


Theory detached from practice: A critique of the History course and exams of the IB *Diploma Programme*

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevenced2024.003-007>

Enio Everton Arlindo Vieira¹

ABSTRACT

This article aims to make a short analysis of the manuals of the History course of the Diploma Program, a high school program of the international curriculum established by the International Baccalaureate. Through the program's own teacher's manuals, and some examples of History teaching material, we seek to perceive the contradictions between the learning objectives and their practical application. If the textbooks preach a modern and interpretative historiography, the didactic materials and tests of the program are still very attached to a traditional, content-based and positivist vision of history, contradicting what the IB preaches what it expects from its students, and what it demands in its evaluations.

Keywords: History, International curriculum, International Baccalaureate, National Common Curriculum Base.

¹ Master's degree in Education, Art and History of Culture from Mackenzie Presbyterian University.
LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/2192908939552475>



INTRODUCTION

This article arises, firstly, from the empirical experiences of the author of the text as a professor of the History of the *Diploma Program*, which is equivalent to the last two years of Brazilian high school in the International Baccalaureate system. Having worked for seven years in international schools in the city of São Paulo, I was able to delve a little deeper into the philosophy behind the history curriculum, and I was able to notice several contradictions between the discourse and philosophy preached by the guides and textbooks of the *Diploma Program*, and its more practical application when it comes to evaluating students through international tests, which are standardized around the world. I was also able to perceive several inconsistencies in the instructions for the production of academic works that must be done by the students, especially those with greater weight in their grades, the so-called *Internal Assessment* and *Extended Essay*, texts that students must write with a certain academic rigor of research, and that can be compared to the term papers adopted by various schools and universities.

We will start with an introductory chapter presenting a little of the course of History of the *Diploma Program*, some of his philosophy and his approach to theories of multiple intelligences, as well as his options for choosing a curriculum and some of the differences between the most basic levels of study, the so-called *Standard Level (SL)* and the most in-depth level, the *Higher Level (HL)*. We will also see how the IB describes its own interpretation of what historical science is, and it is already possible to notice some disparities in relation to modern theories of understanding the Theory of History.

In this article, we will use manuals from the International Baccalaureate itself, which can be found on its official website (<https://www.ibo.org/>), as well as textbooks from Oxford and Hodder publishers, very popular materials for teaching the course. We can see some of the contradictions of the course, which preaches for a teaching in which there is an "opportunity for engagement with multiple perspectives and plurality of opinions",² but presents a clear trend with regard to what it considers to be "authoritarian" states.

In the second chapter, we will present the problems with the exam questions and the contents of the course textbooks. If, on the one hand, the course aims to develop citizens capable of understanding various perspectives and an international and globalized mentality, the tests and didactic contents are strongly based on the positivism of the nineteenth century, since the focus of studies and tests are still the States, political and military leaders as the "engine of transformations and progress in history" (BITTENCOURT, p. 141, 2011).

Finally, we will make a brief comparison between the learning expectations of the *Diploma Program* and the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) showing that, even if in theory both

² History guide: first examinations 2020, p 15, 2015. Free translation by the author of the article.



courses aim to develop similar skills and knowledge in some points, what is expected of the student to develop as a citizen and student is most of the time not only contradictory, but even antagonistic, especially with regard to the specific contents of History.

THE HISTORY COURSE ACCORDING TO THE *DIPLOMA PROGRAM*

Right at the beginning of the History course guide, the *International Baccalaureate* (IB) declares that its mission is "to develop curious, knowledgeable and caring young people who help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect"³. The IB course seeks for students to be full of compassion and internalize a lifelong passion for learning. Within the program, there is a philosophy of developing various learning profiles, including those of researchers, open-minded, thinkers, communicators, reflective, caring, etc. There is a clear attempt to get closer to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

The theory of MI argues that intelligence cannot be something singular, or that the intelligence of human beings can be measured by only two areas such as linguistics and mathematical logic. The theory of MI has a set of eight intelligences, which are: linguistic (words and symbols), logical-mathematical (calculations and problems), musical (production and comprehension of sounds), bodily-kinesthetic (control and body expression), spatial (perception of space, dimension and orientation), naturalistic (recognition and classification of what is related to nature), interpersonal (empathy and understanding of other people's feelings), intrapersonal (understanding of oneself).

Seeking to foster the interests of each student, the program is divided into six major areas of knowledge, namely: the study of language and literature, in which the student usually focuses on grammar and literary works in their own native language; language acquisition, being a study of a foreign language (language options vary depending on the availability offered by the school adopting the IB. In the case of Brazil, English, Spanish and French turn out to be the most popular and available options); sciences, a vague term that encompasses, in a general way, what the BNCC defines as natural sciences, that is, biology, physics and chemistry; the arts, in which students have the choice between visual arts, music, or performing arts; mathematics and, finally; what the program calls individuals and societies, a term it has chosen to represent the human sciences. Within the scope of individuals and societies, high school students can choose from a variety of specializations, including economics, business, global politics, geography, philosophy, psychology, digital society, cultural and social anthropology, world religions, and history. Students must choose to study in each of these areas of knowledge, with the arts being optional and can be replaced by a second subject within the other five areas. In addition, students have among the compulsory subjects one called "theory of knowledge", classes that are close to philosophy classes, but without a traditional focus on studying the history of philosophy; the so-called CAS (creativity, activity and service) where

³ History guide: first examinations 2020, p. 06, 2015. Free translation by the author of the article.



students seek from overcoming various personal challenges such as learning to play an instrument, or evolving in physical activities of their choice, to doing some kind of work for the community in which they are inserted; and *Extended Essay*, academic essay that must contain up to 4000 words, in which students can research and delve into a topic on virtually any subject studied in their chosen subjects. Given the empirical experience of the author of the text, this article will focus only on issues related to the content of History, not working with issues related to the content of History. *Extended Essay* or CAS.

While specifically outlining the aims of the History course, the IB guide says that the course enables the development of "an understanding of the past, which leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of humans and the world today."⁴ The course sets out to study a variety of types of history, including political, economic, social and cultural, and provides a balance between structure and flexibility. In its theoretical proposal, the IB tries to get closer to a modern historiography, which throughout the twentieth century "began to compete for space with the new social sciences that were constituted in the search for understanding society, especially Sociology, Anthropology and Economics" (BITTENCOURT, p. 144, 2011). With the popularization of various social movements, historiographical production began to incorporate new social subjects, "such as feminists, environmentalists, ethnic and religious, their confrontations and struggles with discrimination and prejudice, in addition to the continuity of struggles for labor rights" and other agendas from popular sectors (BITTENCOURT, p. 148, 2011). Historian Circe Bittencourt also points out that such an approach, known as the "history of the vanquished", has been questioned because it often leads to a Manichean interpretation of historical events, in which subaltern social groups are generally presented as the good guys, who were dominated by the bad guys. However, such an interpretation fits the precepts of the IB, to seek - in theory - a multiplicity of opinions and perspectives. However, a brief analysis of the teaching materials available for the IB History course shows us that its theory is not necessarily linked to practices.

THE CONTENT OF THE HISTORY COURSE, AND THE DIFFERENT ASSESSMENTS

If the choice of subjects by the students seems to offer a wide range of possibilities, the choice of possible History topics by the teacher is no less different. However, the number of options between the *Standard Level* and *Higher Level* It can be confusing, and necessarily involves omissions of topics that will not be studied over the course of the two-year course. Starting with the *Standard Level* (SL), the teacher can choose, first, one of the five predetermined topics, being military leaders, with a focus on medieval wars, having as case studies the invasions of Genghis Khan and Richard I of England; Conquest and its Impacts, which studies the Spanish struggle against

⁴ History guide: first examinations 2020, p. 06, 2015. Free translation by the author of the article.



the Muslims, known as *Reconquest*, and the early stages of the colonization of Peru and Mexico; rights and protests, which cover the relevant issues of Martin Luther King Jr.'s role in the struggle for civil rights in the United States, as well as an in-depth study of Apartheid; conflicts and interventions, which study ethnic conflicts and civil wars in Rwanda and Kosovo; and, finally, the path to global war, in which the period between the first and second world wars is studied by the expansion and formation of the Axis countries (Japan, Italy, and Germany). Given the empirical experience of the author of the text, the last topic was the one I chose to work on in the classroom with the students, and this choice was made both by interest, personal taste and greater knowledge of the subject, but also because it was better interconnected with the other topics to be worked on later. An ideal time of 40 hours is reserved for each of the predetermined topics, and due to the total workload of the school, the choice of one of these topics necessarily implies the non-choice of the other four.

The content of these predetermined topics is charged at the end of the course in the so-called *Paper 1*, a test that aims to interpret primary and secondary documents, lasting one hour and weighing between 20% and 30% of the total grade in history, depending on the student's choices. The use of documents in the classroom favors "the student's introduction to historical thought, the initiation into the historian's own working methods" (BITTENCOURT, p. 327, 2011).

The use of documents in history classes is justified by the contributions they can make to the development of historical thought. One of them is to facilitate the understanding of the process of production of historical knowledge by understanding that the vestiges of the past are found in different places, are part of social memory and need to be preserved as society's heritage (BITTENCOURT, p. 333, 2011).

Considering that the IB History guide itself points out the need to foster a multiplicity of perspectives and opinions, working with diverse documents is quite suitable for such a purpose. However, by limiting the choice of subjects to one of the five topics previously described, the possibility of a fuller and more varied understanding of the past is restricted, especially since not only the *Paper 1* has the lowest weight in the final grade, such as the fact of subsequent exams (*Paper 2* and *Paper 3*) are still very much supported by positivist ideas, in which people considered to be "great" leaders are the engine of history, contradicting the very objectives of the predetermined topics for the story. *Paper 1*. In addition, the documentary focus of both exams and textbooks is on written documents, occasionally adding images and other types of human production. Such an approach is still very much related to a traditional view of nineteenth-century Western historiography.

The act of "making history" has historically been linked to the ability of human beings to leave written records of their trajectory in the world, so much so that Western society considers the emergence of writing a founding milestone of its history. It was only in the first half of the twentieth century that new historiographical approaches [...] questioned the



prominence of these records and made room for a diversity of sources. Historians then began to construct their narratives based on other types of records - imagery, oral, sound and material (ABUD et al, p. 01, 2010).

Among the possibilities of primary documents to understand History, Kátia Abud points out the possibility of using newspapers, literature, music lyrics, study of the environment, maps, photographs, cinema, visits to museums and objects of material culture (such as vases, household utensils, electrical appliances, etc.). Using the first unit of the textbook as an example *Move to Global (2015)*⁵ of Oxford, called "The Japanese Expansion in East Asia", we were able to find the following documents and their applications of didactic use:

Table 1: Documents related to Japanese expansion in East Asia in the book *Move to Global War* (Oxford, 2015)

| <i>Document Type</i> | <i>Total Quantity</i> | <i>Use for analysis and interpretation of the past</i> | <i>Illustrative use only</i> |
|--|-----------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Photography | 12 | 5 | 7 |
| Pictures and/or illustrations | 13 | 12 | 1 |
| Private writings (diaries, letters, etc.) | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Writings/speeches by government and/or official representatives | 18 | 13 | 6 |
| Excerpts from books contemporaneous with the events studied | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Secondary documents (writings of expert historians) | 26 | 22 | 4 |
| Maps | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Graphics | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Newspapers of the time | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Literary | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Letras de música | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Movie Suggestions | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Museum Suggestions | 0 | 0 | 0 |

There is a clear predominance of secondary documents, suggesting that historians have greater interpretative authority. Of the thirteen illustrations presented in the unit, six are by the same

⁵ The unit extends from pages 14 to 81.



illustrator, the Englishman David Low. Although Low is considered one of Britain's greatest illustrators, the predominance of his drawings directly contradicts the idea of a "multiplicity of perspectives and opinions". Even though photography is "a rich source of information for the reconstruction of the past" (ABUD et al, p 147, 2010), its use is predominantly illustrative. The maps contained in the unit are all secondary reproductions, and the virtual absence of newspapers as primary sources is noteworthy, as they are excellent primary sources, very rich for the understanding of narratives from the past, especially with regard to the construction of multiple perspectives, an objective so idealized by the IB.

Journalists also make contributions to history, as their work, converted into documents, is now used by historians to cross-reference other sources of information, in order to understand the societies of the past and their forms of relationship, representations, conflicts, games of forces and meanings present in memory (ABUD et al, p. 27, 2010).

Although the book does have some links to videos in the *Youtube*, the unit in question does not suggest any cinematographic or literary work, and the predominance of both official documents and secondary sources shows that the *Paper 1*, even though it has a more modern approach to interpreting history, is still very much tied to the positivist interpretive patterns of the nineteenth century.

The reconstitution of the nation's past through great characters served as a foundation for school history, privileging studies of political, military and war actions, and the natural way to present the nation's history was through a narrative (BITTENCOURT, p. 141, 2011).

When we get to the content of the *Paper 2*, the traditionalist and positivist character of the course is much more pronounced. The second test has a weight of between 25% and 45% of the student's final grade, and its range of possibilities of choice for the teacher is even greater. The topics are loosely classified as "World History" (*World History*) and the time frame goes from 750 A.D. to the end of the Cold War in 1991. Right from the start, the absence of Ancient History topics is striking, and there is no possibility for the professor to choose studies on Ancient Egypt, Classical Greece, the Roman Empire, among other subjects of the period. The teacher must choose two of the twelve topics, again implying a choice that necessarily excludes rich subjects from the history curriculum. The table below shows the possible topics and the suggested subjects within each of them. Among the various suggestions, we highlight those that have a clear positivist character, with a focus on wars, actions of leaders and people considered as great individuals responsible for being the factor of change in History.

Table 2: World History Topics⁶

| <i>Topic</i> | <i>Time Frame</i> | <i>Some of the suggested topics</i> |
|--|-------------------|---|
| 1. Society and economy | 750-1400 | - Individuals such as Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta; - The Social and Economic Impact of the Black Death |
| 2. Causes and effects of wars | 750-1500 | - The Crusades in the Middle East and Europe - Role of War Leaders and Tactics |
| 3. Dynasties and rulers | 750-1500 | - Nature of the power of individual rulers - Methods for legitimizing power |
| 4. Companies in transition | 1400-1700 | - Structural changes and the role of women in society - intellectual, artistic and cultural movements |
| 5. Early Modern States | 1450-1789 | - ideology, legitimacy, and ambition of individual leaders - Territorial and colonial expansion |
| 6. Causes and Effects of Early Modern Wars | 1500-1750 | - Role and significance of leaders - Territorial, economic and political impacts of wars |
| 7. Origins, development and impact of industrialization | 1750-2005 | - Role and significance of individuals - Technological developments |
| 8. Independence movements | 1800-2000 | - Role and Importance of Independence Leaders - Social, economic and cultural challenges |
| 9. Emergence and development of democratic states | 1848-2000 | - Role and significance of leaders - Developments of constitutions, electoral systems and political parties |
| 10. Authoritarian states | Twentieth century | - Methods for the establishment of an authoritarian state - use of legal methods, propaganda and coercion |
| 11 Causes and effects of twentieth-century wars | Twentieth century | - Economic, ideological, political and territorial causes - Technological developments |
| 12. The Cold War: Tensions Between Superpowers and Rivalries | Twentieth century | - Impact of Leaders from Different Regions on the Development of the Cold War - Social, economic, and cultural impacts and rivalry between the superpowers |

Once again, there is a predominance of leaders, political and legislative causes as the main driver of change in history. Among the social groups considered as minorities, women only appear as historical agents (and still in a position of inferiority in relation to the great leaders) in topics 1, 2, 4, 9, 10 and 11. Even if the IB History guide highlights the concept of historical continuity, it is clear that such a concept is pushed into the background. The study of permanences and continuities in history – theorized by French historians such as Marc Bloch and Fernand Braudel as "long-term history" – aimed to emphasize a more durable narrative, seeking to understand the human behaviors most resistant to change, with the aim of better explaining the present time.

⁶ History guide: first examinations 2020, pp. 34-45, 2015. Free translation by the author of the article.



Before, the historical sources concerned the event and its producer, the great historical character in his historical struggles. Then, they move to the economic-social-mental field, in search of the massive and the serial that reveal the lasting, the permanence and the social structures. The documents will refer to the daily life of the anonymous masses, their productive and commercial life, their consumption, their collective beliefs, and their various forms of organization of social life (LIMA, p. 282, 2013).

Considering once again my own empirical experience, I worked in class with topics 10 and 12, Authoritarian States and Cold War, respectively. Here, the teacher again has 40 hours for each of the chosen topics, which will be charged to the students in questions of the *Paper 2*. Using the Textbook *Authoritarian states : course companion* from Oxford, we have an idea of what the IB considers to be an Authoritarian State. The book has four units, which are:

Unit 1: Egypt - Nasser

Unit 2: Cuba - Castro

Unit 3: China - Mao

Unit 4: Germany - Hitler

Initially, the fact that the history of each of the authoritarian states is directly linked to the name of a leader is already striking, leading to a personalization of history and an erasure of other historical agents. This approach is typical of nineteenth-century historians, with Leopold Van Ranke as one of their main representatives of what Bittencourt calls the *Positivist historicism*.

The followers of this theoretical current dedicated themselves to the study of the irreproducible and unique individuality of human acts, highlighting figures of the elites and their biographies, whether personalities, or states - kings, military, Athens, France, Portugal, Brazil, emperors, governors, presidents. [...] The characters are introduced, and the scenes in which they move are described in detail that make it possible to develop the imaginary in the most reliable way possible (BITTENCOURT, p. 141, 2011).

Just to get an idea of this attempt at a reliable reconstruction of the past, we will use unit 4 (Germany - Hitler). The unit has a total of sixty-four pages (pp. 163-227), beginning with Hitler's rise to power and a brief biography of him, a short history of the Weimar Republic, its economic crisis, and the decline in the 1930s. It then describes the German electoral system and how Hitler managed to become chancellor of the country, to finally declare himself *Führer*. It also describes the demonization of peoples considered enemies of Germany, examples of Hitler's charisma and oratory, the groups that tried to oppose his rule, and the treatment they received.

The unit, unlike the previous book, offers literary, cinematic, and musical perspectives. However, the suggested works are *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's autobiography written during his time in prison; music by Wagner, Hitler's favorite composer; and the 1935 film *Triumph of the Will*, which was produced as Nazi propaganda. There are still sub-chapters on Germany's domestic and foreign policies, and the impact of Nazi policies on women, Jews, and homosexuals, always placing Hitler, his advisors, and laws as protagonists of history. For instance:



Paragraph 175 of the Reich Penal Code, which made "indecent activity" among adult males illegal, predated both the Weimar government and the Nazi regime. The moral condemnation of homosexuality (and abortion) practiced by many conservative elements of German society was not a creation of the Nazis, but under the regime, homosexuals suffered far more brutal punishments than those previously imposed. Paragraph 175 was revised in 1935 by the regime with the intention of broadening the definition of "indecent activities" as well as increasing prison sentences for "offenders"⁷ (BRIAN et al, p. 221, 2015).

The positivist interpretation of history becomes even more evident when we see some examples of proof questions related to the *Paper 2*. Unlike the first test, in which students can analyze documents, the questions are open-ended and short, and students must answer two questions in the form of a long text. Although the IB does not clearly recommend how many words to expect in the answers, the textbooks suggest around 800 to 1000 words, to be answered in a period of an hour and a half. Here we look at some of the issues of *Paper 2*, taken from another IB History course textbook⁸:

- Discuss the impact of education on two authoritarian states, each from a different continent.
- Compare and contrast the use of terror and repression used by two authoritarian leaders.
- Analyze the methods of ascension to power of two authoritarian leaders.
- Discuss the extent to which the authoritarian leaders of two countries have been able to alter the economies of their states.
- For what reasons was there no effective opposition against two authoritarian leaders?

More such questions are easily found on practice websites for the IB History exams. It is noteworthy that most of them have leaders and their actions as the focus of historical study, leaving little room for the different perspectives and plurality of opinions so much talked about in IB manuals. And still with regard to the perspectives and different ideologies, let's go back to the four topics of the textbook *Authoritarian states : course companion* of Oxford. Of the four authoritarian states presented, three of them – Egypt, Cuba and China – have ideologies based on socialism, while only one, Germany, has Nazism, an ideology that is openly against Marxism and left-wing policies. In the case of Hodder's book, *Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states*, we have nine units, and only the unit on Hitler is not a leader with origins in Marxist and socialist social struggles. Although Hodder's textbook has a focus on Juan Domingo Perón, who moved between populism and militarism, there is a clear tendency to associate authoritarianism with left-wing policies.

⁷ BRIAN, Gray; PERERA, Sanjay; AYLWARD, Verity; *et al.* *Authoritarian states : course companion*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁸ Questões livremente traduzidas do livro LYNCH, Michael J. *Origins and development of authoritarian and single-party states*. London: Hodder Education, 2013, p. 163



Being a history course based on the twentieth century, there is obviously the possibility of studying the military dictatorships of Latin America, avowedly anti-Bolshevik governments that aligned themselves with the US throughout the Cold War. Such an option appears in the course *Higher Levelcourse optional* of the IB, and which aims to evaluate through the *Paper 3*, a test that represents 35% of the grade of students who choose to take it. It's in the *Higher Level* that the teacher can make more regional choices of history, because among the options we have the History of Africa and the Middle East; History of the Americas; History of Asia and Oceania and; History of Europe. The geographical classification of the regions would merit an entire article on its limitations, but this article will be limited to the History of the Americas.

Again, for the choice of topics studied for the *Paper 3*, there are a large number of choices, which involve not choosing several other topics. Here, the teacher must choose three of the eighteen topics below:

Table 3: Topics in History of the Americas

| <i>Topic</i> | <i>Time Frame</i> | <i>Some of the suggested topics</i> |
|--|-------------------|--|
| 1. Indigenous Societies and Cultures in the Americas | 750-1500 | - Cultural and economic organizations - polytheistic religiosity - Languages and Contributions to Science and the Arts |
| 2. European explorations and conquests in the Americas | 1492-1600 | - Explorations of Columbus and Cortés - Bartolomeu de las Casas' work with indigenous peoples |
| 3. Colonial Government in the New World | 1500-1800 | - Political organization in Spanish and Portuguese America - Political organization in the British and French colonies in North America |
| 4. Religion in the New World | 1500-1800 | - Indigenous peoples' resistance to Christianization - Political and religious organization of the Franciscans, Jesuits and Dominicans |
| 5. Slavery in the New World | 1500-1800 | - Social and Economic Impact of Slavery - Resistance and rebellions of the enslaved |
| 6. Independence Movements | 1763-1830 | - Political, intellectual, and military contributions from Washington, Bolívar, and San Martín - Military battles in the process of U.S. independence |
| 7. Nation-building and its challenges | 1780-1870 | - Formation of the U.S. Constitution and political system - U.S.-Mexico War (1846–1848) |
| 8. Civil War in the USA: Causes and Effects | 1840-1877 | - Debates between Lincoln and Douglas in the 1860 presidential campaign - The Participation of African Americans in the Civil War |



| | | |
|--|------------|---|
| 9. The development of modern nations | 1865-1929 | - Causes and Consequences of Urbanization and Economic Modernization - Influence, Success, and Failures of Leaders in the Transition to the Modern Era |
| 10. The Emergence of the Americas in Global Affairs | 1880-1929 | - U.S. involvement in World War I - The social, economic, and political impacts of World War I in the Americas |
| 11. The Mexican Revolution | 1884-1940 | - The government of Porfirio Diaz - Leaders of the revolution and their methods: Madero, Villa, Zapata |
| 12. The Great Depression and the Americas | 1920s-1939 | - Franklin Roosevelt e o <i>New Deal</i> - The Impact of the Great Depression on Latin America |
| 13. World War II and the Americas | 1933-1945 | - Franklin Roosevelt and the Good Neighbor Policy - The Impact of World War II on Latin America |
| 14. Political developments in Latin America | 1945-1980 | - The Cuban Revolution and the government of Fidel Castro - The rise of a military government in a country |
| 15. Political Developments in the United States and Canada | 1945-1982 | - The policies of statesmanlike presidents between Truman and Nixon |
| 16. The Cold War and the Americas | 1945-1981 | - The policies of statesmanlike presidents between Truman and Reagan |
| 17. The Civil Rights Movements in the Americas | 1945-1980 | - The performances of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X - Feminist movements |
| 18. The Americas | 1980-2005 | - The policies of U.S. presidents between Reagan and Clinton - The Transition to Democracy in Latin America |

Once again, we have a strong focus on leaders and their actions, as well as a predominance of the United States and its territories in the subjects described as studies of the *Americas*. Not only that, the leaders who deserve to be highlighted are, for the most part, people of European origin in topics related to colonial history, also demonstrating the Coloniality of Power, as described by Aníbal Quijano.

Coloniality is one of the constitutive and specific elements of the world pattern of capitalist power. It is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population as the cornerstone of the aforementioned pattern of power and operates on each of the planes, means and dimensions, material and subjective, of daily social existence and of the societal scale. It originates and is globalized from America (QUIJANO, p. 73, 2009).

The very vocabulary used by the IB in its manual, especially when treating Native Americans as *Indigenous*, points to the Eurocentrism of the coloniality of power, as Quijano describes that terms such as Indians, blacks, olives, yellows, mestizos, and their corresponding intersubjective relations,



were fused with the needs of capitalism in formation throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and were configured under a Eurocentric hegemony, giving rise to what we now call modernity (QUIJANO, p. 74, 2009). Quijano also points out that the world economic rise of the United States, which misappropriated the name "America" (which justifies the course described here calling itself the History of America). *Americas*, always in the plural), has led to this country being included as one of the Eurocentric axes of the coloniality of power. This power is even reproduced in the *Paper 3*, through questions⁹ Type:

- To what extent did the Great Depression lead to the collapse of a democracy in a country in the Americas?
- Examine Eisenhower's foreign policies and assess their impacts on the Americas.
- Analyze the successes and failures of John F. Kennedy's policies toward Latin America between 1961 and 1963.

The selection of the above questions was made with the intention of demonstrating the hegemony of the United States as the main protagonist in the region. Even though the proof of the *Paper 3* have questions focused on other topics, such as "analyze the causes of the Mexican Revolution of 1910", suggesting other historical characters and actors, which predominates in the tests (all *Papers 1, 2* and *3*) is a colonialist and Eurocentric view, which was highlighted earlier by the fact that the IB and its didactic material consider authoritarian states, with the exception of Hitler's Germany, states led by leaders with Marxist ideologies, something that directly agrees with the promotion of liberal capitalism promoted by the American propaganda of the victory of capitalism against other forms of social and governmental organization.

The defenders of the triumphal trajectory of liberal capitalism count the enormous obstacles overcome, associated with various variants of statism (fascisms, militarisms, populisms, communisms). However, it is considered that the dispute is defined in the second half of the twentieth century, with the consolidation of three tendencies: 1st with the defeat of Nazi-fascism, the capitalist powers assume representative democracy as a form of government; 2nd with the end of the Cold War, the stage of systemic conflicts with non-capitalist states ends; 3) The globalization of the economy accentuates the expansion of the market to the detriment of the State, even in countries governed by communist parties (AYERBE, p. 115, 2004).

Historian Luis Ayerbe also points out that the end of the Cold War is used to decree the virtual death of any development proposal that has the State as the central actor of the economy, especially those that seek social equity and the production of wealth distribution mechanisms, thus justifying the focus on associating left-wing policies with authoritarian states. This also explains the

⁹ Questions freely translated from the book MAMAUX, Alexis. *History of the Americas 1880-1981 : course companion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.



prominence given in the didactic materials for the History course of the protagonists of the United States and its leaders.

Finally, we want to draw attention to the fact that the table presents a clear end to the time frame of studies in the year 2005. This is due to the fact that the IB, when considering what history is, limits students' documentary research, prohibiting them from analyzing "events that occurred in the last ten years".¹⁰ The historical investigation of students is called *Internal Assessment*, and students must use two historical sources (primary or secondary), and make an analysis of up to 2200 words of their aims, values, purposes, and limitations. The *Internal Assessment* has a weight of between 20% and 25% of the grade, and the professor must assist the students in their research by providing ten hours of class time for this work. However, by limiting the possible events researched to more than ten years past, the IB shows itself once again to be distant from modern historiographical theories, not allowing topics that converse with sociology or anthropology, also called *History of the Present Time*, which limits the understanding of current issues in their long-term contexts.

The mastery of a history of the present provides contents and methods of analysis that enable students to understand everyday facts devoid of myths or demobilizing fatalisms, in addition to situating events in a broader historical time, in a *duration* that contributes to the understanding of an immediate situation full of emotions (BITTENCOURT, p. 152, 2011).

In addition, the suggestions of word numbers for conducting the research is extremely solid, leaving no room for creativity from students in looking for other ways to research and evaluate sources. Out of a total of 2200 words, 500 are reserved for the analysis of sources, 1300 for historical research, and 400 for a personal reflection of what it was like to do historiographical research. And even though the guide describes that such numbers are only suggestions, my experience in class shows that students who did not follow such a format had their grades severely impaired by external examiners. The rubrics for the grades are vague, with subjective instructions such as "the student has stated an appropriate investigative question," but at no point does the guide provide clear examples of what is considered an "appropriate" question. The same can be said of talking about the rubric that charges the student with a selection of "relevant" sources. For centuries, the historiographical tradition has continued to discuss what makes a source relevant, from traditionally written documents, to interviews used for oral history, and utensils of material culture.

Nothing is a source by its very nature and it is the problem posed by the historian who, by identifying a trait that provides an answer, thus transforms a document into a historical source. [...] It is up to the historian, therefore, to select and delimit the appropriate sources for his research. Sources that will be organized by series, or will be composed of archaeological sets or oral interviews (MONIOT apud BITTENCOURT, pp. 328-329, 2011).

¹⁰ History guide: first examinations 2020, p. 85, 2015. Free translation by the author of the article.



For a classical nineteenth-century historian, using personal letters or photographs as historical sources would not be "appropriate" or "relevant." Similarly, the exclusive use of official government documents is not recommended in modern academic works. This makes the evaluation of the *Internal Assessment* It is extremely subjective, because each historian can use his or her bias to use different sources, and such sources can be analyzed in the light of new questions that had not been asked previously.

THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE AND THE COMMON NATIONAL CURRICULUM

There is one last question to be discussed in this article. How (and if) does the IB dialogue with the BNCC? To start this discussion, it is necessary to contextualize the Brazilian schools that use the *Diploma Program* in your high school. The International Job Site *Search Associates* indicates, at the time of writing this article, fifteen schools that use the IB as the basis of their curriculum. All these schools are bilingual and/or international, and have monthly fees that can exceed R\$10,000.00. In other words, in the case of Brazil, the IB is extremely elitist, targeting students who most of the time do not even intend to study in colleges in our country.

By demonstrating the traditionalist historical approaches that tend to defend a capitalist and liberal society, all this added to the public that has access to the type of education offered by the program, the IB hardly offers a content of social transformation and liberation, especially considering that the History course is a course *optional* in the IB curriculum. This makes it difficult to offer these elite students an education with a real possibility of social transformation.

Such an idea can never envisage a freedom in communion. The oppressor is not free either, because he is trapped in a system of oppression that gives him meaning. Without it, its way of being loses its meaning, hence the difficulty on its part in the processes of emancipation. Every emancipatory project implies displacements of position, and those who are most bothered by this are those who are the oppressors (OLIVEIRA, p. 210, 2017).

By proposing an extremely specialized and content-based story, in which students are exhaustively exposed to a few topics to the detriment of other important subjects, the IB itself, with its philosophy of listening to "multiple perspectives and plurality of opinions", deprives students of having exactly that opportunity, making them delve too deeply into too few subjects, alienating them from a macro view of history.

The evidence of *Paper 2* and *Paper 3*, by asking vague and open questions, are still very much based on nineteenth-century teaching methods, which was the reproduction of memorized information, without reflections on the present. "Learning history meant knowing names and facts by heart with their dates, repeating exactly what was written in the book or copied in the notebooks" (BITTENCOURT, p. 67, 2011). Although the IB does not require a repeat *exact* From the contents of



the books, the History rubrics demand "accurate and relevant knowledge, with events placed in their historical context"¹¹, without reflection on how such events affect the world today.

Nowhere in the IB History course guide is the word "prejudice" even mentioned. When compared with the BNCC, the difference in philosophy of understanding of the human sciences and their role in social transformation is evident.

Understanding ethics as a judgment of appreciation of human conduct, necessary for living in society, and on whose bases the ideas of justice, solidarity and free will stand out, this proposal is based on the understanding and recognition of differences, respect for human rights and interculturality, and the fight against prejudice (BNCC, p. 547, 2017).

There are times when both IB and BNCC documents agree, such as the idea of multiple perspectives in the former and the "challenge of developing students' ability to establish dialogues between individuals, social groups and citizens of different nationalities, knowledge and cultures"¹² in the second. But it's in the expectations of what students should develop and learn that we see the biggest differences between both programs.

Table 4: Learning Expectations

| <i>International Baccalaureate</i> ¹³ | <i>Base Nacional Comum Curricular</i> ¹⁴ |
|--|--|
| Do a detailed analysis of sources, with an explicit discussion of their values and limitations | Analyze political, economic, social, environmental and cultural processes at the local, regional, national and global levels at different times [...] and take a critical stance in relation to these processes and the possible relationships between them. |
| Produce coherent and organized research | Analyze the formation of territories and borders in different times and spaces, through the understanding of the social, political, economic and cultural processes that generate conflict and negotiation, inequality and equality, exclusion and inclusion and situations that involve the arbitrary exercise of power |
| Use a variety of sources to support your arguments | Contextualize, analyze and critically evaluate the relations of societies with nature and its economic and socio-environmental impacts, with a view to proposing solutions that respect and promote socio-environmental awareness and ethics and responsible consumption at the local, regional, national and global levels. |
| Evaluate different perspectives | Analyze the relations of production, capital and labor in different territories, contexts and cultures, discussing the role of these relations in the construction, consolidation and transformation of societies |
| Reach consistent conclusions based on the evidence presented in the sources | Recognize and combat the various forms of inequality and violence, adopting ethical, democratic, inclusive |

¹¹ History guide: first examinations 2020, p. 85, 2015. Free translation by the author of the article.

¹² Base Nacional Comum Curricular, p. 548, 2017.

¹³ History guide: first examinations 2020, pp. 88-90, 2015. Free translation by the author of the article.

¹⁴ Base Nacional Comum Curricular, p. 558, 2017.



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| | and supportive principles, and respecting Human Rights. |
| Reflect on the challenges faced by historians | Participate, personally and collectively, in the public debate in a conscious and qualified way, respecting different positions, with a view to enabling choices aligned with the exercise of citizenship and their life project, with freedom, autonomy, critical awareness and responsibility |
| Demonstrate knowledge through detailed, accurate, and relevant answers | Analyze objects of material and immaterial culture as a support for knowledge, values, beliefs and practices that singularize different societies inserted in time and space |
| Give answers that make effective and appropriate comparisons to what they have been asked | Analyze and characterize the dynamics of populations, commodities and capital in the various continents, with emphasis on the mobility and settlement of people, human groups and peoples, as a function of natural, political, economic, social and cultural events |

It is evident that the IB method is much more focused on answers and content, while the BNCC converses with modern tendencies in historiography, which seek a renewed understanding of the past, which "will serve to develop the legitimations on which the acceptance of the present is based, and, above all, because it allows us to reconstruct a line of progress that we can project for the class of future that we wish to achieve" (FONTANA, p. 261, 1999).

The implementation and popularization of the IB in Brazilian elite schools serve mainly to maintain the *status quo*. It has a content-based approach and a disingenuous discourse of plurality, which meets the interests "from the point of view of the dominant interests, [because] there is no doubt that [oppressive] education must be an immobilizing and concealing practice of truths" (FREIRE, p. 111, 1996). With its discourse of presenting "multiple perspectives and plurality of opinions", the "dominant education is progressive in its own way, progressive "by half" (FREIRE, p. 111. 1996).

This article sought to demonstrate the contradictions between what the History guide of the IB course theorizes, and between what it is in practice. This work can be expanded and deepened for each of the *Papers* presented, in addition to explaining, in future articles, the difficulties of working with academic research in the program *International Baccalaureate*. My empirical experience and informal conversations with other teachers from other areas suggest that the curricular adaptation to other areas of knowledge, such as biology, chemistry or foreign languages, is comparatively easier and closer to the BNCC than in the case of History, especially because the international curriculum requires other knowledge from different places in our country. However, I can't help but worry about the contradictions inherent in the IB's own textbooks and teaching materials. I end the article by agreeing with one of Paulo Freire's greatest statements, which said that one of the central concerns of



the teacher should "be to seek an ever greater approximation between what I say and what I do, between what I seem to be and what I really am" (FREIRE, p. 108, 1996).



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