High school and history teaching in Brazil: historical overview and current guidelines

Ensino médio e ensino de história no Brasil: visão geral histórica e diretrizes atuais

Enseñanza secundaria e historia en Brasil: panorama histórico y pautas actuales

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ABSTRACT

This bibliographic research is part of an effort to understand High School education in our country through the analysis of the National Guidelines and Curricular Parameters, with theoretical support from the discussions raised by the consulted bibliography, highlighting especially Décio Gatti Junior, Itamar Freitas, and Maria Inês Sucupira Stamatto. The expansion of this segment of education throughout Brazil shows the need to understand the nature and the various changes it underwent during the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the role of the history discipline and its current configuration in the Guidelines and Curricular Parameters. It is observed, through research in articles and other academic texts, that High School education has had different conceptions, ranging from preparation for university courses to technical vocational training for the job market, and this ambiguity permeates the legislation relevant to it. So, this article intends to bring some statements about High School in a changing world.
Keywords: education, high school, history teaching, curriculum parameters and guidelines.

RESUMO
Esta pesquisa bibliográfica faz parte de um esforço para entender o ensino médio em nosso país através da análise das Diretrizes Nacionais e Parâmetros Curriculares, com apoio teórico das discussões levantadas pela bibliografia consultada, destacando especialmente Décio Gatti Junior, Itamar Freitas e Maria Inês Sucupira Stamatto. A expansão desse segmento da educação em todo o Brasil mostra a necessidade de compreender a natureza e as diversas mudanças por que passou nos séculos 19 e 20, bem como o papel da disciplina de história e sua configuração atual nas Diretrizes e Parâmetros Curriculares. Observa-se, por meio de pesquisas em artigos e outros textos acadêmicos, que o ensino médio teve concepções diferentes, que vão desde a preparação para cursos universitários até a formação profissional técnica para o mercado de trabalho, e essa ambigüidade permeia a legislação relevante para ele. Então, este artigo pretende trazer algumas declarações sobre o ensino médio em um mundo em mudança.

Palavras-clave: educação, ensino médio, ensino de história, parâmetros curriculares e diretrizes.

RESUMEN
Esta investigación bibliográfica forma parte de un esfuerzo por entender la educación secundaria en nuestro país a través del análisis de las Guías Nacionales y Parámetros Curriculares, con apoyo teórico de las discusiones planteadas por la bibliografía consultada, destacando especialmente a Décio Gatti Junior, Itamar Freitas y Maria Inês Sucupira Stamatto. La expansión de este segmento de la educación en todo Brasil muestra la necesidad de comprender la naturaleza y los diversos cambios que sufrió durante los siglos XIX y XX, así como el papel de la disciplina de historia y su configuración actual en las Directrices y Parámetros Curriculares. Se observa, a través de la investigación en artículos y otros textos académicos, que la educación secundaria ha tenido diferentes concepciones, que van desde la preparación para los cursos universitarios hasta la formación profesional técnica para el mercado laboral, y esta ambigüedad impregna la legislación relevante para ella. Por lo tanto, este artículo tiene la intención de traer algunas declaraciones sobre la escuela secundaria en un mundo cambiante.

Palabras clave: educación, bachillerato, enseñanza de historia, parámetros y pautas curriculares.
1 INTRODUCTION

We will discuss, in a panoramic way, High School education in Brazil, pointing out its history, different policies throughout history, and its current configuration, as well as the legislation and new projects or perspectives for this segment of education.

2 HIGH SCHOOL: ORIGINS, PUBLIC POLICIES, CURRENT CHALLENGES

According to the current educational legislation, the Educational Guidelines and Bases Law LDB (1996), High School is the “final stage of basic education, with a minimum duration of three years”, aiming to consolidate and deepen the knowledge acquired in Elementary School, preparing students for work, and developing their intellect and critical thinking (BRAZIL, 1996, p.12). While in the 1990s the main concern was to increase the availability of seats and improve teaching and learning conditions in Elementary School, since the 2000s High School has become the focus of public policies, both by Federal Government (National Textbook Program for High School - PNLDEM in 2004, educational tablets for teachers in 2012) and by State (Class Director Project in 2007 and, in 2013, Young Future Project).

In 2016, a few months after the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and the rise of Michel Temer to power, a complete reform of High School was organized, which reviewed the workload of subjects, provided students with the possibility to choose subjects in Learning Tracks and/or elective subjects, many of which seek connection with the job market and preparation for ENEM - National High School Examination (COSTA E SILVA, 2019, p. 7, 8). Although the New Common National Curriculum Base (BNCC), one of the outcomes of this reform, claims to "help overcome the fragmentation of educational policies, foster the strengthening of collaboration between the three spheres of government, and be a guiding force for the quality of education" (BRAZIL, 2017, p.8), critics argue that
BNCC leads, indirectly, to understand education from a notion that market has a supposed creative and managerial capacity, and the State has not.

So, educational reformations like that, which we are analyzing here, represent much more threats than reconstructions and advances concerning the social quality of education and its guarantee as a right, as well as the threats that signal mechanisms aimed at privatizing education. (COSTA E SILVA, 2019, p. 6).

We can perceive that this concern with High School intensified with the needs of the job market for young people and, especially, the greater availability of places in higher education. This latter factor is linked, on one hand, to the increase in places in private institutions for students from public schools through the University for All Program - PROUNI and, on the other hand, to the Unified Selection System - SiSU, which uses the score of the National High School Examination - ENEM to select students for public institutions. More recently, in 2024, the Federal Government, again under the command of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, created the "Pé de Meia" Program (this can be translated to “Nest Egg Program”), providing scholarships of 200 reais (approx. US$ 39) in 10 installments and an additional 1000 reais (approx. US$ 195) for approval each year of High School. This program is exclusively for students from public schools and who receive social benefits, such as Bolsa-Família (something like “Family Scholarship”), a social warfare program that provides financial assistance to families in need.

According to government information, the objectives are "to democratize access and reduce social inequality among High School students, as well as to promote more social inclusion through education, stimulating social mobility." (BRAZIL, 2024). This presentation of some aspects of High School today leads us to the interest in understanding how it was historically constituted, especially because the hermeneutic turn of history presupposes starting from questions of the present, seeking answers in the past for their elucidation in the same present. This stage of education had several predecessors, and it would be interesting to

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1 According to Google Finances Tool at 04/24/2024, 4:23 p.m. (GMT-3).
make a brief review of what we now call High School. Rulian Rocha (2010) highlights that in the early days of Brazil's history, education assumed a social distinctive character, capable of giving status. Only descendants of aristocratic families enjoyed this privilege. Therefore, education was an instrument used by dominant groups. The Jesuits offered secondary education under the name of the Letters course and the Philosophy and Sciences course. (Rocha, 2010, p.3).

According to the author, if most of the population had little or no minimum education (reading, writing, and arithmetic), even fewer people entered secondary education. For centuries this situation persisted, and even with the arrival of the royal family in Brazil in 1808 and the creation of the Brazilian State years later, the only significant attempt at expansion was the creation of lyceums, institutes intended for the education of elites to prepare them for higher education. (Arantes And Costa, 2019, p. 19,20).

With the transition to the republican regime at the end of the 19th century, public policies focused on maintaining elementary education, albeit precariously (Rocha, 2005, p.6). At the same time, private institutions grew significantly in the early 20th century, and secondary education began to be seen as preparation for life, not just for higher education. Therefore, its duration was extended in some schools, reaching seven years in some cases, such as at the National Gymnasium (former Pedro II School). However, High School only became structured as part of regular studies with the Capanema Reform, in the context of New State, Getúlio Vargas dictatorship, in 1942.

According to Rulian Rocha (2010, p.8), a dichotomy arises between Classical and vocational High School. Vocational High School students are not allowed to study at universities. Thus, although the availability of places increased as never before (Rocha, 2010, p.9-10), most students entered vocational education and entered the job market earlier, with lower salaries and no prospects of professional advancement.

After the Vargas Era (1930-1945) and in the wake of changes brought about by the Brazilian Redemocratization (1945-1964), the first Educational Guidelines and Bases Law was enacted in 1961 (although its project had been
discussed since 1946). This legislation proposed that education called "medium level" (High School) be destined for the "formation of adolescents", without detailing the meaning of this expression. An important change was the equating of Classical High School with vocational High School. During the military period (1964-1985), the “medium level” came to be called the 2nd Grade, and the emphasis on training for the job market was reintroduced, a change that can be understood by the fact that the military governments sought to distance themselves from the “European perspective” in education, criticized for being bachelor, literary, and politicized (therefore, useless for developing the nation) and to approach to the what they understood as “American perspective”, more pragmatic and focused on short-term results, supposedly apolitical (FREITAG et. al., 1989, p.26). This model of education imposed by the military aimed at a dual objective: to expand the offering of 2nd Grade and to supply the expanding job market with low-qualified labor without the need for higher education. However, the proposal did not materialize in either of the two objectives due to structural deficiencies, such as the lack of qualified professionals to teach in vocational schools. According to Carlos Cury,

By ignoring the conditioning factors of the production process and by ignoring social stratification and its class segmentation, the law neither met its letter, favouring its masking, nor was it a barrier to demand for university education since the private sector of this level experienced an expansion never seen before. (Cury, 1998, p.79).

The ineffectiveness in the application of this legislation forced the military governments to several changes, such as encouraging companies to hire students and the possibility for the school to choose between scientific or professional training. However, the transition to a more democratic High School began in discussions for the elaboration of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which postulated the compulsory 1st Grade (Elementary School), the progressive universalization of the 2nd Grade (High School), and advocated the emergence of a new Educational Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB). (Cury, 1998, p.80).
The 1996 LDB sought to bring a new perspective to High School, seeking to align education with the social, political, economic, cultural, and even technological demands of society. The last stage of basic education, according to this legislation, sought to bring together the different uses that had been given to it throughout history. First, it has a formative potential (which echoes the 1961 LDB), preparing the student for citizenship and their full socialization; second, it has a propaedeutic dimension (which reminds us of lyceums and the Pedro II School), preparing students for entry into university; third, there is also preparation for the job market, encouraged by the formation of vocational education schools, which represents a continuity (to some extent) of the educational proposals of the military regime.

How to fulfill, in everyday school life, such disparate demands? This has been one of the challenges of educational managers, whether public or private, when they perceive the reality in which they live and the demands of the society around them. It is possible to expect different responses to this question. We can cite, for example, the University for all Program - PROUNI (2004) and the Unified Selection System for public higher education institutions - SiSU (2009). In PROUNI, scholarships are awarded, either partial or full, to students from public schools; in SiSU, there is a selection for students, both from public and private schools, to enter public higher education, but now with specific quotas for the public ones.

For both selections, the score obtained in the National High School Examination - ENEM is used as a criterion, which, although created in 1998, gained a new configuration in 2009 (with more extensive exams), especially for getting in university by SiSU and PROUNI. As a result, there may be greater democratization of university education. As a result, we have an interesting phenomenon today: on one hand, private High Schools are abandoning a model of education that aimed at memorization of data for another in which the student knows how to contextualize knowledge, which is called the "ENEM style"; on the other hand, public schools are being pressured by their managers to show results regarding adherence and success in PROUNI and SiSU.
The transformations in High School are not only seen in relation to access to university education. The National Textbook Program for High School (PNLDEM), created in 2004, represented a qualitative leap for education, given the difficulty of students in obtaining High School textbooks (in greater number and more expensive), as well as the relevance of the book itself as the only teaching tool used by Brazilian teachers (Oliveira e Oliveira, 2009, p.16). Thus, teachers can work with readings, exercises, images, graphics, and even have suggestions for movies and other sources. The choice of the textbook should be democratic, privileging the participation of teachers, although there may be different ways to choose and use it, as pointed out by a study conducted in Elementary Schools (Timbó, 2009, p.224 ff).

In view of public policies, we ask ourselves: what are the biggest challenges of High School today? Among several others, such as lack of infrastructure and specialized teachers, we will focus on three of them: the expansion of offerings, the reduction of dropout rates, and the reconciliation between work and study. Even schools that have a good offering suffer from the overload of demand, when students go several kilometers to be able to study.

Only long-term actions can alleviate this shortage, because it is the result of decades of educational investments that focused almost exclusively on Elementary School without due attention to its repercussions on High School. The second challenge is dropout, which in the first year is much higher than in the two subsequent years. (Batista, Souza e Oliveira, 2009, p.8). Another factor is repetition, which ends up demotivating the student to continue their studies, and no alternatives are offered to this situation. As the authors cited affirm, "school dropout cannot be understood, analyzed in isolation. This is because, socioeconomic, cultural, educational, historical, and social dimensions, among others, influence the decision made by the person to drop out of school." (Idem, Ibidem p.4). Certainly, of all the problems mentioned, this is the most complex, and therefore, it deserves special attention from managers and education specialists, to reverse this vicious circle of social exclusion, lack of opportunities, and poverty.
It is possible that, with the full-cycle (2024-2027) implementation of the "Pé de Meia" Program, dropout rates and the search for work in adolescence may be mitigated, as it guarantees the student about 9,200 reais (approx. US$ 1,800)\(^2\) over three years, which helps both individual and family income. But it is still necessary to wait for this period to analyze the real impacts in this context. With regard to the third challenge, the State Government has encouraged, in recent years, the creation and expansion of Vocational Education Schools, as well as Full-Time Schools, which aim to give the student, in a full-time shift, the propaedeutic education combined with a profession.

However, in relation to those who study at night, reality is much more difficult for those who work and study in High School. The profile of the student of this shift is different, as a large part returned to studies after interrupted years or even due to deficient previous education. As the workload is smaller, teachers also face difficulties in teaching the content. Despite so many problems and challenges, High School, which for a long time was a type of education accessible only to a tiny portion of the population, has indeed been universalizing and becoming the focus of government actions, which can point us to a future, in the long run, less difficult for students and teachers of this segment. Thus, it may fully fulfill its triple formative, propaedeutic, and citizen function, advocated by legislation and the aspirations of those working in education, and society.

3 HIGH SCHOOL AND THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

When we study the growing attention that High School has been receiving, we can ask: what role does the teaching of history play in it? According to Scheimer (2010), the rapid transformations in which we live in this world are already sufficient reasons for educational managers and history teaching specialists to reflect on the importance of historical knowledge in the classroom.

We are living in a time of paradigm shifts, our students are coming to school with concepts and values different from those in which the teachers were

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\(^2\) According to Google Finances Tool at 04/26/2024, 3:32 p.m. (GMT-3).
educated, causing a certain mismatch between the reality in which the teacher was educated and the reality in which the students live today. (Scheimer, 2010, p.2). These social and cultural changes that young people are experiencing are related to the worldview they are constructing, influenced by new communication technologies and by social media.

Therefore, the way they relate to other people (especially friendships and romantic relationships), which is mediated in part by social networks and in part by their community experiences, becomes more fluid, superficial on one side and more dynamic, interactive on the other. Therefore, the author draws our attention to a new framework that is emerging and represents a major challenge to all history teachers, but especially to those accustomed to chalk and whiteboard: "The performance of the History teacher today, in the classroom, is often disregarded and ignored by the students themselves, as the context in which they live is completely different from the teacher's experience, method, and content". (Scheimer, 2010, p.5).

Given this need to discuss the teaching of history in High School, there are few studies that give visibility to this subject. Most researchers prefer to focus on Elementary School, perhaps because, in Brazil, it is the first time that students come into contact with a teaching divided in specific subjects, and thus the reactions to this transition are more observable (TIMBÓ, 2009, p.20).

An important issue related to teaching practices in history in High School concerns the content that is taught, which is, in most part, the same as in Elementary School. Unlike mathematics, for example, history content repeats in High School, which may lead teachers to just simply repeat the same lesson they taught at the lower level of education. Therefore, it is necessary to first consider the need to have history as a constitutive discipline of the mandatory curriculum and, at the same time, understand what differentiates the pedagogical work of history in this segment. And for this, it is important to discuss the trajectory of history as a discipline in the so-called High School or secondary education.

According to Maria Auxiliadora Schmidt, it can be "stated that the construction of the disciplinary code of History in Brazil has as its founding
institutional milestone the 1838 Regulation of Colégio [School] D. Pedro II, which determined the insertion of History as content in the curriculum." (SCHMIDT, 2012, p.78). At this early stage, what was called "civilization history" was taught, and the history of Brazil was a small appendix to it (idem, p.79). The goal of teaching history was to instruct students in the knowledge of the world, from a civilizing perspective, instilling in them respect and pride for the homeland. This civilizing role persists, with some changes, until the military period (1964-1985), and even today part of the teaching staff, trained in this period, works regarding this perspective.

During the military period, history was merged with geography, and "Social Studies" were created, to suppress any attempt at broader reflection in the classroom, from a supposedly technicist pedagogical perspective. And as the then 2nd Grade became compulsorily professionalizing, the history and geography subjects were removed from their curriculum from the 2nd year onwards, making it difficult for students to prepare for university admission. (Idem, Ibidem, p.85).

With legislative changes in the new Brazilian republic (1988-today), history receives a new function, and the so-called "critical" perspective becomes the standard for educational institutions. In the late 1990s, the National Curriculum Parameters for the area emerged, and currently, the role of history teaching is understood as an indispensable tool for citizenship construction.

4 PARAMETERS AND GUIDELINES FOR HISTORY IN HIGH SCHOOL

So far, we have seen actions proposed by the government and the demands and problems of education. But what does the State expect from schools regarding the learning of their students? This question leads us to understand the construction of the National Curriculum Parameters for High School (PCNEM) and the National Curricular Guidelines (DCN). The PCNs are not static determinations, but rather a proposal for pedagogical work that focuses not on memorization of content, but on the acquisition of certain skills aimed at
learning about citizenship. The DCNs represent general recommendations that, if followed by schools, would bring better results to them.

The PCNs for High School have as reference three recent events that occurred in Brazil: the consolidation of the Democratic State, the emergence and popularization of new technologies, and changes in the labor market. Therefore, its guiding axes are citizenship and work (BRAZIL, 1999, p.4). The document aims to disseminate the principles of curricular reform and guide the teacher in their teaching practice, considering the increasing demand for High School and the persistence of low schooling in the age group of 15 to 17 years old. Whether these roles are fulfilled in schools or not will be a subject addressed later.

The document itself of the PCN states that, in its elaboration, there was great involvement of civil society, with representatives from various segments of schools, teachers, parents, and Education Secretariats, in search of a new conception of High School. However, this dialogue did not occur with all sectors at the same time. On the contrary, the initial document was elaborated together with the state education secretariats, and after that it was presented to the various segments of society (BRAZIL, 1999, p.7,8).

The main concern of the PCNEM is to approximate the competencies that students develop in the classroom with social dimensions, that is, the "technological society" often demands knowledge that students simply have not learned because the legislation did not require it from educational institutions. Therefore, the State's obligation is to provide training in competencies that correspond to these demands (BRAZIL, 1999, p.15). To achieve this goal, the text proposes a triple division, called "domains of human life": life in society, productive activity, and subjective experience, from which the national common base in areas arises: Languages and codes; Mathematics and natural sciences; Human sciences, all linked to technologies. These areas would not be separate but should interact from the perspective of interdisciplinarity and contextualization, although it is not specified how this would be done.

In the specific area of Human Sciences and their technologies, another document was published in 2006 bringing curricular guidelines for each
discipline, and in which “Thus, the teaching of History, articulated with that of other disciplines, seeks to offer students possibilities to develop competencies that enable them to reflect on themselves, to insert themselves and to participate actively and critically in the social, cultural, and work world” (BRAZIL, 2006, p.67).

The discourse present in this document is very much in line with the discussions present in modern historiography and current literature on history teaching at the high school level, and it continues by affirming that the Parameters present basic concepts that support historical knowledge, although each teacher has the freedom to work on them in any history subject.

In the universe of historical concepts, the document presents eight concepts that are essential for student learning: the first is the historicity of concepts itself. Then, follow the concepts of time, historical subject, work, power, and culture. The skills to be worked and presented should be approached in the classroom, which generally link to the need to understand history as a process involving various social subjects in constant struggle in their material life and relating to different ways, thus building their representations and identities. It seeks to combat any form of prejudice and social inequality. For the teacher, it is recommended to avoid memorization for its own sake, to adapt the content to the reality of the students, and that their role is that of a mediator in the teaching-learning process (BRAZIL, 2006, p. 80-83).

Regarding the DCNs for High School, the expression “guideline” is brought as general indications for more lasting actions, as minimum standards. They are based on the aesthetics of sensitivity (which would be a valorization of creativity, inventive spirit, curiosity for the unusual, and affectivity), the politics of equality (understood basically as the recognition of human rights and the exercise of citizenship rights), and the ethics of identity (basically, the process of construction and recognition of identities, considering the other two bases already mentioned) (BRAZIL, 1999, p.62-65).

The DCNs largely repeat the discourse of the PCNs regarding their pedagogical conceptions, and therefore what the Guidelines specifically bring for the area of human sciences and their technologies will interest us more. But
before that, it is important to inform that, according to the text, "technology appears as 'scientific-technological literacy', understood as familiarity with the handling and nomenclature of universally used technologies, such as magnetic cards." (BRAZIL, 1999, p. 92). It is possible to perceive, in this passage, the concern, previously mentioned, to seek an education that confronts the demands of modern society, having practical applicability and avoiding a bachelor-like model of curricular organization.

The teaching of Human Sciences must contemplate the understanding of the meaning of identity, society, and culture, as well as the cognitive elements that underlie them. In addition, the fundamentals of citizenship are sought to be understood, encouraging respect for diversity and social equality. As methodological knowledge, it is expected that the student knows the technologies used for communication and information of the individual, society, and culture. In this way, a profile of high school students is sought who, at the same time, value the exercise of citizenship, know the different historical subjects, and can use the technologies related to this knowledge.

The legislation itself seems, at first glance, modern, interesting, and suitable for the reality of Brazilian education. However, as Manoel de Macedo Neto explains, the readjustment of education legislation in our country came from strong internal pressure, from sectors linked to education for reforms while there was external pressure, since it was necessary to adapt to UNESCO’s main guidelines (Macedo Neto, 2009, p.2).

Commenting specifically on the legislation that was addressed above, Luiz Antonio CUNHA, cited by Macedo Neto, affirms that the elaboration of the PCNs was harmed by insufficient deadlines and by the marginalization of the University in the process. Therefore, he concludes that although the document values citizenship, "its elaboration did not result from a truly democratic experience" (2009, p.3).

It is also possible to affirm that the text is almost unknown to most part of educators, and in general, Education Secretariats do not worry about bringing to each of them what is expected of their work in an educational institution. In many
cases, bureaucratic demands are the main criteria to evaluate teaching in Brazil. Even though they represent an educational advance, the Guidelines and Parameters require urgent revision, which not only conforms to the “technological society”, but above all, to the sociocultural reality of Brazilian students.

In this text, we discussed general aspects concerning High School in Brazil, including its conceptualization, historicity, and current legislation. Initially seen as mere preparation for higher education or for work, with legislation sometimes ambiguous and relatively disconnected from reality, High School has become today a focus in public educational policies.

5 CONCLUSION

The article delves into Brazil's high school education, highlighting its evolving nature amid societal shifts and educational reforms. It explored challenges such as outdated teaching methods and disconnected content, emphasizing the need for educators to adapt to resonate with contemporary learners, as noted by Scheimer (2010).

Examining the historical trajectory of history education, the article traces its evolution from a civilizing tool to a vehicle for critical citizenship, influenced by governance and educational concepts. National curriculum frameworks like the PCN and DCN aim to modernize education by fostering critical thinking and adaptability to technological advancements. However, their implementation faces hurdles like insufficient teacher training and limited alignment with classroom realities.

We emphasize the importance of collaborative and inclusive educational reform, advocating for democratic dialogue and ongoing curriculum refinement. In conclusion, Brazil's high school education must balance historical legacies with contemporary demands, fostering a dynamic learning environment that empowers students to engage critically with the past and present, ultimately shaping a more equitable and democratic society.
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