

Historical-critical literacy: historical development and current challenges

Alfabetização histórico-crítica: construção histórica e desafios atuais

Alfabetización histórico-crítica: construcción histórica y desafíos actuales

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Resumo

O artigo tem como objetivo apresentar um inventário crítico da produção acadêmica brasileira sobre alfabetização fundamentada na Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica (PHC), no período de 1985 a 2025, buscando historicizar a constituição desse campo, identificar seus principais núcleos teóricos e didático-metodológicos e explicitar os deslocamentos e contradições que marcam sua construção coletiva. Fundamentado no materialismo histórico-dialético, o estudo articula levantamento bibliográfico-documental e análise histórico-crítica, tomando a alfabetização como fenômeno histórico e socialmente determinado. O corpus analisado é composto por 103 publicações — entre teses, dissertações, livros, capítulos, artigos e trabalhos em anais — que explicitam adesão à PHC, independentemente da etapa ou modalidade de ensino. A análise evidencia que as primeiras produções, entre 1985 e 2000, encontram-se vinculadas a um grupo de pesquisa específico, focado na alfabetização de jovens e adultos. A dispersão desse grupo na década de 1990 resulta em um período de baixa

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produção e circulação dos trabalhos, com uma retomada, a partir dos anos 2000, marcada pela crítica às concepções hegemônicas de alfabetização, especialmente o construtivismo. A partir de 2015, observa-se: maior ênfase na elaboração de fundamentos didático-metodológicos, bem como a incorporação de procedimentos e materiais didáticos adotados em países socialistas, a emergência de novos temas e a defesa da palavra como unidade nuclear do ensino da linguagem escrita. Conclui-se que, embora tenham ocorrido avanços significativos na consolidação teórica e didática da alfabetização histórico-crítica, o campo ainda enfrenta desafios relacionados à sistematização do trabalho coletivo, à elaboração metodológica e ao enfrentamento das condições históricas desfavoráveis à produção de abordagens contra hegemônicas.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização. Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica. História da Alfabetização.

Abstract

The article aims to present a critical inventory of Brazilian academic production on literacy grounded in Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) from 1985 to 2025, seeking to historicize the constitution of this field, identify its main theoretical and didactic-methodological nuclei, and explain the shifts and contradictions that shape its collective construction. Based on historical-dialectical materialism, the study combines bibliographic-documentary research with historical-critical analysis, understanding literacy as a historically and socially determined phenomenon. The corpus comprises 103 publications — including theses, dissertations, books, chapters, articles, and conference papers — that explicitly adhere to HCP, regardless of educational stage or modality. The analysis shows that the earliest works, produced between 1985 and 2000, were linked to a specific research group focused on adult and youth literacy. The group's dispersion in the 1990s resulted in a period of low production and limited circulation, followed by a renewed phase from the 2000s onward, marked by critiques of hegemonic literacy conceptions, especially constructivism. From 2015 onward, there is growing emphasis on the development of didactic-methodological foundations, the incorporation of procedures and materials used in socialist countries, the emergence of new themes, and the defense of the word as the core unit for teaching written language. The study concludes that, despite significant advances in the theoretical and didactic consolidation of historical-critical literacy, the field still faces challenges related to collective systematization, methodological elaboration, and the historical conditions that hinder counter-hegemonic pedagogical approaches.

Keywords: Literacy. Historical-Critical Pedagogy. History of Literacy.

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo presentar un inventario crítico de la producción académica brasileña sobre alfabetización fundamentada en la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica (PHC) entre 1985 y 2025, buscando historiar la constitución de este campo, identificar sus principales núcleos teóricos y didáctico-metodológicos y explicitar los desplazamientos y contradicciones que marcan su construcción colectiva. Basado en el materialismo histórico-dialéctico, el estudio articula un levantamiento bibliográfico-documental con análisis histórico-crítico, comprendiendo la alfabetización como un fenómeno histórica y socialmente determinado. El corpus está compuesto por 103 publicaciones — tesis, disertaciones, libros, capítulos, artículos y trabajos en anales — que explicitan adhesión a la PHC, independientemente de la etapa o modalidad educativa. El análisis evidencia que las primeras producciones, entre 1985 y 2000, estaban vinculadas a un grupo de investigación centrado en la alfabetización de jóvenes y adultos. La dispersión de ese grupo en la década de 1990 generó un período de baja producción y circulación, seguido de una retomada, a partir de los años 2000, marcada por críticas a las concepciones hegemónicas de alfabetización, especialmente el constructivismo. A partir de 2015, se observa mayor énfasis en la elaboración de fundamentos didáctico-metodológicos, en la incorporación de procedimientos y materiales utilizados en países socialistas, en la emergencia de nuevos temas y en la defensa de la palabra como unidad nuclear de la enseñanza de la lengua escrita. El estudio concluye que, aunque hubo avances significativos en la consolidación teórica y didáctica de la alfabetización histórico-crítica, el campo todavía enfrenta desafíos relacionados con la sistematización colectiva, la elaboración metodológica y las condiciones históricas que dificultan enfoques pedagógicos contrahegemónicos.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización. Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica. Historia de la Alfabetización.

1. Introduction

The beginning of critical elaboration is the awareness of what we really are, that is, “know yourself” as a product of the historical process, until now developed, that left in you an infinite number of traits received without benefit inventory. This inventory should be done initially. (Gramsci, 1978, p. 12).

This article aims to present a critical inventory of Brazilian academic production on literacy based on Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), from 1985 to 2025, seeking to historicize the constitution of this field, identify some of its main theoretical and didactic-methodological nuclei, and explain the shifts, contradictions, and challenges that mark its collective construction over these four decades.

The relevance and urgency of this study stem from three interconnected factors. First, in recent decades, there has been a significant increase in research on literacy from a historical-critical perspective, but with a certain lack of coordination among research groups and publication outlets, which hinders the understanding of the field's historical movement. Second, a significant portion of older research on the subject remains inaccessible, being restricted to printed media or media with limited circulation, leading to artificial restarts of debates and the loss of fundamental references. Third, the intensification of literacy policies and programs based on hegemonic conceptions reinforces the need to critically systematize the accumulated knowledge already produced by the historical-critical approach, both theoretically and didactically, in order to support new research and dialogue with public schools, providing a counterpoint to the dominant discourse.

Literacy, understood from this perspective, is not taken as an isolated technical or methodological problem, but as a historically and socially determined phenomenon, whose analysis requires an understanding of its mediations with educational policies, with theoretical disputes in the pedagogical field, and with the objective conditions of teaching work. Thus, the investigation is anchored in historical-dialectical materialism as a method of analysis, taking literacy as a particular moment in human formation and the socialization of historically elaborated knowledge.

In the theoretical-pedagogical plan, Historical-Critical Pedagogy is adopted as a framework to define the object of study and interpret the analyzed productions, in conjunction with the contributions of Historical-Cultural Psychology, especially regarding the understanding of psychic development and school learning. The choice of this framework stems from its commitment to the centrality of teaching, the historicity of knowledge, and the social function of the school in the formation of the working class.

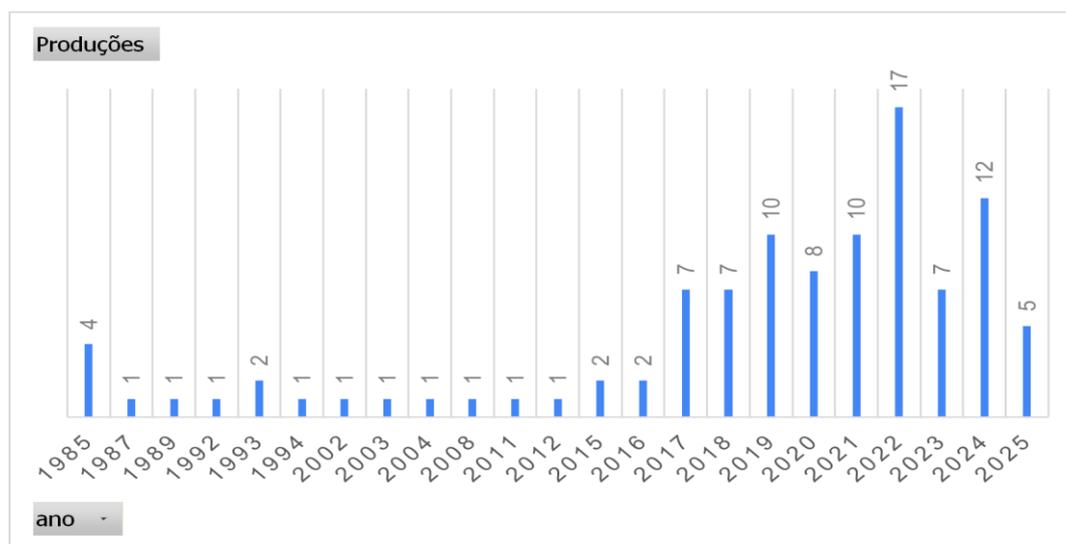
From a methodological point of view, a critical inventory of Brazilian academic production on literacy from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy was carried out, combining bibliographic-documentary research procedures and historical-critical analysis. The corpus consisted of 103 publications, including theses, dissertations, books, chapters, articles, and proceedings, that explicitly adhere to Historical-Critical Pedagogy, regardless of the stage or modality of education, including Youth and Adult Literacy. Studies based exclusively on Historical-Cultural Psychology without an explicit link to HCP were excluded. Although Saviani (2014) and other HCP authors (Scalcon, 2002) emphasize the philosophical mediation and convergence with this psychological approach, there is a group of researchers who base themselves on the Vygotsky school, but do not explicitly adhere to a specific pedagogical current, proposing a Developmental Didactics derived directly from studies in educational psychology or defending other lines such as: Paulo Freire's liberating pedagogy and Libâneo's Critical-Social Pedagogy of Content.

The survey involved searches in thesis and dissertation databases, journal portals, academic platforms (such as academia.edu and researchgate) and search engines (such as Google Scholar), using descriptors that combine variations of the term "literacy" with "historical-critical". Considering the limited digitization of some of the production prior to the year 2000, printed sources were also used, including consultation of the personal collection of one of the researchers, kept by the author himself, located in São Carlos-SP and linked to the São Paulo State University (UNESP), composed of proceedings, chapters and texts of restricted circulation, used exclusively for bibliographic identification and academic analysis purposes.

The time frame 1985–2025 was defined based on historical-institutional and analytical criteria. The second half of the 1980s corresponds to the period of consolidation of the initial formulations of Historical-Critical Pedagogy and the emergence of initial productions in the field of literacy, with the first works of the group coordinated by Betty Antunes de Oliveira having been published in 1985. The scope extends to 2025 to encompass four decades of production, in line with the commemorative milestone of the 40th anniversary of HCP, allowing the identification of different moments in the process of constitution, interruption, resumption, and deepening of the debate.

The quantitative data presented below (Figure 1 and Table 1) show the distribution of the production collected by year and the type of document found, noting that the numbers refer only to documents in the repository.

Figure 1 - Number of publications, by year of publication, in the period 1985-2005



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 1 – Classification of Publications by Type of Production

Type	Quantity
Book chapter	2
Full paper	2
Undergraduate thesis (TCC)	3
Book	5
Conference abstract (proceedings)	6
Doctoral thesis	13
Master’s dissertation	24
Scientific article	48
TOTAL	103

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The analysis of the corpus was guided by the categories of totality, historicity, and contradiction, seeking to: (a) identify the first movements of historical-critical literacy in the period from 1985 to 2000; (b) explain the path of resumption and consolidation from the 2000s onwards; and (c) systematize the theoretical cores and didactic-methodological trends that are affirmed in the most recent productions. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the organization and critical interpretation of a field under construction, offering elements for the advancement of research and for the strengthening of literacy practices guided by the principles of Historical-Critical Pedagogy.

1.1 Historical Construction

The construction of a historical-critical literacy approach constitutes a collective effort subject to the same vicissitudes as the elaboration of this pedagogical conception, with which it has a dialectical relationship. This is because the development of the foundations and didactic implications of Historical-Critical Pedagogy serves as a basis for understanding and guiding the literacy process, while reflections on the specificity of this field can contribute to the debate on broader issues in pedagogy. On the one hand, it involves differentiating this approach from other existing conceptions through critical analysis and, on the other hand, incorporating and elaborating elements for the creation of a set of its own theoretical formulations, constituting a conception of literacy, as well as contributing to the education/training of educators and researchers who adopt and develop this conception, in order to make it increasingly organic and systematized. This process does not occur in a linear and progressive manner, but involves advances, setbacks, interruptions, and deviations, especially since it is a counter-hegemonic approach that does not have the investments, structure, and recognition accorded to dominant conceptions.

An analysis of the corpus collected for this study, it was possible to identify a significant gap in the most recent publications on the subject: there is little or no reference to research produced between 1980 and 2000, giving the impression that the formulation of a historical-critical conception of literacy began in the mid-2000s. It is true that research output in this field has grown exponentially since 2015, as shown in Graph 1. However, it is necessary to understand the foundations of this body of research, which began to emerge earlier. It is also important to point out that a significant portion of academic production prior to the 2000s is not digitized, which makes access more difficult and partly explains the limited awareness of these studies, while also indicating the need to bring the findings from this period to light.

2. The Period from 1985 to 2000: First Steps and Discontinuity

The 1980s were marked by the process of redemocratization in Brazil, following twenty-one years of dictatorship established after the 1964 civil–military coup. The struggle for direct elections and workers' strikes, amid a severe economic crisis, hastened the end of the regime, which in turn implemented a policy of “slow and gradual” political opening. This context was reflected in educational debates and within the field of literacy studies. At the end of the previous decade, Professor **Dermeval Saviani** began publishing texts that started to outline Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP). Saviani subsequently supervised graduate research at the Methodist University of Piracicaba (Unimep) and at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP). His first graduate student to defend a master's dissertation, and later the first to defend a doctoral thesis under his supervision, was Professor Betty Antunes de Oliveira (1940–2024). Her doctoral thesis was published in 1980 under the title *The Brazilian Authoritarian State and Higher Education*, in which she criticizes the educational policy of the military regime, based on the security-and-development doctrine (Oliveira, 1980). In an approach later revisited in other works, she demonstrates how the regime appropriated certain terms, such as “development,” and distorted their meanings in order to serve the interests of the dominant classes.

Betty Oliveira's work in the field of adult literacy is distinguished by the fact that it was largely developed on the basis of practical teaching experiences carried out through the Adult Education Program (AEP) at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), where she taught from 1972 to 1992. The research and study group she coordinated within this program was initially grounded in the work of Marxist authors such as **Antonio Gramsci**, **Friedrich Engels**, **Pavel Vasilievich Kopnin**, and **Mao Zedong**, as well as, more specifically in the field of adult education and literacy, **Álvaro Vieira Pinto** and **Paulo Freire**. In Vieira Pinto's book *Seven Lessons on Adult Education* (1993), the author presents a concept of literacy that situates this process within the broader context of class struggle and the relations of production, based on the Marxian category of labour. He addresses the issue of illiteracy with reference to the

development of the productive forces and the relations of production, which require workers to master—or not master—the writing system.

The author also cites the work *Science and Existence* (1969), in which Álvaro Vieira Pinto presents a materialist and dialectical conception of the process of knowledge, examining its origins in the elementary reflexes of the earliest living organisms and its development up to the most elaborate and intentional form achieved by human beings: scientific knowledge. Dermeval Saviani (2024) highlights the importance of this thinker in a text in which he pays tribute to his former advisee:

Among Betty's various academic works, I would highlight the interview she conducted with Álvaro Vieira Pinto, an important Brazilian philosopher who, unfortunately, is largely overlooked in our intellectual circles, probably due to the radical nature of his critical perspective. Having been a leading figure at the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB), he became a target of persecution by the military regime, which led to his exile in September 1964. He first went to Yugoslavia, then a Socialist Federal Republic. A polyglot, he was fluent in Serbo-Croatian, the language of that country where he spent a year experiencing the hardships of exile. He subsequently moved to Chile, where he produced several works, including the Spanish version of *Seven Lessons on Adult Education* (Saviani, 2024, p. 2).

It should be noted, however, that future studies could benefit greatly from recovering and reassessing Vieira Pinto's possible contributions to deepening the understanding of key concepts within Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), such as critical consciousness, science, and technology.

The adult literacy experiences coordinated by Professor Betty Oliveira were initially based on the concepts and method proposed by Paulo Freire. However, they gradually moved away from this perspective as the challenges of practice and the advancement of the theoretical development of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) made it possible to establish a clearer demarcation between these two pedagogical approaches. The author offers a strong critique of what she termed democratism and politicism in adult teaching and learning processes, warning educators about the risk of attempting to counter prevailing authoritarianism by adopting pedagogical spontaneism and non-directivism, even when employing a discourse centered on terms such as dialogue, democracy, and freedom (Oliveira, 1985c, 1985d). The author offers a strong critique of what she termed democratism and politicism in adult teaching and learning processes, warning educators about the risk of attempting to counter prevailing authoritarianism by adopting pedagogical spontaneism and non-directivism, even when employing a discourse centered on terms such as dialogue, democracy, and freedom (Oliveira, 1985c, 1985d).

Duques (2024, p. 1) conducted a study on the activities and scholarly production of the PEA/UFSCar between 1980 and 1985 and concluded that:

The work, initially combining Liberating Pedagogy and later Historical-Critical Pedagogy, despite the divergences between these theoretical perspectives, sought the transformation of oppressive society, operating from the standpoint of overcoming capitalist society through the socialization of scientific knowledge in its most developed form, as proposed by Historical-Critical Pedagogy.

Along similar lines, Scalcon (2003, p. 10) highlights Betty Oliveira's pioneering role in the development of Historical-Critical Pedagogy:

Betty Oliveira supervised a series of master's dissertations and doctoral theses between 1981 and 2000 that sought to contribute to the development of a theory of educational work grounded in Historical-Critical Pedagogy, thus demonstrating the early existence of efforts aimed at developing this pedagogical theory.

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine more systematically the author's contributions to literacy and, more broadly, to Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP). We will therefore highlight only a few issues and considerations that may enrich current debates in this field.

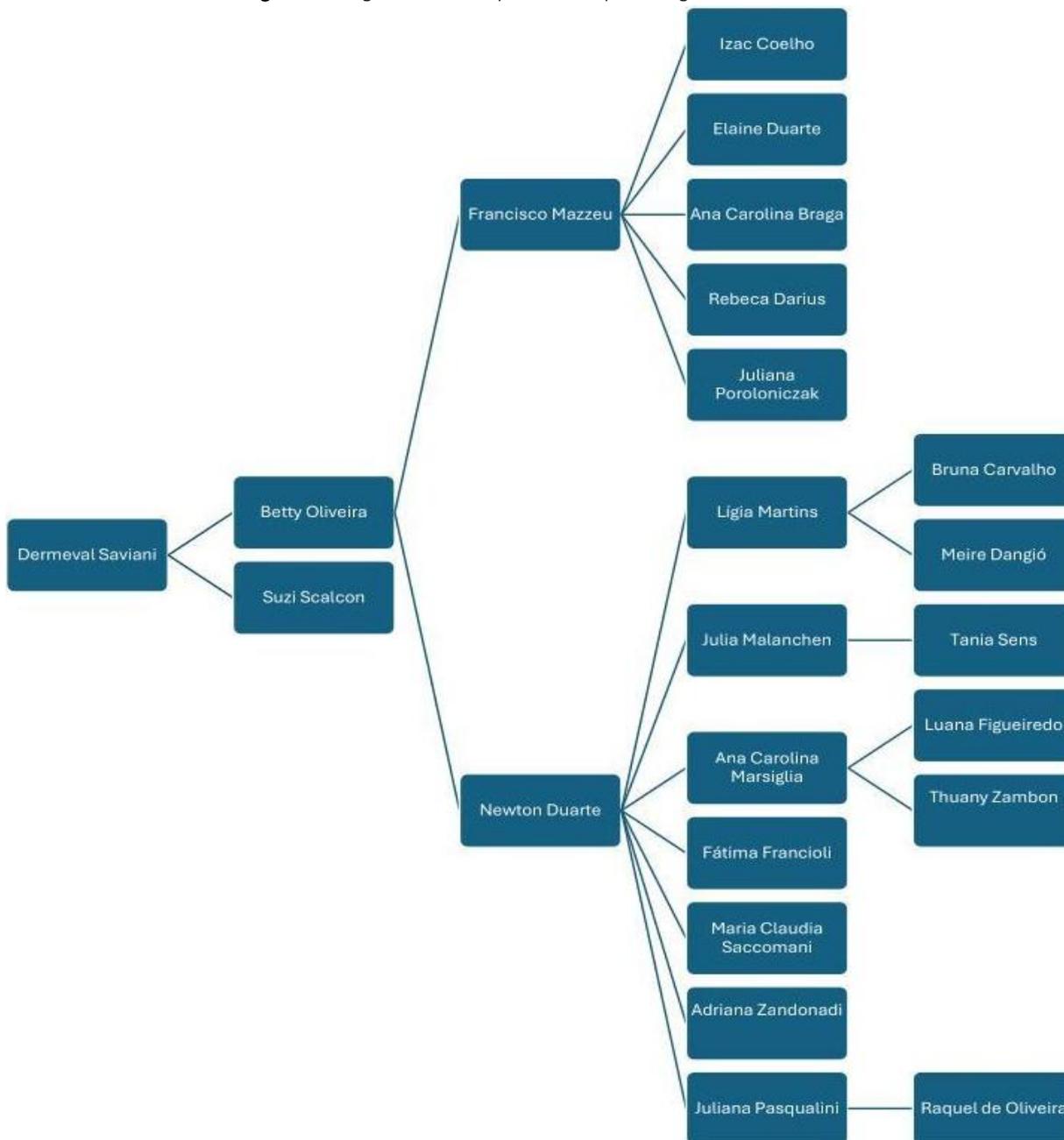
Betty, like Saviani, sought to incorporate Marxism as a theoretical foundation without falling into the mere reproduction of classical texts, instead striving to appropriate the categories of the historical-dialectical materialist method in order to understand the specific dynamics of educational phenomena. Both turned to Gramsci for analytical elements to support this endeavor. Betty introduced the Gramscian discussion on the need to form organic intellectuals of the working class capable of acting as leaders (specialists and political actors simultaneously), in order to defend the inseparability between two fundamental dimensions of the educational process: the technical and the political (Oliveira, 1985a). Within the context of the 1980s, researchers who opposed the military regime denounced the ideological character of the technicist pedagogy adopted by the military governments, while also exposing the exclusionary and alienating mechanisms of schooling under those conditions. This opposition led some thinkers to regard the school merely as an ideological apparatus of the state, and consequently to concentrate their efforts on informal educational processes linked to social movements. Seeking to overcome such approaches—later characterized by Saviani as critical-reproductionist theories—Historical-Critical Pedagogy argued that the socialization of elaborated knowledge through the school offers, albeit contradictorily, an instrumentalization of the popular classes, enabling them to act more decisively within the class struggle.

One of the main questions addressed by Professor Betty in texts from this period is the following: from a historical-critical perspective, would it be sufficient simply to ensure effective literacy instruction for all students, guaranteeing the working class access to the contents of science, art, and philosophy and to the fullest possibilities of human development? Her studies suggest that it is possible to go further by intentionally organizing the relationship between content and the ways in which this knowledge is transmitted and assimilated. This involves reexamining in detail the pedagogical procedures adopted in the classroom in order to foster in students a critical and transformative attitude, which would already be manifested in the way they act within the school (Oliveira, 1989). In this sense, she argues that school content is not devoid of an ethical dimension and that the values and objectives of educators who adopt a socialist worldview must be objectified in the ways in which this content is transmitted and assimilated. In one of her works, she illustrates this with the example of the presentation of vowels in literacy instruction, highlighting the importance of developing in students a mode of thinking guided by dialectical movement and by the overcoming of formal-logical dichotomies (Oliveira, 1985a, 1988).

Although she produced a prolific body of academic work during the 1980s, especially from 1985 onwards, Professor Betty's research gradually shifted focus in the 1990s. With the termination of the Adult Education Program (PEA), due to a lack of institutional support from the university, and her retirement in 1992, the development of her work on literacy was practically interrupted. Her later publications deepened the philosophical analysis of the axiological dimension of educational work (Oliveira, 1993), among other themes. She nevertheless remained associated with the Graduate Program in Education at the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), where she supervised research that in some way revisited her earlier experiences with adult learners, such as the master's thesis entitled *The Meaning of Written Communication Techniques and the Teaching of Spelling in Post-Literacy Education* (Mazzeu, 1992). The fact that so few studies on literacy from a Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) perspective were identified during the period from 1990 to 2000 stems in part from these circumstances, since the work initiated within the PEA/UFSCar did not continue directly in the following years. It is also important to consider that the scholarly production of this period exists predominantly in print form and is therefore not indexed or easily accessible online. Consequently, additional bibliographic materials may exist that have not yet been located.

Although there was a discontinuity in academic production, the main legacy of this period for the development of historical-critical literacy was the training of scholars such as Newton Duarte and Francisco Mazzeu, who have worked and continue to work in teacher education and have supervised numerous studies on the subject in subsequent decades. Figure 2 illustrates some of these supervisory relationships.

Figure 2 – Diagram of Advisory Relationships Among Selected Authors



Source: Prepared by the authors.

3. The Period from 2000 to 2025: toward the Consolidation of Historical-Critical Literacy

From the 2000s onwards, academic production on literacy from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) regained momentum on new foundations, deepening the articulation between Marxism and Historical-Cultural Psychology in order to consolidate its own theoretical and methodological foundations for the teaching of written language. In this movement, criticisms of public literacy policies and hegemonic approaches—such as constructivism and “learning-to-learn” pedagogies—intensified. The limitations of these approaches were analyzed in light of the

Marxist category of **overcoming through incorporation**: what precedes it is overcome not through absolute negation, but through the critical appropriation of still valid elements, integrating them into a higher synthesis. Thus, these criticisms play an essential role: they open the way for original formulations that clarify the didactic foundations necessary for the socialization of systematized knowledge. This shift became a defining feature of the period, generating a rich body of scientific production that emphasizes the defense of the **explicit teaching of the essential contents required for mastering reading and writing** as a condition for emancipation and humanization, particularly for the working class. The following sections summarize the main contributions and relationships among these productions since the 2000s.

3.1 The Period from 2000 to 2015: Theoretical Formulations and Critique of Hegemonic Conceptions

Academic production on literacy from the perspective of **Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP)**, which resumed in the 2000s, initially organized itself around a systematic effort to critique hegemonic conceptions of literacy and to elucidate the theoretical foundations necessary for constructing a pedagogical alternative consistent with **historical-dialectical materialism**. This movement articulates, on the one hand, a theoretical demarcation in relation to **constructivism** and “learning-to-learn” pedagogies and, on the other, the consolidation of the unity between **Historical-Critical Pedagogy and Historical-Cultural Psychology** as the explanatory basis for the process of **appropriation of written language**. This trajectory does not develop linearly but rather expresses the theoretical, political, and institutional disputes characteristic of the Brazilian educational field.

In the early years of the period analyzed, the critique of constructivism occupies a central place. Constructivism is understood not merely as a methodological approach, but as an epistemological conception incompatible with the assumptions of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP). Scalcon’s thesis (2003) inaugurates a body of studies that seeks to demonstrate this incompatibility by problematizing the relationship between theory and practice and by showing that the divergences between HCP and constructivism concern distinct conceptions of knowledge, teaching, and human development. In the same direction, Marsiglia (2011) deepens the analysis by situating constructivism as the hegemonic pedagogical discourse in public literacy policies, pointing to its historical links with the *Escola Nova* (New School) movement and its compatibility with the demands of neoliberal ideology, particularly with regard to the downgrading of teaching and the individualization of responsibility placed on students and teachers for school outcomes.

Francioli (2012) contributes to this debate by analyzing the relationship between low results in national assessments and the adoption of pedagogical conceptions that **weaken work with school knowledge**. The author argues that the unity between literacy and the development of **consciousness** depends on the **appropriation of scientific concepts through systematic and intentional teaching**, while also identifying theoretical confusions in curricular proposals that, although presented as alternatives to constructivism, end up reintroducing elements of “learning-to-learn” approaches. Within this body of production, critique plays the role of delimiting the field of **historical-critical literacy** and highlighting the limits of dominant approaches. At the same time, however, it also reveals its own limits by pointing to the need to advance toward the **development of more consistent didactic foundations**.

Alongside this critical movement, there emerged a growing understanding that historical-critical literacy requires a psychological foundation compatible with the adopted pedagogical conception. In this sense, the articulation between Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and Historical-Cultural Psychology, both grounded in historical-dialectical materialism, becomes central. This articulation makes it possible to understand written language as a cultural instrument whose appropriation does not occur spontaneously, but through a mediated and systematized teaching process oriented toward the development of higher psychological functions. The contributions of Saviani (2018, 2021), Newton Duarte (2006), and Lígia Martins (2013) are particularly important in this context, as they defend the centrality of teaching scientific concepts as the basis of human development, situating literacy as a particular moment within a

broader formative process linked to the horizon of the full humanization of individuals and to the perspective of building a society without class divisions.

From the 2010s onwards, studies focused on the analysis of official documents and public literacy policies intensified, highlighting their internal contradictions, their alignment with the interests of capital, and the ideological and reductionist character that guides such proposals. Studies such as those by Leonardo (2021) and Almeida (2022) examine documents such as the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs, 1997), the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC, 2017), and the National Literacy Policy (PNA, 2019), revealing internal contradictions and the predominance of hegemonic conceptions that tend to impoverish the curriculum and reduce the role of the teacher. Cristofolini (2022) deepens this analysis by showing that these documents reaffirm, in different combinations, constructivist and technicist perspectives, emphasizing competencies, phonological awareness, and the phonics method, while simultaneously limiting literary work and reducing the role of the teacher, thereby composing a project incompatible with the humanizing education advocated by Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP).

Along the same lines, Franco and Martins (2021) argue that the National Literacy Policy (PNA) expresses an ultraliberal agenda that reduces literacy to phonics-based technicalism, contributes to the precarization of teaching work, and ignores the historical-cultural genesis of writing. Other studies, such as those by Matias (2019), Oliveira (2021), Garcia (2022), and Almeida (2022), analyze programs and teaching materials — PNAIC, NAME, Ler e Escrever, and RENABE — and converge in showing that these initiatives operate through prescriptive, technicist, or eclectic approaches that do not ensure the critical appropriation of writing, nor do they respond to the theoretical demands of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, which requires systematized teaching, intentional mediation, and solid teacher education.

Queiroz's (2024) analysis reinforces this diagnosis by historically situating the problem of literacy in Brazil and demonstrating how hegemonic approaches such as neo-New School approaches, constructivism, and “learning to learn” pedagogies contributed, between the 1960s and 1990s, to weakening systematized teaching and disseminating the idea of the natural acquisition of the writing system. By defending the centrality of intentional and scientific teaching and discussing the critical incorporation of phonetic procedures within an omnilateral conception of human formation, the author shows that the contemporary debate on literacy within Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) involves overcoming through incorporation of concepts such as phonological awareness.

In summary, critiques of hegemonic theories, methods, policies, and official documents played an essential role in the constitution of historical-critical literacy by highlighting the limitations of dominant conceptions and demonstrating that such proposals do not meet the educational needs of the working class. At the same time, this critical accumulation paved the way for a progressive shift in the research agenda: critique, without losing its importance, comes to function as a theoretical premise, while the challenge of developing didactic-methodological guidelines capable of guiding the teaching of reading and writing in a systematic manner becomes increasingly central. Such efforts seek coherence with the unity between Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and Historical-Cultural Psychology, incorporating concepts related to the periodization of child development, higher psychological functions, and the prehistory of writing (Luria, 2014). This shift helps explain the centrality that the didactic dimension assumes in more recent studies. However, the critique of constructivism and the incorporation of elements from Historical-Cultural Psychology may also have led to the neglect of a necessary revisiting of debates from the first period concerning the philosophical and sociological foundations of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, through categories such as critical consciousness, ideology, ethics, and socialist values, among others.

3.2 The Period from 2015 to 2025: Didactics in Question

From 2015 onwards, it can be observed that research production on literacy from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), without abandoning the critique of hegemonic conceptions and educational policies, increasingly focuses on the development of didactic principles, the selection and organization of content, and the

clarification of methodological guidelines for the teaching of reading and writing. This movement represents an advance in the consolidation of the field, opening space for addressing the relationship between content and form in historical-critical literacy, that is, addressing **both** what should be taught and how it should be taught under the concrete conditions of public schools.

Much of the research from this period is linked to studies developed within the Graduate Program in School Education at the Faculty of Sciences and Letters of UNESP (Araraquara campus), especially through the contributions of Newton Duarte, Francisco José Carvalho Mazzeu, and Lígia Márcia Martins, as well as their master's and doctoral students. However, as recent surveys indicate (Sens, 2024), the construction of historical-critical literacy results from a broader collective effort involving different graduate programs and research groups.

Across the studies analyzed, it was possible to identify several thematic axes: (a) historical-critical literacy in early childhood education; (b) curriculum, the selection and organization of content, and methodological guidelines; (c) assessment in the literacy process; and (d) the word as the central unit of written language teaching. Although these axes seek to articulate themselves around the general assumptions of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, they do not yet constitute a fully developed didactic conception.

Regarding early childhood education, the studies argue that this stage is decisive for establishing the psychological and cultural conditions necessary for the future appropriation of written language. Following Stemmer (2010), who initiated the debate on literacy in early childhood education from a historical-critical perspective, several studies argue that the teaching of written language should begin at this stage through intentional and systematized practices guided by the child's psychological development. Marsiglia and Bremenkamp (2017) criticize spontaneist practices, such as drawing activities lacking pedagogical direction, arguing that such practices do not promote the development of higher psychological functions. Saccomani (2018) reinforces this position by emphasizing that the teaching of writing cannot be restricted to graphic exercises, making it necessary to develop auditory capacities and phonological awareness within an organized pedagogical framework. Dangió (2017) reaffirms the school function of early childhood education, arguing that the content and forms of teaching must consider the specificities of child development, while Carvalho (2019) contributes by systematizing guidelines that ensure continuity between early childhood education and the first year of elementary school. Other studies, such as those by Barbosa (2021) and Posenti (2021), emphasize reader formation and the psychological domains necessary for the development of written language, reinforcing the centrality of teacher mediation. An important advance in this thematic axis was the development of curricular proposals implemented in municipal school systems, such as those of Bauru (SP) and Jundiaí (SP).

Regarding the elementary school curriculum and the didactic approaches of the early years of this stage, the work of Martins and Marsiglia (2015) stands out. The authors clarify the theoretical and methodological differences between constructivist and historical-critical perspectives and propose analytical frameworks that articulate the prehistory of writing with concrete pedagogical actions. They defend the centrality of children's literature and critically engage with contributions from neuroscience, seeking to incorporate them without breaking with the foundations of historical-dialectical materialism. However, this appropriation may be problematic, as Mazzeu, Silva, and Coutinho (Mazzeu et al., 2024) warn.

Other contributions further develop the didactic elaboration by articulating psychological and linguistic foundations. Marsiglia and Saviani (2017) relate the writing stages described by Luria to the phases of human development proposed by Elkonin, proposing didactic guidelines that range from nursery education to the early years of elementary school. Dangió (2017) systematizes didactic principles for the teaching of written language, while Marsiglia and Carvalho (2017) highlight the development of symbolism as a foundational psychological capacity for the appropriation of writing. Martins et al. (2018) contribute by explaining the transition from pictographic writing to symbolic writing, using the figure-ground analogy to guide pedagogical work, initially centered on grapheme-phoneme correspondences and subsequently on grammatical analysis mediated by texts and oral language. Dangió's thesis, later

published as a book (Dangió & Martins, 2018), stands out as a key work in this period, as it provides a theoretical systematization of the assumptions of historical-critical literacy and advances proposals for classroom practice.

Regarding the organization of literacy content, Mazzeu and Francioli (2018) argue that historical-critical literacy requires the systematic teaching of the scientific concepts of written language—such as word, syllable, phoneme/letter, sentence, genre, and text—understood as part of a system of concepts to be progressively appropriated by students. However, the authors do not propose a specific way of addressing these concepts within the curricular structure or in teaching practice. Carvalho (2019) advances in this direction by formulating and exemplifying didactic guidelines for the first year of elementary school, contributing to the translation of theoretical foundations into teaching practice. More recently, Carvalho and Martins (2024) deepen the analysis of the mobilization of thinking and intellectual operations in the literacy process, articulating the requirements for learning reading and writing with contributions from Historical-Cultural Psychology. Unlike what occurs in early childhood education, no curricular proposals for elementary education based on Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and implemented in municipal school systems were identified.

Another important thematic axis concerns assessment in the process of historical-critical literacy. The studies converge in affirming that assessment must be intentional, continuous, and articulated with the development of higher psychological functions, thereby overcoming both the classificatory logic traditionally associated with school evaluation and the limitations of hegemonic approaches. Zambon (2019) conceives assessment as a dialectical intervention within the teaching–learning process, oriented toward identifying the learner’s actual level of development and the zone of imminent development. Mazzeu et al. (2024) propose alternative diagnostic instruments grounded in Historical-Cultural Psychology, capable of revealing the cultural function of writing in the formation of higher psychological functions, in contrast to constructivist assessment procedures. Carvalho (2025) further advances this discussion by formulating an assessment framework for the first year of elementary school, enabling the analysis of how children mobilize complex intellectual operations in the act of reading and writing. Nevertheless, no study was identified that proposes a comprehensive approach to literacy assessment, encompassing both its theoretical foundations and its corresponding evaluative instruments.

Finally, the word has gradually become consolidated, in a transversal manner across the different thematic nuclei, as the core unit of historical-critical literacy. Several authors argue that the word—understood as a dialectical synthesis between phonetic-graphemic form and semantic-meaningful content—makes it possible to overcome both the fragmentation characteristic of traditional literacy methods and the spontaneous globalism associated with certain progressive approaches. Martins and Dangió (2015) and Martins and Marsiglia (2015) initiated this debate, followed by Coelho (2016) and Coelho and Mazzeu (2016), who propose the critical incorporation of valid elements from different literacy methods, reorganized around the centrality of the word. Franco and Martins (2021) and Maria (2022) deepen this perspective by articulating the question of the word as the core unit of literacy with a broader critique of educational policies that empty school knowledge of its formative content. Chraime and Pedralli (2022) reinforce that the appropriation of writing constitutes a process of humanization; they criticize constructivism, competency-based approaches, the phonics method promoted by the National Literacy Policy, and certain strands of literacy studies. These authors also argue for the defetishization of methods, proposing an articulation between the Alphabetic Writing System and socially meaningful texts, with the word functioning as the organizing unit. Within this framework, phonological awareness is treated as a consequence of a totalizing process of language appropriation, while orality is developed through the teaching of secondary oral genres. This emerging consensus around the word as the central element represents an important methodological advance for the development of historical-critical literacy proposals; however, the implications and further developments of this proposition still require deeper investigation.

In summary, the advancement of the didactic-methodological foundations of historical-critical literacy has occurred in a non-linear manner, marked by advances, disputes, and successive reformulations. Although a significant theoretical densification and a clearer explication of contents, principles, and didactic procedures can be observed, the

field still reveals contradictions and limitations that require further theoretical and practical elaboration. These tensions do not negate the progress achieved; rather, they indicate the need for continued investigation and greater collective systematization, particularly in light of the contemporary challenges faced by Brazilian education.

3.3 Current Context: Expansion of Themes and Persistence of Gaps

Recent mappings of scholarly production on literacy from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy—such as the chapter by Carvalho (2019), which analyzes publications from 2003 to 2018, and the comprehensive survey by Sens (2024), which systematizes theses and dissertations produced between 2003 and 2023—simultaneously reveal two movements: (a) the consolidation of a relatively consistent theoretical core and (b) the diversified expansion of themes, problems, and objects of investigation. This expansion, however, has occurred unevenly and not always in articulation with the historical foundations of the field, generating gaps and discontinuities that should be understood as expressions of the broader contradictions shaping Brazilian education.

First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that these gaps do not stem from internal weaknesses of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, but rather from the historical-social determinations that affect both teaching practice and university research: the precarization of labor, fragmented educational policies, and the hegemony of school conceptions opposed to systematized teaching and to omnilateral education—elements already identified as structural to the literacy problem in Brazil. Within this contradictory context, one can observe the emergence of new thematic axes that expand the scope of historical-critical literacy beyond the most frequently studied educational spaces (early childhood education and the early years of elementary schooling). These axes, while enriching the field, simultaneously reveal tensions between the continuity and the dispersion of the theoretical foundations constructed in previous decades.

a) Youth and Adult Literacy (EJA): Partial Recovery of a Historical Field

Godoy's (2020) research offers a critical reassessment of Youth and Adult Education (EJA) policies and engages with the thought of Paulo Freire, proposing a process of overcoming through incorporation and defending intentional teaching as a mediating activity for the development of higher psychological functions. However, although the study advances didactic propositions and reaffirms the relevance of Historical-Critical Pedagogy for working-class subjects, it does not establish dialogue with the pioneering productions coordinated by Betty Antunes de Oliveira in the 1980s and 1990s—precisely those that gave rise to the first efforts to systematize literacy within the framework of Historical-Critical Pedagogy. This discontinuity exemplifies a gap repeatedly highlighted throughout this article: contemporary production on historical-critical literacy has developed without recovering a substantial portion of its own theoretical and practical roots.

b) Special Education, Rural Education, and the Right to Education: Expanding Toward Historically Marginalized Subjects

Eloy's (2020) study deepens the relationship between literacy, special education, and rural schooling, demonstrating that mastery of reading and writing constitutes an indispensable condition for access to scientific knowledge and, therefore, for processes of humanization among students situated in contexts of social and institutional vulnerability. Such analyses contribute to situating historical-critical literacy within broader struggles for educational rights, reinforcing the argument that systematized teaching remains central to human-generic formation—a premise shared with authors such as Martins (2013) and Saviani (2018), discussed in other sections of this article.

c) Digital Technologies, Technicism, and Processes of Alienation

The studies by Darius (2020) and Zandonadi (2021) offer a critical examination of the role of digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) in literacy. Darius demonstrates that, when dissociated from teacher

mediation, digital applications and games tend to reduce learning to technical training, thereby emptying the historicity of writing as a cultural technology. Zandonadi deepens this critique by showing that such resources reinforce discourses of globalization, neo-technicism, and self-literacy, intensifying processes of alienation and contributing to the erosion of scientific knowledge within school practices. Both studies broaden the scope of historical-critical literacy by connecting it to the structural determinations of contemporary capitalism and to the technological mediations shaping school labor.

d) Literacy and Psychic Development: Deepening the Relations Between Writing, Thought, and Conduct

Branquinho (2019) investigates the relationship between literacy and the self-regulation of conduct, arguing that writing—by constituting a highly abstract level of language—triggers transformations in thought and higher psychological functions, guiding processes of self-regulation and conscious activity. This thematic axis establishes a direct dialogue with the contributions of Luria (2014) and Elkonin, reinforcing the centrality of psychological mediations in the process of appropriating written language.

e) Initial Training of Literacy Teachers: Curricular Limitations and Conceptual Disputes

Rodrigues (2022) analyzes Pedagogy degree programs and demonstrates that the theoretical-methodological fragility of initial teacher education derives from the absence of the foundations of Historical-Critical Pedagogy and from the influence of neoliberal conceptions of language. By articulating Historical-Critical Pedagogy with the Bakhtinian discursive conception of language, the author argues that only systematized teaching grounded in accumulated knowledge can prepare teachers capable of understanding writing as a cultural instrument and of promoting intentionally humanizing educational practices.

Taken together, these new thematic axes reveal the vitality of historical-critical literacy, which demonstrates the capacity to respond to the contradictions of an educational landscape in constant transformation. Nevertheless, important gaps remain:

- the articulation between these emerging themes and the historical-philosophical foundations of Historical-Critical Pedagogy is not always clearly established;
- contemporary production frequently overlooks the contributions of the initial period (1985–2000), generating artificial restarts and theoretical discontinuities;
- thematic expansion has not been accompanied by the production of collective syntheses capable of methodologically organizing the field.

Thus, although there has been a significant theoretical densification and an expansion of research objects, the current scenario still demands a collective effort of systematization and historical recovery, so that historical-critical literacy may advance toward the constitution of an organic and coherent theoretical-methodological body consistent with its foundational principles.

4. Conclusions and challenges

The critical inventory of Brazilian academic production on literacy from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) between 1985 and 2025 allows us to affirm that the formation of this field has developed in a historical, contradictory, and non-linear manner, following both the development of HCP itself and the theoretical and political disputes that shape Brazilian education, as a result of the socio-economic determinants of each period. Rather than following a cumulative trajectory, the study indicates that historical-critical literacy has experienced advances,

interruptions, renewed developments, and re-elaborations, conditioned by institutional circumstances, prevailing educational policies, and the objective conditions of teaching work and educational research.

The analysis revealed that in the initial period (1985–2000), reflections on literacy were strongly linked to a research group engaged in a more intense dialogue with the Freirean approach to literacy. At that time, a systematized theory of historical-critical literacy had not yet emerged, since the broader foundations of this pedagogy were still under development. Nevertheless, promising ideas appeared and researchers were trained who would later contribute to structuring the field in subsequent decades. The absence of publications identified in the 1990s can be understood as a result of the interruption of institutional experiences and the deterioration of research conditions caused by the neoliberal policies that marked that period. The small number of identified works also results from the limited circulation of predominantly printed materials, which are now difficult to access, suggesting the need for future research to employ additional instruments for locating and documenting such materials.

The resumption of production from the 2000s onwards occurred on new foundations. Initially, there was a strong emphasis on the critique of hegemonic conceptions of literacy, especially **constructivism** and the pedagogies of “learning to learn,” as well as the public policies grounded in these frameworks. This critique played a decisive role in defining the field by highlighting epistemological incompatibilities and reaffirming the centrality of teaching, intentional teacher mediation, and the systematic teaching of the alphabetic-orthographic writing system. However, the analysis of the production itself shows that critique, although necessary, was not sufficient to formulate a conception of literacy capable of guiding everyday pedagogical work, thereby opening space for the dissemination and consolidation of other approaches within the school context.

This trajectory makes it possible to identify more precisely the current challenges of historical-critical literacy, understood as historically situated problems that affect both the consolidation of the field and its potential impact on school practice.

4.1 Structural and socio-political challenges

The decisive challenges for historical-critical literacy are not limited to the didactic level; they are rooted in social contradictions and in the conditions under which public schools operate. The persistence of absolute and functional illiteracy, insufficient investment in effective policies for the literacy of children, youth, and adults, and the precarious working conditions of teachers constitute determinants that objectively condition the implementation of any proposal that requires systematic teaching and solid teacher education. For this reason, the critical analysis of contemporary literacy policies cannot be restricted to the theoretical level. It must also consider how programs centered primarily on teacher training—without changes in working conditions and with the persistence of eclectic or hegemonic theoretical frameworks—tend to manage results without confronting their structural causes.

4.2 Ideological and conceptual challenges

The critical inventory reveals that Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) competes for hegemony within a field marked by competing philosophies and theories that are often incompatible in their foundations. A central challenge, therefore, lies in further developing and clarifying the Marxist foundations that underpin historical-critical literacy, particularly with regard to the scientific and linguistic foundations mobilized in contemporary debates. This requires confronting a real tension: critically incorporating contributions from areas such as linguistics, neuroscience, and the so-called “science of reading”—as well as data and issues raised by other theoretical perspectives—without falling into theoretical eclecticism. In this context, the principle of overcoming through incorporation becomes decisive as a criterion for critical appropriation. It involves reorganizing partial contributions into a synthesis consistent with the centrality of teaching, the historicity of knowledge, and the objective of omnilateral human formation.

4.3 Methodological challenges (the “how to”) and didactic systematization

Although recent research reveals progress in the development of principles, contents, and pedagogical directions, the challenge remains of consolidating a more coherent set of didactic-methodological guidelines (not a “single method”) capable of providing tools for literacy teachers working under the concrete conditions of public schooling. The critical inventory shows that there are relevant points of consensus—such as the systematic teaching of the writing system, intentional mediation, and the articulation with Historical-Cultural Psychology—but that the next step—detailing sequences, procedures, teaching materials, criteria, and assessment instruments—still requires greater collective elaboration and the exchange of experiences. In this process, international experiences (such as those developed in Cuba and in the former Soviet Union) may serve as an initial reference, provided that they are treated as objects of critical appropriation rather than as models for simple replication.

At this point, reconsidering contributions that emphasize the inseparability between knowledge and values helps clarify a frequently underestimated problem: in addition to the necessary attention to phonological awareness (adequately highlighted in several studies), historical-critical literacy also requires the development of pedagogical mediations capable of articulating the development of semantic awareness (understanding of meanings and senses) and critical awareness (ethical-political positioning in relation to words and texts), consistent with the formative horizon of Historical-Critical Pedagogy. This challenge is simultaneously didactic and axiological: it involves the selection of contents, the organization of work with texts and words, and the formative intentionality of literacy practice.

5. Final Considerations

In summary, the study makes it possible to affirm that historical-critical literacy has consolidated itself as an expanding field, with a significant body of theoretical work and more evident didactic advances in the last decade. Nevertheless, it still faces challenges stemming from the structural conditions of public schools, ideological disputes within the pedagogical field, and the need for greater collaboration and methodological systematization. By historically reconstructing this movement—from the moment of critical demarcation to the more recent efforts of didactic elaboration and thematic expansion—the present study seeks to contribute to the organization and interpretation of this field, not as a final point of arrival, but as a contribution toward further developing the collective construction of a historical-critical conception of literacy and its realization in school practice.

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