National Curriculum Policy in Brazil: Between Social Control and Social and Cultural Diversity

Adriana Almeida Sales de Melo
Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, Brazil

To investigate the development of a national curriculum policy in Brazil, the research sought to analyze the main legislation from the Federal Constitution of 1988. Following the theoretical and methodological principles of the new sociology of education, we analyzed how the curriculum policy incorporated social and political demands for the universalization of education, including the study of ethnic, cultural, and gender diversity. Such achievements were realized at the common national base curriculum to which, in a public consultation process, had more than 12.4 million contributions. Bringing together multiple and diverse propositions, it shows that the national curriculum policy is at the confluence of multiple social interests and contradictions in the construction of the national project of society and education for the future.

Keywords: curriculum policy, Brazil, public consultation, social and cultural diversity

Introduction

The discussion about building a national curriculum policy has been present at the Brazilian's 20th century educational history, associated with the different curriculum theory tendencies, sometimes latent, sometimes resulting in legal frameworks construction, sometimes simply historically following the political educational changes for all levels and modalities of education in Brazil.

Associated more recently to educational policies that promoted and performed in Brazil, the three main strands of the education for all programs are led by the World Bank and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Latin America and the Caribbean (Melo, 2004), and the questions related to whether or not the construction of a national curriculum should follow policies resulted in the expansion of the universal process of education, the implementation of various aspects of democratic management by Brazilian federal entities, as well as the discussions and actions related with better training of teachers in Brazil.

We can mention, as essential legal frameworks for contemporary conduct of national curriculum policy, the Article 210 of the Constitution of 1988 says, "Will set minimum content for the elementary school in order to ensure a common basic education and respect for cultural and artistic values, national and regional" (Brasil, 1998). We also can point out our law of guidelines and bases of national education (known in Brazil as LDB) in several articles of the Constitution, especially in Article 9, which states that the union is responsible for—in collaboration with the states, federal district, and municipalities—the establishment of skills and guidelines for basic education that will serve to guide the curriculum and their minimum content. Articles 26 and 26a, deal

Adriana Almeida Sales de Melo, Ph.D., professor-researcher, Graduate Program in Education, Universidade de Brasília.

with specific topics to be addressed in the national education, especially with regard to the mandatory teaching of the history and experience of our African and indigenous offspring.

Between the 20th and 21st centuries, Brazil developed the national curriculum standards and the national curriculum guidelines, covering all levels and types of education. The discussion about the need for development of a national curriculum was also presented at the National Conference of Education (CONAE), which included not only the National Conference of Education, but also the National Conference of Basic Education, Professional and Technological Education, and various other seminars, with its local, regional, and district stages. This process contributed to build the discussions that resulted in the 2001 and 2014 National Education Plans (Brazil, 2001; 2014), reflecting intense and fierce battles for different and sometimes contradictory interests of an increasingly wide variety of collective political subjects acting in the educational field. Added to these processes were also the efforts of 26 states, the federal district, and the 5,570 Brazilian municipalities towards building their own curriculum proposals for basic education.

Among these subjects, we can emphasize the strengthening of discussions and local processes, and taking new historical course since the promulgation of LDB 1996, especially regarding the implementation of Articles 12 and 13, laying relevant obligations, responsibilities, and autonomy on educational institutions and teachers. It brings to the centre of discussion the democratic management of cultural and organizational processes that takes place in everyday school life.

The research whose results we present below, brings the main objective analysis of the new proposal led by the Ministry of Education (MEC), in very close cooperation with the National Council of Education Secretaries (CONSED) and the Union of Municipal Education Officers (UNDIME): The preliminary document of the National Curriculum Common Base (BNCC), which aims to compose a national curriculum proposal for all levels of basic education.

We bring the discussion to the area of educational comparative politics, because the evidences show us that the development of a national proposal is at the heart of the great political and educational changes in the area, generating consequences to be held in different institutional levels, and constituting stage of broad social and national academic discussions.

Waxed on March 15, 2016, the public consultation on the BNCC already pointed national and local challenges as far as their representatives in front of the complex framework of collective political subject area, with its contents as well as the planning of its implementation. Even before its consolidation, there was an intense discussion about its future. We propose in this article, a brief discussion of the concept of curriculum in its relationship with the management of basic education, an analysis of the current discussion about BNCC, and then some results that can point to current and future challenges.

National Curriculum Policy: Principles for the Discussion of the Management of Basic Education

In theoretical fields involving discussions about curriculum, there are multiple interfaces with diverse areas of knowledge, each with their own genealogies, board designs, and concepts of what is human, historical ways of building knowledge, the way to produce science and technology, and concerns about how such knowledge will be transmitted to new generations.

Going over the curriculum history in Brazil, especially with respect to a proposed new BNCC which is still in its beginnings, means so much to recover the movements of its construction as taking a future

curriculum project covering the notions of education for all, human rights, quality, democratic management of education, nation, and development project, among other concepts that are becoming increasingly visible and expressed both in driving proposals of Brazilian educational policies, as in their own educational legislation.

In the specific case of BNCC, fulfilling the legal provisions cited as the social pressures of the various institutional and ideological hues, the MEC, together with the CONSED and UNDIME, as well as in conjunction with its national and international advisors formed in 2015, a team of Brazilians experts gathering names of academic researchers with expertise in various areas of knowledge and national scientific societies. They had their main task preparing the draft document for the national public consultation, which was open even in September 2016, as we will show below.

However, one of the main elements of the criticisms that already are structured in relation to BNCC, is that the document, having as main objective the objects of learning and knowledge, did not show yet a clear conceptual proposal of its meaning, or made clear the paths for its future management and implementation, through both by society and by the national agencies, states, district, and municipalities legally responsible, until they become visible and collaborative with schools, teachers, and educators in general.

As a field always in evidence in the conduct of national educational policies, the curriculum of basic education is attached to the discussions about learning assessment policy and institutional assessment, on the need to build hegemonic and homogeneous directions that can be the basis of compliance with the constitutional provisions on the union's responsibilities.

The preparation of BNCC, conducted with the role of the Department of Basic Education (SEB) of MEC, takes position in the discussions as an expression of a basic and common prescribed curriculum in order to ensure national uniformity, especially when it comes to basic learning rights. While complying with the flexibility determinations and open to negotiations with the local authorities, the prospect is that in its next phase, a discussion with the National Council of Education (CNE) could place the needs to clarify its theoretical and epistemological bases.

The curriculum discussions involved various hues and theoretical approaches over the centuries, from the first attempts of modern nations to set parameters for the education of its population to the most current discussions about the inextricable link between the prescribed curriculum, curriculum theory, and its actual practice (Goodson, 2012). These are issues involving the weight of theory and practice in the realization of the curriculum.

According to the researchers Ferreira and Jaehn (2012), that author, who has epistemological roots in the new sociology of education, has a curriculum vision that integrates many of the socio-historical problems on the subject, from large surveys conducted in the years 1970s and early 1980s to the discussions on practical subjects in their school routine. Goodson (2012) also drew our attention to the history of the curriculum development process:

It is therefore not analyse the development of the curriculum, the temptation will be to accept it as an assumption and seek variables within the classroom, or at least in each particular school environment. We would be accepting as "traditional" and "presupposed" curriculum versions that a further examination may be considered the climax of a long and continuous conflict. (p. 24)

These issues are consistent with the ongoing investigation into the preparation of BNCC and its interfaces with the democratic management issues of education. We also could introduce the arguments of the historian

Eric Hobsbawm about the historical process of creating, or even “invention of tradition,” subject of some of its investigations (Hobsbawm, 1997). By accentuating the issues relating to the social construction of curriculum, Goodson (2012) called our attention to the need to consider the historical dynamics of curricula, placing them in their historical context, as far as comparing it with its effective practice in various educational institutions.

Curricular policies have a historical materiality that is associated with planning practices, management, financing, and evaluation of education at various levels and modalities. However, when emerging as a state policy or a national policy, may run the risk of unlinking the direct connection it should have, since its drafting, and its real historical practice in schools and other educational settings, also risks unlinking the action of the subjects that make the daily school.

The Process of Building the Common National Base Curriculum

One of the biggest challenges in the management of the Brazilian basic education is the need and legal obligation of the national construction of the basic education curriculum. Having a population of 203 million people, including 50 million between four and 17 years old enrolled in compulsory basic education by 2015, Brazil entered in the process of condoning the construction of a national curriculum that not only allowed the development of administrative functions and social control, but also of learning outcomes, as respect the rights of learning and cultural and ethnic diversity of its population. In addition to these challenges, as mentioned, this population lives in 26 states, a federal district, and 5,570 municipalities that have their stories, dynamic management, and own curriculum practices.

As a first step to start a new construction of the curriculum, the MEC, through the SEB, negotiated with CONSED and UNDIME, the composition of a committee of 116 experts who had as main task the joint in areas of knowledge and development of introductory texts for each area, and the development of learning objectives for each of the curriculum components. This team met for a few months and delivered to SEB the preliminary document that constituted the original proposal for the public consultation.

Next, we will make a short description of the main structure of BNCC and present some contradictions intrinsic to them.

The public consultation was configured in access to primary document, with its various types of text and each type had a specific entry for all users wishing to make their contributions. Users could register as individuals, organizations, or schools; and their mandatory identification allowed us to view today transparently each of contributions made. On March 15, 2016, we started to organize 12,226,510 contributions that were all analysed. The portal can also be accessed by <http://www.basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br> address, even know that the public consultation has already been closed.

Users could give their contributions with agreeing, disagreeing, and adding various types of suggestions for five types of texts: the original text entitled “give your contribution to BNCC,” the introductory texts of each area, the areas of documents, the learning objectives, and new learning objectives.

In total, as established in the portal in the “query numbers,” 305,207 users have registered and have made their contributions to the five proposed areas: early childhood education, languages, mathematics, humanities and natural sciences, divided. In turn, curriculum components cover all basic education: early childhood education, primary and secondary education. The site also brings the number of contributions by area, curricular component, and Federative Units, as well as offers a variety of content assessment documents of experts and new consultants who were in the process of public consultation, feeding preliminary data to rethink

the necessary changes, as well as reviewing the draft document texts themselves.

The final data is now published on the site, and we can explain the process, in general, being part of the multidisciplinary team at the University of Brasilia, which together with the research group of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, and realizing the project research with the MEC analysis of total data presented public consultation.

With more than 95% approval on the draft text, indicated by the quantification of consistent responses to the various types of text, the research did not aim justification or demonstration of support from society to the project, but analysed each and every one of 12.2 million pointing contributions back to the team of experts, all that could be considered to change the texts.

With the generation of preliminary analysis, data analysis, although on quantitative basis, sought to emphasize and respected all the contributions. Evaluated for clarity, relevance, and pertinence, the texts of the learning objectives were organized in several categories, according to the responses of the public consultation. 1,714 learning objectives were evaluated and the quantification of responses for each one of them ranged from 2,500-16,000 contributions, totalling approximately 3.7 million contributions. The percentage and curricular component differ in areas.

That team analysed all the suggestions for modification of learning objectives, and classified them into general categories: substantial alteration, change of year/stage comments (no exchanges), additions of few words, without editing the goal, and not valid (or blank).

These data were synthesized in quantitative tables. However, all contributions are exposed, per user, at the portal BNCC.

In addition to the public consultation, workshops across the country were being conducted in the states and municipalities, always in partnership with MEC, CONSED, and UNDIME in order to better qualify the contributions that were being articulated at each of these sites; the participation of federal entities, schools, and teachers increased in the workshops, to reflect from a broader spectrum, the needs and positions of public school systems in the country. Such seminars also contributed to stimulate the expression of the diversity of experiences and experiences throughout the national territory.

From the analysis and synthesis produced by the public consultation and the ongoing work of experts and consultants on their specific texts, will be following the consolidation of the text of BNCC, the subsequent submission to the consideration of the CNE, and the consideration of the methodology of the new phase of discussion in bicameral committee (House of Basic Education in the conjunction with the Board of Higher Education).

However, the scale and scope of such public consultation, as well as the success of the reach of contributions made, did not mean that the document had a homogeneous national acceptance, whereas, in the above, the vast majority of the 12.2 million contributions were originated in the public school systems.

The construction process of public consultation, as one of the building foundations of BNCC, not only contributes to redesign the national curriculum, but also brings the need to investigate the process preliminarily described above and reveals issues that deserve to be permanently discussed as renewed discussion of the national curriculum policy.

The national curriculum policy, which is the first step in a broader and deeper curriculum reform, and requires more answers, more partnerships, and a wider range of investments, is not restricted to the curriculum, nor the curriculum is limited to BNCC.

Final Concerns and Conclusions

In addition to the proposal of an official curriculum or formulation of goals and learning rights, in addition to the composition of scripts or lists of contents, the composition of a national curriculum also has a deep relationship with a project of society and education. However, the composition of society and education projects often conflict realistically.

If the composition of BNCC had an intense social participation, led by the major partners mentioned, such participation would base on the mobilization of public networks, allowing other types and different social forums, or the participation of other collective political subjects the public decisions in planning and implementing the curriculum national policy.

All the companies that presented in the “Movement for the Base,” a move that added several private institutions based business consultancy, publishers, and producers of educational material in general, and specialized companies in the continuing education of workers in education, also accompanied the initial process of building BNCC, though otherwise, in direct contact with its traditional historical partners, CONSED and UNDIME.

In addition to the explicit interest in the conduct of curriculum policies as learning knowledge and new knowledge of what is politically consensus as the basis of school knowledge, these issues also relate to their own knowledge production, with the capacity of countries to produce new knowledge.

BNCC, written with the intention of being one of the elements of the national curriculum policy—although its makers recognize it as a defining elemental—brings great risks to the relationship between public and private education, as long as it is related to the dispute concerning the use of public money for public education, and the relationship among the national science policy, technology and innovation, vocational and technological education, and other forms of national education.

We also have the issues that involve the risk of the return of technical rationality and the new theory of human capital, as indicated by recent work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Melo, 2015), and the issues involving the implementation and realization of the new BNCC.

In Brazil, as a subjective public law, that legally-recognized education, such private interests, tries to be permanently brought into the national curriculum policy, so do the initial and continuing teacher education policies and entrepreneurial and managerial values, in order to legitimize their own corporative interests and ethical-political ones, trying to transform education into a commodity compatible with the management of their business.

Among disputes, contradictory society projects, confrontation, and resistance, we are leaning on a complex research field, which interfaces with diverse areas of knowledge and also involves specifically the composition of education systems, history of school subjects, internal relations, and external changes in institutions focused on education (Goodson, 2012). Looking to go beyond all discussions of the area that tell us all that the curriculum can not or should not be, we believe that the process that involves BNCC, in addition to its own propositional forms, brings merit to provoke new discussions and propositions in several areas of research, especially with regard to educational policies for basic education in Brazil, Latin America, and the world.

References

- Apple, M. W. (1979). *Ideology and curriculum*. Boston: Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2000). The teaching today: An agenda. In C. V. Maria (Org.). *Teaching, curriculum, and school knowledge*. Rio de Janeiro: DP & A.

- Brasil. (1988). *Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil* (Federal Constitution). Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Freitas Bastos.
- Brasil. (1996). *Law n.º. 9.394/96*. Brasília: Diário Oficial da União.
- Brasil. (2001). *Law n.º. 10.172/2001*. Brasília: Diário Oficial da União.
- Brasil. (2014) *Law n.º. 13.005/2014*. Brasília: Diário Oficial da União
- Ferreira, M. S., & Jaehn, L. (2012). Prospects for a history curriculum: The contributions of Ivor Thomas Goodson and Thomas Popkewitz. *Pelotas: Review Curriculum Without Borders*, 12(3), 256-272.
- Goodson, I. F. (2012). *International perspectives in curriculum history*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hobsbawn, E., & Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Melo, A. A. S. (2004). *The globalization of education—Consolidation of the neoliberal project in Latin America: Brazil and Venezuela*. Maceió: EDUFAL.
- Melo, A. A. S. (2015). Policies for basic education in Brazil and the guidelines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in the XXI century. *ANPAE Notebooks*, 1, 1-13.
- Moreira, A. F. B. (2013). Curriculum and management: Proposing a partnership. *Essay*, 21(80), 547-562.
- Pacheco, J. A. (2011). Curriculum and school management in the context of educational policies. *Brazilian Journal of Educational Policy and Administration*, 27(3), 377-390.
- Pacheco, J. A. (2003). *Curriculum policies: Benchmarks for analysis*. Porto Alegre: Medical Arts.
- Young, M. (2009). What are the schools for? In M. Z. Pereira, M. P. Carvalho, & R. C. Porto (Eds.), *Globalization, intercultural curriculum, and the school play*. Campinas: Alínea.