

Three historical-critical theses concerning school curricula*

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Abstract

The aim of this theoretical essay is to analyse school curricula from a historical-critical approach. We present the results of the first stage of our postdoctoral research, which, as a whole, addressed the problem of the nature and specificity of early childhood education curricula. The findings presented in this paper result from the effort of a theoretical and conceptual delimitation of the general conception of curricula in historical-critical pedagogy. These results are presented in the form of theses, which were identified, systematised and formulated based on conceptual and bibliographical investigations of selected works from the historical-critical theoretical field concerning the problem at hand. Three theses concerning the general conception of curricula are presented and supported, which highlight: 1) their political dimension and mediating nature, from the dialectic between objectives and means of education; 2) the defense of the classics, showing the clarification needed of this historical-critical principle in order to avoid a simplifying and abstract treatment; 3) the relationship between curriculum content and the problems posed by global social practice, based on the methodological concept of problematisation.

Keywords

Curriculum – Historical-critical pedagogy – School education.

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Introductory elements for discussion

The aim of this theoretical essay is to analyse school curricula under a historical-critical approach, presenting the findings of the first stage of postdoctoral research entitled *The problem of curricula in early childhood education: an investigation in light of the contribution of historical-critical pedagogy and historical-cultural psychology*². In this article, we focus on showing the results derived from the effort of a theoretical and conceptual delimitation of the general conception of curriculum in historical-critical pedagogy. The content is organised in the form of theses, which were identified, systematised and formulated from conceptual and bibliographical investigations of selected works from the historical-critical theoretical field concerning the problem at hand. (DUARTE, 2016; GAMA, 2015; MALANCHEN, 2016; MARTINS, 2013; SAVIANI, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2016).

Emerging in the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s and in the process of collective construction based on the collaboration of diverse authors spread throughout Brazil, historical-critical pedagogy advocates and diffuses the struggle against selectivity, discrimination and the demotion of teaching aimed at the popular layers (SAVIANI, 2012). It is a pedagogical theory that aims to articulate the interests of the exploited class of society, engaged in the effort to guarantee their children the best quality teaching possible in the prevailing historical conditions and to contribute to the overcoming of society supported by the exploitation, domination and oppression of people, that is, from the capitalist class society. This pedagogy starts by recognising schools as institutions inserted in the productive system governed by the imperative of expanded reproduction of capital and crossed by its contradictions. In this context, it is understood that the fundamental task of school education that articulates with the interests of the exploited is the transmission-assimilation of methodical and theoretical knowledge about historically accumulated reality.

Abrantes (2015, p. 134) clarifies that precisely because the exploiting class tries “[...] to convince everyone to conform to today’s society and to unequal access to what is objectively and subjectively produced by the human being”, interests the working class access to scientific, philosophical and artistic knowledge. Firstly to scientific knowledge because it reveals “the movement and the up-and-coming tendencies of objects and phenomena of the real”; also to philosophical knowledge because it enables us “to know and question reality by asking comprehensive questions that deal with objective problems of human beings”, with its meaning; finally to artistic productions, because the accumulation of fruition enables us “to develop human self-consciousness in order to clarify pain and feelings, and to see new social realities that are yet impossible”. The author concludes that “knowing to transform and/or knowing radically transforming human sociability lies within the intellectual horizon of the working class”. (ABRANTES, 2015, p. 134).

2- Held from July 2017 to June 2018 at the Faculty of Education at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP), under the supervision of Professor Dermeval Saviani, this research aimed, as a whole, to analyse the validity for early childhood education of the general historical-critical conception of curriculum, attempting to help elucidate the nature and specificity of this pedagogical device in this stage of schooling considering the contemporary debate held concerning this problem.

In refusing the function of ideological inculcation to which the schools are called in class society, historical-critical pedagogy advocates that educational work should be effected as an act of producing, directly and intentionally, in every single individual, the humanity that is historically and collectively produced by the human kind. For this purpose to be achieved, two tasks are right away set out, already indicated by Saviani (2011): the identification of which contents of the human historical-cultural heritage should be appropriated by people for their humanisation; and the discovery of the most appropriate ways to effect the transmission-assimilation of these contents. In pedagogical science, these tasks correspond respectively to the fields of curriculum, which is dedicated to the problem of teaching content (what to teach), and didactics, which deals with the problem of teaching methodologies (how to teach).

Thus, a curriculum is related to the content of the educational act and, as such, has been theorised by historical-critical pedagogy from the first conceptual approaches to the educational phenomenon. In the proposition of the Authors Collective (1992), revived by Gama (2015), the curriculum refers to the path of the human being in his/her process of gaining knowledge selected and transmitted by the school, a path that takes place through a given organisation and distribution of content in school time and space. In light of this understanding, and seeking to contribute to the collective efforts to develop and implement curriculum proposals committed to the formation of students as praxis-performing subjects, we formulate and discuss below three theses that highlight the mediating nature and the political dimension of the curriculum, as well as its relation to the problems posed by social practice.

Thesis 1: The curriculum is a means of pedagogical work and, as such, has a political dimension

According to Saviani (2013), considering the dialectical relationship between objectives and means of education, a curriculum lies in the sphere of the means. Since human action seeks to produce certain results or effects in social practice, “to act, and in so doing, we need to know what we are acting for.” (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 76). Still in the words of Saviani (2013, p. 48): “objectives indicate the targets of action”. The delineation of objectives is made by becoming aware of what we lack (deficiencies detected in reality); this means that the objectives that guide the educational work refer to what has not yet been achieved, but which must be achieved. It is worth noting that the identification of what is considered lack or deficient in existing reality – deserving or being worthy of a transformation – involves an axiological and consequently political dimension, as it presupposes values that indicate certain human expectations and aspirations.

Achieving objectives depends on using certain resources, instruments and strategies, that is, it becomes possible by using certain means: “[...] the objectives translate the ‘for what’ of the action, the means translate the ‘with what’” (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 76).

Saviani (2013, p. 77) warns, in this sense, that “there is no point in correctly defining the objectives if we use means that do not lead to them.” It is important to realise that

this is not a unilateral determination of the objectives over the means, but a reciprocal determination relationship because:

[...] if it is true that the choice of means depends on defining the objectives, it is also true that achieving the objectives depends on the choice and, moreover, on the use of the means. (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 64).

The author points out that “the more appropriate our knowledge of reality, the more appropriate the means at our disposal will be” (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 52). The analysis of the concrete situation within which the action takes place is thus decisive to ensure the adequacy of the means, as well as the viability of the objectives because it is no use defining goals that presuppose means that we do not have.

Saviani (2013) understands that a curriculum, as a means of educational action, refers to the scope of what to do, while the methods refer to the scope of how to do it. In the book *Educação: do senso comum à consciência filosófica* (Education: From Common Sense to Philosophical Consciousness), the author postulates that the curriculum concerns “[...] the content of education and its distribution in the time and space allocated to it” (SAVIANI, 2013, p. 79). Thus, we can consider that the elaboration of a curriculum proposal presupposes establishing parameters for decision making about what to teach, when to teach and where to teach.

Recovering the historical-critical formulation of the concept of educational work, which proposes its realisation as an act of producing, directly and intentionally, in each singular individual, the humanity that was historically produced by all human beings, we can consider that the curriculum represents an effort to identify which contents of the human historical-cultural heritage should be appropriated by people for their humanisation throughout the schooling process. The elaboration of the curriculum appears, in a specific sense, as an internal necessity of pedagogical practice and, in a broad sense, as a necessity posed by global societal practice.

In the society of antagonistic and irreconcilable interests in which we live, there is a dispute over projects of human formation, linked, on the one hand, to the subjection by the conformation of people to the existing relations of exploitation and domination, and, on the other, to human emancipation through the collective struggle to transform and overcome these relationships. The curriculum will always be an expression of a certain educational intentionality that is instituted in the school-society relationship, placing service as an instrument of an expected direction to educate students. This implies considering the social (contradictory) function of the school in the process of social reproduction and pointing out that the curriculum has a political-pedagogical dimension, taking into account, as Saviani (2011, p. 65) shows us, that “the content, systematised knowledge does not matter to pedagogy as such”, but as it is done through the service of a certain intentionality referred to the direction that is sought to imprint the student’s education.

The historical-critical definition of educational work, which demarcates as intentionality the full humanisation of every student, thus constitutes a political-pedagogical

position within the school-society relationship³. Based on this framework, Saviani (2011, p. 65) highlights that:

In order to teach, it is essential to first ask the following question: What is the point of teaching a subject such as Geography, History or Portuguese to the real students with whom we will work? How are these subjects relevant to the progress, advancement, and development of these students?

We consider that the answer to the questions posed by the author should be guided by the perspective of student education as a subject of praxis, that is: seeing the formation of conscious activity of transformative orientation, based on objective knowledge that provides the intelligibility of reality (MARTINS, 2013), oriented by the philosophical conscience that overcomes common sense (SAVIANI, 2013), instrumentalised by the theoretical thinking (DAVIDOV, 1988) and affectionately marked by an attitude not conformed to the alienating processes.

Returning to Dermeval Saviani's propositions in various works, Malanchen (2016, p. 176) synthesises as a core of the curriculum problematic the movement of "[...] intentional selection and the sequencing of knowledge that should be socialised for the whole population. [...]". Thus, we emphasise that developing a curriculum and putting it into practice involves processes of choice: from the vast historically accumulated human activity deposited in the conceptual systems of the various areas of knowledge and spheres of social practice, what do we want to offer our students? We emphasise that choice is position taking. In this sense, Duarte (2016, p. 95) points out that:

[...] One of the most controversial and, at the same time, most important issues for school education is to select and organise the content that students should learn.

What guides the selection of the contents of culture is, in the first instance, the pedagogical intentionality. However, it is decisive to realise that, in this movement, the understanding of one's own intentionality expands, deepens and requalifies as its concretisation as selection, systematisation and organisation of these contents aiming at their socialisation. Developing and implementing curriculum proposals, thus, presupposes a twofold movement: i) we need to choose the means appropriate to the objective, which means selecting knowledge that meets the historical-critical pedagogical intentionality of praxis subject formation; and ii) at the same time, the very definition of the objectives presupposes the availability of means to achieve them, which means that the knowledge that constitutes the human-generic heritage conditions the very delimitation of the specific pedagogical purposes.

3- Supported by Saviani's analysis of the historical process of consolidation of the systematised character of education, Silva (2017) discusses educational intentionality as a teleological dimension of educational activity. The author situates school education as a particular mediation of the relationship between the uniqueness of the individual's formation and the universality of social relations typical of current class society, identifying that such mediation requires the establishment of an educational intentionality through which school and society interconnect.

We would like to emphasise that only “plunging” into the collection of contents of the human historical-cultural heritage in search of its most developed and potentially praxis-promoting forms in the context of school education the concrete meaning to the purpose of student humanisation can be achieved⁴. As a consequence of this proposition, we indicate that the theoretical-practical treatment about the historical-critical intentionality of humanisation of every student cannot stop at the abstract formulation: we need to clarify the concrete particular contents that will lead to the desired process of humanisation. This selection is one of the core issues of a curriculum.

Malanchen (2016) highlights that the movement of selection (and sequencing) of knowledge expresses a certain conception about the natural and social reality, the knowledge about that reality, the process of transmission and assimilation of this knowledge and the relations between school and society. Duarte (2016, p. 1) adds that “the decision on what to teach to new generations through school education involves relationships between the present, the past and the future of society and human life”, being guided, therefore, by a certain conception of history, a concrete analysis of societal practice and a project of society. Such parameters are provided by the pedagogical theory from which the curriculum is formulated.

Thesis 2: The school curriculum should contemplate the classic knowledge of Philosophy, Science and Arts

The defense of classical knowledge in school is today largely associated with historical-critical pedagogy. Indeed, in the book *Pedagogia histórico-crítica: primeiras aproximações* (Historical-Critical Pedagogy: First Approaches), Dermeval Saviani (2011, p. 13) states that the classic can “[...] constitute a useful criterion to select the contents of the pedagogical work” (italics added by the author). We observe, however, in certain spaces of debate and study of historical-critical pedagogy, a certain trivialisation of the “defense of the classics”, as if it were a simple indication and/or solved, by itself, the problematic of the school curriculum. In considering this concern, we will seek to explore the meaning, the basis and possible directions derived from adopting this criterion, in order to contribute to the collective debate around its specific and effective contribution to the pedagogical work.

For what has been called “pedagogical common sense”, talking about classical knowledge in school seems to conjure up an image of old, dusty, outdated, and lacklustre knowledge, thus, meaningless and useless knowledge for the contemporary student. The historical-critical pedagogy, contrary to the dominant discourse, raises the classic knowledge to the level of priority importance. The classic is living, powerful knowledge, even though its original formulation is rooted in a distant historical moment in time.

In the first pages of the book *Why Read the Classics?* italian novelist Italo Calvino (1923-1985) faces “[...] the decisive problem of how to relate reading the classics to all other non-classical readings” (CALVINO, 1993, p. 14). A representative formulation of this

4- At the same time, as we will discuss in the third thesis, “plunging” into global societal practice.

problem would be the question: “Why read the classics instead of concentrating on readings that make us understand our time more deeply?” (CALVINO, 1993, p. 14). In response, Calvino first ponders that “to be able to read the classics you have to know “from where” you are reading them; otherwise both the book and the reader will be lost in a timeless cloud.”

The author’s position is summarised in two theses that deal with the relationship between classics and actuality: i) “A classic is something that tends to relegate the concerns of the moment to the status of background noise, but at the same time this background noise is something we cannot do without.” (p. 15); ii) “A classic is something that persists as a background noise even when the most incompatible momentary concerns are in control of the situation.” (CALVINO, 1993, p. 15). In the conclusion of the brief chapter that begins the cited work, the author states that “the classics serve to understand who we are and where we have come [...]”. (CALVINO, 1993, p. 16).

Still citing Calvino (1993), it can be stated that “a classic is a book that has never finished saying what it had to say” (p. 11). In line with this formulation specifically referred to the field of literature, Saviani and Duarte (2012, p. 31) state, in a broad sense, that “[...] a classic is something that has resisted time, having a validity that goes beyond the moment when it was formulated. It is therefore defined by the notions of permanence and reference”.

A classic captures core issues that concern the human condition itself and, therefore, remains a reference for subsequent generations in their life process, the authors explain. Referring to the classics of philosophy, they point out that thinkers who consolidate themselves as classics and integrate the human cultural heritage in this condition offer “formulations [which] although rooted in a given epoch, go beyond the boundaries of that epoch, maintaining their interest, even for later times.” (SAVIANI; DUARTE, 2012, p. 31). Thus, the authors state that “classic does not coincide with traditional and does not oppose the modern”, but refers to the essential aspects and long-lasting dispositions; in Saviani’s words (2011, p. 13), he refers to “that which has established itself as fundamental, as essential”. Along the same lines, Calvino (1993) considers that the status of a classic can be attributed to ancient or modern work that already occupies a place of its own in a cultural continuity.

As a provisional synthesis, we have as a defining criterion of classical knowledge the validity that goes beyond the particular historical moment in which it was formulated by capturing core or essential questions of human reality, thus becoming a permanent reference in a certain field of knowledge or social practice. Resorting to Kosik (1976), we can understand that grasping core or essential questions of human reality refers to the ability of classical knowledge to destroy the superficial appearance of reality and to approach its essential inner core in its philosophical, artistic scientific and dimensions. This property may be understood as the universality of knowledge, but one must be clear that the universal, for historical-dialectical materialism, does not exist outside the historical process. Thus, validity and permanence hold while persisting and reproducing in historical time the contradictions that are reflected in a given epistemological formulation and/or decode from it.

Moreover, the universal cannot be considered out of the relation with particularity. This means that, in class society, it is necessary to place the classics in relation to the particular social place of class of the concrete subjects who have the possibility of relating to it, otherwise we may incur an abstract or even idealistic deal with knowledge.

Having as a theoretical-philosophical basis historical-dialectical materialism, it is not appropriate to consider a classic as a neutral cultural object, nor object of consensus; it must be recognised as subject to the dispute of political and epistemological interests. The consolidating of given knowledge, philosophical elaboration or artistic production as a classic of culture is not exempt from political-ideological determinations. It is crucial to consider this dimension because, if we take as the defining element of a classic grasping core issues of the human condition, not everything that remains in time will necessarily be a classic, and may be a mere tradition, which is perpetuated by the correlation of social forces. On the other hand, and for the same reason, we should bear in mind that not every cultural object that reveals essential aspects of human existence will necessarily consolidate itself as a classic, establishing itself as a reference, in view of the obstacles to its social transmission interposed by the dominant interests and precariousness of resources of minority social groups to promote such diffusion - consider, for example, how little we know about great thinkers of the African continent and their absence in the list of classical cultural references.

Moreover, it must be emphasised that the productions of culture that are consolidated as classical are not without contradictions, since all human cultural creations produced in societies structured on relations of exploitation, domination and oppression are necessarily crossed by humanisation-alienation tension. Thus, by defending the presence of classical knowledge in school curricula, it is not proposed that the school promotes a direct and uncritical assimilation of it, but that the student may have access and appropriate the classic as a historically situated production, as a historical expression and synthesis of human social thought and practice as a product of human confrontation with the problems, needs and dramas of social life that illuminate aspects of the present and guide our projection into the future. It is not the classic itself that forms the student, but the classic situated in human history:⁵ what provokes human development is the human history condensed in the classics!

“Classic is an author who lives beyond his own time and also speaks to posters [...]”, says Giuseppe Vacca (2012, p. 38). Justifying the choices made in the organisation of Antonio Gramsci’s *Life and Thought*, written by him, the author argues that the contemporaneity of the interrogations and motivations by which we turn to the thinking of a classical author allows for more fruitful readings the more his life and his writings are situated in his time:

Reliving their temporality is the necessary premise to verify their ability to speak to us as well. Historicising is not relativising, much less neutralising. The more it is historicised, the more the perspectives of reading the texts multiply and enrich themselves. (VACCA, 2012, p. 38).

5- Dermeval Saviani, personal communication, 2017.

Thus, if Italo Calvino (1993) tells us about the need to define from where the classics are being read so that the reader (or student) does not get lost in a timeless cloud, Vacca (2012) highlights the need to clarify where the classics were produced, under which particular circumstances was formulated a given knowledge about reality that is still capable of being placed as a relevant mediation in people's relationship with reality in contemporary circumstances. The possibility of this confrontation is decisive in the process of the formation of the person, as highlighted by Calvino (1993, p.16) when referring to Italian classics in relation to foreign classics: "[...] Italians are indispensable precisely to be confronted with foreigners, and foreigners are indispensable precisely to be confronted with Italians." (CALVINO, 1993, p. 16).

The confrontation with elaborations, values and ways of feeling, thinking and acting from other times and contexts objectified in the classics historicises, denaturalises, requalifies and puts into perspective the student's unique life experience - which again highlights the relationship between universality, particularity and singularity in dealing with the classics.

Duarte (2016, p. 109) corroborates the need to "situate the classic in the history of human development", and draws attention, in addition, to the dimension of the form of teaching the classics and its adequacy to the moment of development of the subject-addressee of teaching. The author postulates that it is also necessary:

[...] situating the educational role of the classic in a given moment of the formation of the individual. Whether it is a classic in the field of the arts, or the sciences, or philosophy, the degree of its educational effectiveness will be determined both by the richness (by value) of its content, in terms of the historical development of mankind, and by the significance that this classic will have, at a given moment, for the realisation of the possibilities of developing the student's individuality. Here it becomes essential that the teacher mediates a proper articulation between the content to be taught and the way in which it will be taught. (DUARTE, 2016, p. 109).

We can establish a relationship between the indication of Duarte (2016) in this excerpt and the reference to the necessary adaptation of school content to the student's socio-cognitive possibilities, reiterated by Gama (2015) as the fundamental guiding principle of the selection of curriculum contents, originally formulated by the Authors Collective (1992). We can also consider that the teacher's personal relationship (as individual and collective subject) with classical knowledge and, ultimately, with human history, is a fundamental determination of the pedagogical act, guiding his/her decisions and actions within of the form-content unit.

Concluding these brief notes on the thesis of the need for the school curriculum to include the classical knowledge of Philosophy, Science and Art, we resume the formulation of Saviani (2011) with which we open this discussion, who states that the classic can constitute a useful criterion for developing curricular proposals. We want to reaffirm that such an indication does not place the classic as the sole and/or ultimate criterion for the curriculum problem in the historical-critical perspective.

It is worth remembering that the defense of classical knowledge is highlighted by Saviani (2011) in his first approaches to the formulation of historical-critical pedagogical

theory in the context of debate with New School, in which the author was engaged in combating the abandonment of the perspective of transmission-assimilation of systematised knowledge as the primary social function of the school and consequent decharacterisation of teaching. This presupposes locating the defense of classical knowledge at school in the context of political combat against the historical tendency of invasion of school space-time by all sorts of extracurricular activities and common sense content and corresponding withdrawal of methodical and theoretical knowledge. This trend not only remains present, but has been strengthened over the course of the historical process ever since, which reaffirms the importance of the political-pedagogical defense of the presence of classics in the school curriculum as a guideline of historical-critical pedagogy. What we want to point out is that this guideline cannot become a slogan that authorises us to consider solved the complex problem of developing and implementing curriculum proposals in a historical-critical perspective of pedagogy.

Thesis 3: The selection of knowledge that should comprise the school curriculum should be guided by the movement of problematisation of societal practice and implies political-pedagogical dispute

In the book *School and Democracy*, Dermeval Saviani (2012) discusses the traditional and new methods of pedagogy, envisioning a pedagogical method that surpasses both - comprising overcoming in the dialectical sense, i.e., simultaneously involving the act of denial and the act of incorporation of valid aspects (elements of truth).

As the author describes, the traditional pedagogical practice, as proposed by J. F. Herbart's general pedagogy (1776-1841), is guided by the linear path that starts from the students' preparation, followed by the presentation of knowledge, which would lead to the assimilation of the transmitted contents (compared to previous knowledge) and its generalisation, finally culminating in the application of knowledge. The new pedagogy, in turn, as formulated by J. Dewey (1859-1952), parts of the student's activity, to be interrupted by the confrontation with a problem that poses an obstacle, which motivates the data collection aiming at the formulation of a hypothesis that will be confirmed or refuted by experimentation.

Both methods are mistaken respectively when identifying teaching with the mere presentation of knowledge or advocating its replacement by (pseudo) knowledge production. In both cases, explains Saviani (2012), an autonomisation of pedagogy is presupposed in relation to society, where the teacher and students are considered individually and inhabitants of a harmonious reality, to the detriment of their recognition as social agents of a fundamentally contradictory reality.

In contrast, the historical-critical pedagogical method has, as its cornerstone, the thesis that school is socially determined:

[...] Let us keep from the critical-reproductive conception the important lesson that it brought us: the school is socially determined; the society in which we live, founded on the capitalist mode of production, is divided into classes with opposite interests; therefore, the school is determined by the conflict of interest that characterises society." (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 30).

There is agreement with the critical-reproductive reading regarding the understanding that, in the school-society relationship, the determining element is society, and the determined element is school. The divergence is based on the historical-critical consideration that the school:

[...] although a determined element, it still influences the determining element. Although secondary, it is nonetheless an important and sometimes decisive instrument in the process of social transformation. (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 66).

From the critical-reproductive reading of the school does not derive a pedagogy. The problem that historical-critical pedagogy poses is the possibility of elaborating a pedagogical theory that captures the school as an instrument capable of contributing to the struggle against domination, tensioning its function in the process of social reproduction towards the interests of the working class.

For this reason, social practice is situated, for this pedagogy, as the starting point and the arrival of school praxis: “[...] it is the social practice itself that constitutes at the same time the support and the context, the presupposition and the target, the foundation and purpose of pedagogical practice” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 72-73). The historical-critical method comprises pedagogical practice as a “mediating activity within global social practice” that requalifies the social insertion of teachers and students through the problematisation, instrumentalisation and catharsis moments/processes.

The problematisation refers to the effort to “detect which issues need to be resolved within the scope of social practice and, consequently, which knowledge needs to be mastered” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 71). The instrumentalisation refers to the “[...] appropriation by the popular layers of the cultural tools necessary for the social struggle that they lock day by day to free themselves from the conditions of exploitation in which they live” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 71). Catharsis is the “culmination of the educational process”; expressed as “[...] a new form of understanding the social practice to which it has risen” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 72), that is, it refers to the “effective incorporation of cultural instruments, now transformed into active elements of social transformation” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 72, italics added by the authors).

Requalifying the previous student’s social insertion is due to the fact that “the understanding of social practice undergoes a qualitative change” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 72), a process also experienced by the teacher, whose activity makes it possible to reach richer and organic syntheses about reality. It is important to note that it is not about applying the knowledge that was presented, as the traditional pedagogy wanted, but the possibility of cultural appropriation of instruments which, once incorporated as second nature, are mediators of people’s actions, as they allow them to perceive (affectively and cognitively) reality in a different qualitative way, develop new capacities for action and see new possibilities of intervening and participating in the social world.

The problematisation, as a moment of school educational praxis, has, in our analysis, a direct connection with the problem of the curriculum. As we have seen, the problematisation has to do with identifying issues that need to be resolved within the scope

of social practice and, consequently, “what knowledge needs to be mastered” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 71). Selecting knowledge that should be socialised by the school, as we have already indicated, is the problem of the curriculum *par excellence*. Thus, we will examine the meaning of the concept of problematisation and its relationship with the curriculum.

In *Education: from common sense to philosophical consciousness*, Saviani (2013, p. 17) is dedicated to the philosophical concept of the problem. Establishing the proper distancing from the ordinary meaning of the term, which takes it as a mere synonym of question, theme or subject, the author postulates that “the essence of the problem is necessity”. A complex or unknown question does not necessarily reflect a problem: “a question whose answer is unknown and needs to be known, that is a problem” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 17), he says. Considering this, it follows that:

[...] an obstacle that needs to be overcome, a difficulty that needs to be overcome, a doubt that cannot be dispelled are situations that make us truly problematic.⁶ (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 18).

Such conceptualisation of the problem leads Saviani (2013, p. 18) to a critical curriculum consideration: “Many of the issues that integrate school curricula are devoid of problematic content”. The author asserts that the artificial nature of the proposed questions - which ultimately constitute pseudo-problems - end up triggering a series of artificial mechanisms in the activity of students and teachers. As students are called upon to engage in pseudo-problems, “the path to fraud, to imposture” opens up after all. Thus, it is noted how necessary it is to revive the problematicity of curriculum contents, which is equivalent to recovering the dramaticity and vitality in the educational process:

[...] The problem, despite the wear and tear caused by overuse of the term, has a profoundly vital and highly dramatic meaning to human existence as it indicates an impasse. (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 22).

Due to this characteristic, the real problem brings about reflection, understood as careful examination, a search for meaning, thorough analysis. It is this search that ultimately gives meaning to cultural instruments socialised by the school, which should not be thought of as an end in itself, but in their connection with the problems of human existence. If the problem is a “necessity that is objectively imposed and subjectively assumed” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 22), it is precisely the objective necessity recognised and subjectively assumed that will mobilise the student to engage in the movement of instrumentalisation, in which cognizable objects can be found that can satisfy or channel the necessity while requalifying it.

What are the main problems posed by social practice, and what knowledge/tools must be mastered to address them? In our analysis, this is a fundamental question to guide

6- It should be noted that the criterion of problematicity is not subjective, that is, a problem cannot be considered to exist simply because the individual feels it as such. Necessity exists when it ascends to the conscious plane, being felt as such, but objectified within concrete circumstances that allow to evaluate its real or supposed character: “the concept of the problem implies both the awareness of a situation of necessity (subjective aspect) as a situation aware of the necessity (objective aspect)” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 22).

us to develop and implement school curricula to ensure the organic link between school praxis and global societal practice, avoiding incurring the “[...] tendency to detach specific contents from the disciplines of the broader social purposes” (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 80). The historical-critical pedagogy is clearly positioned by postulating that knowledge is not of interest in itself and its transmission is not justified as an end in itself, placing in the necessities that emerge in social practice the beacon for developing school curricula: “[...] it is the social needs that determine the content, that is, the curriculum of school education in all its levels and modalities”(SAVIANI, 2016, p. 62). In Saviani’s (2016) proposition, the selection of school contents is subordinated to pedagogical intentionality, which in turn connects to social practice:

If the socially produced knowledge concerning education is not self-interested and if the set of knowledge mobilised by the educator is articulated according to the pedagogical objective that is linked to the development of the student, then *it is not the knowledge, as it is, that determines the construction of school curricula*. On the contrary, it is the educational objectives that determine the selection of knowledge that should comprise the organisation of curricula. (SAVIANI, 2016, p.71, italics added by the authors).

This proposition refers to the first thesis defended in this article, which situates the curriculum as a service to pedagogical intentionality. In the discussion at this point, it is essential to be clear that the concept of social practice is not to be confused with immediate, present, everyday experiences. The social practice to be the object of problematisation, careful analysis and search for meaning does not correspond and is not confined to the personal experiences of students’ daily life. Taking as a starting point for teaching students’ everyday problems is a misunderstanding of what the problematisation of social practice is for historical-critical pedagogy. This has already been pointed out by Martins (2013, p. 290) when dealing with the historical-critical method: “we do not understand that the starting point is represented by any ‘problem’ that is detached from the surrounding and immediate reality and placed as school content [...]”.

Everyday problems are not necessarily real problems, and people’s daily lives are only the apparent facet of social practice. The real problems of social practice are not immediately apparent in everyday experiences, where the true determinations of social existence end up hidden in a light-dark game of truth-dare, as Kosik (1976) taught by postulating that the destruction of the pseudo-concreteness of immediate experience requires theoretical thinking. Therefore, the reference that is taken for teaching and, specifically, for the construction of the curriculum, is the global social practice understood as a historical process and considered in the singular-particular-universal movement.

Thus, once the concept of social practice and its problematisation is established, we see that the curriculum includes specificities of local communities or particular social groups articulated with general and broad structural, economic, national and international issues. In light of the historical-critical pedagogy, it does not seem possible to formulate a

universal, homogeneous and standardised curriculum that disregards the local peculiarities that permeate the concrete lives of the subject-addressees of school teaching. At the same time, the elaboration of curricula shall not have the local as the main reference, disjointed of the totality: in the local-global dialectics, it is in this pole - and not in that one - that the prevalence is based, which means that the problems of local cutting cannot be explained except in the interconnection with fundamental determinations of global/universal order.

The delimitation of which aspects of social practice are to be problematised in the context of school education - and consequently which knowledge is necessary to ensure that students can master - is necessarily made from a political position towards reality. We may, by way of illustration, ask ourselves: is the concentration of land (in the countryside) and real estate (in the city) in Brazil a *problem*, that is, a situation to be clarified and that needs to be overcome, and that should therefore be included in the school curriculum? Depending on the political position from which the issue is analysed, it will be established that it is or is not a problematic aspect of societal practice, requiring conceptual clarification and coping in action.

In highlighting the problematisation of social practice as a process organically linked to developing and implementing school curricula, we note that the delimitation of the teaching objects and correspondent conceptual systems that should comprise the school curriculum is a process which involves various dimensions: epistemological (linked to the structure and specificity of the area of knowledge), pedagogical (linked to the problem of teaching itself), psychological (linked to the affective-cognitive possibilities of the subject-addressee of the educational act) and political (linked to the concrete consequences of the transmission of certain knowledge about the societal practice).

We also emphasise the understanding of the problematisation as a moment pertinent not only to the didactic dimension (i.e., decisions regarding how to teach the contents), as it is more commonly interpreted, but also to the curricular dimension (which contents to teach), showing the global reach of moments of the historical-critical method proposed by Saviani (2012) and the impossibility of fragmentation of the various dimensions that constitute the pedagogical act.

Final considerations

The theses developed here add to the effort of successive approaches to the educational phenomenon in the historical-critical framework, highlighting some of the central issues involved in the curriculum problem. We hope, through its systematisation, to contribute to teachers, researchers and other professionals who face the problem of curriculum in their work activity, theoretical-practical studies and concrete political-pedagogical initiatives.

From the argumentative course developed here, which reiterates the political dimension of the curriculum and the multiple processes involved in its elaboration and implementation, we believe that the need (task) unfolds of constructing mediations that can guide and establish the connection, in the pedagogical praxis, between classical knowledge and global social practice, in light of the principles of the historical-critical

method, both regarding the elaboration of curriculum proposals and their implementation inside schools.

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