaching methodologies based on ‘concentric circles’¹ and on the ‘deductive-inductive method’ for the construction of school geographic knowledge.

The second moment of this text will be dedicated to the apprehensions of ‘student reality’ in the light of the 1970s and 1980s, when, in the 1971 LDB, social studies were hegemonized in the curriculum, replacing geography and history, and, as a school subject, turned to the ‘study of the community’ as a mediating process for learning about social issues. We will show that there is a temporality of social studies for the formation of a specific sense for student reality at that time, based on a demand of a pedagogical nature.

Moving on to the third moment in the text, we will focus on the influence of learning theories for the reconfigurations of the idea of student reality in geography teaching within the context of the Brazilian redemocratization. Thus, we will present how the signifier ‘student reality’ is filled by a temporality characterized by the metonymy ‘marriage’ between the critical renewal of geography in the late 1980s and the Piagetian, Vygotskian and ordinary theories, as presented by Straforini (2004).

Finally, we will end this article with an overview of the signifier ‘student reality’ built by the *Common National Curricular Base [Base Nacional Comum Curricular]* (Brasil, 2016), in which, in our view, ‘geographic principles’ are elements of geographic tradition that are understood as mediators of the construction of school knowledge in geography. At this point in the text, we will defend that the very notion of reality is transformed but, at the same time, is capable of incorporating senses constructed at other moments in the trajectory of school geography.

STUDENT REALITY FOR MODERN SCHOOL GEOGRAPHY

The notion of reality and its different apprehensions in the field of scientific and school knowledge configure different approaches and teaching-learning relationships. Authors such as Silva (2003) highlight the institutional role of the school in face of the demands and issues posed by the sociocultural reality. In this context, geography teaching is historically guided by the student’s reality, which is mediated by the spatial dimension, almost always discussed in the light of the analysis categories of the geographic science (space, landscape, territory, region and place).

¹ In this text, ‘concentric circles’ are understood as the teaching-learning methodology in which the relationships between phenomena are mediated by the reality dimension in which “[...] one starts from the self, to the family, to the school, to the neighborhood, to the municipality, to the State, to Brazil and, finally, to the world. The teacher defines, in each grade, what will be taught, following the simple-to-complex and the local-to-global logic” (Kuhn, Callai, & Toso, 2019, p. 472).

The qualitative aspects that support student reality as a pedagogical tradition of school geography can be verified in their different temporalities, in such a way that their main manifestations can be initially identified from the moment when a pedagogical method guiding this school subject is clearly defined. In Brazil, this moment took place in the context of the first three decades of the 20th century, when the foundations of classical school geography of a Jesuit tradition began to be questioned, basically from four main fronts: (1) the task of geography as a school subject linked to the republican, national-patriotic – and, above all, Vargas-ruled – project of territorial education; (2) the New School principles and the repositioning of the student's role in the teaching-learning processes, in such a way that 'experience' and 'practice' are signifiers of the New School that reconfigure the notion of reality for modern geography teaching; (3) the specific senses of school geography defended by authors politically articulated around the modernization of its teaching; and (4) the institutionalization process of academic geography in Brazil.

The idea of student reality is, in this movement, a discursive practice that articulates these different discourses acting on the formulation of the modern orientation of school geography, hegemonizing a reforming sense of its teaching from the scalar debate that is mediated, on the one hand, by the 'concentric circles' as a pedagogical strategy, and on the other hand, by the 'inductive-deductive method' as a methodological conception of geography as a science. In *Methodology of Geographic Education [Metodologia do ensino geográfico]* (1925), the main work that announces the modernizing principles of school geography in this particular historical context, Delgado de Carvalho defends the concentric circles for the distribution of geographic content over the years of the school curriculum, as well as an active methodology for the teacher to be able to develop a geographic teaching that truly acts towards the knowledge of the 'human factor' and its complexities. In the author's words,

The method of teaching through concentric circles, representing successive degrees of strength and complexity, broadening the horizon little by little to always move from the known to the unknown, this modern method seems to have definitely taken root in the country's most advanced schools.

It applies or adapts more or less to all subjects; it serves the teaching of history as well as that of hygiene and of the natural sciences. For the teaching of geography, it offers special advantages, especially when in connection with the teaching of history.

In geography, the new system spares the effort of intelligence and imagination that, right from the start of the study, would be imposed on the child for them to understand the globe and the notions of cosmography, even primary ones. Instead, one now seeks, among all the surrounding familiar objects, the elements that form geography.

But this last characteristic, the passage from that which is familiar to that which is less known, and then to that which is unknown, is not the main point of the new geographic teaching. The axis of all this teaching, it can be said, is the human factor, [...] it is to make man the main point of interest in any geographic study. The purpose of this teaching is the elementary, clearer and more permanent establishment of the relationships between earth and man.

Therefore, the criterion that has been adopted among us today in the teaching of primary geography is dual: 'the gradual extension of geographic knowledge from the nearest and most familiar points to the farthest, complex ones, and the need to rotate all explanations and descriptions around the human factor, from the isolated man to the man in society, in the nation and in different continents' (Carvalho, 1925, p. 47-48, our emphasis).

Beyond the defense of concentric circles – in which the teaching of geography begins in the first years of schooling, from that which is immediate, real, and which is closest to the student, such as their house, their street, their neighborhood, to gradually progress to other larger scales, such as State, region, country, continent and world –, as part of the pedagogical method formulated for a geography teaching in a modern conception, the curriculum instituted by the Francisco Campos reform (1931)² is also a mark of the discursive practice that characterizes a specific sense for the signifier 'student reality'.

"In Geography teaching, observations and impressions collected by students should always be taken advantage of". It is convenient, in the first two grades, to apply the intuitive method predominantly, through 'demonstrations and experiences [...] Teaching should be, as much as possible, carried out by means of an experience with nature', since, in this way, it makes the capacity for observation more refined and provides knowledge the solidity that only 'contact with the objective reality can give' (Decree-Law No 18.890, 1931, p. 12,411, our emphasis).

It seems to us very significant that the excerpt above from an official state document directly expresses the sense of school geography defended by Delgado de Carvalho, considered one of the main intellectuals of the 1930s and member of the newly created National Council of Education in 1931, which, according to Guilherme and Santos (2019, p. 18), had the role "[...] of specializing government actions to educational matters, that is, that studies referring to education could be inspected by education experts". In this sense, we defend that this juxtaposition of

² For Soares (2017, p. 224-229), the 1931 Francisco Campos reform is one of the first efforts, in republican times, to reorganize school curricula from the scientific communities operating inside and outside the school tradition. Referring to what he calls "[...] crisis of the institutional program of Colégio Pedro II [...]" as of said reform, the author shows the process of "[...] loss of its character as a standard institution for Brazilian secondary education". The scientific discourse, the New School movement and the political demands of the Vargas context begin, then, to play a relevant role in reformulating school programs.

senses of school geography was not a mere coincidence but reveals movements and strategies to fix a hegemonic sense of geography defended by Delgado de Carvalho, who, in his capacity as advisor to the National Council of Education, made this his platform to defend what he deemed urgent as the teaching of a modern geography.

According to Zanatta (2013), these principles are some of the constituent bases of the debate around John Dewey's educational philosophy, which has its main reverberations in Brazil from the 1920s onwards, and whose apex was reached with the *Manifesto of the New School pioneers* [*Manifesto dos pioneiros da Escola Nova*] (1932). According to Cunha (2012), said manifesto was configured as a milestone in an educational renewal project written by Fernando de Azevedo and signed by 25 other thinkers at the time. For the New School advocates who signed this manifesto, the educational dimension of reality mediated by experience should be the key point of the educational process. According to this line of thought, the student's reality is educationally produced by situations in which the scientific method organizes, together with the didactic-pedagogical dimension, practical experiences or activities based on the concrete, on the immediate. Also, according to the author (Zanatta, 2013, p. 53), "Dewey proposes that the study of Geography should privilege the relationship between man and the natural environment, having the local scale as a starting point to expand the limits of experience [...]", thus delimiting a specific apprehension of reality that will define the tasks of geographic teaching mediated by a regional approach.

Although the objective of this text is not to deepen the debate on interpretive currents around Dewey's thought, like Angerami (2017), we believe that, in the teaching of geography, the pedagogical and philosophical currents addressed by the author intersect in the period marked by the Brazilian New School movement, since, epistemologically, geography as a field of knowledge that sought to establish itself among scientific sorts of knowledge found in regional geography the possibility of operating, as well, Dewey's sense of experience of the real world in a holistic manner, in which society and nature were not autonomous 'entities' but inextricably related or connected. Geographically, the region would then be a synthesis of Dewey's philosophy of knowledge.

In this sense, an epistemological particularity of Brazilian school geography is revealed, since, according to the perspective of the modern orientation of geographic teaching, the apprehension of that which is real is built from the theoretical crossing between 'region' as a method arising from geographic tradition and the Deweyan educational philosophy. It can be seen, therefore, that even before the institutionalization process of academic geography in Brazil, school geography already shows a dynamics of knowledge circulation through different theoretical traditions that characterize, in the passage from the 19th to the 20th century, changes that occurred, on the one hand, within the field of scientific knowledge of geography and, on the other hand, in the conceptions of education, with a strong New School influence (Giroto, 2017).

Thus, it is by means of the 'pedagogical' (more precisely, of the New School discourse) that Brazilian geographers formulate the first associations between the regional approach (as a geographic principle and method) and lived experience (as a mediating principle of reality for knowledge construction in the school). This was the juxtaposition defended by (Carlos) Delgado de Carvalho for a modern teaching-learning perspective of geography that conceives the signifier 'reality' in accordance with positivist principles.

This method consisted of 'describing the studied reality in an objective, empirically proven, rationally accurate way', so as to preclude doubts and contradictions. To this end, 'induction, analysis and synthesis' were crucial elements as, 'when studying reality as a whole, this whole would be divided into parts, describing its main characteristics; after thorough observation, the relations that each part had with the other would be established, and these various parts would be added to provide the notion of the systematized whole'. In brief words, this is the scientific method, of a 'positivist-functional foundation', that Brazilian geographers identified as the only one capable of solving the problems of science and of the Brazilian society (Ferraz, 1994, p. 55-56, our emphasis).

School geography is, as we have seen, part of the controversies of the very history of scientific geography in Brazil, coming to be constituted as one of the intellectual bases for supporting the regional method developed here a few years later by academic geographers, as of the second half of the 1930s

In the field of formulations of the modern geography orientation, it is worth noting as well that, according to Ferraz (1994), the concentric circles, as a teaching methodology that mediates the regional approach, are an important part of the desire of geography intellectuals at that given historical moment: the scientificization of geographic knowledge. Throughout the process of the renewal of its teaching in accordance with modern principles, as well as during the very institutionalization of its academic dimension, geography sought, in Brazil, to establish itself as scientific knowledge and join the field of the natural sciences, in such a way that the construction of its pedagogical methods involved the apprehension of reality, in which rationalism and positivist empiricism are raised as criteria of scientificity and truth. It can be seen, then, that the methodology of the concentric circles is an articulatory practice whose nodal point is the systematization of geography as a science. It is a demand of a scientific nature that is internal to the transformation of this knowledge into a subject for both the school and the academia.

STUDENT REALITY FOR THE TEMPORALITY OF SOCIAL STUDIES

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the temporality of the modern orientation of school geography that characterized the Vargas Era is replaced by the hegemonization of the disciplinary field of social studies for the schooling stage between the fifth and eighth grades of the then elementary school, which came to replace history and geography school programs. First, about this school subject specifically, Straforini (2018) draws attention, in his research on the teaching of geography in the early years, to anachronistic readings concerning social studies, since, in geographers' texts, it is very common to associate this school subject exclusively to the military dictatorship period in Brazil, such as the creation of the LDB in 1971, completely disregarding that this subject already occurred as a curricular practice in the early years, in accordance with the interdisciplinary argument and New School foundations.

That said, it is also noteworthy that, in terms of the final grades of elementary school, social studies were “[...] enacted during the military dictatorship from Law No. 5.692/71 and constituted, alongside Moral and Civic Education, the foundations of historical studies, mixed with Geography themes centered on the concentric circles” (Brasil, 1997, p. 23). For Pontuschka, Paganelli and Cacete (2009, p. 63), “[...] the planning of Social Studies curricular activities was based on the following model: core area, concentric circles, and the study of the community”. In this way, the temporality of social studies in the history of school geography already reveals its first contours, since the signifier ‘reality’ mediated by the study of the community and by a scalar reading based on the concentric circles is, even today, present in the school geographic discourse.

The organization of the Social Studies curricular proposals into concentric circles assumed that studies on society should be linked to the student's psychological development stages and should therefore go from the concrete to the abstract in successive stages. Thus began the study of the closest, the community or the neighborhood, successively going to the most distant, the municipality, the state, the country, the world. Hierarchically ordered content should respect the student's age group, so the history of the world should not be taught in primary school for being considered distant and abstract (Brasil, 1997, p. 23).

For this disciplinary conception in particular, the methodology of the concentric circles is intended for another main objective: the pedagogization of social knowledge in the light of the rationalist-empiricist scientific method (Kuhn et al., 2019), so that the scientific knowledge of society and its systematization principles adapt to the student's psychological development.

The social sciences [...] as special subjects, are products of thought, research, experience, discovery. They result from scientific, disinterested and elevated studies that contribute to human progress. Social studies have identical fields, as they deal with human relations and comprise the same subjects. 'But their objective is not investigation itself, but teaching, vulgarization. Their purpose is not to advance Science, but to educate'. Without being a normative science, the Social Sciences guide social studies and lead them to practical, instructive and useful conclusions (Carvalho, 1957, p. 12, our emphasis).

It can be observed, then, that the nodal demand is, quintessentially, pedagogical in nature and significantly different from what we have seen so far, since, as we have noticed, the concentric circles meant for curriculum reformers in the first decades of the 20th century part of the formulation of the teaching method that gave school geography a scientific as well as a pedagogical character. In the temporality of social studies, the scientific knowledge of geography is already in a full process of consolidation and reformulation, mainly due to the theoretical-methodological advent of the theoretical-quantitative current (New Geography).

It is at this point of differentiation that, in our view, resides the temporality of social studies and their permanency in the school discourse of geography until the present day. Establishing itself as a pedagogical demand, the methodology of the concentric circles is taken as a mediator of reality for the teaching of social, historical and spatial themes. In our view, this was the moment when academic geography saw itself detached from its school tradition, and the signifier 'student reality' starts to be fixed by a prominently pedagogical hegemonism. Not by chance, it is possible to state that, notwithstanding a few exceptions and alternative curricular proposals, primary geography education (current initial years) is still customarily marked by this characteristic.

Roughly speaking, even with some permanencies, the hegemonism of this teaching conception will last until the 1980s, when the redemocratization process provided, on the one hand, the return of the history and geography subjects, and, on the other hand, the renewal of academic geography, founded on critical-Marxist assumptions. From this moment, the learning theories also begin to play a fundamental role in reconfiguring the idea of student reality in the school geography field. This will be the third moment of this article, addressed below.

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES: CRITICAL RENEWAL, COGNITIVIST THEORIES, AND NEW WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING REALITY IN GEOGRAPHY TEACHING

Looking at the relationship between critical geography and the school dimension is dear to us due to a new construction around the signifier 'student reality'. From this perspective, reality is constantly mobilized as being *sine qua non*

for social transformation actions, whether in the academic or school context. It is through the knowledge of that which is real, through the unveiling of reality, that it becomes possible to imagine other possibilities of society. Earlier, we stated that student reality is predominantly mobilized under the pedagogical bias. Now, however, what happens is a more marked articulation between the scientific and pedagogical dimensions, in order to construct new senses of reality in relation to geographic purposes.

According to Souza (2011), the Marxist dialectical geography emerged in the 1970s in Europe and the United States and opposed the geography of that time. The new trend sought to demarcate geography as a social science and denounced an alleged neutrality of thought, pointing out the ideological relations present in the geography developed at that time, signified as 'Traditional'. In contrast to quantitative geography (New Geography), this current was called new geography, or even critical geography, and was intensely articulated with the notion of social transformation and in interlocution with economists, sociologists and historians. Despite its epistemological heterogeneity, its objective was aligned with the disagreement regarding socio-spatial injustices, the assumption of a political content in the scientific discourse, and the belief that geography could be seen as a form of fight (Campos, 2012). Traditional geography and quantitative geography were then re-signified by critical geographers as trends that went against the discourse of renewal, constituting themselves as the enemy that should be fought to take the hegemonic place they had in Brazilian academic geography.

In this way, the equivalence between the particularisms that integrated the new current of critical geography was asserted through the dissatisfaction with the hegemonic geography up to that moment. For Cavalcanti (2016), there was a predominance of Marxist trends, but the recognition of plurality was more securely established in the 1990s. In the school context, just as in the academic sphere, there was no unit of critical trend, with the prevalence of the denouncing character of the ways in which teaching was developing up until then, even though concerns such as those were already present in school geography even before the apex of the renewal movement. In this sense, "[...] the reality experienced by students is a way to avoid the fragmentation of the totality lived, so common in school practice, which is characterized by neglecting the social division of work and space" (Campos, 2012, p. 922). In this way, the articulation between student reality and the notion of totality is what obstructs a fragmented education detached from the student's reality, since the totality resulting from the labor-capital conflict takes place and manifests in the concreteness of reality. For Vesentini (2004), despite its ties, school geography does not purely transpose academic discussions and, in critical school geography, considering the reality of students and the typical problems of their place and time is what promotes their autonomy, their role as active citizens, their creativity and criticality so that they can "[...] question reality" (Vesentini, 2004, p. 330).

Amid the consequences of the redemocratization process after the Military Dictatorship in the Brazilian scenario, States and municipalities built their curricular proposals. In 1988, in the State of São Paulo, the curricular proposal created by the Coordination of Studies and Pedagogical Norms [*Coordenadoria de Estudos e Normas Pedagógicas*] (CENP) was published. In geography, the proposal counted on a team of teachers that aimed to carry out a methodological reorientation based on “[...] founding principles of the subject, an initiative known at the time as Critical Geography” (Pontuschka et al., 2009, p. 69). Also according to Pontuschka et al. (2009, p. 73), CENP’s proposal

[...] sought to develop in the student the ability to observe, analyze, interpret and critically think about reality, with a view to its transformation. Reality was conceived as a totality that should involve society and nature. Geography would be responsible for the understanding of the geographic space produced by society, its inequalities and contradictions, the relations of production, and society’s appropriation of nature (São Paulo, 1988, p. 19).

The document is a relevant expression of this moment in which the ideals of renewal of geography found contiguity in the redemocratization process in Brazil and pointed to an emphasis on the education of citizens and their capacity for social transformation from a critical view of reality in relation to its social contradictions.

In the context of critical renewal, reality evokes the notion of totality as a way to antagonize a fragmented perspective of teaching associated with traditional geography and traditional teaching. The view of reality as a social product resulting from processes that respond to a totality articulates with the notion of ‘critical citizens’, that is, an equivalence relationship is created among these aspects, in such a way that it is by knowing reality as a totality that students can achieve autonomy and constitute themselves as full citizens. The traditional model is then seen as decontextualizing in relation to the school environment and aimed only at academic knowledge in teacher training, disregarding a pedagogical dimension.

Oliveira (1994) argues that, in the dialectical educational process, knowledge is built on the basis of the socialization of individuals, that is, through the understanding of their experienced reality. It is in this way that both deepen their knowledge of reality as a prerequisite for its transformation. Likewise, according to Callai (1998), geography is a social science and, as such, should not be detached from reality.

This is the challenge we have: to make geography an interesting subject that ‘has to do with life and not just with data and information that seem far from reality’, and by which it is possible to understand the space built by society as a result of the interconnection between the natural space, with all its rules and laws, and the space constantly transformed by man. To go beyond

descriptive and distant classes, the teacher is required “to make an effort in the sense of bringing to the student’s reality that which is being studied” (Callai, 1998, p. 34, our emphasis).

From this perspective, the signifiers ‘traditional-fragmented-encyclopedic’ compose the same discursive construction as the signifier ‘distant’ in the scalar debate of the concentric circles. In the same way, the student’s reality is placed in equivalence to the signifier ‘life’ and is operated as a condition for geography to become ‘close’ and ‘interesting’. The guarantee for practice not to take place in a descriptive and encyclopedic manner lies in the mobilization of reality, which gives social sense to geography and builds a relationship with the lives of students, as, from the perspective of totality, it articulates indissociable relationships and connections between the distant and the near, or between the local and the global (Santos, 1994).

One of the most exponential approaches towards the creation of alternatives to empiricist teaching concerns those that see in place a power for the teaching of geography from the scalar articulation with the global. This approach starts from a dialectical understanding, so it analyzes “[...] reality in its multi-scalar nature and the totality of phenomena as resulting from the contradictory relationship between the whole and the part” (Cavalcanti, 2011, p. 194). In this sense, the notion of concentric circles began to be questioned. From Alderoqui (2006), Souza (2011) tensions the consideration of that which is close as a spatiality that is simple and easy to understand, so the students’ difficulty in mobilizing these scales is not in the proximity or distance of the phenomena, but in how the complex relationships between these spheres are gradually built by teachers.

Similarly, Straforini (2004) states that the concentric circles determine the explanations about places to themselves and that the central point of the pedagogical decision is not in starting the geographic study by the whole or by the part, but in how these dimensions are understood, given that the child’s living place (the concrete reality) is in the global, and vice versa. It is argued that the assumptions of critical geography do not dialogue with traditional education, as critical geography calls for action, so that the student acts on the object of knowledge and builds it, thus defending a ‘marriage’ between critical geography and the cognitivist theories that understand students as active individuals in the teaching-learning process.

Thus, this article will focus on Jean Piaget’s constructivism and Lev Vygotsky’s socio-historical theory, as they are two branches profusely explored in the teaching of geography. Both perspectives consider that the construction of knowledge is constituted actively and not passively, so knowledge is conceived as a process that is built by individuals. The interaction of individuals with the environment is paramount for their development and learning. For Piaget, this

construction – learning – is only possible from a prior development of psychic structures necessary for learning; for Vygotsky, on the other hand, it is precisely the learning processes that will promote the development of individuals.

According to Castellar (2005), psychogenetics contributes with the relevance it gives to the adaptive functions of individuals in their interaction with the environment, which happens from assimilation and accommodation schemes as poles of balancing processes. In evaluative learning processes, the individual is evaluated on the basis of the degree of scientific knowledge that has been acquired and understood, not by the load of accumulated information. From this perspective, if the objective is to develop the concept of place, for instance, the child needs to draw their living place and be led to reflect on the concepts in a relationship between experience – common sense sphere – and scientific knowledge through reasoning. For the author, school cartography is then conceived as a methodological operation for the construction of school geographic knowledge. Thus, by means of reversibility, proportionality, distancing, proximity, among other notions, the child reaches increasingly elaborate levels of knowledge.

It is up to the teacher to promote the dialectic between scientific knowledge and the student's everyday knowledge that, from their role as mediator, can promote a reflection on “[...] the reality experienced by the student, respecting their life story and helping them understand their role in society: that of a citizen” (Castellar, 2005, p. 222).

Vygotsky's socio-historical psychology was developed at the beginning of the 20th century, in Belarus, with a marked influence of Marxist analyses, and comprises learning and psychic development processes as a historical and social construction throughout the lives of individuals. Thus, the relationship among the psychological, social, cultural and material spheres is considered in the learning and development of individuals. The role of the school would be to create conditions for the development of formal thinking from the student's zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Cavalcanti, 2005), which is the relationship between the child's real development, that is, what they can do by themselves, and their potential development, what they can develop through the mediation of someone more experienced in that matter. It is possible to see in Vygotsky theoretical constructions similar to those developed by critical geography with regard to the notion of social transformation by means of knowledge and interaction with reality in a dialectical process – the individual interferes in reality, and the latter, in the individual's formation. It is about thinking about reality, the student's place of experience, as a mobilizer of the activity. According to Cavalcanti (2005), it is in this process that ordinary and scientific concepts are gradually related, making the analyses that students may carry out about their lived space or, geographically, their living place, more complex. According to the abovementioned author, it is by questioning everyday geography (lived space) with scientific geography (conceived

space) that possibilities to re-elaborate and expand the understanding of that which is lived are created, that is, through the internalization of that which is conceived.

Thus, the 'lived' dimension finds contiguity in the notion of student reality, and the geographic place is sutured to the reality dimension, which means considering the students' prior knowledge and their experiences in mobilizing the lived space (place) as a source of geographic knowledge during all stages of the teaching-learning process. In light of the foregoing, we have that reality is conceived as necessary in the teaching and learning process, as it is through the interaction of the individual with reality – metaphorically constituted as the student's place of experience – that the construction of knowledge takes place, whether from a Piagetian or Vygotskian perspective. It is in the knowledge of living in the place that lies the everyday concept knowledge for Piaget, and spontaneous knowledge for Vygotsky, which will dialectically relate to the new knowledge built from scientific concepts.

About the teaching of the analytical category 'place', Gonçalves (2006) stresses the need to discuss its scalar dimension that, oftentimes, associates said teaching with studies that take place on site in connection with the dimension of the lived space, with more than one way to think of it in geography. For phenomenology, place does not have a defined scale, as it depends on the individuals' experiences. For Milton Santos's analysis, in its turn, place and region can be synonymous, given that the scale is established through the area in which the solidary happening occurs, which, related to time, makes the scale no longer a geometric, but a geographic category. For Ana Clara Torres Ribeiro, the site is understood as the target of actions thought of in other scales, while the place encompasses the consequences of these actions and projects of existing. Thus, the site can be conceived as a space taken in isolation, and the place, in its turn, is established when a social value is added to that site; the place only exists, therefore, in relation to society and not as a Euclidean coordinate system (Gonçalves, 2006).

From the above, we thus saw how the signifier 'student reality' was gradually signified from the movements of geography renewal, as well as with the articulation with educational dimensions, such as learning theories. In the second decade of the 2000s, the BNCC (2017) was launched, addressing significations about school geographic knowledge.

GEOGRAPHIC PRINCIPLES AND SPATIALITY AS MEDIATORS OF STUDENT REALITY IN THE BNCC

The demand for a *National Common Curricular Base* (Brasil, 2017) was homologated by the Law on National Education Guidelines and Framework (Law No 9.394..., 1996), when a single system for Basic Education was indicated. The

document, which claims to institute itself as a base and not as a curriculum, defines competences, thematic units, objects of knowledge, and skills for all segments of basic education. Geography is worked on as a curricular component in elementary school and, in high school, it integrates the area of knowledge of human sciences together with history, sociology and philosophy. The BNCC publication resumes discussions involving the study of spatiality as the objective of school geography. Geographic reasoning is conceived as the main contribution of geography to basic education by promoting the development of spatiality through geographic principles, concepts³ and methodologies.

What the document brings again, in the section dedicated to geography in its textual surface, is the highlight to and systematization of geographic principles. Thus, by means of the principles of location, distribution, analogy, order, differentiation, extension and connection, geographic reasoning is developed with the objective of “[...] understanding ‘fundamental aspects of reality’: location and distribution of facts and phenomena on the earth’s surface, territorial planning, the connections between natural-physical components and anthropic actions” (Brasil, 2017, p. 311, our emphasis). Through this excerpt, the document defines what it considers mandatory in the development of school geography in its contribution to the understanding of reality through spatial thinking. In this sense, it privileges where, how and why phenomena are distributed on the earth’s surface, how they are distributed, how the territory is organized, and the relationships between human actions and natural-physical elements.

The focus is, therefore, on spatiality as a way of interpreting a world in constant transformation and on the relationships between society and nature. To achieve this intent, it suggests the formulation of concepts for ‘factual knowledge’ to be mastered, and citizenship to be practiced (Brasil, 2017). In this sense, it states that learning geography through its concepts drives the use of geographic reasoning to “[...] think and solve problems generated in ‘everyday life’” (Brasil, 2017, p. 314, our emphasis), which are conditions for the development of the general competences announced in the BNCC. We understand that, as in other moments in this article, in this document the term ‘everyday life’ is sutured with student reality. In this way, the BNCC takes geographic reasoning as a way of thinking spatially through geographic principles, methodologies and concepts that can provide support for students to be more autonomous and active in their reality (everyday life), which would make them citizens.

It is established that the teaching of geography must go beyond the description of facts and information, extrapolating the immediate context of the individuals through the mastery of concepts and generalizations, so that “[...] the

³ The main concepts brought by the document are space, more broadly, landscape, place, region, territory and nature as more ‘operational’ concepts (Brasil, 2017).

latter allow new ways of seeing the world and to understand, broadly and critically, the multiple relations that shape reality, in accordance with the learning of the knowledge of the geographic science” (Brasil, 2017, p. 313). The relationship between citizenship and everyday life – as a reality – is also present in other excerpts of the document.

In all these units⁴, there is highlight to aspects related to the exercise of citizenship and to the application of Geography knowledge in the face of situations and mundane problems, such as: establishing rules for coexistence at school and in the community; discussing proposals for the expansion of public spaces; and proposing actions to intervene in reality, all aimed at improving the collectivity and the common good (Brasil, 2017, p. 316).

Reality, in this way, presents senses of living space, place and destiny of students' interventions. In the Initial Years, it is seen as an instance that must be recognized and compared in relation to different places. In the Final Years, from the knowledge of social inequalities, students are expected to take responsibility for “[...] transforming the current reality” (Brasil, 2017, p. 316), based on democratic, solidary and fair principles, and spatially located actions. We can therefore assume that, in the BNCC, student reality finds equivalence in the notion of living spaces and everyday life. It is necessary, therefore, that students compare, understand and analyze their reality so that they are able, in the exercise of their citizenship, to transform it based on principles of democracy and justice, in addition to the geographic principles previously defined. School geography, from this perspective, offers possibilities for interpreting reality through the study of the spatiality of phenomena and helps students solve the problems of everyday life based on a way of thinking geographically about reality; based, therefore, on a geographic reasoning.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

This text aims to develop the argument that student reality is a floating signifier disputed by different political groups and teaching-learning conceptions that cross the history of school geography. Initially, we set the debate around the reality of the student conceived by the modern orientation of school geography, in the context of the first three decades of the 20th century. We emphasized that the signifier ‘reality’ is filled, at this first moment, by a rationalist-empiricist sense, through the primacy of the positivist scientific method and the methodology of the

⁴ All objects of knowledge and skills in the field of geography are divided into five thematic units: the individual and their place in the world; world of labor, forms of representation and spatial thinking; nature, environments and quality of life, and connections and scales.

concentric circles, which, in their turn, align with a demand for the scientificization of geographic knowledge in Brazil. This context also signals the influence of school tradition on the institutionalization process of academic geography in Brazil, when we argue that the regional method is, in the context of Brazilian geography, systematized together with the New School pedagogical discourse.

The second part of the article was dedicated to the temporality of social studies for the construction of the idea of student reality. We saw that, in a way, the concentric circles as a teaching methodology and the principles of the rationalist-empiricist method remain, but that the hegemonizing demand is substantially different from that foreseen by the modernizing reformists of geographic teaching, since, in our understanding, the signifier 'student reality' starts to be fixed by a prominently pedagogical hegemonism, which marks the permanencies of the temporality of social studies in geographic education up to contemporaneity.

In the third part, we discussed the renewal movements of the 1980s in geography, highlighting the constructions around the need to analyze reality in its contradictions to the detriment of an alleged neutrality assigned to geographic knowledge. This movement presented as its nodal point the criticism of a geography that was not committed to social issues. In the school context, students' criticality is built when they learn to question reality, that is, when they become active and autonomous enough to analyze socio-spatial structures and their arrangements. Their socialization takes place through the understanding of their lived reality, and it is precisely on this attitude that their citizenship is built. In this sense, totality, when analyzed dialectically, demarcates the contradictory relationship between the whole and the part and opposes the model of concentric circles adopted in previous moments. It is based on the notion of totality that it becomes possible to understand reality as a whole, denying socio-spatial fragmentation.

Cognitivist theories share with critical geography the look towards reality, conceiving it as substantial in the teaching-learning process due to the active interactions of individuals with their environment. In general, at this moment, the student's reality is signified as a starting point and an arrival point in the teaching-learning process, so students can transform it by being conceived as socially active individuals.

Finally, in the fourth moment, we turned to the publication of the BNCC, which organizes a way of thinking spatially through geographic reasoning. Student reality, equally signified as a living and an everyday-life space, starts to be interpreted spatially from geographic principles that, though already discussed by authors in geography, gain in the document a systematization with a pedagogical bias in a curricular base of national reach.

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