

International Journal of Human Sciences Research

THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: WHY PHILOSOPHY IN HIGH SCHOOL?

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Acceptance date: 15/09/2024

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Abstract: THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY: Why philosophy in high school? This is the result of one of the sub-issues of my Master's Dissertation, the main focus of which is to problematize the teaching of philosophy in public secondary schools. In this discussion, we bring up some challenges that have long surrounded the teaching of philosophy, including the constant inclusion and exclusion of philosophy teaching from the school curriculum of basic education throughout Brazilian educational history, among other challenges. To help us in this journey, we consulted some theoretical contributions that mention and reflect on the subject under discussion. These include: Gallo (2012); Murcho (2002; Alves (2002); Incontri and Bigheto (2012); Rodrigo (2009); Cesar (2012); Nascimento (2021), among others, who will appear in the body of the text. The discussion on the subject has the following objectives: To discuss the challenges that have been surrounding the teaching of philosophy in basic education, specifically in secondary education; To reflect on the possible contributions of philosophy teaching to secondary education. We used a literature review as a theoretical basis for this topic. It is a topic that deserves to be given due importance, because at this moment in time, philosophy teaching is facing many of the challenges it once faced, but they still persist and deserve to be updated and expanded.

Keywords: Philosophy. High school. Challenges. Importance

INTRODUCTION

Answering the question about the subtitle of the text above, why philosophy in high school, has always been a question of answering the obvious, because in all this time of attempts to silence philosophy and its teaching, such arguments have never really managed to convince those who desire the search for knowledge and friendship for wisdom.

To try to meet the expectations of the proposed theme, we will follow two paths: In the first, we will address issues that relate to challenges that have hindered the teaching of philosophy throughout Brazilian educational history.

In the second, we present positions and reflections on the reasons for the importance of the philosophy curriculum in secondary schools.

The discussion on the subject has the following objectives: To discuss the challenges surrounding the teaching of philosophy in basic education, specifically in secondary education; and to reflect on the possible contributions of philosophy teaching to secondary education.

Our methodological approach to achieving the proposed objectives was a literature review, which enabled us to get in touch with the theoretical contributions directly linked to the proposed theme and which appear in the body of the text.

PHILOSOPHY TEACHING: BETWEEN THE TRAINING PROCESS AND OTHER CHALLENGES

Since the 1980s, Brazilian society has been going through a political-socio-cultural process known as re-democratization, in which parts of the social structure, popular strata that were previously not contemplated within society with guaranteed rights, are now experiencing this sensation.

The school institution is also affected by these changes. Until the 1970s, secondary schools were mostly attended by the wealthiest sections of society, including the middle classes and the elite, who therefore had a closer relationship with philosophy.

On this issue, Rodrigues (2012) emphasizes that

The conception of Philosophy disseminated in Brazilian school education has historically been linked to abstract and rationalist knowledge, linked to the education of elites. [...] In colonial Brazil, philosophy was taught in a small number of schools, where scholasticism was the basis of teaching, due to the religious ties of the Jesuits, who were responsible for education at the time. Until the middle of the 20th century, this form of philosophy teaching was present in Brazilian schools, with strong repercussions on curricula. With the Capanema Reform in 1942, the teaching of philosophy became compulsory, especially in religious schools, which catered to the country's social and economic elites (RODRIGUES, 2012, p. 63).

With the dawn of a new scenario, classes such as the working class and the working class began to be included in secondary education to a considerable extent. According to Rodrigo (2009), a movement called "massification" is taking place. This is a process whereby sections of society that were previously out of school now have the opportunity to enter it.

However, it is not a question of juxtaposition. This change also requires reflection at an educational, training, disciplinary and didactic-methodological level, directly involving philosophical teaching. Providing a wide-ranging discussion that opens up space for other fields of knowledge that can make valuable contributions, since the high school public and the scenario are now different, carrying with them challenges and limitations.

Rodrigo (2009) adds that,

Until the mid-1970s, philosophy was taught in an elitist secondary school. In those three decades in which it was totally or partially absent, secondary education went through a process of increasing massification, incorporating less privileged social strata who previously had no access to it, a clientele very different from the previous one: most of them are in public schools with precarious teaching quality, and have serious educational deficiencies, both from a linguistic point of view and in relation to broader cultural references (RODRIGO, 2009, p. 01).

Collaborating on the subject, Ceppas (2010) comments that,

From the 1970s (when philosophy stopped being taught in most of the country's secondary schools) to 2008 (the year in which the law establishing the compulsory teaching of philosophy throughout the country was passed), Brazil went through a process of modernization of the productive forces - from the Brazilian miracle to the globalization of the economy - which radically transformed our society, culture and education. In order to cut out those aspects that, from the Jesuits to the present day, seem most significant to us for rethinking the teaching of philosophy and its aims in secondary education, we need to point out the problematic axis that serves as our backdrop, namely: the fact that the economic stability and the near universalization of primary education, recently achieved, coexist with unacceptable levels of social inequality, living conditions and educational achievement. Despite all the democratic, economic and social achievements, it's as if we were changing everything to continue as it was (CEPPAS, 2010, p. 171-172).

The teaching of philosophy throughout educational history has been immersed in challenges. False reasons have always been found to hinder its activities, its exercises aimed at the educational process.

Within the curriculum, allied to the political and economic context, the teaching of philosophy has always been seen as complementing the workload of other subjects, with its content being taught without much criterion, rigor or mastery. With a workload that hardly allows professionals in this area to carry out quality work. It is seen as teaching that does not serve financial objectives, economic purposes or even as an inefficient way of qualifying labor for the job market.

Philosophy and its teaching have undergone oscillations: sometimes present, sometimes absent from the official curriculum, directly related to political issues. Specifically, government policies. Rodrigo (2009) adds that the fact that philosophy has been excluded from the official curriculum for a long time has hindered its inclusion in secondary education.

In this regard, Vizzotto (2019) emphasizes, that

Currently, we philosophy teachers who work in the context of secondary schools have found it difficult to work with philosophy as a subject in the curriculum because, in addition to the fact that, for a long time, it was not included in the list of compulsory subjects, this situation is compounded by the lack of a culture of appreciation and interest in this area of knowledge. As a result, it is often perceived as a monotonous, “boring” teaching activity with no practical use in life. Philosophical activity demands careful reading, patience, interpretation, concentration, reflection, problematization, conceptual production, and at the same time, we know that what underlies contemporary culture generally takes us in the opposite direction, that is, the speed and superficiality of information and communication (VIZZOTTO, 2019, p. 101).

Another challenge facing philosophy teaching lies in the training process. Universities still find it difficult to separate training for philosophy teachers who work in basic education from philosophy researchers. For the

most part, they train researchers, specialists and not professionals who work successfully in basic education.

Regarding university education, Pedro and Perez (2012) point out that,

Philosophy faculties train few professionals and many have no intention of working in the classroom. Teachers of other subjects are teaching high school philosophy classes. When this happens, the tendency is to work more on the history of philosophy and a few concepts than on giving students the elements to form a critical spirit (PEDRO; PEREZ, 2012, p. 7).

According to Nobre and Terra (2007), it is necessary to think of philosophy teaching at both university and high school in an integrated way, linked to culture, in an interdisciplinary way with other fields of knowledge. Only in this way will philosophy and its teaching be able to overcome “boredom” and “indifference”.

For some time now, official documents have been discussing the problem of training philosophy professionals specifically at secondary level. The OCNs (National Curriculum Guidelines) for secondary education state that:

[...] Furthermore, thinking about the subject of Philosophy in secondary education also requires a discussion about undergraduate Philosophy courses, which prepare future professionals, and philosophical research in general, since, especially in this subject, it cannot be dissociated from teaching, philosophical production and the transmission of knowledge (BRASIL, 2016, p. 16).

Gallo (2012) adds about philosophical training, based on his own previous experience as a university student,

The problem is that philosophers attach little or no importance to the issue of teaching. The courses are concerned with teaching philosophy, transmitting the legacy of its history, sometimes preparing the specialized researcher in this field” (GALLO, 2012, p. 11-12).

For Nobre and Terra (2007), it is important that university education collaborates with this other professional who will not only act as a researcher, but who will be the bridge between philosophical assumptions and the student in basic education.

In the opinion of Guimarães (2010), it is likely that the training of the professional with a degree in philosophy, who is neither a specialist nor a researcher, will require more complex questions, since

Perhaps the training of ME teachers is even more difficult than the training of researchers. Because they need to be able to bridge the gap, let's say, between this tradition, in which they are expected to be as well trained as possible, and to be able to continue training, but bridging this tradition with the experience, questions, anxieties and anxieties of adolescents, who are their audience, is not easy, in fact (GUIMARÃES, 2010, p. 34).

The core issue here is that the teaching of philosophy in secondary education has its own specificities, and cannot simply be the transposition of simplified and/or diminished university teaching.

Still on the subject of the training process, Nascimento (2021) comments that “for every two teachers who teach philosophy in Brazil, one is not from a specific area”. This statement demonstrates a major gap in the training of philosophy teachers for basic education and the space that teachers in this specific area have lost over time.

Gomes (2017) points out that

An article published recently by *Folha de S. Paulo*, on January 23, 2017, points out that “almost 50% of teachers have no training in the subject they teach”. Data from the 2015 school census indicates that 46% of high school teachers in Brazil teach without a specific degree in the subject they teach. Philosophy is the second worst subject in the *ranking*, with only 23% of teachers trained in the area. The figures are worrying,

both in terms of questioning the quality of high school philosophy classes, taught by lay teachers, and in relation to the obvious situation of devaluation of the professional and the area of philosophy, which no longer seems to have any meaning or space for action in the training of teachers, children and young people. After all, why philosophy in education? (GOMES, 2017, p. 118-119).

In this sense, it is important for philosophy teaching to contribute to the education of high school students if it is taught by teachers trained and licensed specifically in this curricular component, as they will be better prepared to work on a series of philosophical contents and questions that will be presented to the students and that the students will present to the teachers. Graduates in the philosophy course should be prepared to develop critical thinking with their students, giving them the space to construct reasoning, to talk about ideas and to build thinking that leads to autonomy over the theories and problems proposed to them, and also to develop their individual texts.

In 2008, after a wide-ranging discussion in the National Congress and media coverage, we saw philosophy reinserted as a compulsory subject in secondary school, after being sanctioned by the President of the Republic. However, a lot had changed since 1971, when philosophy and its teaching, by force of law, became an optional subject at secondary level. Thirteen years have passed between 2008 and 2021. What has been done in the classroom in the meantime to bring students closer to philosophical assumptions? What methodology has been used?

These questions are not easy to answer, not least because there is only a limited amount of research on this subject in the country. Little about philosophical methodologies has been the focus of research and reflection at the level of teacher training in philosophy. And much less in relation to research aimed

at understanding the methodologies that have been practiced in secondary schools during this time.

In view of this problem, Perencin (2017) comments ,

I noted the scant production on the teaching of philosophy by Brazilian researchers, as not even one percent of the articles and/or texts analyzed in the 16 journals were dedicated to discussing the issue in question. From the review of the most relevant Philosophy, Education and Education and Philosophy journals in circulation in Brazil, which totaled 9,242 articles and/or texts reviewed, only 64 - 0.69% of the overall production - dealt with the teaching of philosophy with its different approaches and of this overall number, only 40 - 0.43% of the overall production - dealt with it with a view to Brazilian problems (PERENCIN, 2017, p. 35).

Even though we haven't found a significant number of studies on the teaching of philosophy, it is clear that there are problems related to it and its teaching, since high school students generally find it very difficult to relate to philosophical assumptions. Likewise, philosophy teachers at this level also find it very difficult to carry out their job.

WHY PHILOSOPHY IN HIGH SCHOOL?

As we have seen, the full and autonomous inclusion of philosophy and its teaching in basic education has been a major challenge, because when it was reinserted into the curriculum in LDB 9394/96, with a "disciplinary" and compulsory character in 2008, it was thought that at that moment philosophy and its teaching would have autonomy and its importance for building the foundations of a subject and a society based on democratic values would be recognized, however, what we saw was the dilution of these achievements presented in the BNCC.

Regarding the aforementioned problem, Gallo (2012) states that

The presence of philosophy in schools is not a smooth undertaking. There are many obstacles to overcome if this presence is to be possible; above all, because when an institution chooses to include philosophy in its curriculum or when an educational policy provides for the inclusion of philosophy in school curricula, this is done in the name of a certain philosophy and in the name of certain intentions towards philosophy. In other words, when philosophy is in school, it is there to serve certain interests, to fulfill an "ideological" need. As, for example, in the case of contemporary Brazil, which makes its intentions explicit in the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (GALLO, 2012, p. 27).

So now it is necessary for philosophy to emphasize its importance and necessity once again in the face of "more of the same", of a curriculum that translates into conservatism and denial of difference.

Official documents such as the National Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education (OCNEM) emphasize the importance of teaching philosophy at secondary level by stating that,

The aim of Philosophy is not just to provide students with intellectual enrichment. It is part of a teaching proposal that aims to develop the student's ability to respond, using the knowledge acquired, to questions arising from the most varied situations. This ability to respond must go beyond the mere repetition of acquired information, but at the same time be based on previous knowledge. For example, it would be necessary not only to understand science, literature and the arts, but also, more precisely, their meaning, as well as developing communicative skills closely associated with argumentation. In addition, since general education is the objective and precondition even for vocational education, secondary education should become the final stage of a general education, in which skills are developed rather than content memorized. (BRASIL, 2006, p. 29)

Philosophy is important at this level of education for a number of reasons. Among them is its ability to build critical thinking about the world and reality with students. Unveiling other possible worlds, deconstructing and reconstructing values.

On this subject, Cesar (2012) comments that

[...] the teaching of philosophy is even more important because high school students are at a time when they are consolidating their personalities, with many doubts and anxieties, and philosophy enables young people to seek an understanding of what is happening in their reality, also enabling them to perceive themselves. Philosophy, among other things, develops "thinking skills", which allow students to argue better, analyze issues, in short, develop critical thinking. However, it is not philosophy's sole responsibility to develop a critical conscience in students - it would be a great pretension to claim that. All the other disciplines have the same responsibility. Critical awareness is not something that is "deposited" in the student, it develops and this takes a certain amount of time; in three years (the duration of secondary education today) the student will probably not leave school "complete", totally critical, autonomous, but they will be on the way to it. Ideally, this initiative to form critical consciences should be effectively applied at all stages of education (CESAR, 2012, p. 10-11).

The question of why philosophy should be taught in high school is preceded by another: what would philosophy be? Gallo (2012) asserts that,

In short, teaching philosophy is an exercise in appealing to diversity, to the perspectivism that Nietzsche announced; it is an exercise in accessing questions that are fundamental to human existence; it is an exercise in being open to risk, in the search for creativity, for thinking that is always fresh; it is an exercise in asking questions and distrusting easy answers. Anyone who is not willing to engage in such exercises is unlikely to find

pleasure and success in the adventure that is teaching philosophy, and also learning philosophy (GALLO, 2012, p. 45).

According to Cotrim (1988), philosophy plays an important role in education and schools, as it is based on philosophical assumptions,

Developing the student's critical sense, which implies overcoming naive and superficial conceptions about men, society and nature, conceptions forged by the dominant social "ideology". In order to do this, it is necessary for philosophy teaching to stimulate the development of student reflection and provide them with a set of information on reflections already developed in the history of philosophical thought. The result of this process is a broadening of the student's reflective awareness, focused on two fundamental areas: * self-consciousness: criticism of oneself as a person and of one's individual and social role (self-criticism); * world-consciousness: understanding the natural and social world and its possibilities for change. (COTRIM, 1988, p. 19).

For Desiderio Murcho (2002), philosophy and philosophical practice are a kind of knowledge, a field of knowledge that helps build the development of autonomy-oriented thinking.

For Alves (2002), philosophy is important in high school because of its ability to build effective ways for students to act in reality, transforming it to the extent that they are also transformed.

High school students are the ones who are subjected to many influences. The burden of duties towards society is immense. What do I want to be? Which university course to choose? Expectations for their first job, fed by their family and social circle.

In this sense, philosophy is the guiding knowledge for such questioning, which takes place through analysis, reflection and a critical stance. These steps allow high school students to ask questions such as: What kind of society

are we living in? What does it demand of me? And why? Why do I choose this course over another? Why does professional and technical training take precedence over comprehensive, human training?

Philosophy teaching needs to get closer and closer to the daily lives of young people, their challenges and the issues that affect them.

For Greter (2010), philosophy has a fundamental role to play in transforming and building a society based on reflective and critical dimensions, far beyond the job market.

Still on the subject of the importance of philosophy for the educational process, Gomes (2017) comments that philosophy is extremely important for the current scenario and is necessary, including in school spaces. He justifies his speech in an article published in the British newspaper *The Guardian* with the title “Philosophy can teach what Google can’t”, where he comments that:

In a world where knowledge is increasingly restricted, the skills and confidence to traverse disciplines will be rewarded. We will need people who are prepared to ask and answer questions that can’t be found on Google, such as: What are the ethical ramifications of machine automation? What are the political consequences of mass unemployment? How should wealth be distributed in a digitalized society? As a society, we will need to be more familiar with philosophy in order to discuss such questions (GOMES, 2017, p. 119).

For Valério (2010), even though philosophy competes with other information vehicles these days, it doesn’t make its formative function in secondary education unfeasible.

The main role of philosophical teaching is to address new realities, to connect with the economic, political and cultural world and to be a bulwark against social exclusion. Even considering the immense range of out-of-school media, information media, there is still a place for philosophy teaching in and for society, because it occupies functions that

are not provided by any other instance; it is a synthesis between the experienced culture that takes place in the city, at meeting points, in the media, in the family, at work, etc. Philosophical education is a continuation of the development of cognitive skills, as students are encouraged to develop their critical sense and interpret the information they receive on a daily basis. The significance of philosophical education is unique. Its role in the life of the human being is unique, as it is responsible for training a working citizen capable of critically interfering in reality in order to transform it, and not just training to be part of the job market. It is an education that helps the human being to become a thinking subject, so that they learn to use their thinking potential in the construction and reconstruction of concepts, skills, attitudes, values, etc. (VALÉRIO, 2010, p. 05)

The National Curriculum Parameters (PCNEM) published in 2008, in the philosophy section, emphasize the competencies and skills that students at this level of education should develop, thus demonstrating the importance of the philosophy component within the high school curriculum:

- Reading philosophical texts in a meaningful way;
- Reading texts of different structures and registers in a philosophical way;
- Articulating philosophical knowledge with different contents and discursive modes in the natural and human sciences, the arts and other cultural productions;
- Contextualize philosophical knowledge, both at the level of its specific origin and at other levels: the personal-biographical; the socio-political, historical and cultural environment; the horizon of scientific-technological society;
- Elaborate, in writing, what has been appropriated in a reflective manner;

- Debate, taking a position, defending it argumentatively and changing position in the face of more consistent arguments. (BRASIL, 1996, p. 64)

The criteria for improving philosophy and its teaching, in addition to those already mentioned, must be that it be seen as a specific subject in schools and with its respective professionals specifically licensed in the area.

According to the authors Mattar, Tomazetti and Danelon (2013), even though philosophy has an inconstant presence in the Brazilian education curriculum, it remains a legacy that has helped the world and younger generations to situate themselves in the world in relation to themselves and others.

According to Valério (2010):

It is important to realize that knowing means establishing the meaning of the world. It is understood that philosophical education has this function, that is, the function of training people to have or come to have the meaning of reality. Those who are educated can have a universal vision of themselves, of others and of education itself. People ask a lot about the meaning of life. With philosophical education you can have a broader vision of this meaning. Hence the idea that philosophical education is indispensable in secondary education (VALÉRIO, 2010, p. 5-6).

Alves (2002) argues that philosophy is justified in secondary education, also based on what is written in LDB 9394/96:

According to the aims and objectives attributed to basic education in the new LDB (art. 22), among the many attributions given to this level of education, one of them is to be in line with the current demands of the job market (art. 35, item II); the other is to guarantee “the improvement of the student as a human person, including ethical training and the development of intellectual autonomy and critical thinking” (art. 35, item III). According to the new guidelines,

this means enabling students, especially those in public schools, to build the skills and abilities necessary for their education (ALVES, 2002, p. 110-111).

The authors Incontri and Bigheto (2009) emphasize the importance of philosophical education in basic education, citing high school, that care must be taken to use the most attractive methodologies, thus trying to bring students’ daily lives closer to philosophical assumptions in order to build philosophical reflections.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When it comes to philosophy and its teaching, part of society has always viewed it with suspicion. We can see this diagnosis as far back as the condemnation of Socrates, in specific dialogues by Plato (2002), such as in his work **Apology** of Socrates, where he recounts the condemnation of Socrates, one of the most famous philosophers of his time - the classical period - who was “invited” to drink a cup of poison. There, one of the fundamental arguments for his condemnation was that the philosophical teachings passed on by Socrates were corrupting the Greek/Athenian youth.

Since then, in a sneaky and perceptive way, this same argument dressed up in other words has been passed down to posterity, and used as an instrument or resource for this purpose, the curriculum.

As we have seen in the body of the text, many challenges have been overshadowing the teaching of philosophy in national education, however, we have also seen important voices, spokespeople who speak in favor of philosophy, more than that, they make important contributions so that the teaching of philosophy continues in high school, doing what it does best, building freedom and autonomy of thought through the resources of criticism.

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