

Historical culture in Secondary Education in the State of São Paulo: theoretical reflections for educational conversation¹

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ABSTRACT

Brazil instituted a new Secondary Education (SE) with Law 13.415/17. São Paulo was the first state to begin its implementation, in 2021, with the “Curriculum in Action” (CA) program. This article investigates the CA for History, focusing on three issues: conceptions of curriculum, curricular identity and the historical culture promoted by the CA. The research, based on qualitative documentary analysis, adopts references on curriculum and History Teaching, including Richard Rorty's Neopragmatism, reflections by Michael Apple and post-critics such as Ivor Goodson and Gimeno Sacristán, as well as Jörn Rüsen's concept of historical culture. The results indicate that the CA imposes limits on the teaching of history and the humanities, which affects the quality of democracy. It is argued, however, that the active participation of teachers and students, through conversation with the real world, can transform SE by bringing it closer to real needs and promoting a more democratic Education.

KEYWORDS: New Secondary Education; New São Paulo Curriculum; Historical Culture; Democracy.

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*Cultura histórica no Ensino Médio do Estado de São Paulo:
reflexões teóricas para a conversação educacional*

RESUMO

O Brasil instituiu um novo Ensino Médio (EM) com a Lei 13.415/17. São Paulo foi o primeiro estado a iniciar sua implementação, no ano de 2021, com o “Currículo em Ação” (CA). Este artigo, investiga o CA de História para o EM, focando três questões: concepções de currículo, identidade curricular e cultura histórica promovida pelo CA. A pesquisa, baseada em análise documental qualitativa, adota referenciais sobre currículo e Ensino de História, incluindo o Neopragmatismo de Richard Rorty, reflexões de Michael Apple e pós-críticos como Ivor Goodson e Gimeno Sacristán, além do conceito de cultura histórica de Jörn Rüsen. Os resultados indicam que o CA impõe limites ao ensino de História e das ciências humanas, o que afeta a qualidade da democracia. Argumenta-se, porém, que a participação ativa de professores e estudantes, pela conversação dotada da palavra verdadeira, pode aproximar o EM das necessidades reais e promover uma Educação mais democrática.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ensino Médio; Currículo Paulista; Cultura Histórica; Democracia.

Cultura Histórica en la Educación Secundaria en el Estado de São Paulo: reflexiones teóricas para la conversación educacional

RESUMEN

Brasil instituyó una nueva Educación Secundaria (ES) con la Ley 13.415/17. São Paulo fue el primer estado en iniciar su implementación, en 2021, con el “Currículo em Ação” (CA). Este artículo investiga el CA de Historia para la ES, centrándose en tres cuestiones: conceptos curriculares, identidad curricular y cultura histórica promovida por el CA. La investigación, basada en un análisis documental cualitativo, adopta referenciales sobre currículo y enseñanza de la historia, incluyendo el neopragmatismo de Richard Rorty, reflexiones de Michael Apple y poscríticos como Ivor Goodson y Gimeno Sacristán, además del concepto de cultura histórica de Jörn Rüsen. Los resultados indican que

el CA impone límites a la enseñanza de la historia y las ciencias humanas, lo que afecta la calidad de la democracia. Se argumenta, sin embargo, que la participación activa de docentes y estudiantes, a través de conversaciones con la palabra verdadera, puede acercar la ES a las necesidades reales y promover una educación más democrática.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación secundaria; Currículo Paulista; Cultura Histórica; Democracia.

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Introduction

The primary motivation for producing this article is to disseminate the results of a completed doctoral investigation (Santos, 2024) and to continue the curricular conversation we initiated around and through the New São Paulo Curriculum (NSPC) and the New Secondary Education (NSE) in the State of São Paulo. This federative entity was the first in Brazil to formally approve the curriculum and begin implementing the NSE, a model that has been widely criticized by various social sectors. These criticisms culminated in the submission of Bill No. 5.230/2023 to the Federal Chamber at the end of October 2023⁵, for debate in the legislature. This bill, supported by a broad public consultation process in which students, teachers, and other stakeholders called for the repeal of the NSE in opposition to the advocates of privatization, was later enacted as Law No. 14.945/2024.

The structure of this article begins with the presentation of the methodological framework, which allows us to outline some characteristics of the NSPC/NSE. We then describe the theoretical framework, which includes the conceptions and disputes that surround curriculum theories and curricular models, particularly as they affect

⁵ The aforementioned PL was supported by a broad consultation process, in which students, teachers and other actors called for the repeal of the NEM in opposition to the heralds of privatization. Available at: <https://encurtador.com.br/wdXFp>. Accessed on: 2 aug. 2024.

History teaching. These discussions encompass the notion of historical culture, which we later articulate — in the following subsection — with narrative identity and conversation. Next, we present an analytical description of the NSPC/NSE, highlighting aspects we consider critical. In the final considerations, we reflect on the relevance of sustaining a form of conversation grounded in truthful speech, as opposed to hollow words, since truthful speech is committed to transforming reality and promoting hope through a utopian horizon (Freire, 2022).

We work from the perspective that the historical culture underlying the NSPC reflects the hegemonic and ideological dominance of a competency-based education model, one that seeks to shape citizens who are flexible in the workforce yet rigid in identity, and incapable of critically (re)constructing narratives. The role and identity of the History discipline are defined by competencies conceived through a reductionist perspective, one that fails to encompass the complexity of non-objectively measurable learning outcomes, such as the capacity to feel indignation, show solidarity, create, criticize, interpret, propose, argue, narrate, along with cognitive actions, attitudes, values, and motivations connected to culture and historical consciousness.

Methodological Aspects of a Curriculum Research

We understand that documentary research aligns with the nature of the NSPC, as it is a document that reverberates with the current and ongoing educational, cultural, and social changes. Regarding this relationship between documentary sources and contemporary changes in progress, Gil (2014, pp. 153–154) emphasizes that in order to identify “[...] processes of change, it is not enough [...] to observe people or question them [...]. In this sense, documentary sources become important for detecting changes in the population, in the social structure, in social attitudes and values, etc.”

Our perspective on the qualitative approach to curriculum research considers that curricula and their theories involve identity-related and subjective aspects (Silva, 2021). The very nature of the research question — previously mentioned — demands addressing aspects related to the subjectivities of curricula (Silva, 2021) and the disputes they provoke, particularly within the field of History Teaching and historical science (Rüsen, 2007; 2010).

Still within the methodological domain, our choice of case study confronted us with the need to situate our object in a broader context, in order to allow for some level of generalization. Therefore, we sought to place the NSPC within the field of curriculum theories. Such an approach implied possibilities that depend not on what the concept of curriculum is, but on what each theory conceives around the curriculum. In this sense, we consider that the identity of the NSPC — as with other documents — corresponds to a social place (Certeau, 1982), and is therefore not a technically and politically neutral artifact, but rather a product of intentionalities and an object of disputes.

We understand that the NSPC is part of a tradition of educational policies in the state of São Paulo promoted by the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), which, according to Sanfelice (2010, p. 152), has shown itself to be authoritarian. An example of this can be seen in “[...] the evaluation and bonus systems for 'productive' teachers [...]”. The author investigated the period of the administrations of governors Mário Covas (1995–2001), Geraldo Alckmin (2001–2006), Cláudio Lembo (2006–2007), and José Serra (2007–2010), which led him to affirm that São Paulo’s educational policies have “[...] been characterized by punctual undertakings, not always lasting, with media-oriented effects and questionable qualitative outcomes [...]” (Sanfelice, 2010, p. 153). For the aforementioned author, evidence of the failure of such policies includes: the precarious contracts of teachers in São Paulo and their low salaries compared to those in other Brazilian states. These statements remain current, as the situation has worsened under subsequent governments, along with other

adversities in educational policies — among which we highlight the NSPC/NSE developed under the responsibility of the João Dória administration (2019–2022), whose implementation was initiated and continued by the Rodrigo Garcia (2022–2023) and the current Tarcísio de Freitas (since 2023) administrations — such that they “[...] deeply compromise the teaching work, student learning, and the role of the state as an educational agent [...]” (Sanfelice, 2010, p. 153).

Curricula and Curriculum Theories: conceptions and narrative disputes

We align ourselves with curriculum theorists who argue that it is more fruitful to understand the discourses, the narrative nature, and the identity of a curriculum or a curriculum theory than to merely answer what curriculum is, or to theorize with the expectation of simply discovering, describing, and/or objectively explaining the reality represented in a given curriculum (Silva, 2021). First, because description itself, from a post-structuralist perspective, is not neutral and contributes to the production of its object. In our case, our narrative about curriculum does not effectively produce what the NSPC is, but rather a particular notion that may be more or less legitimate — yet still a possible notion among others.

The second aspect motivating our choice of a perspectivist focus is related to the field of curriculum theories, which can be grouped into three conceptions: traditional, critical, and post-critical (Silva, 2021). In short, traditional theories seek to be neutral and disinterested, but are inevitably implicated in power relations, being prone to “[...] more easily accept the *status quo*, dominant knowledge and expertise, and end up focusing on technical issues [...]” (Silva, 2021, p. 16, author's italics). According to Silva (2021), such theories likely emerged in the United States during the 1920s to address the demands of intense industrialization and immigration, which required the massification of schooling, in line with Taylorist aspirations to manage education through the rationalization of curriculum construction and testing.

In the 1960s, critical theories emerged in response to traditional curricula and their association with maintaining the *status quo*, perpetuating social inequalities, and promoting conformity. Critical authors provoke suspicion and questioning that foster deep change. Instead of techniques for “efficient” curricula, they advocate for understanding the sociopolitical effects of curricular practices.

Critical curriculum theories involve the concepts of hegemony and ideology. The concept of hegemony is particularly relevant as it avoids the reductionist view that social and cultural relations merely reflect economic structures. This distinction is fundamental to the effectiveness of ideology, which becomes entrenched when the dominant class’s ideas are internalized by the broader society (Chauí, 2017). We adopt Karl Marx’s concept of ideology, understood as “false consciousness” that operates through the unspoken, sustained by the gaps in narratives — not as lies, but as a commitment to not revealing everything (Chauí, 2017).

As for the possible meanings attributed to hegemony, Antonio Gramsci himself — the author who uniquely and recognizably developed the concept — “[...] oscillates between a more restricted meaning of ‘direction’ as opposed to ‘domination,’ and a broader, more comprehensive sense of both (direction plus domination) [...]” (Cospito, 2017, pp. 365–366). Given our topic and object, it is pertinent to highlight that Gramscian descriptions of hegemonic disputes — articulated with ideological operations — contribute, in our understanding, to curriculum studies, as the latter are shaped within contemporary ideological tensions, notably by hegemonic ideas within society. According to Tarlau and Moeller (2020), such disputes are at the core of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) and, consequently, in the curricula that take it as a reference, such as the NSPC.

Michael Apple’s thought (2006) enables a dialogue with post-critical theorists by employing the concepts of ideology and hegemony to discuss tensions between social classes without falling into critical determinisms. Apple argues that educational research should be grounded in a theory of

economic and social justice, aiming to reveal how the school curriculum is historically linked to the socio-economic and cultural context, exposing the underlying conflicts. In capitalism, according to Apple (2006), schools must operate effectively by promoting technical knowledge and socializing students in such a way that normalizes a society centered on technical and economic capital as the only possible reality. This understanding of power relations is supported by concepts such as cultural capital, proposed by Bourdieu's theoretical framework, which serves as a starting point for Apple (2006), who appropriates this framework to develop his investigations, while seeking to distance himself from potentially deterministic perspectives regarding the relationship between economic structures, culture, and consciousness.

We undertake this comparison of authors from different theoretical frameworks — critical and post-critical — to emphasize our choice of a framework that considers ideological disputes over curriculum, carried out through different narratives that engage with historical culture and the broad range of social relations that shape contemporary life, with all its contradictions and possibilities.

In other words, from our perspective, analyzing a contemporary curriculum such as the NSPC demands a theoretical framework that encompasses the crises of our time. These crises may be described through discussions on historical culture and the narrativist paradigm proposed by Rüsen (2007; 2014); they may also, within the broader curricular field, consider that such contemporary narratives are infused with ideologies that dispute hegemony based on the unique horizon of contemporaneity. This also implies the emergence of new subjectivities that require the construction of other understandings about the relationship between knowledge and power — and their narrative manifestations — and the diverse identities that compose a multicultural world. Such perspectives are embraced by post-critical curriculum theories (Silva, 2021; Goodson, 2019).

Due to these demands of contemporary curriculum research, we incorporate into our theoretical framework a concept and a notion, both from the field of philosophy: narrative identity (Ricoeur, 2014) and conversation (Rorty, 1994), which we explain in the next subsection. Our decision to articulate these theoretical references is grounded in the understanding of curriculum as narrative (Goodson, 2019, p. 94), which marks a shift from the notion “[...] of a curriculum as prescription to a curriculum as a narrative of identity, from prescriptive cognitive learning to narrative learning for life management.” Although Sacristán (2000) had already successfully proposed distinctions among curricula — prescribed, in action, and enacted — we understand that investigating curriculum as narrative, by opening the way to work with the narrativist paradigm, contributes to analyses of historical culture (in the Rüsenian perspective), as we intend to do in relation to the NSPC/NSE.

Articulation of Historical Culture, Narrative Identity, and Conversation

In the field of historical science, the narrativist paradigm has been met with both enthusiasm and rejection (Rüsen, 2010), which is partly explained by the fact that “attributing a type of rationality to narrativity is anything but obvious [...]” (Rüsen, 2010, p. 153), since historians critical of the narrativity paradigm are primarily concerned that History might regress from its scientific status, as narrativity would be incompatible with scientific rationality.

This debate among historians implies a search for universal laws akin to those in mathematical–experimental sciences, which would render the cognitive operations of historical thought as untimely weaknesses for its claim to recognition as a scientific field. According to Rüsen (2010), this resistant perspective toward narratives began to be overcome thanks to the innovative contributions of American philosopher Arthur Coleman Danto, to

which we add the input from French historian Michel de Certeau and another U.S. philosopher, Richard Rorty.

For Certeau (1982), as previously mentioned, scientific objectivity in the sense of neutrality is impossible for the historian, since their production concerns constitutive elements of their identity and social position. Rorty (1994), in turn, observes that the field of Philosophy, in contemporary times, has lost the possibility of persisting in the exclusive metaphysical search for foundations legitimizing knowledge — the so-called modern philosophical foundationalism based on the Cartesian cogito — according to which the product of philosophical work would reveal the essence or principle (*archê*) of each element of reality. For Rorty (1994, p. 382), it is up to Philosophy and science — in view of the limits of modern rationality, cultural relativism, and the incommensurability of scientific paradigms — to conceive the act of knowing not as an effort to describe a definitive essence nor an epistemological construction about the ontology of the world and knowledge, but rather as a right to believe, which invites us to view “[...] conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge must be understood [...].”

In other words, Rorty (1994, p. 382) advocates shifting epistemology toward hermeneutics or “[...] from the relationship between human beings and the objects of their inquiry to the relationship among alternative patterns of justification [...],” thereby enabling changes in intellectual history’s standards.

Given the unpredictable and mutable nature of the phenomenal world, capturing it through the senses rather than Cartesian rationality seems auspicious. However, Rorty’s (1994) proposal raises, as feared by historians worried about losing objective scientific grounding, the risk of Philosophy’s disappearance. If one accepts the impossibility of a definitive metaphysical answer, does Philosophy retain any function? Rorty’s neopragmatic answer (1994) remains inconclusive, considering the question open, yet he speculates on possible roles for philosophers in future generations. What matters most in his thesis is that “[...] the moral concern

of the philosopher should be more about continuing the Western conversation than insisting on a place for the traditional problems of modern philosophy within the conversation,” which helps us locate the function and heuristic potential of narratives.

Another valuable contribution regarding narrative potential comes from Paul Ricoeur’s narrative theory (2014), which supports the viability of the notion of “narrative unity of a life” by comparing it to fictional narrative. In developing his theory, Ricoeur (2014) addresses four inherent difficulties of life narratives — which we identify as akin to historical narratives. Regarding the first difficulty, he reflects on the narrator’s role and their relationship to characters, which in fiction are distinct roles, unlike life narratives — closer to historical narratives — in which the author’s notion is ambiguous. Concerning the second difficulty, he addresses literary devices that, in fictional narratives, resolve gaps at the beginning and end, both regarding the distant past and projecting an uncertain future in which death is looming.

The third difficulty is inherent in the variety of narratives an individual might create to tell several stories about their life trajectory, each lacking a definitively conclusive attribute. In a novel, this issue is at least mitigated because each work has a specific context, whereas historiographic narratives and life stories are necessarily interwoven with other individuals’, societies’, and eras’ trajectories — as suggested by intergenerational legacies. Ricoeur (2014) observes that because of this intertwining and the indefinite nature of beginnings and endings, life narratives differ from literary stories, leading him to question whether it is possible to defend the notion of narrative unity of a life. Is it still valid to produce and disseminate historiographical narratives? He argues that precisely because real life is evasive, we need the aid provided by fiction, which enables retrospective organization after events occur.

The fourth difficulty concerns the assumed limitation in understanding the self, which would be confined to the past or, at best, struggle to incorporate future projections and plans. Thus, historical narratives would not help articulate past, present, and future, or experience and expectation. Ricoeur then negates what Rüsen (2010) describes as historical consciousness, which would be constituted

[...] by the generic and elementary operation of practical life, of narrating, with which human beings orient their acting and suffering in time. Through narrative, representations are formulated of the continuity of human and world evolution, instituting identity via memory, and inserted, as a determination of meaning, into the framework that guides human practical life (Rüsen, 2010, pp. 66–67).

In sum, the comparison between literary-type narratives and life stories conducted by Ricoeur (2014) — extendable to historical narratives — reveals a complementarity that favors a dialectic between fiction and life stories, between the narrativist paradigm and historiographic production; it also reminds us that narrative is an original element of life and capable of describing experiences, as Ricoeur (2014) observes, and that historical science is nourished by everything emerging from practical life (Rüsen, 2007).

In historical science, Rüsen (2010) evaluates that, paradoxically, the introduction of narrative heuristic potential was aided by the sidelining of narratives—justified by an assumed lack of rationality in narrative activity. For that reason, it was taken more as a cultural practice of linguistic and literary nature than as an activity of the scientific field. This also resulted in some erasure of narrative rationality, as if narrating were not a rational mode of argument. Faced with that, in History, narrative activity was valued in the scope of linguistic practice as a procedure to constitute meaning and regulate that procedure, which was beneficial, since it allowed investigation into the specific rationality of historical science regarding

narratives, “[...] to begin with this linguistic approach and with typical categories of meaning and the constitution of meaning. Meaning is more fundamental than rationality. [...]” (Rüsen, 2010, p. 154). We can assert that historical narratives are a way of constituting meaning based on communicating rational arguments, because their nature operates toward the constitution of meaning—a requirement of the nascent narrativist paradigm: contemporaneity.

In the Rüsenian interpretation, contemporaneity imposed the emptying of modern perspectives that were meaningful until the period centered on the industrial, technical, and scientific model that promised advances in freedom, equality, and democracy. Faced with this crisis of meaning, the question that emerged for the field of historical science is whether it can confront this orientation crisis (Rüsen, 2010), similar to what Ricoeur (2014) identifies as an identity crisis and what Rorty (1994) describes regarding Philosophy’s activity.

Rüsen’s (2010) answer asserts that History can help address this orientation crisis, based on five factors constituting a disciplinary matrix he proposes to describe the fundamental logical structure of how historical thought is constituted and how it can be guiding. The five factors are: 1) interests, 2) ideas, 3) methods, 4) forms of presentation, and 5) functions.

The first matrix factor refers to practical and everyday needs of the present time in view of temporal transformations. The second helps elaborate orientation deficiencies, interpret humans and the world, raise hypotheses, and propose actions. The third refers to the rules guiding the historian’s work to shape ideas into forms recognizable by historical science. The fourth emerges from the need to disseminate research results—usually via a historiographical textual product, which implies narrative work, language, and contemporary options discussed around the impossibility of objective and neutral communication, possible textual style gains that also concern the function of guiding practical action (the fifth factor) of actors outside the historian community.

This matrix aims to help us understand that “[...] historical thought obeys [...] the logic of narrative” (Rüsen, 2010, p. 149), since this thought is presented in the form of narrative and its production results from an intellectual activity categorized as narrative (Rüsen, 2010). Therefore, we propose to leverage the possibilities offered by the narrativist paradigm for History and its teaching, and for curriculum studies that conceive curricula as narrative (Goodson, 2019). Based on such assumptions, we engage with the propositions of Ricoeur (2014) and Rorty (1994).

Regarding Rorty (1994), his investigation into working with narratives originates from considerations converging with those of Rüsen (2014, p. 327) — according to whom contemporaneity is marked by a lack of inspiring, animating ideas that “[...] promotes paralysis and discouragement. Discouragement with politics, social stagnation, demobilization of hopeful movements [...]”. For Rorty (2007), faced with the crisis of metanarratives, conversation nourished by diverse narratives can be a way to link “the present to the past, on the one hand, and to utopian futures, on the other” (Rorty, 2007, p. 21), which would bring forth utopias and the capacity to indefinitely imagine new possibilities, valuing the freedom to think, converse, and propose reasons instead of seeking pre-existing truth.

These theoretical implications encourage us to choose the category of historical culture as the link to History Teaching, as it enables articulating historical consciousness, narrative identity, the narrative constitution of historical meaning, because it is also a product of the interpretive processes of historical narrative—for example, historical identity which, in turn, involves the “[...] relationship of man with himself, [and] time [...] interpreted [...] so that a minimum consistency of the ‘I’ be achieved: historical identity” (Rüsen, 2010, p. 156). These contours, from our perspective, favor discussion of the NSPC as narrative (Goodson, 2019).

In Rüsen’s words (2014, p. 101), “historical culture is the quintessence of social activities and institutions, through and within which historical

consciousness takes place [...]”, meaning it is the most refined, excellent, and essential product of daily experience, which implies historical meaning and orientation in practical life, being guided by “[...] experiences, interpretations, orientations and motivations referring to past experiences as conditions for understanding the present and expecting the future [...]” (Rüsen, 2014, p. 101).

In summary, by adopting a conception of historical culture as a transitory product of social construction, we associate it with the idea of constituting historical meaning and historical consciousness based on the narrativist paradigm, which in turn encompasses and constructs a narrative identity (Ricoeur, 2014) with elements of past and present, including (why not?) material conditions described based on notions and concepts developed by historical and dialectical materialist thought, which we have already highlighted: ideology and hegemony (Apple, 2006; Gramsci, 2022).

New Paulista Curriculum – "Curriculum in Action" – for the New Secondary Education: Identity and Narrative Contours

We emphasize that our focus is on SE, which is why we highlight that the New Paulista Curriculum (NSPC/SE) is a product of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) and also of the Secondary Education Reform, established by Law 13.415/17, which originated the NSE. The mentioned law was built following the publication of Provisional Measure (MP) 746/2016, signed by then-President Michel Miguel Elias Temer Lulia, which, in our view, was an action that made any meaningful conversation impossible. First, because the MP highlighted the disproportionate power of the Executive Branch in producing immediate legal effects and forcing the abbreviation of discussions already underway in the Legislative Branch (Lastória; Santos; Mello, 2018). Secondly, the aforementioned president lacked political legitimacy to implement any structural reforms, as he was not elected for such tasks.

When comparing the strategies for the approval of the reform with the discussions on the BNCC, Rebecca Tarlau and Kathryn Moeller (2020) argue that the reform had a more Gramscian approach – in the sense of building a hegemony with different social sectors, which was made possible primarily through the actions of the Lemann Foundation – while the discussions around the BNCC were more draconian. However, there are several repercussions of the curricular identity of the BNCC in the NSPC, as we observe when comparing insights from different studies. For example, the social participation⁶ and philanthropy-based consensus⁷ are, respectively, strategies identified by Cássio (2019) and Tarlau and Moeller (2020) as decisive in the construction and implementation of the BNCC.

Social participation, according to Cássio (2019), was the limited and limiting mode of participation for students, teachers, and society in general in the formulation and implementation of the BNCC. According to the report by Omuro (2020, p. 2)⁸, the NSPC was also framed by the same logic. In both cases, participation was limited to “[...] legitimizing decisions previously imposed by higher political, economic, or social instances [...]” (Santos, 2024, p. 73), including the fact that any potential effective questioning of these policies was rendered impossible, as the so-called “public opinion” has hindered access to any criticism opposing the hegemonic ideological perspective (Tarlau; Moeller, 2020). According to Lourenço (2021, p. 120), the entry “participation,” when explicitly stated in the New Paulista Curriculum (NSPC), is not related to associations of education professionals or school communities, but rather to the “[...] meaning that uses the verb ‘participate’ in the imperative form: ‘I inform you that...’.”

⁶ Both the BNCC and the NSPC obtained the endorsement of democratic documents through public consultations, seminars, and other participatory activities designed to prevent any effective questioning from prospering (Cássio, 2019; Omuro, 2020).

⁷ According to Tarlau and Moeller (2020, p. 554), “[...] the concept of philanthropy-based consensus shows how philanthropic foundations have become important contemporary actors in establishing new hegemonic blocks in education across different geographies,” funding training courses or recruiting individuals to spread, through various channels, including mainstream media, ideological perspectives that favor their interests, as the Lemann Foundation did in relation to the BNCC.

⁸ Selma de Araújo Torres Omuro, a pedagogue with over thirty years of experience in the São Paulo education network and a PhD in Education, who participated in discussions about the NSPC as a Teaching Supervisor for the Registro region of SP, stated that she had no minimum conditions to discuss the NSPC proposal.

Still regarding the social participation supported by philanthropy-based consensus, we highlight that even within the National Education Council (CNE), conversation was rendered impossible, as evidenced by the statements of at least four councilors: Cesar Calligari, who resigned from the presidency of the bicameral commission responsible for analyzing the BNCC and publicly presented severe criticisms of the BNCC/SE⁹, Aurina Oliveira Santana, Malvina Tuttman, and Márcia Angela Aguiar, who stated in their requests for reviews that they were surprised by the urgency and untimeliness of the CNE Presidency, which, according to the councilors, opted for speed at the expense of the necessary discussion, an affront to the collegiate body, which is a state body, not a government body (Cássio, 2019).

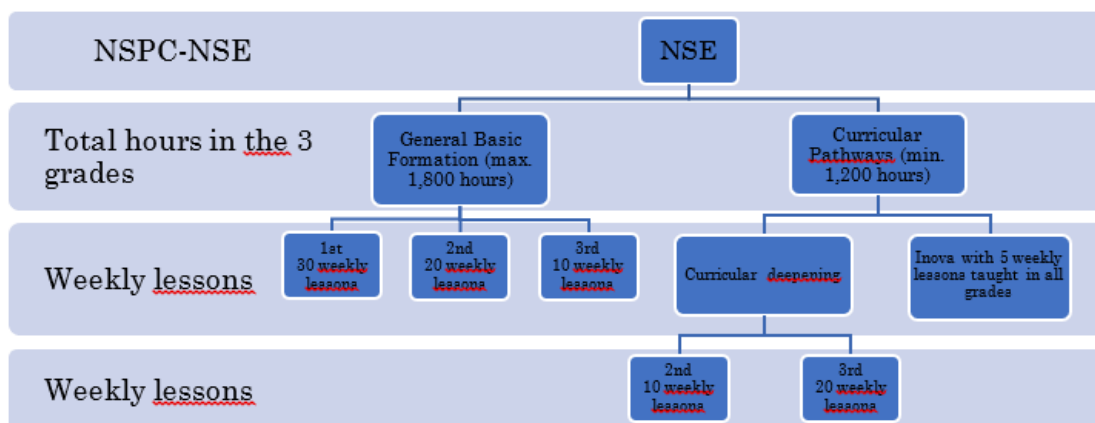
The NSPC is explicitly aligned with the BNCC/EM, which, in turn, was "[...] ratified by Rossieli Soares himself when he held the position of Minister of Education, in December 2018." (São Paulo, 2020, n.p.) and later, as head of SEDUC-SP, led the implementation of the federal document. Not surprisingly, he expressed pride that the São Paulo education network was the first to implement the NSE. However, Rede Escola Pública e Universidade (2022, p. 5) disapproved of this pioneering approach, as the rushed implementation ignored the adverse context when schools were closed due to the Covid-19 syndemic, with no in-person activities, relying on the "[...] unsuccessful implementation of an emergency remote teaching policy, characterized by improvisation, with the creation of the São Paulo Media Center for Education (CMSP)."

The alignment of the NSPC with the BNCC is evident through the competency-based pedagogy—favored by private foundations (Tarlau and Moeller, 2020)—and through Eurocentric History teaching with a quadruple approach (Cerri and Costa, 2019).

⁹ Letter to the advisors of the National Education Council - César Callegari – Resignation from the Presidency of the BNCC Commission.
Available at: <https://www.epsvj.fiocruz.br/carta-aos-conselheiros-do-conselho-nacional-de-educacao-cesar-callegari-renuncia-a-presidencia-da>. Accessed on: 25 jan. 2022.

Our investigation encountered a large volume of information in the NSPC/NSE that hinders the effectiveness of what would be the most innovative proposal of the NSE: the curricular pathways to be chosen by students according to their interests. Indeed, the pathways were formed by the three mandatory subjects of the Inova Educação Program (Life Project, Electives, and Technology and Innovation, taught in all SE grades with 5 weekly lessons). Only students in the 2nd and 3rd years could choose deeper curricular tracks—the other part of the pathways (figure 1).

FIGURE 1: The New São Paulo Curriculum for NSE.



Source: Santos, 2024, p. 246.

Figure 1 points to some problems, starting with the reduction in the weekly hours of the General Basic Formation, which consists of the classic curricular components, including History, which, together with Geography, Philosophy, and Sociology, forms the area of Human and Social Applied Sciences (HSAS). Of the 3,000 hours initially planned for SE, the General Basic Formation was limited to a maximum of 1,800 hours, meaning that in the 3rd year, only 10 weekly lessons were dedicated to all subjects required for university entrance exams, further exacerbating inequality in access.

Another problem is that the deepening options to be chosen by students amounted to 293 possible courses to be developed over a semester, called curricular units (UC). These UC/matrices included areas such as: a) Languages and Their Technologies; b) Mathematics and Its Technologies; c) Natural Sciences and Their Technologies; d) HSAS. This total of 293 units also included matrices for schools in the Full-Time Education Program (PEI) and a HSAS matrix for Novotec Expresso¹⁰. Each matrix had two versions, one for the daytime and one for the nighttime¹¹. Additionally, there were two matrices aimed at students who began SE in 2020, both for daytime and nighttime periods.

In addition to the curricular implementation being marked by an overload of information combined with the lack of support for teachers and students to handle the new possibilities, the UC offered in the curricular deepening were notable for providing content, skills, and competencies that were minimally effective for entering the workforce, unless we think in terms of entrepreneurship and the businessification of oneself. As for preparatory purposes, access to universities became even more favorable for students in private schools.

The reduction in General Basic Formation—including History—diminishes the chances of developing historical culture. This culture is the result of the interaction between historical consciousness in its aspect of seeking historical rationality, and utopian thinking, seen as the elixir of culture by generating restlessness, mobilization, and inspiration. The critique of utopia, performed by historical consciousness, improves the utopia's ability to stimulate a persistent passion, fostering a culture that

¹⁰ The Novotec Program, from the São Paulo Government, aimed to offer free technical and professional courses to SE students in the state network. There were four modalities: Novotec Expresso; Novotec Integrated; Novotec Virtual; and Novotec Mobile. More information available at: <https://www.novotec.sp.gov.br/#Programa>. Accessed on: 5 mar. 2022.

¹¹ The matrices for the daytime and nighttime are the same, except that the latter allocates half of the weekly hours for each component to expansion lessons, which may be offered by CMSP, either synchronously or asynchronously, to meet the requirement of increasing the minimum hours from 2,400 to 3,000 hours, according to Deliberation CEE 186/2020. Available at: <https://abrir.link/FJvtk>. Accessed on: 1 jun. 2025. Our investigation focused on the daytime matrices.

interprets both the human being and the world—"I" and "other"—in a meaningful and motivating way (Rüsen, 2014; Ricoeur, 2014).

Rüsen's view of culture as a guiding force for action involves skills such as narrating and orienting oneself in time. This leads to the idea of a historical culture that enriches conversation with practical elements, giving meaning to time (past, present, and future), helping to discern truth and act with hope. By reducing opportunities to promote this historical culture, the NSPC compromises the quality and essence of the conversation, hindering the creation of a narrative curriculum (Goodson, 2019), politically and socially legitimate, with higher chances of successful implementation. Therefore, we argue that the NSPC is qualitatively fragile due to being shaped by the "[...] authoritarian pragmatism of action aimed at solving problems [...]" (Rüsen, 2014, p. 321).

The promise of the NSPC/NSE was to resolve the historical ambiguity of the role of SE, whether preparatory or vocational. Beyond the lack of a complete educational perspective (Ramos, 2003), the authoritarian pragmatism of NSPC/SE brings another weakness: it lacks concepts that stimulate action, especially passionate action, which is essential for a culture of action (Rüsen, 2014). Authoritarian pragmatism is, therefore, paralyzing, fatalistic, and silencing, and it contaminates the NSPC/NSE, which can only be countered, in our view, through genuine conversation. A possible starting point is to initiate the debate on why it is of interest to both business and state powers to drastically reduce History and other disciplines that lead to humanistic reflection: Why do they claim that it is not of interest? Why do they prefer that it is not taught? Who benefits?

As a result of these questions, the next step is to question which historical culture the NSPC points to. Obviously, it points to one that does not depend on the dissemination of school historical knowledge, both socially referenced and academically grounded. The promotion of the poverty of this category of knowledge by the NSPC widens the space for the historical culture of the population to be tied to notions, knowledge, and

understandings foreign to the sciences and/or impermeable to conversation with academic knowledge, which in turn aims to continuously increase the rationality of the narratives that engage in debates.

Academically oriented historical knowledge, including school knowledge, is fundamentally supported by principles of foundation (logical, empirical, documentary...) of statements, the prevalence of the best argument, and the provisionality of conclusions, through which no definitive truths are worked with, but with what is currently known about each topic: there is a method in the process of reviewing what is known so far. Its central core, therefore, is not authority but consensus, which can only be produced through open conversation. This *modus operandi* is preparatory for democratic life, and although common to all scientific disciplines, it is the Human Sciences that build the most significant bridge between these disciplinary perspectives and social experiences. Reducing the space and importance of these disciplines is not a technical or impartial decision but a step towards a societal project whose historical culture moves away from effective participation and the ability for political dialogue armed with critique, reasoning, and the perception of the possibility for change as things are today. This is because a truly participatory society cannot disregard what History and the other Human Sciences are capable of providing, both in terms of forming citizens and establishing parameters for configuring state institutions, actions, and public policies.

In the analysis of the construction and legitimation of the NSPC, as well as its contents, one notices a transversal element: a project of historical culture, political culture, societal culture, all guided by the subjugation of people to political and economic power. Because the participation in consultations for its development was deficient, a mere simulation of effective conversation with hollow words. The disregard for school disciplines in Human and Social Sciences, in turn, directs society toward an incapacity for participation because it is progressively deprived of the educational outcomes of these disciplines: a historical and political culture of participation.

An example of the new political culture of subjugation that neoliberalism seeks to promote through this curriculum structure is the idea of entrepreneurship as a solution to work and employment problems in late capitalism, where job stability and workers' rights are also dissipating. This is an individualistic project that carries a particular concept of time – hence it is a teaching of History that circumvents disciplinary knowledge in History – trapped in a continuous present, with a fatalistic projection where the future simply repeats the present. The past does not provide the tools to think of alternatives for addressing the challenges of the work world in a cooperative, collective manner, or supported by a democratic state. There is a lack of access to historical knowledge that is not confined to repeating what we know about social life, as seen through presentism.

Considerations for the maintenance of conversation

These aspects and many other criticisms, including those concerning the actions of the current state government of São Paulo, could be addressed in a productive manner. However, for this to happen, it is essential to have a curricular conversation characterized by sincere and sensitive listening (Goodson, 2019), a conversation sustained by the true word, one that is dissatisfied with the authoritarian pragmatism—immobilizing, fatalistic, and silencing of anti-hegemonic voices (Rüsen, 2014; Goodson, 2019). But why doesn't the conversation progress? Because the dialogue is not genuinely with the population, but with educational foundations linked to business interests (in the political spectrum located in a certain moderate right), where the effective language is money, which always speaks louder. What blocks the effective communication between the state and its citizens, as well as their collective organizations, is the financial interest, both dual and triple: that of private schools, which see public school students once

again out of the game for the most competitive spots in public universities; the privatization of public education, opening new markets for capital; and, lastly, the prevention of additional state spending on education, especially on SE, preserving fiscal surpluses destined to pay interest on public debt that benefits private rent-seeking, which permeates, from top to bottom, the dominant classes. On the other end of the right-wing spectrum, the far-right narrative is anchored in its alternative truth, those “alternative facts,” which are structurally incompatible with dialogue.

The utopia we defend—the utopia of genuine conversation—is not so distant if we consider the success of the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific, and Technological Education, which has reduced the gap between traditional SE and vocational education by serving students with socioeconomic conditions similar to those in regular public schools (Nascimento; Cavalcanti; Ostermann, 2020).

In the case of São Paulo, perhaps the current administration is not inclined to engage in conversation, but neither will our tenacious passion—born of the utopia critiqued by historical reason (Rüsen, 2014)—succumb, especially because governments are more contingent than the possibility of genuine conversation (Rorty, 1994; 2007). From the Brazilian context, we echo Goodson (2019), who, upon investigating the educational scenario in seven European countries, affirmed from both quantitative and qualitative data that even in large-scale assessments, the social democratic countries—those that listen to and value teachers and other actors in the sector—consistently come out on top. Finland, for example, stands in contrast to countries like England, leading the author to state: “[...] it seems that it is time to seriously assess the neoliberal orthodoxy in the field of education,” which we consider a good starting point for promoting a historical culture pertinent to full citizenship.

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Received in February 2025.

Approved in July 2025.