

ARTICLE

DERMEVAL SAVIANI'S MARXIST CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORICAL-CRITICAL
PEDAGOGY IN RELATION TO KNOWLEDGE THEMES:
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CURRICULUM¹

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ABSTRACT: This article brings to light the contributions of the Brazilian educator Dermeval Saviani to the curriculum's field. To do so, we did a bibliographical research, rescuing Saviani's Marxist principles in his work, articulating them to the curriculum's field against the background of knowledge theme. The paper also uses Saviani commentators to present a more complete and diverse analysis. Rescuing Saviani's contributions to the curriculum is important at a time when the field moves away from the knowledge theme (MOREIRA, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2012) by prioritizing articulations with the culture under a sharply post-structuralist bias. Thus, the conceptions of Dermeval Saviani remain current and controversial to the field, because they defend a conception of knowledge that embraces principles of universality and prioritizes the curriculum's necessity as a vector of transmission of knowledge considered as patrimony of humanity.

Keywords: Curriculum; Dermeval Saviani; Knowledge.

AS CONCEPÇÕES MARXISTAS DA PEDAGOGIA HISTÓRICO-CRÍTICA DE DERMEVAL SAVIANI
EM RELAÇÃO À TEMÁTICA DO CONHECIMENTO: CONTRIBUIÇÕES AO CURRÍCULO

RESUMO: O presente artigo traz à tona as contribuições do educador brasileiro Dermeval Saviani ao campo do currículo. Para isso, utiliza de pesquisa bibliográfica resgatando os princípios marxistas de sua obra, articulando-os ao

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campo do currículo tendo como pano de fundo a temática do conhecimento. O trabalho utiliza também comentadores de Saviani de modo a tornar mais completa e diversificada a análise. Resgatar as contribuições de Saviani ao currículo é importante em um momento que o campo se afasta da temática do conhecimento (MOREIRA, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2012) ao priorizar as articulações com a cultura sob viés marcadamente pós-estruturalista. Assim, as concepções de Dermeval Saviani se mantêm atuais e polêmicas ao campo, ao defender uma concepção de conhecimento que acolhe princípios de universalidade, e que prioriza a necessidade do currículo como um vetor de transmissão dos conhecimentos tidos como patrimônios da humanidade.

Palavras-chave: Currículo; Dermeval Saviani; Conhecimento.

INTRODUCTION

The conception of knowledge is fundamental to understand the legacy that is intended to pass on to future generations. In those terms, the curriculum emerges as a valuable field for the presentation of various conceptions of school knowledge and, consequently, enables the unveiling of the society that is intended to build.

With the advent of a national curriculum project, i.e., a Common National Curriculum Base, emerges a redesign of curricular policies that involve in a crystalline way a curriculum conception founded on the pretension of clarity, neutrality, scientific character, universality and objectivity of knowledge to be promoted by school. In short, what is at stake in basic times, is the old question always central to the field of the curriculum: What should students know?

Answering this question brings to light the need to discuss, analyze and problematize the subject of knowledge, and of the knowledge recontextualized in school: school knowledge. Knowledge subject is the raw material of the curriculum field, from its technicist roots from Ralph Tyler's studies.

However, to answer this central question – what should students know? – is not a simple task and puts into question a game of disputes of different education conceptions, of society and of the world. For this reason, different answers are given by theorists, curricularists or not, making the subject of knowledge far from being consensual in educational debates. The curriculum field is fruitful for this discussion and it has different conceptions about knowledge and school knowledge, as Ribeiro (2017) points out. Antônio Flávio Barbosa Moreira has been in the last decades the scholar of the field who most cares about the articulation curriculum-knowledge through the process of recontextualization (MOREIRA; CANDAU, 2008).

The author also seeks to defend in his works the articulation of knowledge taken as universal with the existing know-how in the common sense, in order to problematize the idea of knowledge universality, seeking to associate it always with the criteria of legitimization of certain groups that confer prestige on certain expertise at the expense of others (MOREIRA, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2012).

Previously on Antonio F. B. Moreira, there is all of Paulo Freire's contribution to knowledge. It is known that Paulo Freire was not a curricularist, but his questioning in relation to knowledge and expertise, since the 1960s, influenced a whole generation of authors in the field of critical curricular theory, as well as Moreira (1990) and Paraíso (1994). Freire's conception (1992, 1996, 2013) in relation to knowledge goes towards the common knowing appreciation of the subjects' concrete reality, as a starting point for a dialogic construction with the knowledge taken as universal, which the author calls it standard knowledge. In a book with Ira Shor, Paulo Freire accurately synthesizes his conception:

The so-called "pattern" is a deeply ideological concept, but it is necessary to teach its use while also criticizing its political implications. Now, the question is: knowing all this, will the teacher liberate the right not to teach the standardized forms? You will have the right to say, "I am a revolutionary, so do I not teach the 'good' English?" No. From my point of view, the educator should make it possible for the students to master the standard English, but – and here is the big difference between him and another reactionary teacher – while the traditional teacher teaches the rules of the first English (laughter), he accentuates the domination of the students by the elitist ideology, which is included in those rules. The liberating professor teaches them the standardized way, so that they can survive, discussing with them all the ideological ingredients of this ungrateful task. Do you see it? I think this is how teachers can reflect on the fear they have of the rejection of students and about their fear of standardized forms (FREIRE; SHOR, 1986, p. 49).

Still within the theme of knowledge, another author who has contributed to the curricular field is the English curricularist Michael Young, who brings the concept of specialized knowledge as a synonym for curriculum and handles it to the condition of powerful knowledge. For Young (2007, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016) the curriculum role is the transmission of powerful knowledge, one that is universal and objective, patrimony of humanity, to all students, especially of popular layers. The English author comes to argue that it is not up to the school, and therefore the curriculum, the work with the knowledge of the students' experience. In an informative passage, the emphasis on the transmission of powerful knowledge and a certain disregard for knowing the experience can be observed:

School knowledge (in other words, the curriculum) and everyday knowledge are made up of concepts that differ both in their structure and in their purpose. The concepts of everyday life, which children acquire as they grow, empower them to make sense of the world around them. Although they are concepts that serve only for specific contexts, they are flexible and adaptable to new contexts and new experiences. The experience, in this sense, can be understood as the acquisition of more and more concepts that serve for specific contexts. However, the coherence of this day-to-day knowledge is linked to certain contexts and, without the opportunity to engage with concepts of a curriculum based on disciplines, the understanding of children is inevitably limited to those contexts and their daily experiences. On the other hand, the concepts associated with a curriculum based on disciplines are not linked to specific contexts but connected to each other, as well as to the underlying theories of each of the disciplines, legitimized by its community of specialists. It is because of this difference of structure that students who have access to those concepts can generalize beyond their experience. In addition, this structure of specialized knowledge provides educational logic for the curriculum and its links to the broader purposes of schooling. (YOUNG, 2013, p. 238).

For the author, the powerful knowledge is the one whose school has a crucial obligation to convey, and it is the specialized, objective, scientific knowledge whose curriculum task is more the transmission and less its questioning. The English author uses it as synonyms of powerful knowledge,

(...) *the independent knowledge of context or theoretical knowledge*. It provides generalizations and universal search. It provides a basis for making judgments and is usually, but not solely, related to the sciences. It is this context-independent knowledge that is at least potentially acquired in the school and it is to it that I refer as powerful knowledge (YOUNG, 2007, p. 1296).

Michael Young's conception of knowledge is distant from Paulo Freire's and the curricularist Antônio Flávio Barbosa Moreira's conception, and ends up keeping many similarities with the theorist who will be the subject of the study of this text: Dermeval Saviani. In the same direction, the Historical-Critical Pedagogy of Dermeval Saviani admits the possibility of knowledge universality and conceives that the social function of the school is primarily the transmission of those knowledge considered patrimony of humanity.

This work aims to analyze the Historical-Critical Pedagogy of Dermeval Saviani about the conception of knowledge, having the curriculum as a background, always seeking to emphasize its Marxist roots in the social function of the school. The work proposal will therefore be developed by a revision of the fundamental Dermeval Saviani's concepts in the field of school knowledge seeking to go beyond his book *Escola e Democracia* (School and Democracy), as well

as to put it in dialogue with his most prominent disciple to field of the curriculum (Newton Duarte) and seeking complements in the Julia Malanchen's doctoral thesis, which makes a dive in Saviani's conception of knowledge through the Historical-Critical Pedagogy. To accomplish such a task, a bibliographical survey (GIL, 2002) was sought, which was carried through by the most recent works of the author, even those already considered classics in Brazilian education.

KNOWLEDGE IN SAVIANI'S HISTORICAL-CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

In the late 1970s, therefore, still under the military regime, Dermeval Saviani began to consolidate his revolutionary pedagogical conception that later, as early as the 1980s, would be called the name of Historical-Critical Pedagogy. Certainly, one of the most important contributions in the context of Brazilian pedagogical debate.

A revolutionary pedagogical conception that has in the subject of knowledge its epicenter. As he says, "I was therefore explicitly in the field of historical materialism, stating it as the theoretical basis of my educational conception against the reductionist and dogmatic interpretations that fashion stimulated". (SAVIANI, 2003a, p. 15).

Over the years, several times through numerous editions, Dermeval Saviani revisited his theory, but always closely linked to historical materialism as a basis, understanding the school as a possibility of resistance beyond the mere reproduction and committed to the revolutionary transformation of society. It is a premise that he and others who followed his theories never gave up.

What I want to translate with the expression Historical-Critical Pedagogy is the commitment to understand the educational issue based on historical-objective development. Therefore, the assumed conception in this vision of Historical-Critical Pedagogy is historical materialism, that is, the understanding of history from material development, the determination of the material conditions of human existence (SAVIANI, 2003a, p. 88).

His Marxist root is evidenced from the host of the idea of historical materialism present in the above quote. Saviani (2003a) in the chapter entitled *Contextualização histórica e teórica da Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica* (Historical and Theoretical contextualization of Historical-Critical Pedagogy) points out that he initially called its conception by *Dialectic pedagogy*, in the sense of historical materialism as understood by Karl Marx. However, Saviani (2003a) understood that the expression resulted in very broad senses of understanding and began to conceptualize his pedagogy as historical-critical, in the counterposition of the critical logic-

reproductivist and faithful to the historical materialism and dialectical present in Marx. This expression accompanied him in the remainder of his works (SAVIANI, 1996, 2003b, 2012, 2016).

The adoption of historical materialism-dialectical cannot be understood in a “didactizing” way, as a mere sequence of steps to teach school content. It is a conception of the world, of a human being, therefore, a project of society and of Education, in the perspective of the overcoming of the capitalist society. The formation desired by Historical-Critical Pedagogy is the formation of a omni lateral human being, that is, a free and universal individuality, as Duarte (2016) points out.

This is to situate this pedagogy in a project that is part of the contradiction between, on one hand, the specific function of the socialization school of the systematized knowledge and, on the other, the fact that it is a part of the means of production and its property cannot be fully socialized in capitalism (SAVIANI, 2003b).

It should be noted initially that, in a curriculum based on Historical-Critical Pedagogy, what is desired is not criticism by criticism, knowledge by knowledge, but the formation of critical awareness with critical knowledge, for a social practice that can make changes in reality in the knowledge plan and in the historical-social plan.

For the author, this conception has the need to understand the education in its historical development-objective with the premise the possibility of articulating a pedagogical proposal whose commitment is the transformation of the society and not its conservation. “Their assumptions, therefore, are those of the dialectic conception of history. This involves the possibility of understanding school education as it manifests itself in the present but understood this manifestation present because of a long process of historical transformation. (SAVIANI, 2003a, p. 93).

Aware that Historical-Critical Pedagogy comprises an entire conception of education and the world, we have decided here to delimit the conception that this pedagogy has about knowledge and its intrinsic relationship with the curriculum. Interestingly, in his thesis, he notes that although Historical-Critical Pedagogy has contributions to curriculum theories, his survey did not find any dissertation or thesis that dealt specifically with the articulation between those two dimensions. It was even the author’s justification for conducting a thesis that formulated a historical-critical proposal to the curriculum. To think of the knowledge in this perspective, it is necessary to understand that for Saviani (2003a, 2003b, 2016), the learning objective converted into learning school is one of the central elements of Historical-Critical Pedagogy.

This way, for Saviani (2003b, p. 7), “to say that certain knowledge is universal means to say that it is objective”, i.e., it expresses laws that govern the existence of phenomena, then it is something whose validity is universal. The author notes that it applies both to natural and social phenomena and complete: “Thus, the knowledge of the laws governing nature has universal character, therefore its validity exceeds the particular interests of people, classes, times and place” (Idem, p. 58).

However, he also notes that such knowledge is always historical, i.e., the development of those is historically conditioned. Thus, the knowledge that matters specifically to education is one that “emerges because of the learning process due to educational work” (SAVIANI, 2003b, p. 7). But to get to that result it is necessary to take as raw material, the knowledge objective produced historically.

With this explanation, the author reiterates the importance of historicization as a central element to understand the question of objectivity and universality, without linking them, therefore, with the neutrality assumed by the positivists. With this, Saviani (2003a, 2003b) makes clear which knowledge should be transmitted in the school, according to the historical-critics fundamentals: the objective knowledge.

According to Duarte (2016), when Dermeval Saviani defines the objective knowledge as the central element of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, delimiting it as knowing that it must necessarily compose the school curriculum, this does not mean to defend a type of aseptic knowledge or pretensionally neutral, based on positivist reasoning. On the contrary, Saviani (2003a) argues that it is possible to deny neutrality and assert objectivity. As Duarte (2016) asserts, this is possible, because there is no uninterested knowledge, but it is not all interest that prevents objectivity. Objectivity is not synonymous of neutrality. Saviani (2003b, p. 57) clarifies this question:

It is therefore important to understand that the question of neutrality (or non-neutrality) is an ideological question, i.e., it concerns the character concerned or not of knowledge, while objectivity (or not objectivity) is a gnosiologic issue, that is, is related to the interested character or not of the knowledge with the reality to which it refers. It is possible to perceive that there is no disinterested knowledge; so, neutrality is impossible. However, the always interested character of knowledge does not mean the impossibility of objectivity.

And he completes in another book:

[...] we know that the conceptions that men draw up not only have a gnosiologic character, that is, concerning the knowledge of reality, but also ideological, that is, concerning the human interests and needs. In short, knowledge is never neutral, i.e., disinterested and impartial [...] But those two aspects do not confuse each other, they do not exclude each other and do not deny each other. In other

words, it is not a question of considering that the interests impede the objective knowledge or that it excludes the interests. The interests impale the knowledge and at the same time the limited within certain limits. (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 66).

Malanchen (2014) analyses that to know what interests are preventing and which require objectivity it is necessary to address the problem in historical terms, in the context of the development of concrete situations. Thus, the objective knowledge does not exactly exclude the ideological character. But from the interpretation of the author's words, there seems to be a kind of articulation between the gnosologic and ideological character of knowledge. From this explanation, Saviani (2003) argues that the social function of school has to do with this knowledge of universal character and that this universality is entirely linked to objectivity, therefore, to know objective. According to the author:

School knowledge assumes the existence of objective (and universal) knowledge. In fact, what is conventionally to call school knowledge is nothing other than the sequential and gradual organization of objective knowledge, available at a historical stage determined as effect of its transmission-assimilation throughout the schooling process. (SAVIANI, 2012, p. 62).

The curriculum would then be the objective knowledge organized and sequenced to enable its teaching and its learning throughout the schooling process. The knowledge organization in the form of a school curriculum, in Duarte's vision (2016) works with the unity between objectivity and subjectivity, considering that there are objective criteria contained in the knowledge that establish progressive levels of complexity and, on the other hand, the sequencing of school contents should take into account the characteristics of the psyche of the subjects involved in the educational activity.

Education is in this process the formation of the revolutionary consciousness of the human being, and this is articulated to the scientific and philosophical knowledge that must be appropriate by means of the curriculum, so that individuals can understand the laws that they direct objective reality. "We understand that by defining which training is intended to be offered to individuals, the school indirectly influences the way in which they can intervene in society. Therefore, the tensions and debates on curriculum have a strong political character." (DUARTE, 2016, p. 74).

Thus, Historical-Critical Pedagogy considers as a priority that in school the contents are worked in an intentional educational process, and it represents a work with the objective and universal knowledge, therefore, understands that knowledge has a historical character. In this way, it is the scientific knowledge, as well as the artistic and the

philosophical, that should be considered in the organization of the curriculum together with its linking to the theoretical and practical requirements of men's formation.

In Historical-Critical Pedagogy, the curriculum is conceived as a historical product, the result of a collective struggle, of the dispute among classes, which involves ideological, political and pedagogical issues (SAVIANI, 2016). In considering this, the organization of the curriculum must provide not only means to understand the knowledge in it, but also the movement of contradiction that exists in society and the way in which the working class is inserted. The school curriculum becomes, in this perspective, an intentional selection of a portion of the universal culture produced historically. Such an idea is here synthesized by Saviani and Duarte (2012, p. 3)

The other possible direction of the movement produced by the contradiction that marks the school education in the capitalist society, this yes, favorable to the interests of the working class, is that of the struggle for the effectiveness of the school's specificity, making the knowledge socialization work the central axis of all that is carried out within this institution, that is, that which gives meaning to its existence. This struggle requires actions organized in the plan of political battles, in the plan of the formation of highly qualified tables, in the plan of knowledge production on education and in the plan of the theoretical and practical construction of a pedagogy that strengthens the work of direct and intentional production, in each student and in all pupils, of the mastery of the knowledge necessary to their full development as human beings.

It is therefore a curriculum conception in which the unity between content and form is explicitly supported by a materialistic, historical and dialectic perspective of the knowledge meaning for the collective social practice of struggle for the overcoming of society of classes, that is, by the overcoming of the private property of the means of production, of the social division of labor, in short, of alienation overrun.

Duarte (2016, p. 84) tries to articulate this whole conception of appreciation of universal knowledge, without deserving the knowledge of the common sense: "On the one hand educational work should not ignore the daily acquaintance, but also cannot have it as threshold or main reference". In other words, the author argues that it is necessary to go beyond, focusing the school curriculum on the work of appropriation of the systematized knowledge.

It is interesting to clarify that at this certain point, Dermeval Saviani and Paulo Freire are approaching. In addition to Freire's quote already mentioned in the introduction, in which he advocates the appropriation of standardized knowledge since problematized, thus

reiterates that the progressive educator cannot evade such knowledge to the students, Freire (1992) still defends it, in *Pedagogia da Esperança* (Pedagogy of Hope) the transition from naïve curiosity to criticism as a fundamental factor for the students' emancipation.

In other words, the immediate, everyday knowledge is the naïve, unarmed wisdom of rigorous methods of approaching the object, “but that, not so, can or should be disregarded by us. Its necessary overcoming is through respect for it and has its starting point” (FREIRE, 1992, p. 82). The approximation with Saviani (1996, p. 2) is undeniable:

Passing from common sense to philosophical consciousness means moving from a fragmentary, incoherent, disjointed, implicit, degraded, mechanical, passive and simplistic conception to a unitary, coherent, articulated, explicit, original, intentional, active and cultivated conception.

It is worth bringing Paulo Freire at this time for two reasons: first, to distrust some possible interpretations that try to put him and Dermeval Saviani as opposites in relation to the conception of knowledge. Secondly, by believing that by defending possible approaches, we can better understand their differences as well. We believe, in this way, that the main distinction between them is emphasis.

While Dermeval Saviani emphasizes the transmission of knowledge taken as patrimony of humanity, objectives and scientific, in schools, Freire (2013, 1992, 1993, 1996) prioritizes the questioning of that knowledge from the reality of the students through an educator-educating dialogue mediated by the world. It does not mean that Dermeval Saviani devalues the questioning of knowledge, on the contrary, the author stresses the importance of understanding them critically, the question is that, in our understanding, he will emphasize throughout his works the transmission of that knowledge without taking the reality of the students as a fundamental starting point in the process and putting the dimension of dialogue in the background. It is as if, in Freire's logic, Dermeval Saviani approached the transmission of knowledge through a process in which A talks to B, and not A with B.

For Malanchen (2014) the defense, made by Saviani, of school contents objectivity does not imply the disregard of the subjective aspects of human activity in general and of the educational activity. “The universal value of knowledge is not in conflict with the fact that they are always produced in specific social conditions and by temporal and spatially situated individuals” (MALANCHEN, 2014, p. 143).

Saviani (1996, 2003a, 2003b, 2012, 2016) reiterates that school knowledge is dominated by the bourgeoisie and therefore needs to

be socialized and appropriate by the working class. But it is not by the fact that it is dominated by the bourgeoisie, that knowledge is intrinsically bourgeois. He explains, “hence the conclusion: this knowledge, which, of itself, is not bourgeois, serves, however, the bourgeois interests, once the bourgeoisie is appropriated, placing it at its service and evading the working classes” (SAVIANI, 2003a, p. 55).

Therefore, it is essential for him to end the evasion, since it is by the appropriation of this knowledge school by workers who “[...] they will be withdrawn from this knowledge their bourgeois characters and will be printed the proletarian characters.” (SAVIANI, 2003a, p. 55). This emphasis on the socialization of that universal knowledge aims to enable the working class to dominate what the dominant dominates, which for Saviani (1996, 2003a, 2003b, 2012, 2016) is a liberation condition.

Welcoming the idea of universal knowledge and learning about school as one that emerges from educational work is to operate with the notion that knowledge has as a principle the reality knowable. In this way, Saviani (2003b, 2012) strongly criticizes subjectivist and relativistic positions. In explaining his Marxist conception of knowledge, Saviani (2012b, p. 63) clarifies it:

[...] clearly realistic, in ontological terms, and objectivist, in gnosiologic terms, it moves within the framework of two fundamental principles: 1. Things exist independently of thought, with the corollary: it is the reality that determines the ideas and not the other way around. 2. Reality is knowable, with the corollary: the act of knowing is creative not as production of the own object of knowledge, but as production of the categories that allow the reproduction, in thought, of the object that is sought to know.

Both Duarte (2016) and Malanchen (2014) agree that working in school with scientific, artistic and philosophical knowledge requires historical, materialistic and dialectic perspective of the objectivity and universality of knowledge, considering both the coming to be historical of the appropriation of the natural and social reality by thought, as well as the links between the development of knowledge and the very demands of human formation. Thus, Saviani (2003a, 2003b) explains that, the object of education deals with the identification of cultural elements that need to be assimilated by individuals of the human species so that they become human and, on the other hand and concomitantly, to the discovery of more appropriate ways to achieve that goal.

Thus, according to Malanchen (2014), the function of education, more specifically of school education is: to identify which contents are fundamental in the continuity of the development and

evolution of the human gender, known, in Marxism, as omni lateral human formation, as well as the most appropriate ways for those contents to be incorporated into the second nature of the pupils.

For Saviani (2003) other areas of human sciences studies are specifically focused on ideas, concepts, values, symbols, attitudes and human abilities as external objects of study. In the case of studies in education, as an alert by Malanchen (2014), the interest is returned to the appropriation of those objects by subjects, by new generations, thus forming what Saviani (2003) calls the second human nature that builds based on the first, the biophysical nature. It is understood, in this way, that human nature is not born with the individual, it must be produced by him on the biological basis.

Resuming the question of the contents necessary for the incorporation of this second human nature, Saviani (2003, p. 13) provides an exit: “It is about distinguishing between the essential and the accidental, the principal and the secondary, the fundamental and the attachment” in the action of selecting content. To distinguish between the main, fundamental, and secondary, in other words, means to say that the author advocates the socialization of the classics, understood by him as this essential and fundamental element: “Classic, in fact, is what resisted time. It is in this sense that Greco-Roman culture is a classical one, that Kant and Hegel are classics of philosophy, Victor Hugo is a classic of universal literature, Guimarães” (SAVIANI, 2003, p. 18).

Both Saviani (2003) and Duarte (2016) conceive the classic as that knowledge that extrapolates time, that is, the moment it was produced. It is related to its historical permanence capacity and at the same time becoming a reference. Because even though it is produced in a specific historical juncture, such classical knowledge can capture central (nuclear) issues that for the authors relate to the identity of the human as a being that develops himself historically. Seeking a very propositive tone, Saviani (2003b, p. 69) seeks to delimit a “how to do” so that the school can in fact guarantee its social function, to transmit the universal contents, classics to those who do not have it:

A pedagogy articulated with the popular interests will therefore value the school; it will not be indifferent to what is occurring inside; it will be committed to the school working well; therefore, you will be interested in effective teaching methods. Those methods will be in addition to the traditional and new methods, surpassing by incorporating the contributions of ones and others. They are methods that will stimulate the activity and initiative of the pupils without giving up, however, the teacher’s initiative; they will favor the dialogue of the pupils between themselves and the teacher, but without failing to value the dialogue

with the historically accumulated culture; they will take into account the interests of the pupils, the rhythms of learning and the psychological development, but without losing sight of the logical systematization of knowledge, its ordination and gradation for the purposes of the process of transmission and assimilation of the cognitive contents.

Duarte (2016, p. 87) complements:

In this way, the appropriation of scientific concepts promotes the development of psychological functions to allow the understanding of the essential processes of reality, a necessary condition, even if not sufficient, for its transformation by social practice. The appropriation of scientific knowledge promotes special forms of conduct, modifies the activity of the psychic functions, creates new levels of human development and provides a more articulate understanding of reality.

Sought to overcome by incorporating the traditional and new methods, the proposal of Saviani (2003b) makes clear the emphasis on the systematization and ordination of knowledge aiming at its transmission and assimilation. Although the author makes weightings in order not to disregard the students' initiatives, nor the dialogue with them, it is highlighted the priority in the transmitter aspect on the part of the teacher.

In this way, Saviani (2003b) is particularly concerned about what he means by decharacterizing educational work, under the context in which everything becomes a curriculum. Thus, the curriculum ceases to be the set of nuclear activities of the school, that is, the ordination of universal knowledge, fruit of the objective knowledge, for transmission to the pupils, aiming for their emancipation. In the molds of Michael Young, Dermeval Saviani imbricates curriculum and knowledge, hitching the social function of the school for its transmission.

It is for this reason that Saviani (2003b) criticizes the excessive commemorative dates, which for him, secondary as they are, if excessive, only hinder the nuclear function of transmitting the objective knowledge.

It is not too much to remember that this phenomenon can be easily observed in the day to day schools. I give only one example: the school year begins in the second fortnight of February and in March we have the week of the revolution; then the Holy Week; then Mother's Week, festivals parties, Soldier Week, Folklore Week, Country Week, Spring Games, Children's Week, Indian Week, Asa Week, etc., and right now it's November. The school year is closed, and we are faced with the following realization: it was done in the schools; there was time for all sorts of celebrations, but very little time was destined to the process of transmission-assimilation of systematized knowledge. This means that the school's nuclear activity has been lost, i.e., the transmission of the access instruments to the elaborate knowledge (SAVIANI, 2003b, p. 16).

It is evident that for Saviani (1996, 2003a, 2003b, 2012), the school function is the transmission-assimilation of the systematized knowledge and is based on this premise that the author understands curriculum as: “(...) the organization of the whole of the nuclear activities distributed in space and school time. A curriculum is therefore a working school, a school performing the function that is itself. (SAVIANI, 2003a, p. 18). The author also ponders that to exist the school is not enough for the existence of systematized knowledge. It is necessary to make possible the conditions of its transmission and assimilation. “This implies dose and sequence it so that the child gradually passes from its non-domain to its domain” (Idem, p. 18). And concludes: “Now knowledge dosed and sequenced for the purposes of its transmission and assimilation in the school space, over a given time, is what we conventionally call the school knowledge” (Idem, p. 18).

Thus, for Saviani (2003b), democracy in the teaching process at school means inequality at the starting point that must become equality at the arrival point. “This occurs through the selection of knowledge that will be worked, which should provide individuals with what is not put at the starting point, that is, access to the classical culture, to the classic” (MALANCHEN, 2014, p. 156). For Historical-Critical Pedagogy, the transmission of the most elaborate knowledge, of universal and classical character, as a social function of the school, allows students a common point of arrival and a real possibility of emancipation with a view to Saviani (1996, 2003a, 2003b, 2012, 2016), the appropriation of that knowledge by the working class, develops superior psychic forms that give them the condition to transform reality.

For this reason, Saviani (2003a) understands popular culture as an important starting point, provided that the school allows the student to go beyond the same, in search of a scholarly knowledge. It is common, in the author’s works, terms that refer to an evolutionary and hierarchical perspective of knowledge, such as: more developed forms of know-how, more elaborate learning, superior knowing, scholarly learning. Without problematizing or denying those dimensions, the author is clear in defending the appropriation of elaborate knowledge, so that the popular culture itself is expressed in a more elaborate way.

The popular culture, from a school point of view, is of the utmost importance as a starting point. It is not, however, the popular culture that will define the point of arrival of pedagogical work in schools. If the schools are merely reiterating the popular culture, what will be their function? To develop popular culture, this systematic and spontaneous culture, people do not need school. They develop it through the work of their own struggles, relationships and practices. People need the school to have access to the erudite knowledge, in the systematized knowledge, consequently, to express in an elaborate way the contents of the popular culture that correspond to their interests. (SAVIANI, 2003, p. 95).

This issue is also perceived in analyzing the function of Historical-Critical Pedagogy:

a) identification of the most developed forms in which the objective knowledge produced historically is expressed, recognizing the conditions of its production and understanding its main manifestations as well as the current trends of transformation; b) conversion of the objective knowledge into learning school so as to make it assimilable by students in space and school time; c) providing the necessary means for students not only to assimilate the objective knowledge as a result, but apprehend the process of their production as well as the tendencies of their transformation (SAVIANI, 2003a, p. 9).

Malanchen (2014, p. 163) in defending the curriculum under the historical-critical prism reiterates: “When we advocate the most developed knowledge, such as the one that should be transmitted in schools through curriculums, we are defending the knowledge that allows the objective of the human being in an increasingly free and universal way, being the criterion of human emancipation. In another passage, he argues that “we seek in the culture produced by humans, what is richer, what is most developed to transmit to the new generations” (MALANCHEN, 2014, p. 181). In this way, the socialization of the universal intellectual wealth by the school is in a broader context, the struggle for the socialization of human wealth and, more precisely, by the overcoming of the private property of the means of production.

In this hierarchical perspective of knowledge, there is clearly an objective, systematized understanding that for Dermeval Saviani, throughout his work, is associated with the idea of truth. The postmodern relativistic vision of truth, heavily criticized by Duarte (2016), does not concern the formulations of Historical-Critical Pedagogy. Duarte (2016) argues that knowledge is historical and therefore can be modified, overcome, challenged and refuted, which gives it historical relativity. But in this historical process of building knowledge, human beings produce truths that become an absolute value. In this respect, Lénin weaves pertinent problematizations:

[...] Is there an objective truth, that is, can there be in human representations a content that does not depend on the subject, which does not depend neither of man nor of humanity? If so, can the human representations that express the objective truth express it at once, wholly, unconditionally, absolutely, or just in an approximate and relative way? This second question is the one of the relationship between the absolute truth and the relative truth. (LÊNIN, 1982, p. 92).

In another passage of the same work, the Russian revolutionary synthesizes brilliantly from the point of view of the dialectic, as the truth can have elements of relativism without reducing it, without denying the existence of objective truths:

The dialectic, as Hegel explained, contains an element of relativism, denial, skepticism, but it is not reduced to relativism. The materialistic dialectic of Marx and Engels certainly contains relativism, but it is not reduced to it, that is, it recognizes the relativity of all our knowledge, not in the sense of the denial of objective truth, but in the sense of the historical conditionality of limits of the approximation of our knowledge in relation to this truth. (LÉNIN, 1982, p. 103).

It is possible to say, in this sense, that the relativity of human knowledge understood by the historical and dialectical materialist is very distinct from the relativism present in the basis of postmodern thinking, because knowledge as a process, has for fundamentals and objective content, the domination of phenomena, of the laws of the world.

Malanchen (2014) and Duarte (2016) go in the same direction by advocating that by means of the relative truths produced by individuals the human gender advances in the ever deeper and broader knowledge of the natural and social reality. “This proves that the authentic truth is possible to be achieved, not in a mechanical, watertight and definitive way” (MALANCHEN, 2014, p. 193), but in its movement, in the infinite process of enrichment with new content.

CONCLUSIONS

It was our intention to prioritize the contributions of Dermeval Saviani’s Historical-Critical Pedagogy to the curriculum, through the articulations of this aspect with the theme of knowledge and the social function of the school. We argue that in times whose curriculum has played several discussions in the educational field, rescuing Dermeval Saviani’s conceptions, highlighted Brazilian intellectual, is salutary to the field of curriculum. In addition, the recent productions in the curricular field, although increasingly plural and consolidated, have approached little of the relationship of the curriculum with the said author.

We believe that through the analysis of the author’s various works, as well as dialogue with his disciples and other different theorists, it was possible to clarify clearly the importance of the classical knowledge socialization process, as the primary function of school, in order to ensure the appropriation of that know-how by the working class. Having contact with the knowledge taken as patrimony of humanity, for the proponents of Dermeval Saviani’s ideas, guarantees the subject a higher cognitive development, a crucial condition for his emancipation.

Dermeval Saviani’s Historical-Critical Pedagogy supports the historical materialism and dialectical of Marxist guidance, so that it

is not only a “how to do” pedagogical, but rather, a revolutionary proposal of social transformation, via work education, which has as a pretension the construction of another society.

We can disagree with the author on several points: from his Marxist guidance, from his defense of the understanding of knowledge taken as universal, from the hierarchical character that imposes to the knowledge, and the way the author operates with the notion of transmission and acquisition of knowledge. However, it is undeniable Dermeval Saviani’s coherence throughout his work, always committed to the oppressed and providing a scathing criticism of the inequalities promoted by capitalism and its reflexes, especially in education.

In Dermeval Saviani we can also inspire ourselves in the defense of the school institution and the importance of the teacher’s role. In difficult times whose pessimism insists on the utopias, rescuing this Brazilian intellectual is not only valuing our scientific production, but also remembering, through his teachings, that we cannot stop and fight for another education and another society.

It is in Saviani’s conception a Marxist approach that surpasses the limits of the enlightenment without neglecting the emancipatory character of knowledge and reason; that transcends the limits of bourgeois democracy without denying the necessity of politics; that exceeds the limits of science put to the service of capital without, however, denying the indispensable character of it for human development; that rejects the bourgeois conception of social progress without denying the possibility of making society progress in the direction of more evolved forms of human existence. All this translates, about the educational field, in the defense of a Marxist pedagogy that “surpasses school education in its bourgeois forms without denying the importance of the transmission, by the school, of the most developed knowledge already produced by humanity.” (DUARTE, 2016, p. 42).

We reiterate here, that for the curricular field, in a way, Dermeval Saviani’s contributions and other supporters of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, are still valuable to reflect and analyze the subject of knowledge, so fundamental to the curriculum. We also defend and suggest future deepening in other studies, that this conception has several approaches with the idea of powerful knowledge of the English curricularist Michael Young, and that there are some similarities with Freire’s epistemology, especially about the transition from a naïve know-how to an elaborate knowledge. Thus, this text leaves the doors open for other research that seeks to deepen those meeting points and disagreement here outlined.

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NOTAS

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