

Historical-Critical Pedagogy and hegemonic struggles (1985–2025): systematic review with qualitative meta-synthesis

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Abstract

The Brazilian redemocratization, initiated in 1985, reopened educational disputes between emancipatory and conservative projects. In this context, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), systematized by Dermeval Saviani, emerged as a framework for hegemonic struggles against "banking education," promoting historical class consciousness within strikes, unions, and occupations. This study aims to map and synthesize, through a systematic review with qualitative meta-synthesis, the contributions of HCP to educational struggles in Brazil between 1985 and 2025, identifying historical contexts, collective actions, and its function as a counter-hegemonic praxis against the dictatorship, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism. This review mapped 127 studies (1985–2025), following PRISMA 2020 and ENTREQ guidelines. Historically, HCP guided teachers' strikes in the 1980s against precarious conditions, union reorganization, and experimental implementation in Paraná (1983–1994). In the 1990s, it resisted the neoliberalism of the LDB/1996. Between 2003–2015, it gained ground in teacher training and the 2015 secondary school occupations. Post-2016, it faced setbacks with Constitutional Amendment 95/2016 and the "School without Party" movement. The Bolsonaro government (2019–2022) reduced the education budget by 13.5%, leading to 58 strikes and 214 reports of ideological persecution. The pandemic exacerbated inequalities, leaving 5.5 million students without internet access. HCP criticized "inclusive exclusion" and remained a praxis of resistance. Under the Lula administration (2023–), debates on curricular reconstruction once again position HCP as a key reference.

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Keywords: Historical-Critical Pedagogy. Counter-hegemonic struggles. Brazilian redemocratization. Systematic review. Qualitative meta-synthesis.

Resumo

A redemocratização brasileira, iniciada em 1985, reabriu disputas educacionais entre projetos emancipatórios e conservadores. Nesse contexto, a Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica (PHC), sistematizada por Dermeval Saviani, emergiu como referencial para lutas hegemônicas contra a educação bancária, promovendo consciência histórica de classe em greves, sindicatos e ocupações. O objetivo deste trabalho é mapear e sintetizar, por meio de revisão sistemática com meta-síntese qualitativa, as contribuições da PHC às lutas educacionais no Brasil entre 1985 e 2025, identificando contextos históricos, ações coletivas e sua função como práxis contra-hegemônica frente à ditadura, ao neoliberalismo e ao neoconservadorismo. Esta revisão mapeou 127 estudos (1985–2025), seguindo PRISMA 2020 e ENTREQ. Historicamente, a PHC orientou greves docentes nos anos 1980 contra precarização, reorganização sindical e implementação experimental no Paraná (1983–1994). Nos anos 1990, resistiu ao neoliberalismo da LDB/1996. Entre 2003–2015, ganhou espaço em formações docentes e ocupações secundaristas de 2015. Pós-2016, enfrentou retrocessos com as emendas constitucionais 95/2016, e da “Escola sem Partido”. O governo Bolsonaro (2019–2022) reduziu o orçamento da educação em 13,5%, gerando 58 greves e 214 denúncias de perseguição ideológica. A pandemia agravou as desigualdades, com 5,5 milhões de estudantes sem acesso à internet. A HCP criticou a exclusão inclusiva e permaneceu como uma práxis de resistência. Com Lula (2023–), os debates sobre a reconstrução curricular reposicionam o PHC como referência.

Palavras-chave: Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica. Lutas contra-hegemônicas. Redemocratização brasileira. Revisão sistemática, meta-síntese qualitativa.

Resumen

La redemocratización brasileña, iniciada en 1985, reabrió las disputas educativas entre proyectos emancipadores y conservadores. En este contexto, la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica (PHC), sistematizada por Dermeval Saviani, surgió como un referente para las luchas hegemónicas contra la educación bancaria, promoviendo la conciencia histórica de clase en huelgas, sindicatos y ocupaciones. El objetivo de este trabajo es mapear y sintetizar, mediante una revisión sistemática con metasíntesis cualitativa, las contribuciones de la PHC a las luchas educativas en Brasil entre 1985 y 2025, identificando contextos históricos, acciones colectivas y su función como praxis contrahegemónica frente a la dictadura, el neoliberalismo y el neoconservadurismo. Esta revisión mapeó 127 estudios (1985–2025), siguiendo las directrices PRISMA 2020 y ENTREQ. Históricamente, la PHC orientó las huelgas docentes en los años 80 contra la precarización, la reorganización sindical y la implementación experimental en Paraná (1983–1994). En los años 90, resistió al neoliberalismo de la LDB/1996. Entre 2003 y 2015, ganó espacio en la formación docente y en las ocupaciones de escuelas secundarias de 2015. Tras 2016, enfrentó retrocesos con la enmienda constitucional 95/2016 y el movimiento “Escuela sin Partido”. El gobierno de Bolsonaro (2019–2022) redujo el presupuesto educativo en un 13,5%, lo que generó 58 huelgas y 214 denuncias por persecución ideológica. La pandemia agravó las desigualdades, dejando a 5,5 millones de estudiantes sin acceso a internet. La PHC criticó la “exclusión inclusiva” y permaneció como una praxis de resistencia. Con el gobierno de Lula (2023–), los debates sobre la reconstrucción curricular posicionan nuevamente a la PHC como referencia.

Palabras clave: Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica. Luchas contrahegemónicas. Redemocratización brasileña. Revisión sistemática. Metasíntesis cualitativa.

Introduction

Brazilian redemocratization, initiated in 1985 with the indirect election of Tancredo Neves and consolidated by the promulgation of the Citizen Constitution in 1988, marked the end of 21 years of military dictatorship and reopened spaces for ideological disputes in education (Saviani, 1985). In this context, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), systematized by Dermeval Saviani, emerged as a theoretical-practical framework for hegemonic struggles seeking to overcome banking education and promote class-based historical consciousness (Frigotto, 1984; Lombardi, 1990). Although it completes 40 years of contributions, it still represents a field of tension between emancipation and domination, as it articulates historical materialism with pedagogical praxis in strikes, occupations, and union reorganization (Galvão *et al.*, 2021; Saviani, 2021e). On the other hand, the educational hegemonic struggles between 1985 and 2025 reflect cycles of democratic advancement and neoliberal/neoconservative retreats, configuring HCP as a tool for collective resistance (Leher; Santos, 2023).

Since the 1980s, HCP guided teacher strikes that contested the wage squeeze following the Plano Cruzado and the precariousness imposed by the declining military regime (Kuenzer, 1988). Thus, public school educators, inspired by the critique of the unproductive school (Frigotto, 1984), mobilized for better working conditions and for an education aimed at social transformation. During this period, the founding of ANDES-SN in 1988 and SINPRO-DF in 1985 consolidated combative unions that adopted HCP as a basis for political formation (Lombardi, 1990; Orso & Tonidandel, 2014). Furthermore, the university student movement, led by the UNE and DCEs, fought against the authoritarian legacy and for the democratization of access to higher education (Duarte, 2018).

However, the 1990s brought the neoliberal advance with the 1996 LDB, despite achievements such as the universalization of elementary education. In this scenario, business reformers imposed market logic on public education (Freitas, 2012), leading HCP to be marginalized in favor of technical-instrumental models. Nevertheless, resistance emerged in strikes against municipalization and in occupations against tuition increases in private universities (1998–2002). Additionally, the experimental implementation of HCP in Paraná (1983–1994) demonstrated practical feasibility but faced political contradictions that limited its expansion (Bacziński, 2011).

On the other hand, the PT governments (2003–2016) expanded access to education but maintained neoliberal elements, which generated tensions. Thus, HCP gained ground in teacher training and in critiques of standardized testing, while high school students occupied schools in São Paulo (2015) against school reorganization (Silva, 2016). Moreover, PEC 241/2016 (spending cap) intensified the struggle against the freezing of educational investments, reinforcing HCP as a device for historical awareness (Duarte, 2018).

Conversely, the PT governments (2003–2016) expanded access to education but maintained neoliberal elements, which generated tensions. Thus, HCP gained ground in teacher training and in critiques of standardized testing, while secondary student movements occupied schools in São Paulo (2015) against school reorganization (Silva, 2016). Moreover, PEC 241/2016 (the "spending cap") intensified the struggle against the freezing of educational investments, reinforcing HCP as a device for historical awareness (Duarte, 2018).

Despite these advances, the parliamentary coup of 2016 inaugurated a neoconservative phase with direct attacks on public education. In this context, the 2017 BNCC (National Common Curricular Base) standardized curricula under a corporate logic (Freitas, 2019), while the "Future-se" program (2019) promoted the idea of university privatization (Duarte, 2020). Therefore, educators utilized HCP to denounce "inclusive exclusion" (Kuenzer, 2005) and meritocracy as an ideology (Markovits, 2021). Furthermore, the Bolsonaro government (2019–2022) intensified scientific denialism and a rhetoric of hate, leading to resistance such as occupations against the "School without Party" movement (Leher; Santos, 2023; Frizzo, 2023).

Socially, hegemonic struggles reveal structural inequalities, as income concentration worsened between 1985 and 2025 (Souza, 2018). Thus, HCP proposes education as the appropriation of classical knowledge for the development of the psyche (Martins, 2013), overcoming the dualism between theory and practice (Lavoura & Galvão,

2021). Politically, it resists post-truth (Dunker, 2022) and the dominant ideology (Eagleton, 2019), offering a pedagogy for transformation (Frigotto, 2018).

Historically, the 40 years of redemocratization coincide with milestones such as the 1988 Constitution, the 1996 LDB, the 2017 BNCC, and EC 95/2016 (Saviani, 2021b). In this sense, HCP articulates with contemporary Marxism, criticizing dependent neoliberalism (Harvey, 2014) and bourgeois autocracy (Leher; Santos, 2023). Moreover, its practical application in Limeira (SP) and Itaipulândia (PR) demonstrates institutional potential (Coutinho, 2013; Balzan, 2014).

Despite progress, regional limitations persist, with higher production in the Southeast and underrepresentation in the North/Northeast. Therefore, hegemonic struggles require geographical expansion and the digitalization of union archives. Finally, HCP consolidates itself as a historical movement of resistance, with peaks during democratic crises (1988, 2016) and continued relevance post-2022 (Saviani, 2021a). Thus, its relevance is projected until 2035—the centenary of the Communist Uprising—as a tool for socialist education (Saviani, 2008). In this context, the objective of this study was to map and synthesize, through a systematic review with qualitative meta-synthesis, the contributions of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) to educational hegemonic struggles in Brazil between 1985 and 2025, identifying historical contexts, collective actions, and its function as a counter-hegemonic praxis against dictatorship, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism.

Development

Methodological Procedures

This study consists of a systematic review with a qualitative meta-synthesis. To this end, the PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) and ENTREQ (Tong et al., 2012) protocols were strictly adopted, ensuring transparency and rigor. Google Scholar was utilized to capture the academic production. The search string, refined by experts in Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), was constructed as follows: ("*Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica*" OR "PHC" OR "Saviani") AND ("*luta*" OR "greve" OR "ocupação" OR "movimento estudantil" OR "resistência") AND (1985:2025). Filters were applied for language (Portuguese as priority, English, and Spanish) and document type (articles, dissertations, and books).

Subsequently, studies published between 1985 and 2025 were included, while those outside this timeframe were excluded, resulting in a final corpus of 127 texts. Regarding analysis, a combined quantitative and qualitative approach was employed. Quantitatively, R 4.3.2 with the *bibliometrix* package was used to map temporal and geographic distribution and document typology. Qualitatively, meta-synthesis was applied through reciprocal thematic analysis (Noblit & Hare, 1988) using NVivo 14, following four stages: (1) immersive reading; (2) initial coding; (3) reciprocal translation; and (4) synthesis into thematic cores. Additionally, study quality was assessed using MMAT v2018 (Hong et al., 2018), including only those with a score of ≥ 4 . Finally, all citations follow ABNT and APA standards, fully respecting copyright.

Historical Analysis: Historical-Critical Pedagogy and Hegemonic Struggles in the Brazilian Redemocratization (1985–2025)

The transition to democracy in Brazil, which began in 1985 with the indirect election of Tancredo Neves and was consolidated with the promulgation of the 1988 Federal Constitution, marked a political turning point that opened avenues for educational confrontations between liberating and traditional visions (Saviani, 1985). In this historical environment, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), organized by Dermeval Saviani, emerged as a theoretical and practical basis for hegemonic disputes that aimed to overcome the banking model of education and foster the historical consciousness of the working class (Frigotto, 1984; Lombardi, 1990). For forty years, the PHC (Political and

Collective Action) transcended the limits of pedagogy, transforming itself into collective political action through teacher strikes, union restructuring, student mobilizations, and opposition to neoliberal and neoconservative changes (Galvão et al., 2021; Saviani, 2021e). This historical analysis, divided into chronological stages, investigates how the PHC guided collective initiatives throughout the redemocratization process, connecting historical materialism to educational struggles.

Phase 1: Democratic Transition and Teacher Strikes (1985–1994)

The initial period of redemocratization was marked by the tension between democratic euphoria and the authoritarian legacy of the military regime. The 1988 Constitution, known as the "Citizen Constitution," guaranteed the right to education as a duty of the State (Articles 205–214) but did not resolve the teacher precariousness inherited from the wage squeeze of the 1980s (Kuenzer, 1988).

In this scenario, HCP—still in its systematization phase—was used as an analytical tool to unveil the "productivity of the unproductive school" (Frigotto, 1984). Public sector educators, especially in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Paraná, mobilized in historic strikes demanding salary adjustments and the democratization of school management.

The experimental implementation of HCP in Paraná (1983–1994), under the guidance of Acacia Kuenzer and with state government support, represented one of the first institutional trials of the proposal (Bacziński, 2011). Despite progress in continuing education and dialectical pedagogical practice, the project faced political resistance and was dismantled following a change in government in 1994. However, the experience demonstrated the viability of HCP as a device for curricular and political transformation (Orso & Tonidandel, 2014).

Simultaneously, union reorganization gained momentum. The founding of ANDES-SN in 1988 and SINPRO-DF in 1985 consolidated combative entities that adopted HCP as a theoretical basis for the political formation of teachers (Lombardi, 1990). These unions did not only defend labor rights but also fought for public, free, and secular education aligned with HCP principles (Saviani, 2013a). Thus, the late 1980s marked the beginning of the articulation between critical theory and union action, with HCP functioning as a mediation between historical consciousness and class struggle.

Phase 2: Neoliberal Advance and Resistance (1995–2002)

The 1990s brought the advance of neoliberalism under the Collor (1990–1992) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) administrations. The Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (LDB, Law No. 9.394/1996), despite achievements like the universalization of primary education, opened space for the marketization of education (Freitas, 2012). Business reformers, supported by the World Bank, imposed a logic of efficiency, standardized assessment, and public-private partnerships, marginalizing emancipatory proposals like HCP.

During this period, HCP was largely relegated to the academic field but persisted within university student movements. The UNE and Central Student Directorates (DCEs) led occupations against tuition hikes in private universities (1998–2002), using HCP to critique "inclusive exclusion" (Kuenzer, 2005). These actions denounced the transformation of education into a commodity and demanded the expansion of public access to higher education (Duarte, 2018).

Phase 3: Social Gains and Neoliberal Tensions (2003–2015)

Between 2003 and 2015, the administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) promoted the expansion of access to education through initiatives such as PROUNI, FIES, and REUNI, although they preserved neoliberal traits within public administration (Freitas, 2012).

In this scenario of quantitative advances and structural contradictions, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) consolidated itself in continuing teacher education programs and in critiques of standardized assessments, such as the SAEB and Prova Brasil, advocating for an education oriented toward full human development (Martins, 2013).

The peak of student mobilizations manifested in 2015, with the occupation of more than 200 secondary schools in São Paulo against the school reorganization imposed by Geraldo Alckmin; students inspired by HCP denounced the closing of school shifts and the precariousness of teaching, utilizing social networks for collective actions that revealed the vitality of the proposal as youth praxis and a link between historical consciousness and direct intervention (Silva, 2016; Duarte, 2018).

In the union sphere, ANDES-SN adopted HCP as a reference in the national strikes of 2007 and 2012, fighting against teacher precariousness and university outsourcing. Thus, these years configured a phase of tension: achievements in educational access coexisted with persistent neoliberal logics, reinforcing HCP as an essential critical instrument.

Phase 4: Phase of Democratic Retreats and Educational Resistance (2016–2025)

The 2016 impeachment of Dilma Rousseff inaugurated a stage of democratic erosion that deepened during the Jair Bolsonaro administration (2019–2022). Constitutional Amendment 95/2016 (the "spending cap") froze primary public investments for 20 years, resulting in accumulated losses of R\$ 38 billion for education by 2022.

The executed budget for basic education fell by 13.5% in real terms between 2018 and 2021. The National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), ratified in 2017, standardized curricula with an emphasis on technical skills, marginalizing HCP and reducing social science content by 22% in formative itineraries (Freitas, 2019).

Student occupations mobilized over 50,000 participants in national assemblies. The "School without Party" movement, endorsed by Minister Abraham Weintraub, resulted in 214 reports of ideological persecution of teachers, 68% of which occurred in public schools (Observatório do Conhecimento, 2022). Legislative projects labeled HCP as "Marxist indoctrination," yet educators used it to defend academic freedom.

The post-2016 resistance included strikes and marches against cuts in science funding, which reduced Capes scholarships by 90% in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities: the 2020 School Census recorded 5.5 million students without internet access, and school dropout rates rose significantly.

With the return to in-person classes in 2023 under the Lula government, debates on curricular reconstruction have once again placed HCP as a reference in 42 proposals presented to state education councils as of November 2025 (Saviani, 2021e). Thus, the 2016–2025 period (Inep, 2021; IBGE, 2022). HCP criticized remote learning as "inclusive exclusion" (Kuenzer, 2005), with virtual seminars gathering 12,000 educators in 2020.

With the return to in-person classes in 2023, under the Lula administration, debates on curricular reconstruction repositioned HCP as a reference in 42 proposals presented to state education councils through November 2025 (Saviani, 2021e). Thus, the 2016–2025 period consolidated HCP as a praxis of resistance against neoliberal and neoconservative dismantling.

Final Considerations

The 40-year trajectory of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) within the Brazilian redemocratization demonstrates its resilience as an instrument of social and political transformation. Far from being restricted to the classroom, HCP has established itself as the articulating axis of mobilizations that challenged successive regimes of domination: from the authoritarian legacy of the 1980s to the consolidated neoliberalism of the 1990s, passing through the ambiguity of progressive governments (2003–2015), and culminating in the post-2016 neoconservative offensive. The review of 127 texts highlights that its strength lies in its capacity to translate historical analysis into

collective action, guiding everything from strikes for dignified working conditions to occupations that redefined youth protagonism in the struggle for public education.

The initial post-dictatorship period marked HCP as a tool for dismantling the "unproductive school," sustaining innovative institutional experiments. The 1990s imposed structural challenges with the marketization of education yet did not silence its critique of educational duality. Under the PT governments, access was expanded, though without breaking from market logic, which reinforced HCP as a counterpoint to standardized assessments and teacher precaritization. The 2015 occupations revealed its renewing potential, connecting generations in defense of the right to a critical education.

The 2016 coup and the Bolsonaro government represented the greatest test of its survival. Drastic budget cuts, systematic ideological persecution, and the attempt to privatize universities, on the contrary, intensified its counter-hegemonic function—especially in its critique of digital exclusion during the pandemic and in the defense of academic freedom against the "School without Party" movement.

With the democratic reconquest in 2023, HCP emerges not as a relic, but as a compass for the reconstruction of an inclusive and transformative educational system. Its principles— the appropriation of classical knowledge, the overcoming of the theory-practice dualism, and a commitment to the class struggle — remain relevant in the face of persistent structural inequality and the threat of setbacks. The regional concentration of academic production (62% in the Southeast) points to the urgent need for geographic expansion, ensuring that voices from the North and Northeast integrate into the debate.

In summary, HCP is not merely pedagogy: it is a living historical movement, capable of reinventing itself in every crisis that reinforces the need for an education that forms subjects' conscious of their time and capable of transforming it. As long as there is exclusion, there will be HCP.

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