

Competencies in High School Curriculum: dialogues with Hannah Arendt

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ABSTRACT – Competencies in High School Curriculum: dialogues with Hannah Arendt. This article problematizes the terms *competencies* and *skills* present in the curricular regulations for high school, in articulation with the thought of Hannah Arendt in her essay *The Crisis in Education*. It adopts the document analysis of the National Curriculum Guidelines for High School (1998; 2012), the National Curriculum Parameters for High School and the National Common Curricular Base for High School (2018). It uses the IRAMUTEQ software to aid the analysis. The results point to the prevalence of private interests over the common good, aimed at the immediate insertion of young people in the labor market and towards a conception of citizenship that is close to market ideals. It is concluded that the strong presence of these competencies reflects the crisis of modernity in education, revealing the immediatist character arising from contemporary presentism.

Keywords: Competencies. Education. High School. Training. Hannah Arendt.

RESUMO – Competências e o Currículo do Ensino Médio: diálogos com Hannah Arendt. Problematisa os termos *competências* e *habilidades* presentes nos normativos curriculares para o ensino médio, em articulação com o pensamento de Hannah Arendt em seu ensaio *A crise na educação*. Adota a análise documental das Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para o Ensino Médio (1998; 2012), dos Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais para o Ensino Médio e da Base Nacional Comum Curricular do Ensino Médio (2018). Utiliza o *software* IRAMUTEQ para auxílio das análises. Os resultados apontam a prevalência dos interesses privados sobre o bem comum, voltados para a inserção imediata dos jovens no mercado de trabalho e para uma concepção de cidadania aproximada dos ideais mercadológicos. Conclui-se que a forte presença dessas competências é um reflexo da crise da modernidade na educação, revelando o caráter imediatista advindo do presentismo contemporâneo.

Palavras-chave: Competências. Educação. Ensino Médio. Formação. Hannah Arendt.

Introduction

The term *competency* first appeared in Brazilian educational policies in 1993 in the Ten-Year Plan, considered the embryo of the curricular reforms of the 1990s, specifically for high school, namely: the National Curriculum Parameters for High School (NCPHS) (Brasil, 1999) and the National Curriculum Guidelines for High School (NCGHS) (Brasil, 1998). This perspective was revisited in recent educational reforms with the National Common Curricular Base for High School (NCCBHS) (Brasil, 2018).

Scholars in the field of educational policy understand that the recent educational reforms are a continuation of the educational project of the 1990s. When analyzing the NCGHS, Ciavatta and Ramos (2012) compare the 1998 and 2011 versions. For the authors, the 2011 NCGHS, despite having advanced in terms of the concept of education and the protagonism of youth, maintained an adaptive and uncritical view of the labor market and its functionality for the business sectors, thus revealing a certain continuity with the 1998 NCGHS. However, we believe that in the 2011 NCGHS, the world of work comes closer to its meaning, as we will show below.

Moura and Lima Filho (2017) criticize the fact that the discussions that began in 2013 in the Special Commission to Promote Studies and Proposals for the Reformulation of High School took place without the 2011 NCGHS having even been adopted by the schools. For the authors, the reform has led high school towards a market logic, contrary to the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law - NEGBL (Brasil, 1996) and the NCGHS. In turn, Motta and Frigotto (2017) highlight the speed with which the High School Reform was approved, followed by the NCCBHS in 2018. Silva (2018) understands that the current High School Reform discourse harks back to the educational conceptions of the mid-1990s, especially regarding competency-based education and the idea of competitiveness.

As Carvalho (2008, p. 11) rightly points out, education is “[...] the act of welcoming and initiating young people into the world, making them capable of mastering, appreciating, and transforming the cultural traditions that form the common and public symbolic heritage”, making us question how the Brazilian curriculum policy for high school, by emphasizing competencies and skills, pre(occupies) itself with the human formation of young people, with a view to their active participation in the public world. It is not just a question of thinking about this heritage in its material context, but also in its shared cultural and symbolic aspects.

To problematize these issues, although it is not possible to exhaust them in this article, we have used Hannah Arendt's (1906–1975) reflections on education as a major political issue. Arendt was an important 20th-century thinker; she was a woman of Jewish origin who was born in Germany, survived Nazism, and went into exile in France. She was imprisoned in a concentration camp because she was con-

sidered a suspicious foreigner (Young-Bruehl, 1997), but managed to escape to the United States of America in 1941. From then until 1951, she lost all her political rights until she was granted US citizenship (Berriel, 2006). According to Young-Bruehl (1997), at the beginning of the 1950s, the author began to envision a new science of politics.

For Berriel (2006, p. 61), “Arendt was not just a woman of ideas, but an individual active in the world”, concerned with understanding it. As an example of this, in the introductory notes to the book *Action and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Arendt, 2018), Heloisa Murgel Starling (2018) states that *thinking about what we are doing* is a typical proposition of Hannah Arendt’s thinking, which reveals a lot about her view of politics. In our view, this question can also be considered when reflecting on education.

Hannah Arendt has only one essay that explicitly addresses education, entitled *The Crisis in Education* (2014), published in 1958. Without worrying about pedagogical or didactic issues, but from the perspective of politics, she presents a conservative notion of education, which means maintaining practices, knowledge, principles that “[...] the past has always bequeathed us as a legacy to guide us in the world [which] concerns entering the memory of the community, keeping alive past experiences and the experiences of those who continue to shed light on the present and the future” (Araújo; Auer, 2022, p. 13). Reflecting critically on the artifacts of the past makes it possible to preserve what was good and prevent what was bad from being repeated. Thus, “[...] it is precisely for the benefit of what is new and revolutionary in every child that education needs to be conservative” (Arendt, 2014, p. 243).

According to Almeida (2016, p. 115), this essay by Arendt (2014) is an impactful and distressing text as it highlights “[...] our responsibility towards children and young people who owe nothing to this world, on the contrary, who need to be welcomed into it and by it [and shows] clearly the impasses of an education affected by the crisis of the world”. Although the crisis of the world and modernity vehemently affects education, the author reminds us that “[...] it is within the power of human thought and action to interrupt and stop these processes” (Arendt, 2014, p. 245). This power to act and think comes into existence with every human being who is born (Almeida, 2016). In this sense, birth is “[...] a miracle that saves the world from ruin” (Correia, 2007, p. 10) and “[...] each new birth guarantees this beginning; it is, in fact, each one of us” (Arendt, 1989, p. 531).

According to Arendt (2014, p. 223), “[...] the essence of education is natality, the fact that beings are born into the world”. For her, education only exists because there are new beings in the world, making it necessary for newcomers. The human capacity to make beginnings finds its genesis in our first appearance, when the incentive to action begins. However, when human beings are born, they are not yet part of political life, because they need to be trained for this, since politics is related to the formulation of judgments about human coexistence. Natality, as an ontological

category, takes place with the arrival of children and young people, but it is the formation of these newcomers that can enable the renewal of the common world. They are therefore actors on the stage of history, capable of inaugurating new worlds.

In this sense, they need educational institutions that share with the family the responsibility of caring for and educating them. Children and young people come to school with their personal experiences and certain knowledge already acquired, but teachers are the ones who can say: “Here is our world, this is what it is, [because] whenever authority has existed it has been linked to responsibility for the course of things in the world” (Arendt, 2014, p. 44). It is not about any kind of learning or construction of knowledge, but the “[...] transmission of a legacy of symbolic experiences” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 983). In dialog with Arendt, Carvalho (2014, p. 816) states:

The choice of curriculum, for example, beyond the pragmatic reasons that may justify it, always means an effort to preserve a way of thinking from the ruin that the inexorable passage of time would inflict on it [...]. In this sense, the teaching of a discipline or field of knowledge always represents a way of saving a part or aspect of the world and its legacy of historical achievements.

Bearing in mind that education is a care for the world, that is, a way for men and women to “[...] affirm the greatness of some of their works, languages and ways of understanding” (Carvalho, 2014, p. 816), and that curriculum policy is what guides the content and knowledge that will be taught to young people in high school, it is possible to infer that an investigation into what is being taught through competencies and skills is important in the educational process and, at the same time, a challenge.

We are well aware that much is said in educational discourses and policies about the importance of school education, but “[...] the highest ideal to be pursued by education is not [necessarily] that of participation and the renewal of a common and public world, but that of obtaining competencies and skills for production in a consumer society” (Carvalho, 2008, p. 13). In our view, this can lead to economic interests taking precedence over the ethical-political horizon of education. Given this scenario, our research problem is: considering the curriculum based on competencies and skills, what kind of education is being imparted to young people in the context of high school curriculum reforms? Because of this, this article aims to problematize the terms *competencies* and *skills* present in the normative texts of the high school curriculum, in conjunction with Hannah Arendt’s thinking in her essay *The Crisis in Education*¹.

Methodological Design

In order to meet the proposed objectives and research questions, we conducted a critical documentary analysis. We based ourselves on the theorizing of Marc Bloch (2001, p. 73), who states: “[...] as a first characteristic, knowledge of all human facts in the past and

most of them in the present must be obtained through traces". In this way, we are looking for the senses and meanings of competencies and skills in the traces of the sources. The research design takes a qualitative, explanatory approach. We used the following sources: NCGHS (Brasil, 1998; 2011), NCPHS (Brasil, 1999) and NCCBHS (Brasil, 2018). We chose these documents because we believe that they best represent the discussion of competencies and skills in Brazilian education, constituting the trajectory of a curriculum policy for high school.

In order to conduct this analysis, we read the sources in search of the conceptualizations of competencies and skills used in the documents. We also relied on Prost's (2003) theorizing on lexical analysis. The author believes that combining history with linguistic methods makes it possible to put research on the road to discovery, revealing approximations, differences, and structures that were not perceived when simply reading the texts.

To this end, we used the IRAMUTEQ software as a tool to help organize the sources. We developed the basic lexicography type of analysis (Maximum Similarity Tree) when the software provides the words that appear most in the body of text inserted into it and the relationships between the central words and the peripheral words. To do this, in each of the documents, we selected the paragraphs containing the word *competency*, transferring them to a notepad for each of the documents separately, so that they could then be imported into the software and submitted to the Maximum Similarity Tree algorithms, a separate .txt file for each document, generating Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4. Among the words that would make up the analysis in the algorithms (with a minimum of three repetitions), we excluded pronouns, prepositions, linking verbs and adverbs.

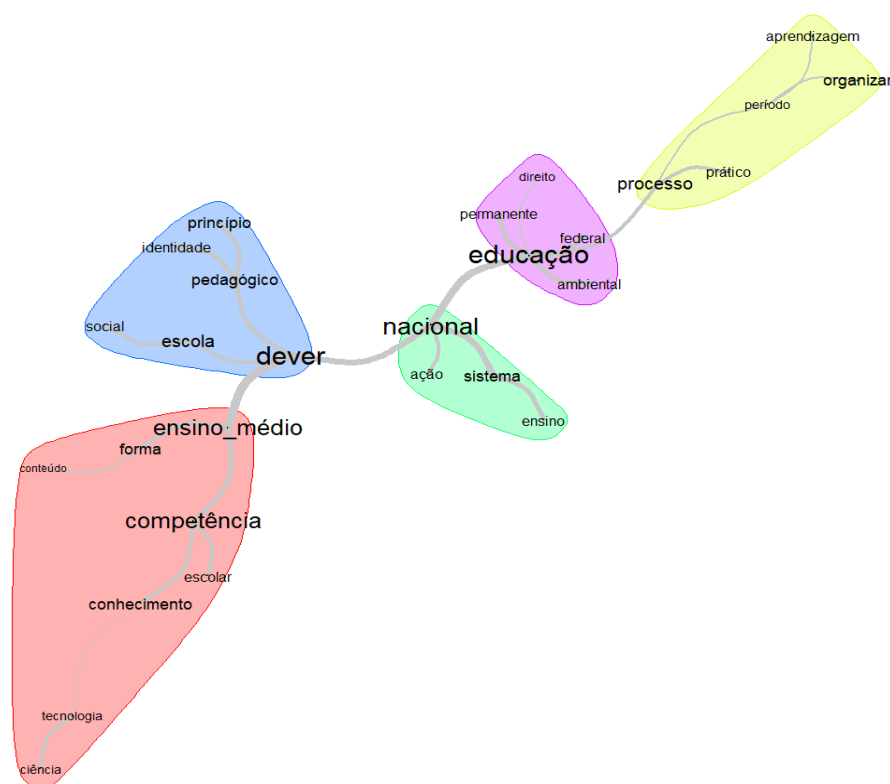
Results and Discussions

Drawn up by the National Education Council (NEC), an attribute that was defined by the NEGBL (1996), the NCGHS (1998) had the characteristic of being a long-term public policy — above all because of the property attributed by law to the NEC to make decisions privately and autonomously — that could transcend governments and different educational projects. From a normative point of view, these guidelines were intended to systematize the principles of the NEGBL (1996), establishing the direction to ensure common basic training, plus the diversified part and the work-oriented part, based on competency-based education.

The *World Education Report* (1995) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is used to contextualize the low enrollment rate of young people aged 15 to 17 years in high school. It also includes the report's considerations, such as *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*, and *learning to be*, which will guide the entire document. There is also reference to the difficulty of the productive sectors in hiring qualified professionals and, in this way, investment and improvement in high school would be a way of

bridging the technical gap and continuing the country's prosperous economic growth. The focus on developing competencies and skills was the alternative chosen, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Maximum Similarity Tree of the *competency* corpus in the NCGHS (1998)



Note: Red cluster: high_school, form, content, competency, schools, knowledge, technology, science; Blue cluster: principle, identity, pedagogical, social, school, duty; Green cluster: national, action, system, education; Purple cluster: right, permanent, federal, education, environmental; Light green cluster: learning, organize, period, practical, process.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The configurations used to generate the graph in Figure 1 show the relationships between the main words that make up the text segments that contain *competency* (*competência*) in the NCGHS (1998). The color separation shows the grouping of the most associated words. They are all connected by a *tree root*. We can see that *competency* is directly linked to the cluster (red) led by the word *high_school* (*ensino médio*²). In turn, *competency* is linked to *school* (*escolar*) and *knowledge* (*conhecimento*); the latter continues its root to *technology* (*tecnologia*) and *science* (*ciência*). It is therefore possible to pick up clues as to how the term *competency* is understood in the document.

The document not only points to the development of general and specific competencies as the main objective of high school but also requires teachers to be able to articulate the different school knowledge with society and the development of competencies for the world of work, according to the 1998 NCGHS. It should be noted that the *world of work* and the *labor market* are treated as synonyms in the 1998 NCGHS (which mentions both terms), although in reality, they have different meanings. While the former refers to work as a human activity, the latter refers to it as employability (Oliveira; Almeida, 2009, p. 161). Thus, the world of work as an educational principle only appears effectively in the 2011 NCGHS.

To a certain extent, the teacher's attribution can converge with Arendt's thinking, not when she assigns educators the task of providing skilled labor for economic development (the labor market), but, for example, when she talks about their responsibility towards society as a whole. For Arendt (2014, p. 43), "[...] in the face of young people, educators always appear as representatives of a world which, although it was not built by them, they must take responsibility for, even when, secretly or openly, they want it to be different from what it is".

The school is understood as a mediation, a pre-political space in which children and young people leave the family (private space) to be introduced to the public space. The author finds her inspiration for the definition of public and private in Ancient Greece, where these spaces were separate and well-defined. The private space was the *oikia*,³ which means inhabited environment, home, or family. In the public space, the political experience took place in the *agora*,⁴ where there was plurality and discussions of the common good were based.

Within the *oikos*,⁵ each family was concerned with its own maintenance, with the realm of necessity, so there was no space for interaction with the group or with other families. The private is the field of the hidden. Telles (1990, p. 34) understands it as the equivalent of having a "[...] place in the world, a tangible place possessed on earth by a person, and in which each person can protect themselves from the light of publicity".

As for the term *public*, its meaning lies in the fact that everything that appears in it can be heard and seen by everyone. Public means the world itself, not the world as a physical space situated in the universe as we know it, but a world of things interposed between those who have it in common (Arendt, 2016). The public space is not a gathering of people, but an experience constituted when men and/or women come together to debate, expound ideas, the conclusion of which is decisions aimed at the common good, thus exercising politics. Arendt (2016, p. 80) believes that it is only possible to realize the public space when issues of necessity have been resolved, "[...] public life was only possible once the most urgent needs of life had been met". With basic needs in a state of fragility, the common good can be overshadowed by them, risking a war of private interests.

As a space that is neither private nor public in its entirety, it is not up to the school institution to submit to the particular interests of a group. Responsibility towards the world does not prevail from this market perspective, and those who follow this trend should not be allowed to participate in the education of young people and children. Arendt (2014, p. 243) states that those who “[...] refuse to take responsibility for the world should neither have children nor be allowed to participate in their education”. The commitment to the human formation of these young people lies not only with the school and education professionals but with all the agents of the political community.

As for the words *technology* and *science*, which are linked to *knowledge* and *competency*, they are related to the labor market and not to learning new technologies for caring for and developing the world in constant scientific and technological change. In the NCGHS (Brasil, 1998, p. 42), it is a priority to “[...] develop pedagogical strategies that contribute to understanding how work [...] socially and historically produces science and technology and is influenced by and influences the culture of social groups”.

We have identified that *competency* in this document (Figure 1) is still in a cluster in which it is subordinated to the word *high_school*, which is dominant, even though we have only selected the excerpts from the documents in which the term *competency* is inserted. The development of these competencies is related to the central objective for high school: the development of competencies and skills for the labor market. Although the labor market is implied in the terms *knowledge* and *technology*, which made it necessary to analyze the entire document to reach the conclusions described, this movement will become more evident in the normative texts analyzed below.

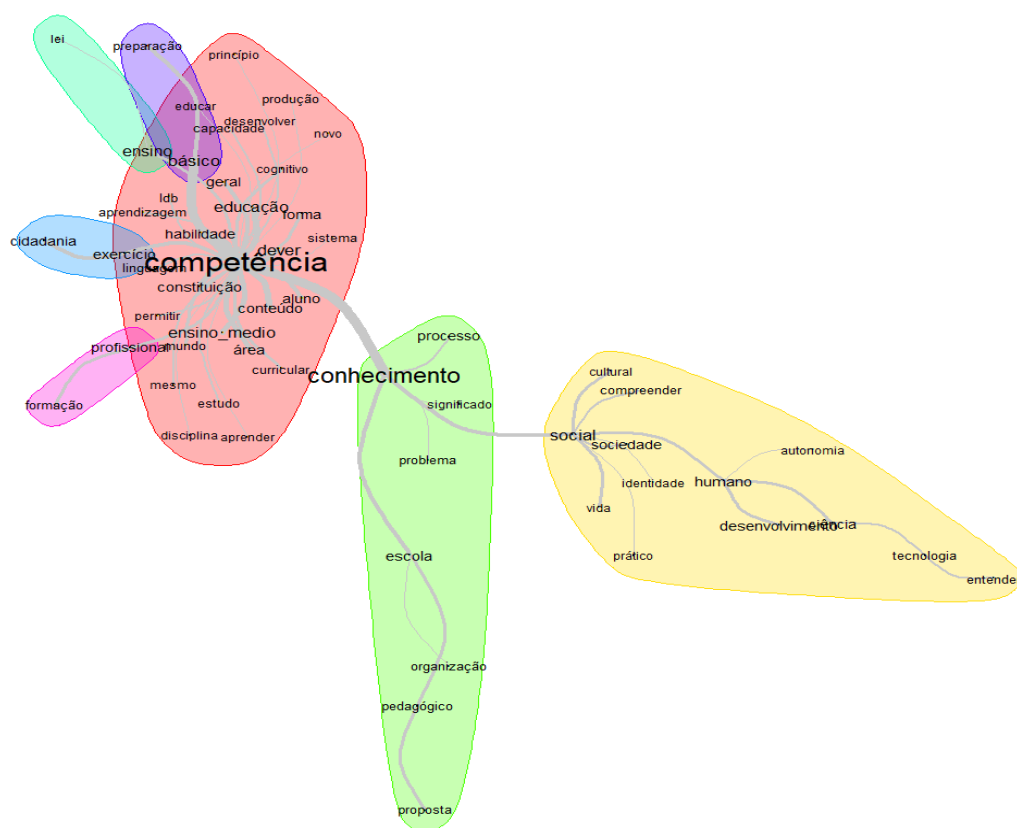
Arendt (2016) connects the notions of work, creation⁶ and action⁷ to the concept of natality, as these have the task of preserving the world for the constant influx of the new. The author understands that “[...] human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but action is the only one that cannot be imagined outside the society of men” (Arendt, 2016, p. 27). Action depends on the existence of the other and *inter-action* only exists in the context of public space, that is, outside private space. Thus, “[...] of the three activities [work, creation and action], action has the closest relationship to the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the ability to start something new, that is, to act” (Arendt, 2016, p. 11).

Among the three human activities, work is the only endless one, because it continues “[...] automatically in line with life, outside the scope of voluntary decisions or humanly meaningful purposes” (Arendt, 2016, p. 130). If *work* is linked to the realm of necessity and “[...] always moves in the same circle prescribed by the biological process of the living organism” (Arendt, 2016, p. 121) and *creation* relates to the permanence of men and women in this world “[...] which ends when the object is finished, ready to be added to the world of things”

(Arendt, 2016, p. 121), we ask: what are the NCGHS (1998) referring to when they talk about work and its historical and cultural production? It seems that the document is referring to work for one's own subsistence, consumption, and the enrichment of those who provide it, linked to the maintenance of life. It is, then, "[...] the work of our bodies [and not] the creation of our hands" (Arendt, 2016, p. 98).

In the same way that we selected the excerpts from the NCGHS (1998), we analyzed the NCPHS (2000) by selecting the paragraphs that contain the word *competency*, generating a Maximum Similarity Tree, which allows us to visualize the evolution of the use of the term in the normative texts.

Figure 2 – Maximum Similarity Tree of the *competency* corpus in the NCPHS (2000)



Note: Red cluster: competency, law, preparation, citizenship, exercise, training, professional, principle, educate, production, develop, capacity, new, teaching, basic, cognitive, general, learning, education, negbl, form, skill, system, duty, language, constitution, student, content, allow, world, high_school, area, curricular, same, study, discipline, learn; Green cluster: process, knowledge, meaning, problem, school, organization, pedagogical, proposal; Orange cluster: cultural, understand, social, society, autonomy, identity, human, life, development, science, practical, technology, understand.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In the second paragraph of the presentation of the NCPHS (Brasil, 2000, p. 4), a commitment is made to an education based on “[...] basic competencies for the insertion of our young people into adult life”. This commitment is linked to the requirements of the NEGBL (Brasil, 1996) when this new curriculum profile based on competencies and skills was affirmed⁸. In the Maximum Similarity Tree of the NCGHS (Brasil, 1998), *competency* appears in the cluster where the dominant word is *high_school*. In the NCPHS (Brasil, 2000), the centrality of *competency* is illustrated not only in the cluster where it is dominant but also in the Tree as a whole. *High_school* then becomes a term that comes after *competency*, which explains the degree of importance assumed not only by the word but also by the concept. The concept of competency is not identified in the context of the document, but examples are described:

What competencies are we talking about? The capacity for abstraction, the development of systemic thinking, as opposed to a partial and fragmented understanding of phenomena, creativity, curiosity, the ability to think of multiple alternatives for solving a problem [...] These are competencies that must be present in the social, cultural sphere, in political and social activities as a whole, and which are conditions for exercising citizenship in a democratic context (Brasil, 2000, p. 11).

Competency, in this document, refers to the specific skills that must be acquired for young people to continue in life in society and in the *world of work*. We note that when the word *world* (*mundo*) appears in the normative texts, it is directly linked to the term *work* (*trabalho*). Although the development of creativity, the capacity for abstraction, and systemic thinking are taken into account, we are signaling capacities that are in fact linked to the labor market. In comparison with the NCGHS (Brasil, 1998), the competencies to be developed are broken down into skills, such as cognitive ability and problem-solving.

Carvalho (2013, p. 30) states that sticking to “[...] the development of ‘competencies’ or ‘capacities’ can compromise the educational ideal, since, in their common use, neither of these terms — ‘competency’ or ‘capacity’ — reveals a necessary ethical commitment beyond effectiveness.” Effectiveness, here, is understood as synonymous with the applicability in the productive system of the knowledge acquired at school, aimed at the private interests of the labor market and the individual interests of the subject himself, as revealed by the analysis of the NCPHS (Brasil, 2000).

The technological revolution is another point explored in the NCPHS (Brasil, 2000). We can see this aspect in the predominant cluster of the word *social* (yellow cluster), and not by chance, as this attribute is seen by the document as a new way of organizing society. This is one of the social developments that leads to the conclusion that the development of general and specific competencies is essential for young people to enter the productive process. The labor market is given a specific cluster in this analysis (pink cluster), represent-

ed by *professional training*, even though the word linked to this cluster is *world*; we understand that, in this case, the word *world* refers to the *labor market* (and not the *world of work*). The pink cluster (professional training) intersects with the main cluster, that of competency, demonstrating that such training depends on the acquisition of new competencies.

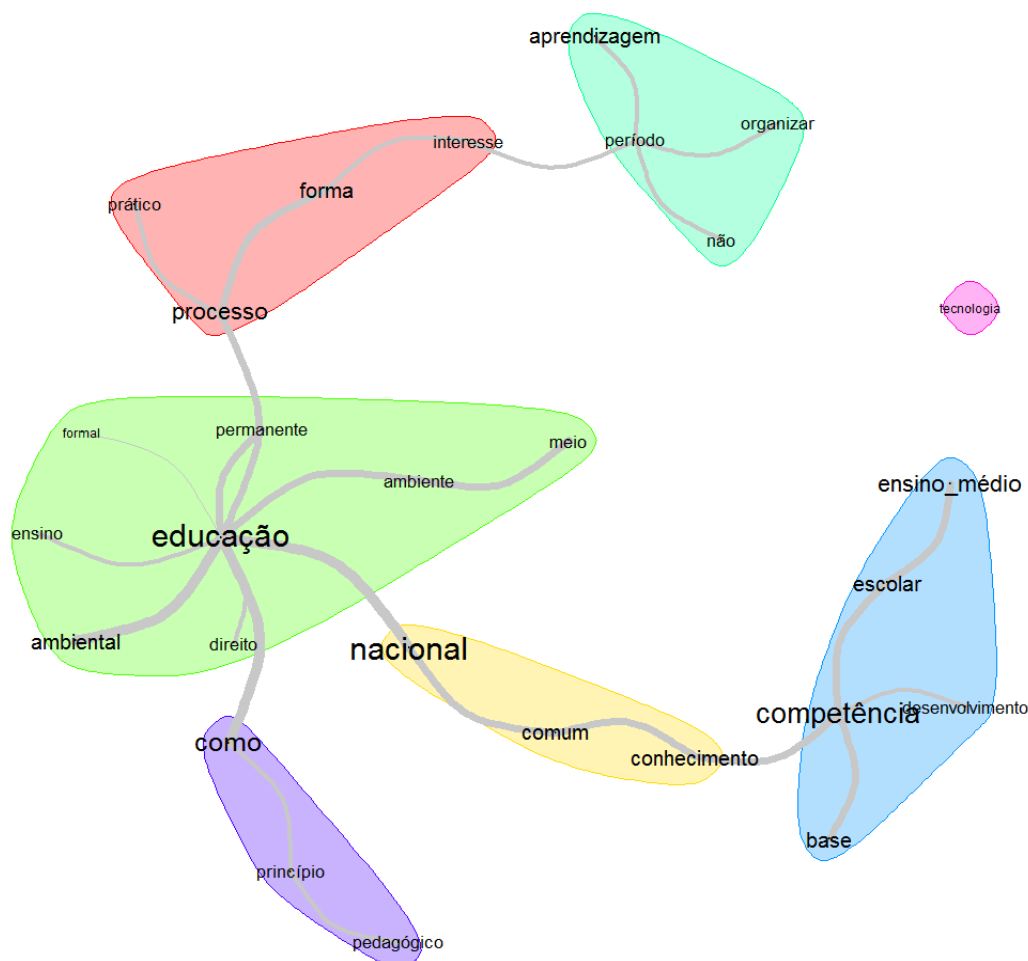
Knowledge (green cluster) becomes secondary, leaving the main cluster (*competencies*) and becoming linked to memorization, a process considered outdated by the new technologies (technological competencies), which must be learned in order for students to enter the labor market. Carvalho (2013) questions the compatibility between personal autonomy, individual responsibility and agreement in the educational context that has been assumed with these competencies for the future in the labor market. The author encourages us to think that the development of curriculum policies is a center of disputes imposed by economic progress and technological development. In this sense, “[...] it is no longer important to train young people *worthy of their ancestors*, but to prepare them to face the novelties of the future” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 991).

Other clusters appear in smaller sizes and intersect with the *competency* cluster, such as the cluster (dark blue) of the words *exercise* (*exercício*) and *citizenship* (*cidadania*); the *law* (*lei*) and *teaching* (*ensino*) cluster (light blue); and the *educate* (*educar*) and *preparation* (*preparação*) cluster (purple). This shows that, despite having different concepts, these terms are connected in some way to *competency*. When the word *citizenship* appears in the NCPHS (Brasil, 2000), it is preceded by the term *exercise*, showing that for it to exist, a previous action must take place. According to the document, in order to exercise citizenship intertwined with productive activities, specific competencies need to be developed (for each social dimension, a competency), making education a protagonist in the development of society (Brasil, 2000).

Therefore, when the NCPHS (Brasil, 2000) indicate the development of specific competencies and skills for the exercise of citizenship in addition to qualified participation in productive activities and then bring citizenship closer to market ideals, in a way, this private interest puts the idea of the experience of shared citizenship on hold.

The introduction to the NCGHS (Brasil, 2011) mentions Brazil’s economic development, sustained by the redistribution of income that has taken place in the country since 2003. The document states that one of the factors for this economic development to continue to grow is education, especially for young people in high school. However, we should not demand that young people solve problems that already existed before they were born, i.e., “[...] a responsibility to act in a world of solving problems that we adults created” (Brayner, 2008, p. 105), because there are situations that they are not yet prepared to face on their own, for example, boosting the country’s economy, because education will not be able to solve the issue.

Figure 3 – Maximum Similarity Tree of the *competency* corpus in the NCGHS (2011)



Note: Light blue cluster: learning, period, organize, no; Red cluster: practical, form, interest, process; Green cluster: education, formal, permanent, environment, medium, teaching, environmental, law; Purple cluster: as, pedagogical, principle; Orange cluster: national, common, knowledge; Blue cluster: high_school, school, competency, development, base; Purple cluster: technology.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In the Maximum Similarity Tree of the NCGHS (Brasil, 2011), *competency* (*competência*) appears in the blue cluster, linked to development (*desenvolvimento*), *foundation* (*base*) and *school* (*escolar*). The latter is linked to *high_school* (*ensino_médio*). Thus, the fact that *high_school* is not directly linked to competency indicates a movement towards discontinuity in this policy, even if there has not been a break with the educational project established in the 1990s, highlighted by the very evidence of competency in the document, in a cluster

of its own, although it is not the centrality. According to Figure 3, the focus of this policy was education itself, which appears prominently in the green cluster, linked to *permanent* (*permanente*), *environmental* (*ambiental*), *teaching* (*ensino*), *formal* and *law* (*direito*). We emphasize this last word because we believe it sums up the meaning of the 2011 NCGHS, which established education as a right for young people.

In the NCGHS (Brasil, 2011), work is configured as an integral part of culture, which allows us to understand that this policy understands that work permeates the education of young people who are in the school context, but are loaded with concerns related to reality and the professional future. Therefore, it should be considered an educational principle. However, this concern is associated with work in the ontological sense, capable of transforming oneself and society in order to reduce inequalities, as the document itself states (Brasil, 2011, p. 157):

Among the relevant factors to consider is the relationship between youth, school, and work. Although we do not assume, *a priori*, that there is a linearity between staying in school and getting a job, the relationship between schooling, professional training and generating financial independence by entering the world of work has been strained and reconfigured, as studies on youth employment and unemployment have shown.

We highlight the researcher Juarez Tarcisio Dayrell⁹ as an important reference point for the 2011 NCGHS, whose reflections corroborated the centrality of young people in the document, while the core of the 1998 NCGHS was work with an instrumental focus. Despite Ciavatta and Ramos' (2012) understanding that the 2011 NCGHS did not abandon the market logic of education, by maintaining an adaptive view of the labor market, we understand that there was a move away from competency-based education, the core of the curricular reforms of the 1990s, as shown in Figure 3, and move towards work as an educational principle (world of work). This movement is understood from the document's concern with giving youth a leading role and focusing on education as a goal, so that competency appears laterally and on the periphery of the discussion in this document.

In 2016, President Dilma Rousseff faced a political upheaval that culminated in her impeachment, understood by Cêa, Silva and Natividade (2021) as a legal-parliamentary-media coup. Michel Temer assumed power and established commitments with the business elites. One of these commitments resulted in the implementation of the High School Reform, initiated through Provisional Measure 746/2016 and later consolidated by Law 13.415/2017, together with the NCCBHS in 2018. For its part, the NCCBHS (Brasil, 2018) defines competency as the mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to solve the complex demands of everyday life, once again linked to the exercise of citizenship and the labor market. The document proposes ten general competencies that will unfold and interrelate in basic education: 1) knowledge; 2) scientific thinking; 3) cultural

repertoire; 4) communication skills; 5) ability to deal with technological tools; 6) argumentation; 7) life project; 8) self-knowledge and self-care; 9) social development; 10) development of autonomy and responsibility (Brasil, 2018).

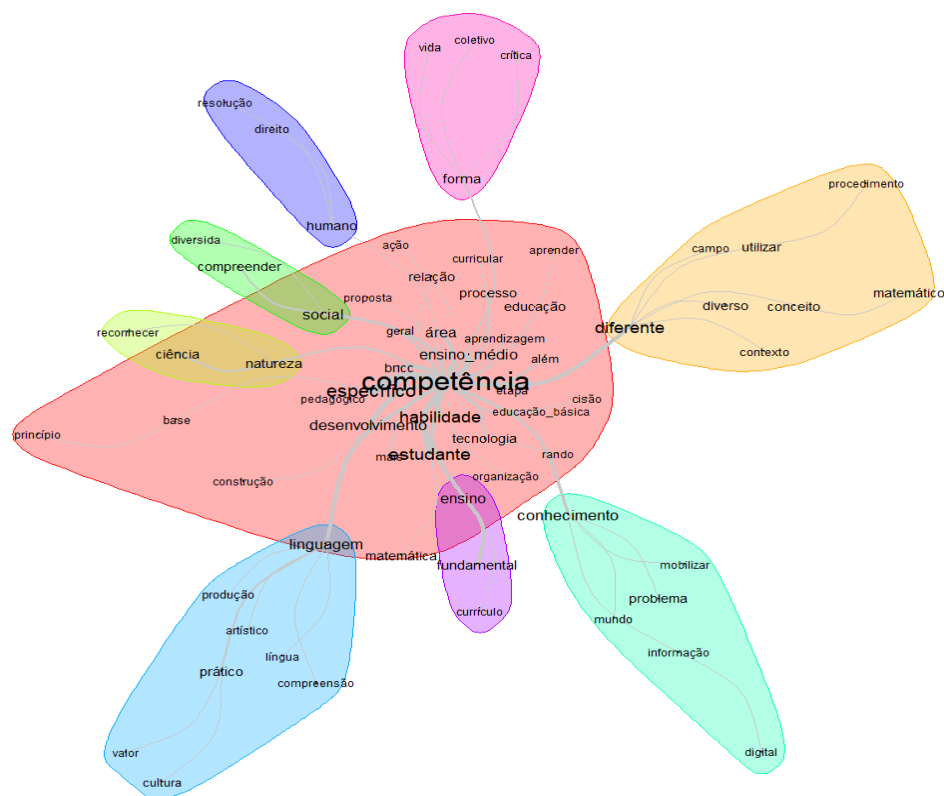
We would draw attention to the document's separation of knowledge, scientific thinking, and argumentation. This reveals the dismissal of thinking as central to the educational experience, since cognition stands out in isolation, as if it were more important than thinking and, furthermore, as if the power to argue did not also depend on thinking and existing knowledge. According to Arendt (2009), knowledge and thought are not synonymous. Almeida (2010, p. 85) says: "[...] if thought is driven by the search for meaning, cognition is driven by the search for truth". Thought cannot be taught at school as if it were simply a subject, but education can help to enhance it by transmitting knowledge in a non-utilitarian way, by awakening in young people a search for meaning and a sense of belonging to the common world (Almeida, 2010).

The focus on competencies in the NCCBHS (2018) follows the assumption of the large-scale assessments of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which coordinates the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), making explicit the concern of the most recent Brazilian educational document with adapting its curricular guidelines to the guidelines of the assessments of multilateral organizations. On the other hand, according to Cunha (2017), the High School Reform is related to the crisis faced by private higher education and the reduction in student funding. Thus, this reform also aims to contain the demand for higher education, further widening inequalities.

The NCCBHS (2018) contains 176 mentions of the term *competency*. The document is organized into four areas of knowledge, as determined by the NEGBL (1996): Languages and their Technologies; Mathematics and its Technologies; Natural Sciences and their Technologies; Human Sciences and their Technologies. According to Ferreira (2023), legislation issued in 2022 corroborates Cunha's (2017) hypothesis and deepens competency-based education. In this context, Opinion 5 NEC/CP of 2022 establishes that the new structure of high school requires a new exam for access to higher education, in line with the NCCBHS.

Each area of knowledge establishes specific competencies in line with the general competencies of the NCCB (2018) for the whole of basic education. The specific competencies for high school are the ways in which the general competencies will appear within the areas and training itineraries, related to a set of skills that will be detailed, particularizing the competency in question (Brasil, 2018). We can see that the NCCBHS (2018) deepens and details education based on competencies and skills, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Maximum Similarity Tree of the *competency* corpus in the NCCBHS (2018)



Note: Pink cluster: competency, action, curricular, to learn, relationship, proposal, process, education, general, learning, area, high_school, beyond, specific, pedagogical, skill, development, stage, split, basic_education, technology, student, organization, language, mathematics, construction, basis, principle; Other clusters: life, collective, critical, form, resolution, right, human, diversity, understand, recognize, social, science, nature, procedure, field, use, diverse, different, concept, context, knowledge, mobilize, problem, world, information, digital, teaching, elementary, curriculum, production, artistic, language, practical, understanding, value, culture.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

With the NCCBHS (2018), competency-based education takes center stage, as shown in Figure 4. It also shows that the concept of competencies is becoming increasingly specific, intersecting directly with four clusters (blue, lilac, light green, and yellow) and indirectly with another four clusters (green, orange, pink, and purple). The word closest to *competency* is *specific*, which may be peculiar for a document that is intended as a basis and not as the curriculum itself. Cury, Reis, and Zanardi (2018) believe that the NCCBHS (2018) brings a concept of curriculum dressed up as learning rights. The authors find

it strange that the Ministry of Education's guidelines reduce the curriculum to the *path outlined* and the basis to the *objective to be achieved*. Andrade and Duarte (2023) understand that this conception of the New High School curriculum has reduced basic general education, diminishing the relevance of subjects such as Sociology, Philosophy, History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Physical Education, and the Arts, which are essential for the development of critical thinking and citizenship.

The supposed scientific neutrality seeks to generate conformity by inserting a standard curriculum into schools, which should always emerge with the permanent transformation of the world. As the curriculum is composed of this single ideology, it is decontextualized in the name of the theoretical and scientific neutrality of knowledge. In dialogue with Arendtian thought, Carvalho (2014, p. 815) points out that the split between the domains of education and politics "[...] should not be taken as an affirmation of the *apolitical* character of educational institutions and practices", since, for the author, there is a political dimension to the school experience.

As "[...] teaching activity is not to be confused with political action" (Carvalho, 2014, p. 825), discussions related to the right to education and curriculum policy are not necessarily of a pedagogical nature but belong to an ethical and political nature. Given this, the unification of the Brazilian curriculum as intended by the NCCBHS (2018), which takes on a positivist character, and the erroneous belief in scientific neutrality, so that all Brazilian schools will have a curriculum with defined specificities and not a curriculum base, tend to eliminate the possibility of debates between the different subjects of a community about what could be taught to young people in that specific context. For Arendt (2016), politics can only exist with the consideration of diverse ideas and is only possible in the public space and in the plurality of reasons and opinions.

The idea of making the curriculum more flexible adopted by the High School Reform, which is reflected in the training itineraries,¹⁰ carries the fallacy of student autonomy. On the one hand, the lack of enough teachers for the itineraries leads to the hiring of professionals with so-called *notorious knowledge*, i.e., individuals who are not teachers. On the other hand, almost three thousand municipalities have only one high school, which restricts the freedom of choice of what is offered, as Ferreira (2023) points out.

Arendt (2014) understands the crisis in education as a crisis of authority when tradition is lost and what takes its place is the instrumentalization of knowledge emptied of content and knowledge. This stifling of different visions and the imposition of a certain group's private interests on the school, which is present in parts of the curriculum policy for high school, contribute to authority being emptied. Teachers would have no authority in an imposed, presupposed, and unique education, as proposed by the NCCBHS (2018). They would be

reduced to “[...] facilitators of learning or more experienced partners” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 983).

Arendt’s (2014, p. 33) critique of *general science pedagogy* is forceful, arguing that the training received should be in teaching and not a particular subject, an education empty of content. In this conception, the teacher’s most legitimate source of authority is removed. In other words, since the content is less important than *learning how to learn* and the development of competencies, on the one hand, it is as if the teacher is capable of teaching anything; on the other hand, it is as if he or she has no mastery of any legacy.

The two most prominent words (*skill* [*habilidade*] and *specific* [*específico*]) in Figure 4, in the *competency* cluster, can be joined together, referring to the specificity of doing. In our view, *learning to do* is equivalent to *knowing by doing*, another point criticized by Arendt (2014, p. 34), because the idea that you cannot know and understand what you do not do yourself is to replace, “[...] as far as possible, learning by doing”. In this direction, the intention would not be to teach knowledge but to teach *how to do* things, the “[...] result of which is a kind of transformation of general educational institutions into professional institutes. Such institutes were very successful when it came to learning how to drive a car or sew [...]” (Arendt, 2014, p. 35).

Education is one of society’s most necessary activities, as it will never be static since it is always renewed by the constant influx of new human beings into the world. In this way, education is conceived as “[...] a process of initiation into a common world” (Carvalho, 2014, p. 813). However, school “[...] is not [...] the world and must not pretend to be” (Arendt, 2014, p. 185). *Learning to do* requires young people to imitate the way adults live, causing confusion between what school is and what the world is, like a game of make-believe.

In our view, the strong presence of competencies and skills in the high school curriculum policy reflects the crisis of modernity that has caused a crisis in education, a crisis that is not specific to the school environment. Based on the reflections of Pochmann (2017), we understand that the High School Reform (2017) goes beyond the educational context and is part of a set of ultra-liberal measures of a conservative, classist, and authoritarian nature, intensified with the rise of Michel Temer (2016). However, for Arendt (2014, p. 225), a crisis is an opportunity “[...] to explore and investigate everything that has been uncovered in the essence of the problem”. If every crisis forces us to look closely at the issues in order to find answers, “[...] a crisis only becomes a disaster when we respond to it with pre-formed judgments, that is, with prejudices” (Arendt, 2014, p. 223).

As we have seen in the normative texts analyzed, when curricular projects are delegated the function of reducing socio-economic inequality, it becomes clear that education is being misused. Certainly, “[...] it is not *at* school or through school that we transform the world” (Almeida, 2016, p. 118-119). According to Carvalho (2014, p. 823), “[...] the transformation of education into an instrument of politics also

ends up revealing the lack of vigor of politics itself in the contemporary world". This crisis of modern society also reverberates in education with the deepening insertion of private interests in educational policies. This is reflected in the curriculum and large-scale assessments, etc., which are based on international organizations as the domestic educational parameter. For Arendt (2004, p. 272), we cannot "[...] have our political battles fought in schoolyards", because they concern adults, those who arrived first in the world.

Conclusion

Using the normative texts that make up the high school curriculum reforms, we found that the insertion of the particular interests of small groups in education is an artifice of the crisis of modern society. Through the lexical analysis tools, using the IRAMUTEQ software, we observed that the 1998 NCGHS, the 2000 NCPHS and the 2018 NCCBHS show a continuous increase in education based on competencies and skills, with a flash of discontinuity in the 2011 NCGHS.

Just like the crisis of modern society, this way of thinking about education originates internationally, when international economic organizations begin to issue reports and rankings on education in countries and end up becoming a parameter for the issue of educational policies that also emanate from these interests in the Brazilian state. This process has nothing to do with presenting the world to new beings, or with the public function of "[...] access to literate culture, to a symbolic heritage rooted in knowledge, languages, and practices [that preserves the] legacy of tradition" (Carvalho, 2015, p. 991). Thus, it does not necessarily contribute to the insertion of new subjects into political life and the occupation of public space. On the contrary, it clouds the view of what is public, distorting the meaning of politics.

The High School Reform, which took place in 2017, and the discussions that continue until 2023 and will continue into 2024¹¹ indicate that the recommendations of multilateral organizations and business elites have not been fully accepted by society. The tensions and disputes surrounding this project persist, demonstrating civil society's critical capacity with regard to human formation. According to Innerarity (2017, p. 122), "[...] who, then, should be in charge of politics? To the question of who does politics, who can and should devote themselves to it, there is only one democratic answer: everyone". From this perspective, we start with the assumption that debates and (re)thinking about this project should be made available to everyone, as it is implicated in the public benefit.

Competencies and skills in the normative texts analyzed are geared towards technological innovations, the early insertion of young people into the labor market, the quest for profit and citizenship as a response to market interests. They express an immediatist educational character, as it is no longer the past that illuminates the present and the future, creating temporal links between the different

generations; on the contrary, “[...] it is the present that illuminates itself [...] in the age of progress” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 991).

Carvalho (2015, p. 992) draws attention to this *contemporary presentism* that affects schools and educational policies by increasingly imbuing their discourses and practices with the “[...] demands for productivity, flexibility and mobility that guide managerial and market concerns”. However, all of this brings a risk to the world, because “[...] the price of the effectiveness of its adaptation and conformation to the dominant temporality may be the loss of its historical meaning” (Carvalho, 2015, p. 992).

If, for Arendt (2014), education creates a sense of belonging between us and the world, and concerns the responsibility that older people have towards younger people, then we must protect young people. We must defend them from the evils of the world, so that the historical legacy is passed on, instilling in them a love for the world to which they belong. Looking at the new generations arriving in this pre-existing place awakens (or at least it should) the ethical and political responsibility we have for the world and for the human beings who live, have lived and will live in it, whose horizon involves thinking about it for everyone.

Arendt (2014, p. 234) asks: “[...] what can we learn from this crisis about the essence of education [...] by reflecting on the role that education plays in every civilization, that is, on the obligation that the existence of children [and young people] imposes on every human society?”. Inspired by this assertion, we could also add: will the competencies and skills prioritized in the high school curriculum policy be able to train young people to take on the public commitment to the durability of the world that transcends the existence of each one of us, spanning past, present and future? What ethical-political commitment are we making in these high school curriculum reforms? These are questions that can be explored in greater depth in future studies, as it was not our intention to answer them here. But, for the moment, our focus is on the fact that education makes the future unpredictable since we have no idea what young people will use the knowledge they acquire at school for. Thus, it is “[...] in this frightening unpredictability that our hope for a better world lies” (Almeida, 2008, p. 478).

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Notes

¹ Although we have used contributions from other works by Hannah Arendt, we have drawn attention to the essay *The Crisis in Education* because it is the only text in which the author writes explicitly about education.

² We joined the words high and school with an underscore “_” so that they could be considered as a single term.

³ *House*, in Greek.

- ⁴ This was the name given to public gathering places in Ancient Greece. Meetings to deliberate on matters of the common good, of the city (*polis*) took place in this space, not a physical space by definition, but a space for decisions.
- ⁵ Private property.
- ⁶ The creation is the stage of *homo faber*, who produces durable objects (techniques) by sharing his manufacturing knowledge with other men. He goes beyond the realm of necessity and starts building objects. Sense of permanence in the world.
- ⁷ Action, beginning, is the fulfillment of the human condition of natality – “To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin [...] to set something in motion” (Arendt, 2013, p. 157).
- ⁸ Competency-based education gains strength from the NEGBL (1996), in art. 23: “Basic education may be organized in annual series, semester periods, cycles, regular alternation of study periods, non-serial groups, based on age, *competency* and other criteria, or by a different form of organization, whenever the interest of the learning process so recommends” (Brasil, 1996, emphasis added).
- ⁹ Professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais; coordinator of the *Youth Observatory* Research Group.
- ¹⁰ According to the Ministry of Education (2023), the formative itineraries consist of “[...] a set of subjects, projects, workshops, study centers, among other activities, that students can choose from in high school”. In other words, they represent the diversified part of the New High School curriculum.
- ¹¹ With the election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2022 and the start of his third term in 2023, the demands of civil society and the educational community in relation to High School Reform gained prominence. The Lula government submitted a bill to the Chamber of Deputies with the aim of expanding general education, which had been reduced. The bill was expected to be voted on in 2023. However, faced with the threat of being overtaken by the bill by the rapporteur, Mendonça Filho – who played a key role in the creation of the New High School while Minister of Education in the Michel Temer government – the current Minister of Education, Camilo Santana (under pressure from the educational community), negotiated the postponement of the vote until 2024, allowing for a broader debate with society.

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