The critical and the post-critical approaches in preparing curriculum propositions in Brazil

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Abstract
This article aims at finding indications of the results coming from the confrontation between the critical and post-critical theories within the curriculum field in the production of curriculum propositions in Brazil, as well as to discuss how the developments stemming from this confrontation affect the work of schools. We look into identifying whether it is possible to state that the directions given to the pedagogical work developed in those institutions, based on some measure from the theoretical discussions in the curriculum field, highlights the presence of a utopic perspective or not - and how it can dialogue with the school and its agents. To that end, two documents were analyzed: a curriculum proposition produced by a municipal office of education in 2004, under the clear influence of Cultural Studies, and the second reviewed version of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular [National Common Core Curriculum] that started to be prepared in 2015. The reflection now started highlights the possible ways for the new theoretical approaches to enter the pedagogical mindset, how those elements making sense to those who are involved in the school work tend to stay, and how those aspects are expressed on the curriculum documents.

Keywords: Curriculum theories; Critical; Post-critical; Curriculum propositions.

Introduction

On an article published in 1997¹, Antônio Flávio Barbosa Moreira considered that, within the curriculum field, the confrontation between views on critical theory and those more linked with the post-modern period, it would be possible and necessary to search for balance. In short, this balance would reside “in the preservation of the utopia as a future view in both curriculum theory and practice” (Moreira, 1997, p. 73).

For the author, two streams of thought were present in the field within that context: one that stated the impossibility of any type of articulation with the ideals of modernism, and another one that, despite challenging them, tried to redefine them within the post-modern period. For him, “only the second stream of thought, which was not entirely against modernism, [...] is able to help expand the critical education discourse” (p. 71).

Resuming the criticism produced by authors to both sides of this conflict, with emphasis on those that were closer to the second stream of thought presented above, Moreira (1997) highlights that “the adoption of a view of future
[in discussions about school curriculum] does not need to imply the appreciation of great narratives that correspond to closed universalizing schemes, the unmistakable propositions of a better world” (p. 73). And by referring to those authors he focus on, he explains in his text what he refers to when speaking of utopia:

The important goals of personal development and moral conduct, defended by Burbules and Rice (1993) imply the perspective of virtues to be developed. Giroux's view (1992, 1993), according to whom, post-modernism should broaden and deepen the more democratic claims of modernism, involves the belief in the value of democracy and critical citizenship. Social justice, freedom and decent life constitute ideals that Giroux seems to not intend to move away from. His appeal to the commitment with building a fairer society, characteristic of a radical education, requires a view of future that guides the struggles and the efforts involved in this activity. Thus, I perceive the preservation of a utopic perspective in all those positions, although I see it occurring timidly and being insufficiently analyzed (p. 73).

This important researcher of the Brazilian curriculum field ends his article reinforcing his bet on the fact that, in curriculum theory and practice, one can walk toward articulating the ideals of modernism with the post-modern categories. In his own words:

If education in favor of a fairer social world is still intended, what is necessary is to guide the pedagogical work from a view of future, of a utopic perspective that challenges the limits of what has been established, that confronts what is real, that outlines a new horizon of possibilities (Moreira, 1997, p. 77).

In an approach that is similar to that developed by Moreira (1997) and Dussel (2009) speaks of a crisis in cultural transmission at schools that would occur by taking one out of two paths: one that attacks the humanistic curriculum - essentially because of its link to the elite - and another that comes from the crisis of the idea of cultural reproduction and transmission. For the author, when it comes to the first path:

The criticism to the humanistic curriculum is based on three strong exclusions that were found in its foundations: that of mass culture, of contemporary culture (particularly that of the products of the mass culture industry), and that of the "voice" of children and teenagers. As George Steiner points out, that criticism can be read as a type of "war cry", of "counterattack to the privilege those who are literate enjoy", because "hundreds of thousands of human beings were excluded" from that privilege...” (Dussel, 2009, p. 353).

Concerning the second path, Dussel refers to the "liquidity" today's context presents, and ponders:

If schools constituted a space for cultural transmission, whose culture was clearly distinct from that of the outside world, and was supported on an alliance between State and family, today, the schools compete with other cultural agencies, such as means of mass communication and the Internet for the transmission of knowledge, intellectual formation and the education of the sensitiveness of children and teenagers. And it competes in conditions of disadvantage, since, because of its "hard" characteristics, and its structuring grammar, the school presents itself as less permeable to those new settings of fluidity and uncertainty (p. 357).

In the search for stating the cultural transmission developed by the school, and for paths to face the crises mentioned, Dussel (2009) comes closer to the balance Moreira intended, when it comes to defending a common agenda for educating the new generations:
The challenge is that of structuring an idea of common culture that can be transmitted and shared, one that takes into account the injustices and privileges from the past, while proposing some other inclusions that do not come from the hands of the market culture or from the self-designed individual. That common culture would have to help relieve the weight of individualism, without the intention of defining cultural transmission with that, without taking into account whatever is in front of it. The possibility of a common culture emerges within this tension between universalization and individualization (p. 359).

This article recaptures that bet, particularly the one expressed in the mid-90s by Moreira, so as to look for indications of what has resulted from that confrontation characterized by the author in theoretical discussions in the curriculum field in Brazil about the curriculum propositions. The goal is that of identifying whether an advance occurred within that articulation between the perspectives presented or not, in other words, whether it is possible to state that the direction given for a pedagogical work developed at schools, and based on some measure in theoretical discussions within the field, highlights the presence of an utopic perspective or not. This utopia is seen as finding its basis in what is expected from the school; thus, its presence is consistent with the production and implementation of curriculum propositions. Thus, the intention is that of starting a discussion about whether those directions may be - or may not be - dialoguing with the school and its agents.

Firstly we will present some elements referring to the different positions present in the debate about curriculum in Brazil starting in the 80s, when, by rejecting a technical view, the critical debate dives deeper into what and how education is given in the public schools. Next, we look for discussing how the theoretical emphasis within the curriculum field, associated with other types of pressure that fall on the process of curriculum proposition preparation and on the school, may be establishing a consistent dialogue with the agents involved in school education, pointing toward a perspective of future.

1. Elements of the academic debate about curriculum, and the production of curriculum propositions in Brazil: between the critical and the post-critical approaches

The 80s was characterized by an intense curriculum renewal movement in Brazil, particularly in the Southeast and South regions, starting when governments opposing the military regime were elected. According to Moreira (2000), “that movement's first priority” was that of:

[…] improving the quality of the education offered at public schools, and to reduce the high grade repetition rates and that of school dropout, which mainly penalized children coming from less privileged classes. They also looked for encouraging school community participation in the decisions, as a way to overcome the authoritarianism of the previous reforms, often imposed from "top to bottom" (p. 111) [emphasis added].

Those curriculum reforms were supported by two main theoretical lines as follows: education for the masses, particularly referenced to in the studies by Paulo Freire, and critical social pedagogy of contents, centrally grounded on the writings by Dermeval Saviani. Both lines had the statement of the need for "theorizing from the specific situation of the Brazilian reality” and the "urgency in building a quality school for the students belonging to less privileged classes” in
common (Moreira, 2000, p. 111). But the divergent points were heavily striking, and need some further consideration.

For the pedagogy of contents, it was important to have: “official programs to be developed by the teachers, taking into account the conditions of the school, the experience of the students, as well as the didactic situations specific to the different grades and subjects” (p. 112). Thus, the reforms performed in the States of Minas Gerais and São Paulo, based on that pedagogy, engaged in basically “offering the students from less privileged class good education, and in democratizing the school space” (p. 112). It was not about questioning how the subjects were organized, and much less about the school subjects per se.

In turn, the other line valued the “knowledge of the masses, tried to start from it, and employed it in the process of raising awareness of the subaltern classes." According to this view, “the curriculum […] should have as its organizing axis the needs and demands of the social life, and not that of school subjects” (p. 114). According to Lopes and Macedo (2011), Paulo Freire's ideas, particularly those found in his work, Pedagogia do Oprimido [Pedagogy of the Oppressed], point to "an alternative to the curriculum's technical concepts, proposing procedures for preparing types of curriculum that are able to try and integrate the real world of individuals to the curriculum decisions" (pp. 34-35).

Still referring to the 80s, Moreira (2000) comes to the conclusion that, within the scope of those alternative curriculum propositions:

As a result of the stimuli of the administrations established and/or mobilization of teachers, in line with the civil society organization in the 80s, some spaces were created for new relations between schools and government office, among the several school individuals, as well as between school and community. [...] The effort to establish democracy at school added to reverting the official authoritarianism of the dictatorship reforms, at least partially, led by "commissions of notables", who, without the participation of subjects with direct interest, prepared "packages" that were hard to be "digested" at school (p. 116).

The author calls the attention to the entry into scene of theoretical aspects linked with Cultural Studies, with post-modernism and post-structuralism in the scenario of the production of those curriculum propositions in the 80s. He also states that the entry continued to be expressed in the 90s, although doing so with specific indications.


Barretto (2000), by also referring to those propositions, points that:

The Secretary of Education in the Municipality of São Paulo, during the term from 1989 to 1992 [Luíza Erundina's term], and that of Belo Horizonte, between 1993 and 1996 [Patrus Ananias' term], both under the guidance of the Labor Party, promoted reformulations to the curriculum concept, and broadened and expanded it as an instrument of organization and performance at school (pp. 26-27).

The author, when referring to the curriculum proposition of the municipality of São Paulo, which had Professor Paulo Freire as head of the office, states that it advocates:
the need of diving into reality, proposing that the school breaks its isolation, while
trying to identify the main issues lived by the populace around it by means of a
survey within the community. From that point, generating themes with strong social
connotation are selected [...]. The subjects are then called on to interpret these
themes, while keeping their specific approach (p. 28).

Concerning the proposition of Belo Horizonte, Barretto (2000) highlights
that:

The Secretary of Education of the Minas Gerais capital [which had the teacher and
government representative, Sandra Starling, as Municipal Secretary of Education
followed until the end of the term by the teachers, Glaura Vasques Miranda and
Miguel Arroyo] chooses to welcome the widest variety of projects prepared by the
schools from different principles, having as confluence point the systematic
knowledge, the experiences of the students, collective participation, and social
issues. [...] [She proposes] the insertion of contemporary themes of great social
appeal that go beyond specific fields of the different areas of school knowledge.
Citizenship is proposed as a core transversal theme, seconded by other themes,
such as environment preservation, living with cultural diversity, respect and
equality of genders and different ethnicities, sexual education and consumer
education (pp. 30-31).

According to Moreira’s (2000) view, the curriculum renewal movements
produced within this decade, despite being:

[...] influenced by the cultural studies, by post-modernism and by post-
structuralism, [...] preserved the concern with school knowledge, by approaching
themes such as: the power-knowledge nexus in the curriculum, the transversality in
the curriculum, new curriculum organizations, the interactions within the curriculum
in action, knowledge and school everyday life as networks, the curriculum as a
space for building identities, the curriculum as practice of signification, the
expression of the social dynamics of gender, sexuality and ethnicity in the
curriculum, the multiculturalism. [...] The penetration of what have been called as
post-critical theorization of the curriculum propositions in Brazil, during the 90s,
was limited to some suggestions about multiculturalism, gender and sexuality (p.
118).

According to this statement, Moreira seems to be underlining that the
influence of theoretical streams within the curriculum field was expressed in those
experiences in the 80s, in the search for finding balance between issues that
were dear to the critical social view of the contents - the importance of school
knowledge in particular - and issues highlighted by the post-critical view, such as
those mentioned above - multiculturalism and gender issues. Furthermore, in the
80s, that theoretical entry found harmony with the demands of social movements
and with the calls around constructivism, with its emphasis on the culture of the
students; in the 90s, new views in tune with neoliberal policies enter the game.

Barretto (2000), however, seems to have a different way to understand
what occurred in the production of curriculum propositions in the 80s:

In the curriculum propositions prepared by the States in the 80s, the treatment
given to the local and regional differences, and to the students’ sociocultural
diversity is poor, among other reasons, because it is not placed as the core issue
of these documents, essentially oriented as they are toward the systematization of
a body of knowledge that is capable of being acquired by all. [...] The generic tone
that, as a general rule, predominates in the propositions, however, does not stop
several curriculum guides from also making explicit a certain sensitiveness and
concern regarding the treatment of issues referring to education of students or
groups either presenting specific ethnic and/or sociocultural characteristics, or
living under very peculiar conditions. [...] Several States refer to the treatment
demands of this kind coming from the school system, but it is common that they be forwarded to the decision of the collective of schools and that of the community, with the recommendation that they should be considered under the light of the theoretical principles adopted by their respective offices of education (p. 23).

In turn, for Lopes and Macedo (2011), it is in the 90s that another theory stream on curriculum emerges within the academic debate in Brazil. They refer to the poststructuralist studies that would have represented a different way to define curriculum that goes beyond issues highlighted by the critical theory, which usually emphasizes the distinctions between what is prescribed, concealed and lived. Actually, this new view would not be about “integrating those levels but about thinking without them” (p. 37).

Still, according to these authors, the influence of the post-structuralist studies in Brazil does not start before mid-90s, when it begins to gradually gain strength in the academic debate about curriculum. They present the post-structuralism principles and highlight this stream:

it encompasses authors who dialogue with structuralism in particular, and take on some of its assumptions and question others. To the extent that the dialogue implies the questioning of Modernism's fundamental aspects, at times, it comes close to what is called post-modern thought (p. 38).

Referring to this dialogue as an approach point between structuralism and post-structuralism, Lopes and Macedo (2011) point out that both of them "defend that language creates that which it speaks of rather than simply naming what exists in the world." Thus, according to this assumption: “one cannot think of knowledge about the world, or a subject they know, by changing the very nature of the structuring subject-object relationship of the Modern project” (p. 38).

But the dialogue between structuralism and post-structuralism includes a very important aspect of detachment that is summarized by the authors as follows:

According to structuralism, language is a system of signs consisting of signifier (sound and word) and signified (its concept), which have an arbitrary relationship between one another. To the extent that language does not represent reality, any signified can be attributed to a signifier, and that is a cultural process. [...] post-structuralism is forced to fully disconnect the idea of signified from that of signifier. There are no structural relationships between two signifiers, there are no fixed distinctiveness between them, and, as such, there is no signified associated to them [...] Thus, every signifier fluctuates, and their meaning can only be defined within a historical, discursive and socially contingent formation (Lopes & Macedo, 2011, pp. 39-40).

The emphasis on the next text stretch aims at highlighting the conflicts that can be expressed at the level of the production of guidelines that are essential for the work done at schools, in face of the influence of those different ways to approach curriculum in the academic debate. Thus, in the midst of the curriculum critical theories:

a good curriculum theory should create mechanisms that would allow the choice, in the universal culture, of what to teach; it should be concerned about the underlying power relationships; it should notice that knowledge (part of the culture) is not external to the student, but, rather, it interacts with them; it should handle the education process involved in what occurs at schools, in addition to transmitting selected knowledge of an universal culture. If, however, [as it occurs in the post-structuralist view] the reality is consisted of language, neither culture nor knowledge can be regarded as mirrors of the material reality. [...] Culture and
knowledge are the very production of meanings given in multiple moments and spaces, one of which we call curriculum (Lopes & Macedo, 2011, p. 41).

However, if under the point of view of the theoretical streams of the curriculum field the producers of documents that will guide the curriculums in the Brazilian schools find such inflexions, one cannot forget that pressures of other natures are added to them, and they are expressed in other legal texts. Concerning that matter, Libâneo highlights that:

Within the past years, by taking into account the official documents of policies and guidelines for education at least, the themes approached in events and publications in the area, and the theoretical guidance presented in training courses for teachers, it is possible to identify three directions referring to the purposes of schools and how they function; the direction coming from multilateral organizations, the World Bank in particular, given to education policies of protection to poverty that are associated with the instrumental curriculum, or that of immediatist results; the sociological/intercultural direction of attention to social and cultural diversity, usually linked with the studies conducted in the curriculum field; and the dialectic and critical direction based either on the tradition of the historical and cultural theory or on versions of social and critical pedagogies (Libâneo, 2016, p. 40).

On the article, Libâneo develops his arguments around the internationalization processes of education policies and their impacts on Brazil, with special attention to what he calls "poverty relief policies", which, within the education field, are expressed in the embrittlement of the specific role the school plays, which serves the less privileged part of the population. In turn, this article will seek to identify in curriculum propositions the way by which the calls of post-critical theories may be granting these documents peculiar characteristics. It is worth emphasizing that those influences of the academic field on the production of curriculum propositions possibly occur by exercising advisory activities developed by teachers linked to universities with the offices of education of States and Municipalities, as well as by the offer of continuing education activities for the school system by those professionals. We believe that, through these paths, the tensions in the curriculum field will add to outlining specific paths when it comes to curriculum guides for basic schools.

So as to develop this analysis, we will focus on two documents: a curriculum proposition produced in 2004, in the municipality of Vitória/ES that had a researcher linked with the post-critical curriculum view as adviser, and a second version of the document titled Base Nacional Comum Curricular, under production led by MEC [Ministry of Education and Culture] since September 2015.

2. The curriculum proposition in the municipality of Vitória/ES

The document titled: Diretrizes Curriculares para o Ensino Fundamental [Curriculum Guidelines for Basic Education] produced by the municipal school system in Vitória was published in 2004, and had as leading agents in the preparation process a General Consultant, Professor Marisa Cristina Vorraber Costa, in addition to professionals linked with the Municipal Office of Education (SME).

The General Consultant is a researcher in the curriculum field, and during the period she developed that advisory service with the SME in Vitória, she was also conducting many research projects, among them one titled: When the post-
modern theory invades the school: a study about new cultural artifacts, identities and practices. For this project, according to the researcher, the theoretical references were those “that are subsidizing the investigations in the field of contemporary Cultural Studies, particularly those from the post-structuralist stream inspired by Michel Foucault and other authors, who have been outlining the field named Foucauldian studies”.2

The document is split into 13 items, where the most general aspects are dealt with in the first four items (1) Introduction, (2) For a more inclusive education in the view of a historical and cultural pedagogy, (3) Making explicit the fundaments of the propositions directed to a historical and cultural pedagogy, (4) Transversal axis of the Guidelines in the view of a historical and cultural pedagogy toward inclusive education. This analysis will be conducted on those items.

One first statement highlighted on the stretch chosen for the analysis exposes an assumption related with the knowledge that has to be the object of school education that deals with the "necessary and pertinent relationship among types of global knowledge, of abstract-generic-universal nature and types of knowledge that are inserted within the political, economic and social reality of educators and students" (Vitória, 2004, p. 13). In other words, we highlight the importance, in the historic-cultural pedagogy, of "the relationship among culture, politics and pedagogy, acknowledging that, by excluding the game of power and that of politics, educators obstruct the possibility for understanding how education is linked to social changes." And we also reinforce that it is about "defending culture as an important location for the political struggle, and about pedagogy as a vital component of the political culture" (p. 13). It is expressed there the defense of a critical attitude in the face of knowledge "of abstract-generic-universal nature" that emphasizes the needed appropriation of conceptual tools and of a thought that favor the unveiling of the relationships of power included in the production and selection processes of that knowledge that will constitute the curriculum, but one that does not abandon it, does not ignore its potential for the education of the new generations. The role of pedagogical choices understood as powerful elements for establishing the relationships between this school knowledge and the reality in which teachers and students are inserted are equally highlighted.

In these first parts of the document it is already found a concern over the treatment given to the differences at school, which is regarded here as an indication of marks of post-critical readings in the discussion and preparation processes:

[The development of the curriculum], within any dimension, involves the issue of the contribution school education and educators are requested to give for overcoming the difficulties stemming from the presence of people and groups with different social classes, race, gender, etc., meaning, the issue of whether to serve the minority, sidelined groups or not, in complex societies (p. 14).

As elements theoretically supporting the document, the following is pointed out within the text body:

the view stemming from Neo-Marxism, when incorporating elements of cultural nature without over-determining the economic nature from Gramsci and Critical Theory; post-critical substantiation is understood as the contribution of Cultural
Studies, of Sociolinguistics, of Post-structuralism, among others, that have cause a significant change to how man and Nature are seen, inserting that view in the relationship among politics, economy, culture and power, and producing an important contribution for understanding society, and, in it, for understanding how school education takes part in this process in a passive or transgressing and/or transforming way (Vitória, 2004, p. 14).

It is also of interest to verify what is seen as the role those involved in the culture transmission process play:

the culture workers, educators and others should rethink the relationship between the identity policy and the possibilities for social and self changes. What is at stake here is the need for new discursive practices, and new practical, critical and post-critical discourses aimed at analyzing and recognizing the need for combining different and changeable cultures, so that differences are defended within a broader view of the social and democratic public life (p. 17).

Next, the item, "Making explicit the fundaments of the propositions directed to a historical and cultural pedagogy", presents aspects that bring the propositions for each subject closer to one another, consubstantiated on the political-social-historical, epistemological and methodological basis of theoretical-philosophic, critical and post-critical foundation (p. 18). The following excerpts highlight how the concern about the differences clearly permeates some of the subjects:

For instance, in the Portuguese Language, we highlight: “the importance of critically analyzing the discourses as establishers of and established by judgments of values that may or may not be of socio-ideological, prejudicial nature (particularly against black people, women, the elderly, homosexuals), as well as values that may or may not be of historical-cultural nature, including those of aesthetical nature” (p. 18). In Natural Sciences, we highlight the importance "of accessing scientific ways to explain and understand what is known, respecting the collective's beliefs, taking into account the alternative students have, their cultural productions, explanations of religious origins, of oral and ethnic tradition, meaning, their previous knowledge and their ability to reason" (p. 19). In turn, in Geography, it is stated the belief "in an interface between the critical category and non-critical category, such as race, ethnicity, gender, identity, subjectivity, otherness, multiculturalism, among others, that give Geography the opportunity to strengthen its ethical and political commitment" (Vitória, 2004, p. 20).

There is still item four, “Transversal axis of the Guidelines in the view of a historical and cultural pedagogy toward inclusive education”, to be pointed out, and it defines transversal axis as those referring to the Education of Young People and Adults, to Anti-racial Education, and to Special Education.

At the end, the document brings the theoretical references supporting it. Among them we find the following works: Não lugares: introdução a uma antropologia da supermodernidade [Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of super-modernity] (Augé, 1994), O local da cultura [The location of culture] (Bhabha, 1998), A invenção do cotidiano [The practice of everyday life] (Certeau, 1996), Atos impuros [Impure acts] (Giroux, 2003) and A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade [The cultural identity in post-modernism] (Hall, 1999).

We point out that the excerpts selected in the curriculum proposition analyzed, the link with the critical view is expressed by stating the need for searching for an understanding of mankind and that of Nature within a broader
analytical framework, supported on a given setting of power that needs to be taken as object of reflection. In turn, the post-critical view seems to be particularly expressed in highlighting the differences among people and groups, notably those who are socially less privileged. This view is also clearly accepted by theoretical references adopted for the production of the document. In turn, it is not identified the emphasis placed on knowledge's discursive nature, meaning, on the statement that each and every type of knowledge would be equally relevant to be included in the school curriculum, since it constitutes a discourse whose production and legitimation responds to the games of power played among social groups.

It seems that a possible reading is that of continuity of the "purposes" of the previous critical references. Following that direction, the strong calls of the new view - that of post-modernism -, although being somewhat obscure and poorly known, make sense, are slightly in tune with what is already believed in – and this opens the door for it to be accepted.

3. BNCC and the rights to learning and developing

As the most up to date expression of this movement of production of curriculum definitions, it became the second version of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) presented on April 2016, after discussions in different instances and public consultation through a website put together for that purpose. It is indicated in the mentioned document that:

Given its participative construction nature, it is expected that the BNCC, under an inclusive view, be the basis for the right of Basic Education students to learn and develop. A common curriculum basis, a document of normative nature, is the reference to other schools and school systems to prepare their curriculums, so that they become the instrument of pedagogical management of the systems. To that end, it needs to be articulated to a set of other policies and actions within federal, state and municipal scope that allow the principles, targets and goals around which it is organized to be made effective (Brasil, 2016, p. 25).

And, so that the inclusive view taken on in this document is possible, we state the need for:

incorporating to the curriculum documents the narrative of historically excluded groups, in a way that human, social, cultural, economic diversity in the Brazilian society is contemplated in the education public policies, aiming at overcoming discrimination (Brasil, 2016, p. 25).

One of the paths by which the highlighted issues are dealt with by the post-critical curriculum theories - such as issues that emphasize the caution needed for dealing with the critical treatment of the differences in the school curriculum - and expressed on legal texts resulting from the struggle of social movements is addressed in the document, is by indicating the Special Themes. Those Themes:

concern the issues that permeate the experience of subjects within their life context and performance, thus interfering in their identity-building process and in how they interact with other subjects and with the environment, ethically and critically positioning themselves on and in the world. Thus, they are contemporary social themes that go beyond the cognitive dimension, and that contemplate the political, ethical and aesthetical dimensions of educating these subjects, with a full human education in view. Thus, its approach to the curriculum propositions aims at overcoming the logic of mere transversality when they are positioned as structuring and contextualizing agents of the learning goals. The Special Themes of
multidiscipline nature permeate the learning goals of several curriculum components, in the different stages of Basic Education (Brasil, 2016, pp. 47-48).

Such Special Themes are: (1) Economy, financial education and sustainability; (2) Indigenous and African cultures; (3) Digital and computer cultures; (4) Human rights and citizenship, and (5) Environmental education (p. 48).

For the present analysis, the Indigenous and African Culture Special Theme, clearly linked with the demands expressed in emends to LDB [Law on Brazilian Education Guidelines and Basis] nº 9394/96, stand out. On the BNCC second version it is stated that:

For a long time, the history taught at schools was the history lived and told centered in the European point of view. This view did not take into account the history and culture of indigenous and African populations.

The Indigenous and African Cultures Special Theme is related with acknowledging the important role played by actors who were excluded from the historical narratives, as well as from the need that this recognition be incorporated to the education process of the new generations. Also in line with Law nº 11,645/2008, which emended Article 26-A of the LDB, is the compulsory approach to the African-Brazilian history and culture, as well as that of the indigenous population by the curriculum (pp. 49-50).

Although it is stated that the approach to Special Themes "aims at overcoming the logic of mere transversality", since they would be positioned as structuring and contextualizing agents of the learning goals in the curriculum components, it is worth advancing a bit further into the analysis of the indications on how to deal with the African, African-Brazilian and indigenous history and culture in basic education. Accordingly, excerpts that stand out from some curriculum components are exposed below.

In the Portuguese Language, for instance, the following overall goal for basic education is identified: “To read and appreciate literary texts about different cultures and people, by valuing from the authors of our literary tradition to those of the culture of the masses, as well as the African-Brazilian and African literature, and works by indigenous authors” (pp. 97-98).

In turn, Physical Education states it seeks to offer:

a series of possibilities so as to enrich the experience of children, teenagers, young adults and adults in Basic Education, allowing the access to a vast cultural universe. This universe includes body knowledge, aesthetical, emotional, lucid experiences that are inscribed, but that are not restricted to the rationality typical to scientific knowledge, which guides the pedagogical practices at school. To experience and analyze ways of expression that are not underpinned only by that rationality is one of the potentialities of this component, and one of the core reasons for its condition as right of the students across Brazil (Brasil, 2016, p. 102).

By dealing with the curriculum component History, the document points out that, in it, we should:

contemplate the right of all to understand the multiple temporalities lived by the societies, as well as the awareness that the societies have different histories that can be approached from different points of view. That need is manifested with growing critical strength from the independence processes of former European colonies in Africa and Asia in the second post-war period, requiring the acceptance of different plural historical periods and articulations, by overcoming the
assumption of a single and hegemonic center, meaning, of the existence of a single or universal history (pp. 154-155).

And, still concerning this curriculum component, it is stated:

Strictly speaking, there is no past, present or future common to all humans; regardless of that, it is possible to critically accept general principles for sets of societies, for instance, human rights. But this cannot overshadow the existence of multiple pasts and presents, or the necessary and constant need for comprehending and reinterpreting them. In the case of Brazil, this need is even more pressing, particularly when the history of the African people and the fate of indigenous populations are considered (p. 155).

Another curriculum component where the concern about diversity is easily identified is Religious Education. Accordingly, it is stated that:

The school knowledge of Religious Education needs to cover the religious cultural diversity, by questioning the ambivalence of religious discourses and structures, without any form of proselytism. One avoids conceiving the Religious Education area as the study of different religions per se, or the religious knowledge that predominates within certain academic environments that, at times, idealize the contribution of certain religions to the society, and may produce ethnocentric and monocultural readings (Brasil, 2016, p. 170).

It is also worth saying that the second reviewed version of the BNCC brings no indication of the references that support the choices, nor does the content of each curriculum component or the end of the document. However, it transits across the consensual references, in the critical view already made flexible by the more post-critical calls, and, with that, the instructions can become legitimized without the need for theoretical justifications.

Final considerations

Our intention, in this article, was that of identifying the presence of a utopic view, as defined by Moreira (1997), in two Brazilian curriculum propositions produced in 2004 and 2016. The intention was that of highlighting aspects in these two texts that could reveal the marks of the curriculum critical theories and the views linked with post-modernism, taking into account that such views have as one of their practical expression pathways the advisory activities provided by researchers from universities with the curriculum propositions producers, as well as the continuing education processes offered by the school system.

So as to begin the analysis of what was previously presented, it is worth recovering the following statement by Azanha (1985):

Absolute assumptions concern the ideas that are so fundamental to the efforts of knowledge or action that questioning them would have a paralyzing effect in relation to those efforts. As an example of absolute assumption, think of the idea of human improvement. The rejection of this idea would make the education activity unfeasible. To believe in it, accepting it is something absolutely inevitable to the educator (p. 71).

With this education absolute assumption, we ask: how could a guiding school work document fail to bet in a future, in a utopia? And where would this view of future to which the school points find support?

In turn, by presenting the ideas that started to gain grounds in the post-modernism, particularly in the emergence of Post-Structuralism and Cultural Studies, the emphasis on the notion of discourse stood out, and it is antagonistic...
to the search for "truths" that would have any intrinsic power to explain the social and natural phenomena. Accordingly, since every discourse is a social-historic construction marked by relationships of power that either legitimate them or reject them, no cultural selection to be included in a curriculum to be accessed by all at the schools would find support. These choices, according to this approach, could be made based on what?

What the curriculum propositions analyzed show is that the subjects the curriculum is based on, a selection of knowledge of different areas, seem to respond to the need for establishing a point toward which the school education should walk. In turn, the calls of post-modernism, if they are not a rejection to those subject discourses, come in defense of the expression and of the respect to other discourses, of less privileged social groups. This is probably another expression of the utopia remaining in curriculum proposition preparation processes.

This aspect is expressed more strikingly in the Vitória document, which restates it to every school subject or teaching modality. In the BNCC, in turn, this finds a clearer defined place in the Special Themes, and can grant the issue a secondary character.

About the treatment granted to the diversity in the Brazilian curriculum propositions, Galian (2014), by comparing two reports that analyze these documents, produced in distinct periods - in the mid 90s and the first decade of 2000 - highlights that:

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Despite the advance in proposing policies serving diversity, such as that referring to ethnic-racial relationships and serving those with special needs, the advance in curriculum propositions occurred quite timidly. Although the relevance of legal devices that are attentive to these issues is not ignored, we cannot undervalue the importance of a critical approach to these aspects in documents that guide the work the school performs, going beyond simple theoretical statements, and advancing into the indications of ways to deal with this theme.
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The absence of such critical approach recalls what Silva (2000) states:

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The issues concerning culture pluralism and difference became the core issues in the critical education theory, and even in official pedagogies. Despite being treated in a marginalized way, as "transversal themes", these issues are acknowledged, including by officials, as being legitimate knowledge issues (p. 73) [Emphasis added].
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And, despite the gradual centrality found in official curriculum texts for culture pluralism and difference, the author asks:

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How would one configure a pedagogy and a curriculum that do not focus on diversity but on the difference, conceived as a process, a pedagogy, and a curriculum that were not limited to celebrating the identity and the difference, but would seek to question them? (p. 74).
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It is suggested that utopia is thus expressed in two pathways, when focusing on the preparation process of curriculum propositions: by legitimating the subject-based knowledge as the horizon for school education of the new generations, and by stating the need for staying attentive to the other distinct discourses of the school subject basis - the discourses about socially less privileged groups -, as well as by indications for the development of a pedagogy that values the student's previous knowledge. Still, some documents advance
toward a critical position, both in relation with school subject knowledge and that referring to the identity production processes - such as the Vitória curriculum proposition -, while others are limited to defending the recognition of the differences, and leaving the possibilities of critical reflection about the theme in a cloudy place of what is "transversal" or "special." The very explicitness of theoretical references in the propositions can be seen as a step forward in that direction, since that is how the choices referring to the confrontations within the academic field are revealed. By choosing to stay silent in relation to those choices - when the theoretical references are not indicated - the goal may be that of responding to the legal demands and to an "education common sense", meaning, to shared knowledge that emerges from combining guidance with the knowledge and concepts coming from the curriculum producers or shapers, which may be aimed at making it easier for the document to be accepted by the education professionals.

Within the theory field, however, the emphasis placed on the discursive nature of knowledge makes defending utopic views all the more difficult. Hence, perhaps, the difficulty in getting the curriculum theorists involved in the discussion about a common basis for the basic education curriculum - which may favor the adoption of an attitude of non-critical acceptance of a school subject knowledge basis that is not discussed about enough.

In the intersection of the discussions within the theoretical field, the search for government instances as ways to guide the work of the school, the discourses and practices that make sense to teachers and students, and the highly unequal conditions in which the education of children and teenagers develops end up becoming hybrid discourses. In them, elements of different natures, at times incompatible, overlap. However, if in the case of theorists in the curriculum field, it is possible to keep a closer link with certain views without walking toward the establishment of a flexible attitude, for the curriculum producers, such orthodoxy is unfeasible. In other words, in this place of prescription, legitimating the text produced mainly depends on it being linked with a future, a utopia, as well as with what makes sense at school.

Calls that make sense relate with values, types of knowledge, traditions that justify the pedagogical activity, and support its continuity, by confirming, unfolding and diving deep into the pedagogical mindset with the inclusion of new ideas, concepts and approaches. Within this relationship, the issues linked with what is valuable, important, or oriented to social justice find relevance, since education is not undone from a normative horizon that is based on educating students.

On several stretches from his discussion about culture, curriculum and school, Forquin (1993) considers that issue. For instance, by discussing the cultural relativism within different directions from the anthropological thought, which may be equally appreciated within the pedagogical plan, he states the following:

By definition, education is necessarily inscribed in a normative horizon, and that is what distinguishes one education process from information, communication process or that of influence of one person on another. Education certainly includes all these: information, communication, the exercise of influence, but it also means something that is more than that; it includes an idea of development, of
improvement, of positive transformation of individuals (despite following the
direction of their own potentialities, their own self-affirmation power – in what it
distinguishes from training, conditioning and indoctrination), and thus postulates in
its core, in an explicit or implicit, active or latent state, the presence of a value
scale (pp. 160-161).

In the study mentioned above, the author points to the differences found in
education intentionality, which constitutes the intransigence of the internal
"practical" approach and that of the external analytical approach: the value issue
(p. 165). Those are two possible readings, and they are in inevitable opposition –
the normative pedagogical reading and the scientific reading (in this case, sociological reading):

Every one of them are valid in their own order, and are found endlessly doomed to
meet one another, without ever understanding the other or merging with the other
in a superior synthesis. They are to coexist as two sides, two tendencies, and two
inseparable and incompatible poles of thought. The sociological reason is fully
oriented toward describing, explaining and objectifying the phenomena (Forquin,
1993, p. 166).

In turn, he states, the pedagogical reason is "essentially normative and
prescriptive", and includes in its "regular postulation a certain type of practical
idealism of its own" (p. 166).

By seeing the normative horizon as the context of the indicators of the
utopic thinking, characteristic to pedagogical reason, we can observe that,
differences in theoretical view apart, these marks are present both on the official
document, which seeks to prescribe what is to be taught in basic schools across
the country, and the curriculum-guiding document of a State of the Federation.
Accordingly, the very references of Cultural and Post-structuralist Studies are
flexible when it comes to dialoguing with the path the pedagogical process should
take, by particularly expressing itself in the emphasis given to the differences
among people and groups, notably those socially less privileged, without
abandoning the discussion about knowledge, toward a cultural policy articulated
to a fairer society.

Despite being two opposing poles, the theoretical references and the
pedagogical reason dialogue with one another in the curriculum propositions, in
the same way that, in building the pedagogical discourse, the instructional and
the regulatory discourses coexist with one another (Bernstein, 2000). It seems
clear that on the documents analyzed, the curriculum is not dissociated from the
pedagogical determinations, and, with that, it includes the defense of what is
valuable, what is to be taught, of what announces some possibility of growth, of
improvement, of social transformation, of future.

The data presented here seems to indicate Moreira's (1997, p. 73)
pondering on the balance needed between views on critical theory and those
more linked to post-modernism by preserving the traits of utopia as
contemplated. However, we cannot fail to raise other indications reflecting the
confrontation presented in the dialogue with the school and its agents.

This article has taken into account some difficulties that permeate the
directions for the pedagogical work developed at schools, in addition to the
theoretical discussions within the curriculum field: the different formulations in
relation to the purpose of schools and how they should function, the competition
with other cultural agencies for transmitting knowledge and educating children
and teenagers, the criticism to curriculums and to the rigidity of the work of the school in serving the heterogeneous school population. Faced with so many different messages, and within the complex framework of questions and issues in the everyday life - not abandoning the view of utopia, but, rather displacing its focus -, the educators can lose faith in the work more oriented to knowledge, to the defense of a common culture to be distributed. They then turn to defending only the development of diversified projects, the acceptance and caution, challenged by that which is announced, or that is understood as announced in the references deemed as more up to date and more accurate.

As questions for this research, emerge those concerns over the indications of a new type of shared knowledge that is constituted by crossing the several directions given and curriculum theories with types of knowledge and concepts coming from teachers, in the search for identifying the relationship between this mindset with the right to knowledge, and the learning process and education of those children and teenagers at school.

Notes
1. The referred text was first presented at a roundtable discussion held at the II Encontro Perspectivas do Ensino de História, and is part of this event's proceedings.

References
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