

## ARTICLE

# Curriculum, power and geography textbook policy in Brazil

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### ABSTRACT

In this third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a period in which neoconservative actions seek to euphemize, distort and make social, political, economic and cultural issues invisible, discussions about school curriculum and public educational policies become central. Initially, we promoted an analysis of the relationship between curriculum and power, in which different actors express their intentions, highlighting some themes and underlying others. Then, we approach the role of the textbook in the school curriculum, especially in the field of Geography teaching, in a perspective that sometimes relativizes, sometimes prioritizes the use of these manuals in the teaching and learning processes. Finally, we seek to understand public policies related to textbooks and the recent actions in the field of curriculum, embodied in the Common National Curriculum Base (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular* — BNCC) and in the High School Reform.

### KEYWORDS

Common National Curriculum Base; National Textbook Program; educational policies.

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## *CURRÍCULO, PODER E A POLÍTICA DO LIVRO DIDÁTICO DE GEOGRAFIA NO BRASIL*

### RESUMO

Neste terceiro decênio do século XXI, período no qual ações neoconservadoras buscam eufemizar, distorcer e invisibilizar temas sociais, políticos, econômicos e culturais, as discussões sobre currículo escolar e políticas públicas educacionais tornam-se centrais. Inicialmente, promovemos uma análise da relação entre currículo e poder, no qual diferentes atores exprimem suas intencionalidades, sobrelevando alguns temas e subjazendo outros. Em seguida, abordamos o papel do livro didático no currículo escolar, especialmente no âmbito do ensino de Geografia, em uma perspectiva que ora relativiza, ora prioriza o uso desses manuais nos processos de ensino e aprendizagem. Por fim, buscamos compreender as políticas públicas relativas ao livro didático e as recentes ações no campo do currículo, consubstanciadas na Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC) e na Reforma do Ensino Médio.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Base Nacional Comum Curricular; Programa Nacional do Livro Didático; política educacional.

## *CURRÍCULUM, PODER Y POLÍTICA DE LIBROS DE TEXTO DE GEOGRAFÍA EN BRASIL*

### RESUMEN

En esta tercera década del siglo XXI, un período en el que las acciones neoconservadoras buscan eufemizar, distorsionar y hacer invisibles los problemas sociales, políticos, económicos y culturales, las discusiones sobre los planes de estudio escolares y las políticas educativas públicas se vuelven centrales. Inicialmente, promovimos un análisis de la relación entre el currículum y el poder, en el que diferentes actores expresan sus intenciones, destacando algunos temas y otros subyacentes. Luego, abordamos el papel del libro de texto en el currículo escolar, especialmente en el campo de la enseñanza de Geografía, en una perspectiva que a veces se relativiza, a veces prioriza el uso de estos manuales en los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje. Finalmente, buscamos comprender las políticas públicas relacionadas con los libros de texto y las acciones recientes en el campo del currículum, plasmadas en la Base Nacional Curricular Común (BNCC) y en la Reforma de la Escuela Secundaria.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Base Nacional Curricular Común; Programa Nacional del Libro de Texto; política educativa.

## CURRICULUM AND POWER

Curriculum developed as a social, and particularly, economic and cultural need, which expresses distinct power relations, ideologies, values, and concepts related to education. From a post-structuralist perspective, Silva (2003, p. 16) indicates that curriculum should firstly be understood as a question of power, recalling that “to select is an operation of power. To privilege a type of knowledge is an operation of power”.

This power of selection is defined amid a broad field of discussions and debates in the sociology of curriculum. According to Bernstein (1993), various agents act in the production and reproduction of pedagogical discourse, including the State, teachers, families, communities, editors and textbook authors, universities, and others. In this case, the field of official recontextualization is that which is created and dominated by the State and its agents, while that of pedagogical recontextualization is constituted by educators and universities. Thus, the recontextualizing pedagogic field:

1. Encompasses the university and departments of education, university centers of education and their research and private foundations;
2. Includes publications specialized in education: seminars, journals, as well as editorials, their readers and advertisers;
3. Can be extended to fields not specialized in educational discourse and its practices, but that are capable of influencing both the State and its different entities, and special places, agents and practices in the realm of education. (Bernstein, 1993, p. 197)

For Bernstein (1993), according to theories of cultural reproduction, power relations in society are transported to the interior of schools and reproduced by them. In this way, both schools and teachers have more prominent roles in the reproduction of the pedagogical discourse. Bernstein (1993) also emphasizes that both fields of recontextualization — the official and the pedagogical — are affected by fields of production (economic) and symbolic control.

When considering the curriculum based on various practices, Sacristán (1998) affirms that schools, through teaching, transmit a certain culture which is transformed by processes of selection, formulation (confection of the curriculum), and performance (teaching).

Thus, the author maintains that curriculum is formulated by different agents, who plan it from outside the environment in which it is carried out in practice and affirms that “the culture selected and organized within the curriculum is not the culture itself, but a scholastic version in particular” (Sacristán, 1998, p. 128). He also affirms that the culture contained in curriculum is a “curricularized” knowledge and that curriculum, therefore, has its own culture, which provides a service to socialization and reproduction.

Another important concept discussed by Sacristán (1998) is that of hidden curriculum. This concept, coined by Philip Jackson (1968), is defined as a non-evident dimension — as opposed to the “official curriculum” — constituted in social

relations, in the distribution of time and space, in relations of authority, in the use of prizes and punishments, in evaluative processes, and others. Moreover, Sacristán (1998) affirms that norms for school behavior are not generated as something autonomous, but are related to social values and forms of understanding the role of individuals in social processes. And adds:

The most objective analyses about the hidden curriculum come from social and political study of school contents and experiences. Habits of order, timeliness, correction, respect, competition-collaboration, docility and conformity are, among others, aspects consciously or unconsciously inculcated by schools that denote a model of citizen. (Sacristán, 1998, p. 132)

For this author, these values are also elements of a hidden socialization and schools are not isolated from social conflicts external to them. Thus, messages derived from the hidden curriculum are not isolated from social conflicts such as the roles of sex in culture, the exercise of authority, mechanisms for distribution of wealth, and positions of social political, racial and religious groups.

One example is that of distinction in the treatment between boys and girls, by imposing certain standards of behavior and conduct according to gender. By becoming manifestations of a social conflict, they can be analyzed for their hidden but also explicit dimension. For Sacristán (1998), certain cases of school dropouts and failure are passive and active manifestations of the norms of hidden curriculum, or the failure of socialization that is imposed.

By understanding curriculum as a process and not only as a list of contents defined *a priori* by a team of specialists who defend the dominant class, Sacristán (1998) understands that a broader number of agents act in the preparation, implementation, and development of curriculum, which approaches the conception and elaboration of textbooks, for example. For Sacristán (1998, p. 140), “if the relationship between curriculum and school practice is not mechanical, but mediated by various practices, these practices are elements of reproduction or, to the contrary, potential elements of resistance”.

To justify his position, Sacristán (1998) criticizes authors who subjugate school culture to the domain of a dominant class, as such a vision ignores resistance manifested by groups of teachers and students to attempts at cultural imposition, and also does not consider that schools are places of cultural production.

Apple (2006, p. 37) affirms that, beyond economic property, there is symbolic property, or cultural capital, which is preserved and distributed by schools. Thus, according to Apple (2006), it is possible to understand how schools “create and recreate forms of consciousness that allow the maintenance of social control without need for dominant groups to appeal to open mechanisms of domination”. Ideological issues present in curriculum are also broadly questioned by Michael Apple (2006, p. 40):

The fundamental act involves making problematic the forms of curriculum found in schools, so that their latent ideological content can be revealed.

Questions about selective tradition, as presented below must be taken seriously. To whom does knowledge pertain? Who selects it? Why is it organized and taught in this way? And to this group in particular? It is not enough, however, to only formulate these questions. We are also guided by the attempt to link these investigations to current concepts of economic and social power and ideologies. In this way, we can begin to have a more concrete appreciation of the connections between economic and political power and the knowledge that is made available (and that which is not made available) to students.

We must understand that ideology is a complex concept. Beginning from a broad conceptualization, in which it is defined as a false consciousness that deforms social reality, serving the interests of the dominant class, Apple (2006) warns of the need to understand ideology in connection to the concept of hegemony. To this end, he uses studies of Antônio Gramsci and Raymond Williams to affirm that

hegemony refers not to the accumulation of meanings that are at an abstract level in some place ‘in the upper portion of our brains’. To the contrary, it refers to an organized [...] effective and dominant group of meanings, values and actions that are lived (Apple, 2006, p. 39).

This vision is similar to the conceptual discussion made by John Thompson (1990, p. 76), for whom “to study ideology is to study the way that meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination”. That is, what matters to Thompson (1990) is not the truth or falsity of the symbolic form, but the way that these forms serve to establish and sustain relations of domination.

It is also important to indicate where the main points of support are found for curriculum research according to Sacristán (1998, p. 138, our emphasis):

In *curriculum documents* (the prescribed and regulated curriculum); in the *programs* or *pedagogical projects* of schools (curriculum in the context of organizational practices); in *learning assignments* or lesson plans of teachers (curriculum in action); in *exams* or evaluations and in *text books* (didactic guides and various materials), the latter classified as “curriculum created to be consumed by teachers and students.

## CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOKS

It is in this context of discussion about curriculum that textbooks are inserted. According to Barreto (1998), although since the mid 1980s a broad range of official proposals and documents has been prescribed, this plurality and apparent diversity of curriculum guidelines in the country became diluted, because what marks curriculum in classrooms is frequently the strong connection between teachers and the textbooks adopted by them. Apple (2002) identifies this correlation between official curriculum and textbooks.

Whether this is desired or not, in most American schools, curriculum is not defined by disciplines or by suggested programs, but through a certain artefact — the standardized and specific manual for each level of mathematics, reading, social studies, sciences (when they are taught) and others. (Apple, 2002, p. 65)

Textbooks, manuals or school compendiums are complex objects of study that combine various elements. They are pedagogical works that reflect scientific knowledge and cultural characteristics of a given society in a certain historic period and geographic space. Moreover, they accompany technical and commercial processes of editorial production and are one of the vectors of curriculum in school environments.

Choppin (2004) indicates that textbooks exercise four essential functions: *referential*, or curricular, which involves a faithful translation of an educational program and special support for educational contents; *instrumental*, because they place in practice methods of learning, most often with exercises and activities; *ideological* and *cultural*, because they are important vectors of dissemination of language, but also of values of ruling classes; and *documental*, because they compose a group of textual or iconic documents that can contribute to the development of students' critical spirits. Moreover, Choppin (2004) does not see textbooks as being solely responsible for the education of students.

The didactic book is not, however, the sole instrument that is part of youth education [...]. These other didactic materials can be part of the universe of printed texts (charts or wall maps, world maps, vacation diaries, collections of images, [...] school encyclopedia...) or are produced in other medium (audiovisual, didactic software, CD-Rom, internet, etc.). [...] The textbook, in these situations, no longer has an independent existence, but becomes a constitutive element of a multimedia group. (Choppin, 2004, p. 553)

Also considering the multifaceted aspect of textbooks, Bittencourt (2010) points to some important characteristics of school manuals such as being *commodities*, and thus products that obey a market logic; as being *collective productions* that in addition to an author involve editors, graphic technicians, illustrators and visual programmers; as *depositories of school contents*, and support for curricular proposals; as *pedagogical tools*, in which are inserted not only the contents of disciplines, but how they should be taught; and finally, the fact that they are *vehicles that carry a system of values, an ideology, a culture*.

The complexity of the nature of this cultural product explains with greater precision the predominance that it exercises as a didactic material in the process of teaching and learning a discipline, whatever it may be. The textbook has been, since the nineteenth century, the main tool of the work of teachers and students, and is used in a wide variety of classrooms and pedagogical conditions, serving as a mediator between the official proposal of the power expressed in curriculum programs and the school knowledge taught by the teacher. (Bittencourt, 2010, p. 72)

Although textbooks are often transformed into standardized objects, with simplified language that impede reflections by or disagreements from readers, the use that teachers and students make of the material varies and they can become work tools that are more suitable to the needs of autonomous education.

Sene (2014), defending the use of textbooks, argues that teachers, as good as their education may have been, are not capable of producing consistent didactic material, partly because in most cases they have low salaries, are required to teach many classes, and lack time. This combines with the fact that, according to data from the 2015 *Censo Escolar* (Brazil's School Census of 2015), nearly 41% of high school geography teachers and 70% of students in the final years of elementary education (Redação, 2017), did not receive education in this field. For these teachers, therefore, textbooks are important tools for finding texts, supporting interdisciplinary activities, providing suggestions for complementary readings, and other resources that can facilitate teaching<sup>1</sup>.

While textbooks can thus support the work of teachers, they can also create limitations, such as a dependence on attributes, values, contents and methods found in textbooks. As Oliva affirms (1999, p. 40), “even with changes towards renovation, most textbooks still resist and maintain a journalistic and anti-academic format”.

Sene (2014), in turn, questions this sovereign positioning imposed by academic geography and disagrees that textbooks are a mere didactic transposition<sup>2</sup> of academic knowledge to schools.

Even today much of the content found in didactic books does not involve transposition. Based on my experience as an author, I find that I would not be able to write didactic books if I had to base myself only on the production of the “scientific community of geography” [...]. To prepare them I use a lot of data, information and knowledge produced by non-academic institutions, above all those available in reports and documents of national institutions — such as IBGE, IPEA, INPE and various entities of the three spheres of government — and international institutions — such as UN agencies (UNPD, UNCTAD, UNIDO, FAO etc.), the World Bank, the WTO, the IMF, the OECD, and others — as well as NGOs, in the country and abroad. (Sene, 2014, p. 35)

This reference is supported by the statement of another author of geography textbooks, professor Elian Allabi Lucci, found in an interview transcribed in Munakata (1997, p. 191):

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- 1 According to a survey by “QEdu: Aprendizado em Foco”, a partnership between Merritt and the Fundação Lemann, 98% of teachers affirm that they use textbooks, compared with 85% who say they use newspapers and magazines and 62% the internet. Questionnaires issued: 304.412 (QEdu, 2013).
  - 2 The concept of didactic transposition was coined in 1975 by Michel Verret, but was made popular by the work *La transposición didáctica: del saber sabio al saber enseñado*, by French educator Yves Chevallard (1991), published in 1985 in French.

The life of the professional author [involves] a lot of reading, a lot of research about various aspects and many interviews. In my case, geography, I have to go out in the field to do research, to interview people. So, our time today is completely involved with this. Today, in my work, I travel, take photographs, interview, do research. I search for more concrete knowledge of reality.

It should be emphasized that textbooks have exercised an essential role in the consolidation of the ideals of the national State since the nineteenth century. They were used to disseminate patriotic values, to impose a hegemonic language and to instill official discourse. The first authors of textbooks in Brazil, during the imperial period, belonged to an intellectual elite and had close ties with state educational policies. Many of them came from Military School (*Escola Militar*), founded in 1810; from the *Colégio Pedro II*, founded in 1837 and the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute (*Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* — IHGB), which was founded one year later; all were based in Rio de Janeiro, which was then the national capital.

According to Bittencourt (2004), in the late nineteenth century, a second generation of textbook authors appeared. They had more pedagogical experience and were concerned with teacher education. This group was also more heterogeneous, and planned its works for a broader public, including women and youth from less favored classes.

There was also the emergence of authors who opposed the direct influence of the State and Catholic Church in their work, and who sought to promote a positivist education, without dogmas and based on secularity and “neutrality”.

Although textbooks have been broadly distributed in most of the world’s educational institutions for about two centuries, it was particularly since the 1970s that some researchers began to more critically analyze them.

One work of reference, whose first edition dates back to 1972, but which has been republished until today, is *Mentiras que parecem verdades*<sup>3</sup>, by the Italian linguist and writer Umberto Eco (1932-2016) and educator Mariza Bonazzi (1927-2015). In this book, the authors present a series of texts taken from Italian school manuals to demonstrate their ideological character that was aligned to an authoritarian, repressive, conservative, and reactionary society. The poor, work, races and the native people, among others, are some of the issues used for the analysis. For Eco and Bonazzi (1980, p. 16) “the [school] readers contain lies, educate youth for a false reality, fill their head with common-places, with basic issues, with non-critical attitudes”.

It is clear that an unconscious racism penetrates the school texts, even when the apparent purpose of the story or poetry is to present the child the reality of ethnic differences, through an understanding and a sympathy that are a bit vague [...] only the “diversity” of other races is highlighted and always with a

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3 The Italian version is denominated *I pampini bugiardi* (Rimini: Guaraldi, 1972).

teratological curiosity, to the degree that other texts intervene to reinforce in the young reader the idea that he belongs to a better race, to a nation with the most beautiful mountains and greener pastures than other nations. (Eco and Bonazzi, 1980, p. 53)

In Brazil, mainly since the 1980s, various authors began to dedicate themselves to this analysis, including Molina (1987), Freitag, Motta and Costa (1989), Munakata (1997, 2012), Bittencourt (2004, 2010), Faria (2008), and Moreira (2014).

Moreira (2014, p. 97) affirmed that textbooks “express how school education dialogs on the one hand with the flow chart of university curriculums, where school teachers are educated [...] and on the other with official, mandatory and standardized programs, for all the schools in the country”. By analyzing some collections of geography textbooks since the 1930s, Moreira (2014) established three phases of evolution of textbooks: the classic, the transitory, and the innovative.

In the first phase, based on collections of Aroldo de Azevedo published between 1930 and 1970, Moreira (2014) affirms that the structure of the collections groups the chapters in three parts: “The physical base”, “Human life”, and “Economic life”, which he denominates as the archetype-stratification Nature-Man-Economy (*Natureza-Homem-Economia* — N-H-E)<sup>4</sup>. In the transition<sup>5</sup> phase, in the 1970s, Moreira (2014) maintains that the landscape disappears as an element of aggregation and the map and photo lose the didactic interaction that they had between each other and with the text to become illustrative recourses; education gives way to information.

In the 1980s, according to Moreira (2014), innovative textbooks began to appear, with different intellectual orientations and with plural didactic models. Some of these collections — which involve geography of the world in network<sup>6</sup> — promote the dissolution of the N-H-E line.

Sectoral physical geography and sectoral human geography are also a-systematic references in the generic human-physical mix which is the dominant

4 Moreira (2014, p. 57) maintained that the model of site-situation-structure N-H-E is the “standard of science that during the twentieth century was established as geographic discourse throughout the world”. It is the Strabonion-Ptolemaic archetype that is materialized in university and school books in France, in the works: *Tratado de geografia física* (1920), by Emmanuel De Martonne; and *Princípios de geografia humana* (1922), by Vidal de la Blache.

5 As exponents of this phase Moreira (2014) cites Guiomar Goulart de Azevedo and Zoraide Victorello Beltrame.

6 In this phase, Moreira (2014) cites the works *Geografias do mundo: redes e fluxos*, by Marcos Bernardino de Carvalho and Diamantino Alves; *Geografia*, de Valquíria Pires Garcia and Beluce Belucci; *Geografia, espaço e vivência*, by Levon Boligian and Andressa Alves; *Geografia e cidadania*, of Eustáquio Sene and João Carlos Moreira; and *Geografia, pesquisa e ação*, by Angela Corrêa Krajewski, Raul Borges Guimarães and Wagner Costa Ribeiro.

technoenvironmental perspective. The geography of population is diluted in the anthroposociologized dimension of the manifestations of cultures and social movements. The site's classic vocabulary repertoire of, position, situation, habitat, region, continent is substituted by the transversality that permeates the theme of global network. (Moreira, 2014, p. 121)

With the introduction and expansion of the National Textbook Program (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático* — PNLD) mainly in the past two decades, school materials became more closely aligned with the conceptual and methodological presumptions established in the government's public bids for textbook production.

At this time, we use the conceptualization of Munakata (1997, p. 100), for whom, “the textbook should be produced to suit the parameters that are thought to be constitutive of an auxiliary instrument of the teaching and learning process”; which implies a series of criteria:

Content suitable to the curriculum, legibility and intelligibility suitable to the target public; a subdivision of the work in parts, as a text itself, focus boxes, summaries, glossary, bibliography, activities and exercises etc., according to an organizational structure suitable to learning; and above all, subordination of the style of text and graphic art to this objective to serve as an auxiliary instrument of teaching/learning. (Munakata, 1997, p. 100)

## THE BRAZILIAN STATE AND THE NATIONAL TEXTBOOK PROGRAM

In Brazil, different forms of analyses, interventions and even censorship accompany the history of public policies for textbooks. Although the first school manuals were published in the Imperial<sup>7</sup> period and some evaluation processes date back to the nineteenth century, official control at a federal level began in the 1930s and suffered alterations at various historic moments.

Filgueiras (2011) highlights four periods related to national policies for educational books prior to the PNLD. The first process was instituted in 1938, with the creation of the National Textbook Commission (*Comissão Nacional do Livro Didático* — CNLD) and the second in the 1950s, with the Textbook and Teaching Manual Campaign (*Campanha do Livro Didático e Manuais de Ensino* — CALDEME). The third and fourth periods took place

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<sup>7</sup> Although the first geography college at the level of higher education appeared only in 1934 at the Universidade de São Paulo, geography had been taught in schools since the early nineteenth century, evidenced by the existence of school manuals such as *Corografia Brasileira*, written by Portuguese Padre Ayres de Casal (1817) and *Compendio elementar de Geographia Geral e Especial do Brasil*, by Thomaz Pompêo de Souza Brasil (1851).

during the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985): in 1966 the Commission of the Technical Book and the Textbook (*Comissão do Livro Técnico e do Livro Didático* — COLTED) was created, and terminated in 1971, when the National Book Institute (*Instituto Nacional do Livro* — INL) was created, which was responsible for the Textbook Program. Important studies about these commissions for evaluation were made by Munakata (1997), Gonçalves (2005), Krafzik (2006) and Ferreira (2008).

During the New State period (1937-1945) in the Vargas era, Decree-law 1.006 of December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1938 (Brasil, 1939), established the conditions for production, importation, and use of textbooks, and prior authorization was needed for a book to circulate. To evaluate the educational materials, the CNLD was created and composed of seven members.

According to Chapter IV, art. 20, there would be the exclusion of books that:

- a) give heed, in any form, against national unity, independence or honor;
  - b) contain, explicitly or implicitly, ideological promotion or indication of violence against the political regime adopted by the Nation;
  - c) involve any offense to the Head of the Nation, or to established authorities, the Army, Navy, or to other national institutions;
  - d) disdain or bemean national traditions, or attempt to blemish the reputation of those who struggled or sacrificed for the nation;
  - e) include any affirmation or suggestion, which induces pessimism about the power and destiny of the Brazilian race;
  - f) inspire a sense of superiority or inferiority of men from one region of the country in relation to those of the other regions;
  - g) incite hate against the races and foreign nations;
  - h) stir or nourish opposition and struggle among social classes;
  - i) seek to deny or destroy religious sentiment or combat any religious belief;
  - j) inspire disdain for virtue, induce a sense of inutility or lack of need for individual effort, or combat the legitimate prerogatives of the human personality.
- (Brasil, 1939, p. 277)

By examining and judging the books, therefore, the CNLD promoted political and ideological control over educational books. For Freitag, Motta and Costa (1989, p. 24), “the creation of the Commission was inserted in a group of measures that sought reorganization and ideological control of the entire system”. In this period, to meet the needs of the State, the teaching of moral and civic education was introduced, professional courses expanded and schools for immigrants and teaching of foreign language terminated, thus reinforcing the national spirit of this government. Since the 1950s, the CNLD had its functions reduced until it was terminated in 1969.

In 1952, seeking to renovate teaching methods, revise and produce new educational books, an educator from Bahia, Anísio Teixeira, who was then director of the National Institute of Educational Research (*Instituto Nacional de*

*Pesquisas Educacionais — Inep*)<sup>8</sup>, created the CALDEME. During this period, this Campaign, in addition to improving the quality of the books, stimulated the production of teaching manuals for use by teachers and the creation of a pedagogical library.

The Campaign sought to give greater attention to authors, and books were not required to follow an official program, while general criteria were established for the basic necessary contents. The objective of the analyses was to promote a constructive criticism that would reveal the qualities and defects of the program and of the compendiums of geography and contribute to their improvement<sup>9</sup>. In this period, aspects were evaluated related to materials, content, vocabulary, and pedagogical issues.

The Coup of 1964 terminated the educational discussions and advancements underway and changed the direction of policies for school materials. Three institutions were created to evaluate and regulate the distribution of textbooks: COLTED<sup>10</sup>, INL, and the National School Material Foundation (*Fundação Nacional do Material Escolar — Fename*)<sup>11</sup>. Since then, the Ministry of Education (*Ministry of Education — MEC*) established agreements with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which increased the U.S. influence not only on political-economic issues, in the Cold War context, but also on educational issues.

During the Military and Corporate Dictatorship, an analysis conducted by Faria (2008) demonstrated that textbooks for the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grades of elementary school for classes in “communication and expression”, “social studies”, and “moral and civic education”, which were among 35 of the best-selling books in 1977, were vehicles used by the school to transmit bourgeois ideology. For her:

Education in capitalist society has the school as one of the tools of domination, whose role is to reproduce bourgeois society, through the inculcation of its ideology and accreditation, which allows creating a hierarchy in production, which guarantees greater control in the process of the dominant class. (Faria, 2008, p.12)

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8 INEP was created in 1937 to conduct studies and research in education and thus support the Ministry of Education. Currently, it is named for Anísio Teixeira, who led the Institute from 1952 until 1964.

9 Under an agreement between the textbook campaign and James Braga Vieira da Fonseca, who was a specialist in education in history and geography, and professor at the Faculdades de Filosofia da Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro and of the Universidade do Brasil. In Filgueiras (2011, p. 115).

10 Created by decrees 58.653/66 (Brasil, 1966a) and 59.355/66 (Brasil, 1966b), with the attribution of “generating and applying resources aimed at financing and realization of programs and projects of expansion of the schoolbook and technical book”.

11 Created by Law 5.327/67 (Brasil, 1967), with the objective of producing and distributing educational materials to schools.

Under command of the military and corporate dictatorship, textbooks suffered strong interdictions. Faria (2008) describes that they were general in nature, simplistic, did not speak of social classes, camouflaged the exploitation of workers, and reproduced moralist values, people appeared as a-historical beings and historic facts were omitted. At that time, the Coup of 1964 was presented as a revolution that was justified by threats of strikes, revolts, class struggle, and conflict among Brazilians. The Indigenous were portrayed as wild and primitive; women the elderly and blacks were discriminated. Freitag, Motta and Costa (1989) affirm that education in this period sought to assure the technical and economic development of the country and silence critical voices of politicized leaders.

This vision was dominant for decades in geography textbooks, even before the dictatorship. In the presentation of the General Geography book for the second year of high school, written in 1952, Azevedo (1960, p. 10), for example, affirmed that while Europe was presented as the “nursery” of true civilization, the African continent was portrayed only as a landscape formed by “burning sands and impenetrable forests”.

Faria (2008) emphasized that the reproduction of bourgeois ideology is not only contained in the textbooks she analyzed. “As it is not only the school that transmits the ideology of the dominant class, it is not only the textbook that, at its interior, is responsible for its promotion. Teachers can guarantee its transmission by their attitude and knowledge” (Faria, 2008, p. 79).

During the dictatorship, according to Freitag, Motta and Costa (1989, p. 21), beyond the State, there were no “other institutions in Brazil capable of influencing, formulating and redirecting the decision-making process about textbooks”. Other important social actors, such as the church, scientific associations, workers’ and teachers’ unions, parent and student’ associations, universities, among others, did not have sufficient strength to influence this State policy. Even the editorial market submits itself only to instructions from the State, defined through a basic curriculum.

In the 1970s, the MEC distributed an average of 20 million textbooks each year, mainly to schools that served needy communities, under the Textbook for Elementary Education Plan (*Plano do Livro Didático do Ensino Fundamental — PLIDEF*). The 1980s began with annual distribution of 30 million books to first grade students, reaching 50 million at the end of the decade, which represented 50% of the national production of all books at that time.

Freitag, Motta and Costa (1989) also present comparisons with other countries in the period. Even in countries behind the so-called “Iron Curtain” and in the Soviet Union — which were under dictatorial regimes — central governments consulted professional associations, scientists, and educators. West Germany had mixed commissions formed by members of state governments, various associations and representatives of publishers. In the United States four sectors, in addition to the government, participated in planning textbooks, scientists, teachers, publishers, and teams of authors.

Michel Apple (2002), however, relativizes this apparent autonomy in the preparation of U.S. schoolbooks. He affirms that “there is pressure from a variety

of groups — mostly conservatives — to define how teachers would teach, and the knowledge considered legitimate for curriculum” (Apple, 2002, p. 77).

The domination of the State over contents and methods of Brazilian textbooks began to change in the 1980s, with the end of the military regime and the transition to democracy, when various researchers from universities in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro States began to influence the debate about school manuals. In the second half of the 1980s, the Directory of the Textbook of the Student Assistance Foundation (*Diretoria do Livro Didático da Fundação de Assistência ao Estudante* — FAE) indicated a list of books from which teachers would choose their preferences.

At that time, Molina (1987), warned about the false power of the choice of teachers. She affirmed it was the large publishers, who used massive propaganda and distribution of free samples, who directly determined the teachers’ choices. Molina (1987) maintained it was necessary to prepare teachers to make choices based on certain criteria. Moreover, the books were submitted to federal and state evaluations by commissions formed exclusively by technicians, assistants, and people with the political confidence of the minister, who often had little familiarity with education.

Problems in these evaluations made by the State are found in the difficulty of developing suitable evaluation criteria, these range from those of a technical nature, like layout and the paper used to make a book; or of a psycho-pedagogical character; and also involve the use of data and ideological elements.

In the 1980s, although government revenue allocated to Education decreased, investments in textbooks increased. For this reason, because of State centralization, the evaluation commissions often assumed the function of State censors.

Excess centralization is undesirable (which culminates in political-ideological censorship of the textbook) as is a falsely understood democratization, which attributes the task of buying books to unprepared and overworked, unmotivated teachers, who are pressured to choose books by sales representatives of publishers. (Freitag, Motta and Costa, 1989, p. 49)

About the censorship of textbooks, Molina (1987, p. 27) affirms that

countries that exercise practically no censorship over the communication media control textbooks, at times severely. In many places, the books are provided by the state. This can clearly be a two-sided sword but has the merit of impeding an often unchecked commodification over national education.

State centralization over textbook distribution policies, according to Freitag, Motta and Costa (1989) and Oliveira *et al.* (1984), is vulnerable to corruption, the lobby of publishers and limits participation from plural political and ideological tendencies that can correct distortions, criticize mistakes, and propose more effective alternatives. For these authors, greater decentralization of textbook policies is needed, with the inclusion of states, municipalities, and schools (directors, teachers, parents, and students).

At that time, the need for regionalization of didactic materials was discussed, with some defending that this work should be left to teachers, and others thinking of differentiated materials for those who live in urban peripheries or in poor rural regions. However, there was a risk that this measure would reinforce existing inequalities, instead of overcoming them.

In the conditions of misery and mediocrity of the Brazilian educational system as a whole and with a low level of qualification of the majority of educational agents (including directors, teachers and teaching assistants), regionalization was often a synonym for improvisation and banalization. (Freitag, Motta and Costa, 1989, p. 37)

With the end of Brazil's Military Dictatorship in the 1980s, public policies aimed at textbooks fell under the PNLD (Brasil, 1985). But it was only after 1996 that the current model was designed through consecutive evaluations and publication of Textbook Guides.

The objective of this program was to promote the distribution of school manuals to all students regularly matriculated in public schools in the country<sup>12</sup>. To mediate the production of these materials and create a possibility for the production of different collections with independent theoretical-methodological lines, the Ministry of Education and Sports established an evaluation to be conducted by commissions of university professors.

The program was expanded in 1997 and the Ministry of Education began to regularly acquire textbooks for Portuguese language, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies, History, and Geography for all students from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grades. In the year 2000, the distribution of Portuguese dictionaries was added; in 2001, students with visual disabilities were served; and, in 2003, geographic atlases were issued. In 2004, the National High School Textbook Program (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático para o Ensino Médio* — PNLEM) was implemented, which at first distributed Mathematics and Portuguese language books. It was only in 2009, however, that the geography textbooks came to be distributed to high school students.

From 2007 to 2009 programs focused on Youth and Adult Education (*Educação de Jovens e Adultos* — EJA) were regulated and entitled the National Program for Youth and Adult Literacy (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático para a Alfabetização de Jovens e Adultos* — PNLA) and the National Textbook Program for Youth and Adult Education (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático para a Educação de Jovens e Adultos* — PNLD EJA). In 2010 Decree No. 7.084, of January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010 (Brasil, 2010) was enacted and established procedures for

12 All of the schools benefited are registered in the school census conducted annually by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Education Research and Studies (Inep/MEC). Although they have the right to, many Brazilian municipalities adopt private textbook systems in the school networks according to data from the NGO Ação Educativa, in 2013, 339 municipalities had adhered to this model (Adrião, 2016).

the execution of programs for didactic materials: the PNLD and the National School Library Program (*Programa Nacional Biblioteca da Escola* — PNBE). The PNLD thus shifted from being a government policy to a State one. Since 2014, some didactic collections began to be accompanied by digital media with audiovisual content, including educational electronic games, simulators, and animated infographics.

In 2019, the PNLD served 35,177,889 students through the distribution of nearly 126 million books that cost just over R\$ 1.1 billion in government funds (Brasil, 2020). It thus created a large market for publishers, but was also a useful means for socialization of knowledge.

Since 2016, with the “fall” of President Dilma Rousseff and ascension to power of more conservative sectors of Brazilian society, the debate about a new National Common Curricular Base (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular* — BNCC) gave way to private interests of minority groups associated to a neoliberal agenda. The State was progressively losing its central role as author of regulations and corporations began to have an important role in the formulation of educational policies through foundations, NGOs and philanthropic institutions. According to Saviani (2014, p. 105):

The strength of the private [sector] expressed in the emphasis on market mechanisms has been increasingly contaminating the public sphere. This is how a corporate movement has been occupying spaces in public school networks through Undime and Consed on the Education Councils and in the state apparatus itself, as illustrated by the actions of the “Everyone for Education” movement.

It should also be highlighted that the influence of external Brazilian and international agents in the formulation of educational policies and the organization of curriculums has been common in the country. This is complemented by a lack of involvement of teachers, students, and the school community in this process, which has often led to the rejection of policies as took place in the curricular field. The real curriculum is carried out in classrooms and depends essentially on decisions made by teachers. In this sense, any decision about curriculum should have active participation of teachers.

In its pedagogical foundations, the BNCC determined that curricular contents must focus on the development of skills. Knowledge is thus legitimated under a pragmatic perspective that is situationally operated and applied. A prior focus on having curriculum help students understand reality in a critical manner and seek its transformation has become transformed into an emphasis on developing a group of abilities and skills that the market demands from individuals.

In elementary education (grades 1-12 in Brazil), the BNCC is divided into topics by skills and abilities and has a fragmented structure that separates geographic knowledge. For example, one of the skills requires that students “analyze the impacts of the process of industrialization on the production and circulation of products

and cultures in Europe, Asia and Oceania” (Brasil, 2017b), as if it were possible to address this issue, in a context of globalization, while excluding the Americas and Africa. This reveals an evident setback to the period from the 1940s to 1980, when regional geography was taught in its most traditional form. In high schools, the BNCC is organized by fields of knowledge, and geography is no longer a required component of the curriculum. In this dismantling, themes of physical geography were summarily excluded and the categories of geographic analysis were submitted to a generalized treatment among the human sciences.

Finally, Law 13.415/2017 (Brasil, 2017a), which concerns high school reform, determines that in the three years of high school only Mathematics and Portuguese will be mandatory disciplines, and that Geography, as well as other disciplines in the Human Sciences, are not priorities in the Institutional Program for Initiation to Teaching (*Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação à Docência* — PIBID) and Pedagogic Residency Grants in 2020.

These changes have had direct impacts on the production of textbooks. The public notice of the National Textbook Program 2020 determined for example that didactic collections aimed at the final years of fundamental education that “do not contribute adequately to the development of all the general and specific competencies of the fields of knowledge, found in the BNCC [National Common Curricular Base]” (Brasil, 2018) will be excluded from Brazilian schools for at least four years. And, beginning with the National Textbook Program of 2021 (Brasil, 2019), Geography textbooks will no longer exist at the high school level, and will become part of a set of materials in the applied Human and Social Sciences, divided into a didactic work containing “integrating projects” and a collection of six books.

## IN CONCLUSION

Subject to a diversity of meanings, curriculum is a territory of disputes that involves different concepts of education and worldviews related to the educational process. Curricular discourse and construction in Brazil and other countries has been based on distinct ideological perspectives influenced by various trends, objectives, and interests. In this sense, it is important to not separate the construction of curriculum from the historic and social context of the country and from influence from international agencies.

Textbooks are a commodity and are often object of criticisms, particularly considering their central role in the implementation of curriculums, which can perpetuate teachers’ dependence on textbooks, which limits teachers to being mere manipulators and reproducers of manuals. On the other hand, affirmations about the importance of school textbooks to improving the quality of education can be implemented mainly when teachers have a productive conviviality in a constant dialog with reality. Geography has an important role in this process, helping students to reflect on the world as active subjects and citizens. For this reason, the permanence of geography in the elementary school curriculum is essential.

Public policies concerning textbooks have provided broad access to this type of material, which for many students is the sole text available in a universe where books are not part of the cultural elements of many families. Their absence and fragmentation, under current public educational policies, should produce an enormous vacuum in this field of knowledge that is strategic to the formation of critical and active citizens.

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