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## Culture and society in the teaching of the mother tongue and literature

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### Abstract

We shall discuss the principles that justify the existence of literary studies in contemporary basic education and examine their situation in the field of literacy, particularly intended for high school, in face of cultural circumstances in contemporary society. We consider the notions of the curriculum and teaching planning, which are based on suggested guidelines regarding the experience of teaching and learning in the training of readers in basic high school education.

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Due to the many changes in Modern culture since the end of last century, education has been slowly adjusting to the new educational demands. Facts such as the decentralization of social individuals as stated by Hall (1996), the multiplication of reliable sources of information through electronic media, and the profile of the reader who acts like the author himself (cf. Senna, 2007), all that are real challenges for the contemporary schools, once traditional notions of student and reader - both submissive to the truths and pre-determined intellectual standards within the Modern culture - are suffering very significant transformations. Traditional school contents lose their meaning in a society in which the production and access to knowledge has drifted to other forms of education that reach everyone at anytime and anywhere. All knowledge that once we had to learn and kept by heart through constant repetition and

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memorization can be now easily accessed whenever wanted, making the process of systematic memorization unnecessary and irrelevant. Most practices in traditional education, such as lectures, tests for knowledge verification, strict disciplinary codes etc., turned to be incoherent with contemporary social practices, which are strongly marked by autonomy and the right to self-expression. It is impossible to analyze the situation in a particular field of formal education, for example literature, without regarding the general situation of education as a whole in so called post-industrial society.

Until the last century, discussions about the various educational subjects were either centered on the curriculum or methodologies for teaching the curriculum. The whole meaning of school was based on the curriculum in such a way that the concept of curriculum has traditionally been linked to the contents of each subject in each grade. The relevance of the contents in the school curriculum is historically associated with the idea of human development. Since Renaissance, the idea that the civilization of men is achieved through knowledge is still ingrained in modern culture and it explains the emergence of the school system (Bacon, [1605] 2007, p. 61-63). Naturally, this idea is related to such a culture in which writing is the sole means for recording, accumulating and disseminating knowledge, in a way that the fulfillment of training practices of civilized men would favor, both, the development of the conditions for using written sources, as well as the knowledge conveyed by them. The educational practices underlying content-based curriculum was considered as a training program for social individuals during that time in modernity in which knowledge conveyed by alphabetic writing was understood as a civilizing instrument. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the contents of each subject are instruments of a social program, to which they are subordinated, giving them the right to exist within the school context and justifying the way they are addressed in teaching.

It is impossible to reform the structure of subjects that compose basic education without being taken upon a new curriculum project. As to say, an educational project facing to the public sphere, and based on a set of parameters to which school is subordinated and over which has no control. Basically, such a curricular project parts from the premise that contemporary school no more deals with that primary social subject from Modern Age until the last two decades of XX century, when it was still preponderant the usage of written language and practices of memorization. For this reason, it is irrelevant to singly arise questions about the contents of each subject or the teaching methods, since the very problem is prior to the school, it is related to the meaning of schooling for contemporary humans.

The first question concerned to the subject of literature as well as other subjects in basic education is related to the goals regarding the overall development of students: should the goals focus on the contents and primary objects of the subject itself, thus being it considered an academic field?; or should it focus on more general and broad formative principles with the purpose of developing certain intellectual and social-affective skills? These options are not mutually exclusive, but each one indicates a particular decision-making framework that will guide the entire planning process of the subject, in particular the evaluation process throughout schooling.

The academic field of literature is extremely larger than the one analogous restricted to the school traditional contents, ranging from studies on the nature of the literary phenomenon and its singular forms connected to the field called poetics or the science of literature, to the most complex studies concerning. This includes, for example, the production of the literary phenomenon, from the perspective of the reader in the field of aesthetic reception, strongly related to social psychology and comparative literature, which considers the relationship of the significance of the literary text with other literary texts or texts from other fields of knowledge. In any literature approach, it is possible to consider the text under the following perspectives: the text itself, considered as a monument of artistic expression; a set of texts considered as a collection of productions of the same cultural movement; or a set of texts from different cultural movements or eras that present the evolution of specific literary characteristics, such as models of narration or social figures, such as female characters, policies etc. The world of literature is so vast that a single teacher could, throughout his/her career, teach a new class every school year without ever repeating the same approach. Note that, in this way, literature and the literature teaching project of the teacher become central to the school subject, allowing the traditional content to be in favor of a curriculum project that, in addition to the authorship of the teacher, favors the production of meaning and knowledge. Formal content becomes a consequence of literature and not the literary object itself.

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