

THEORETICAL DEFICIT IN INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING IN BRAZIL: AN ANALYSIS OF CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS PRODUCED BETWEEN 2001 AND 2024

ESVAZIAMENTO TEÓRICO NA FORMAÇÃO INICIAL DE PROFESSORES NO BRASIL: UMA ANÁLISE DOS DOCUMENTOS CURRICULARES PRODUZIDOS NO PERÍODO 2001–2024

VACIAMIENTO TEÓRICO EN LA FORMACIÓN INICIAL DEL PROFESORADO EN BRASIL: UN ANÁLISIS DE LOS DOCUMENTOS CURRICULARES ELABORADOS ENTRE 2001 Y 2024



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ABSTRACT: This study analyzes the theoretical emptying movement present in the formulation of national curriculum guidelines produced for teacher training in the period 2001–2024. Three specific objectives were outlined: to understand the field of teacher training in dispute; to examine the curricular documents that regulate teacher training; and to problematize the points of convergence between these curricular documents and their effects on teacher training. The research was anchored in the assumptions of the qualitative approach by discussing teacher training and in the theoretical contributions of André (2016), Contreras (2002), Giroux (1997), and Nóvoa (2017). The study demonstrates that there is an alignment of the documents with the guidelines of multilateral organizations, especially when they criticize the “theoretical knowledge” present in university teacher training. The intention, therefore, is to empty initial teacher training of theoretical content and saturate it with practices that can contribute to the de-intellectualization of teaching.

KEYWORDS: Public education policies. Teacher training. Curriculum. Neoliberalism.

RESUMO: Este estudo analisa o movimento de esvaziamento teórico presente na formulação das diretrizes curriculares nacionais produzidas para a formação de professores no período 2001–2024. Foram delineados três objetivos específicos: compreender o campo da formação de professores em disputa; examinar os documentos curriculares que regulam a formação de professores; e problematizar os pontos de convergência entre esses documentos curriculares e os seus efeitos para a formação de professores. A pesquisa ancorou-se nos pressupostos da abordagem qualitativa por colocar em discussão a formação de professores e nas contribuições teóricas de André (2016), Contreras (2002), Giroux (1997) e Nóvoa (2017). O estudo demonstra que há um alinhamento dos documentos com as orientações de organismos multilaterais, sobretudo quando fazem a crítica ao “conhecimento teórico” presente na formação universitária de professores. Pretende-se, portanto, esvaziar a formação inicial de professores de conteúdos teóricos e encharcá-los de práticas que podem contribuir para a desintelectualização da docência.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas públicas educacionais. Formação de professores. Currículo. Neoliberalismo.

RESUMEN: Este estudio analiza el vaciamiento teórico presente en la formulación de las directrices curriculares nacionales para la formación docente en el periodo 2001–2024. Se plantearon tres objetivos específicos: comprender el campo de la formación docente en disputa; examinar los documentos curriculares que la regulan; y problematizar los puntos de convergencia entre estos documentos y sus efectos en la formación docente. La investigación se fundamentó en los supuestos del enfoque cualitativo, analizando la formación docente y las contribuciones teóricas de André (2016), Contreras (2002), Giroux (1997) y Nóvoa (2017). El estudio demuestra que existe una alineación de los documentos con las directrices de las organizaciones multilaterales, especialmente cuando critican el “conocimiento teórico” presente en la formación docente universitaria. La intención, por lo tanto, es vaciar la formación inicial del profesorado de contenido teórico y saturarla con prácticas que contribuyan a la desintelectualización de la docencia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Políticas de educación pública. Formación docente. Currículo. Neoliberalismo.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a social practice shaped by social, political, economic, and cultural factors. Neoliberalism has exerted a strong influence on the structure of schools and on the formation of individuals to adapt to the profound changes arising from the world of work. To shape individuals in line with the principles of neoliberalism, it is necessary to develop a neoliberal pedagogy, as Debiasi and Muller (2024) point out. For these authors, neoliberalism cannot be understood solely through a socio-political-economic lens, as cultural elements are fundamental to forging the identities that drive the functioning of the neoliberal machine. This assertion becomes evident when analyzing the set of neoliberal-oriented educational policies instituted beginning in the 1990s.

School education contributes to the production of subjectivities aligned with neoliberal precepts, since the adherence of the actors (teachers and students) is essential for the perpetuation of this system. Within the school environment, this rationality manifests itself and regulates the actors through the curriculum. The central role given to the curriculum in public education policies—especially in the development of curriculum documents—is therefore no accident. In this context, teacher training becomes a battleground for competing visions of education: those based on neoliberal principles and those committed to social transformation.

The studies by Giroux (1997) and Contreras (2002) highlight the importance of understanding teacher training and the teaching profession as an intellectual activity, given the need to move beyond the technical-instrumental rationality emphasized by social, political, economic, and cultural constraints. Thus, the theoretical dimension of teacher training and the teaching profession must be strengthened, not undermined. This is not a one-time erosion, but rather a continuous trend that has been unfolding since the late 1990s with the implementation of various public education policies. In the case of curriculum guidelines for initial teacher training, this trend began in the 2000s.

Based on these reflections, the general objective of this article is to analyze the trend of theoretical erosion present in the formulation of curriculum guidelines for teacher training from 2001 to 2024. To this end, this study aims to fulfill three specific objectives: 1) to understand the contested field of teacher training; 2) to examine the curriculum documents regulating teacher training produced between 2001 and 2024; and 3) to critically examine the convergences among these documents and their impacts on teacher training.

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on document analysis to examine in depth the process of developing curriculum guidelines for teacher training. The objective is to understand this phenomenon as the result of qualitative transformations and to identify, through the documents, elements that reveal the processes of initial teacher training at the undergraduate level.

The structure of this article includes a brief introduction, followed by a section that contextualizes teacher training within the context of competing educational projects. Next, an analysis of normative curriculum documents and their impacts on teaching is presented. Finally, the article concludes with concluding remarks and the bibliographic references used.

TEACHER TRAINING IN DISPUTE

In Brazil, the importance of teacher training has grown considerably in educational research, as schools have been challenged to develop educational programs that meet the demands of the workforce. Consequently, the role of the teacher and the processes involved in teacher training have become the focus of studies and research based on various theoretical perspectives. According to García (2012),

Teacher training is the field of knowledge, research, and theoretical and practical proposals that, within the scope of pedagogy and school organization, studies the processes through which teachers—whether in training or currently practicing—engage, individually or as a team, in learning experiences through which they acquire or improve their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and which enable them to contribute professionally to the development of their teaching, the curriculum, and the school, with the goal of improving the quality of education that students receive. (García, 2012, p. 26)

It can therefore be observed that the field of teacher training, which was initially very strongly linked to traditional pedagogical disciplines such as Didactics and School Organization, has undergone a significant shift in its trajectory. This trajectory culminated in a consolidation that established it as an autonomous field of research of growing relevance within the Educational Sciences.

In the Brazilian context, the origins and development of studies on teacher training were, for a long time, intrinsically linked and disseminated through key events, most notably the National Conference on Didactics and Teaching Practice (Endipe). This event served as

one of the main platforms for the presentation and discussion of early and ongoing research on the topic. Thus, teacher training, which was once a subtopic of Didactics, has now emerged as a well-established field of research with a clearly defined scope, featuring studies that employ diverse theoretical and methodological approaches and occupying an undeniably central role in debates on the quality of education.

In the 1990s, Brazil embarked on a movement to reform the state, driven by a vision that advocated minimizing its direct role in the economy and in the provision of services. The central tenet of this perspective was the belief that efficiency and quality in the provision of goods and services could be significantly improved by transferring responsibilities and assets to the private sector, with the aim of transforming social rights into services subject to free-market competition.

In order for this reform agenda to move forward without encountering insurmountable political resistance, it became necessary to develop effective strategies for building consensus within society. One of the key tactics used to justify and legitimize privatization and the reduction of the state's presence was to discredit the management capacity and efficiency of public institutions. It became standard government practice to let the physical, technological, and human infrastructure of state-run services and enterprises fall into disrepair. By exposing the precarious state of public services, the government created an environment conducive to arguing that the only viable and modern solution was privatization, presented as the inevitable path to modernization and a guarantee of quality in the provision of these 'services.'

The state ceases to be the primary entity directly responsible for the provision and implementation of social policies and instead assumes the role of a regulatory state. In this way, it contributed significantly to various public policies coming under the control of specialized national regulatory agencies or, more broadly, being regulated by rigorous performance and results evaluation processes.

In the field of education, the changes implemented were driven by guidelines from influential multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which sought to promote a profound realignment of schools with the demands of the labor market and the globalized economy.

It is within this context of redefining the role of the state and aligning with global agendas that what is taught and learned in schools has become the central focus of analysis and intervention in educational policies. The implementation of national curriculum

documents, such as the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs) and, more recently, the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC), reflects this concern with standardization and control over content. At the same time, concerns regarding the use of new technologies in education, the restructuring of initial and continuing teacher training, the growing commodification and commercialization of education (with the expansion of the private sector and the application of consumerist logic to teaching), the restructuring of school administration from a managerialist perspective, and the adoption of large-scale assessments have gradually been incorporated into the Brazilian educational context. All these elements converge to give rise to the principles of a neoliberal pedagogy.

The curriculum, organized by competencies and skills, has taken center stage in this context for the development of the “productive citizen.” Similarly, the processes of tracking and monitoring this curriculum through large-scale exams—both in basic education (such as the Saeb and Enem) and in higher education (such as the Enade)—have become essential tools for regulating and comparing systems and institutions.

In this context, teachers have gained a prominent role in public policy, particularly due to the profusion of documents produced by the Brazilian government that detail how they should be trained, evaluated, recruited, and managed within the professional field, transforming them into key players for the success of the reform agenda while simultaneously subjecting them to intense pressure to deliver results.

Antônio Nóvoa (2017) stands out in the debate on teacher training, as his research spans both the global stage and the Brazilian context. His studies and reflections are incorporated and debated in academic circles and in the development of educational policies. He emphasizes that professional development is a continuous and reflective process, deeply linked to the experience and practical context of teaching, and is reflected in various Brazilian teacher training policies, such as the Teaching Initiation Scholarship Program (PIBID), created in 2007 by the Ministry of Education as a government initiative that reflects a commitment to overcoming the traditional dichotomy between theory and practice. Nóvoa (2017) advocates for valuing teaching experience and the school as the primary locus of professional development, transforming the teacher into a researcher and agent of their own professional development. He emphasizes the importance of valuing and training teachers, placing them at the center of the educational process as reflective and autonomous professionals, essential for building a more just and effective school.

All teacher training must be informed by the professional dimension—not in a technical or applied sense, but in terms of positioning teaching as a knowledge-based profession. Training should be structured in an alternating pattern, with periods of strong theoretical focus in academic disciplines and the educational sciences, followed by periods of work in schools, during which new problems arise to be studied through reflection and research. (Nóvoa, 2017, p. 1116)

According to Nóvoa (2017), teacher training is based on the integration of theoretical foundations and the opportunity to engage in formative experiences within the school context in a reflective and investigative manner. This critical and problematizing pedagogical practice, however, is under increasing threat, as managerial models of education administration—imported from the corporate sector—have contributed to the excessive rationalization and bureaucratization of teaching work. This rationalized management system, focused on efficiency metrics and standardized outcomes, promotes the intensification of work, resulting in an excessive expansion of responsibilities. This intensification manifests itself not only in increased classroom hours or time spent grading assignments, but primarily in an overload of administrative tasks, the completion of detailed reports to meet the system's bureaucratic demands, and the need to align planning with strictly controlled curricula and assessments:

As the processes of control, technicality, and intensification increase, teachers tend to interpret this expansion of technical responsibilities as an enhancement of their professional competencies. Thus, although their dependence on experts and administrators in setting the curriculum has grown, they have had to master a new, broader range of technical skills, which lend special legitimacy to their work because they are grounded in scientific knowledge or “rational” procedures, focusing their responsibility on such tasks and accepting that this requires greater dedication. (Contreras, 2002, p. 40)

In this regard, the expansion of teachers' responsibilities—particularly with the platformization of their professional activities, as evidenced by the mandatory use of online journals, academic management systems, and virtual learning environments as central tools for communication, record-keeping, and pedagogical monitoring—along with the growing demand for online professional development to comply with regulations and develop new digital skills, contributes significantly to transforming teachers into educational technologists.

This overload of bureaucratic tasks seeks to standardize teaching work and promotes a substantial intellectual disengagement from educational practices. The time that would otherwise be devoted to in-depth pedagogical planning, critical reflection on practice, research into new theoretical and methodological approaches, and individualized student support is increasingly absorbed by filling out digital forms, constantly entering data into systems, and managing multiple platforms.

The resulting de-intellectualization of work leads to a progressive loss of teachers' autonomy. The curriculum becomes more rigid, and freedom of methodological choice is curtailed by the need to feed standardized data into the systems. Teachers become mere executors of protocols and managers of platforms, to the detriment of their role as intellectuals and mediators of knowledge, resulting in the precariousness of their pedagogical practice and a shift away from the primary focus of teaching, which is the teaching-learning process in all its human and social complexity.

autonomy must be understood as intellectual independence, justified by the idea of personal emancipation from authority and repressive control, and by overcoming ideological dependencies through the critical questioning of our conception of education and society. This critical stance, by becoming a process of emancipation for teachers, enables them to fulfill the role of critical detachment they are obliged to assume in relation to the civic culture they teach in school. (Contreras, 2002, p. 204)

The de-intellectualization of teacher training and teaching is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, deeply rooted in educational policies and contemporary social transformations. This theoretical and reflective regression is clearly evident in the decline of theoretical rigor and conceptual depth in teacher-training programs, a trend that has intensified with the creation of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Teacher training (DCN).

One of the most notable signs of this intellectual hollowing-out lies, for example, in the increase in the number of hours dedicated to practical activities in teacher training programs, often at the expense of a solid theoretical foundation and the necessary mastery of the conceptual frameworks that underpin pedagogical practice. This excessive emphasis on 'doing' over 'thinking' reduces the teacher to a mere technician who carries out prescribed curricula and methodologies, undermining their capacity for critical analysis, research, and autonomous intervention in the educational reality.

In this context, the claim that technical rationality permeates and dominates both teacher training and the practice of the teaching profession finds resonance in critical analyses, such as those developed by Henry Giroux (1997). According to the author, the hegemony of technical rationality transforms pedagogy into a set of neutral skills and techniques, divorced from ethical, political, and ideological issues. This technification of teaching depoliticizes the educational act and undermines the teacher's role as a transformative intellectual, limiting their role to an instrumental one.

Every time education professionals, lured by the apparent time savings or by an overload of duties, relinquish essential parts of their work—especially those of an intellectual and creative nature, such as developing original lesson plans, curating diverse materials, and creating contextualized assessment tools—they actively contribute to the erosion of the profession itself. The outsourcing of these core tasks to private companies that produce textbooks and other instructional materials—including lesson plans—enables the transfer of control over the curriculum and pedagogy to market logic, transforming the teacher from an intellectual into a technician who merely reproduces content.

From the perspective of understanding teacher training processes, it is pertinent to revisit the importance of teachers' intellectual capacity:

The category of intellectual is useful in several ways. First, it provides a theoretical basis for examining teaching as a form of intellectual labor, in contrast to its definition in purely instrumental or technical terms. Second, it clarifies the types of ideological and practical conditions necessary for teachers to function as intellectuals. Third, it helps clarify the role that teachers play in the production and legitimization of various political, economic, and social interests through the pedagogies they endorse and employ. (Giroux, 1997, p. 161)

As an institution that trains teachers, the university bears the responsibility of going beyond the mere and superficial transmission of technical and practical knowledge. The critical and transformative training of teachers is an ethical and political imperative grounded in pedagogical projects that incorporate discussions about the true social function of schools in an unequal society, the intricate power relations that manifest and reproduce themselves in the hidden and explicit curriculum, in classroom practices, and in the educational structure itself, and the central role of the educator as a reflective intellectual who thinks critically about their practice, their assumptions, and the complex reality in which they operate.

This necessarily implies equipping future teachers with a robust theoretical framework that enables them to uncover relations of domination and oppression and to design educational projects as instruments for intervening in and transforming reality. André (2016) emphasizes that the integration of research into teacher-training processes is a catalytic element that can decisively contribute to training teachers with a high level of critical and transformative potential, capable of going beyond prescribed practices and innovating through reflection on their own practice and the challenges of reality.

The discussions presented here contribute to an understanding of teacher training as a field of contention between technical-instrumental rationality and the critical-transformative perspective. Technical-instrumental rationality aligns with neoliberal assumptions, while the critical-transformative perspective offers insights for creating spaces of resistance to the de-intellectualization of teacher training and the teaching profession. The contributions of Nóvoa (2017), Giroux (1997), and Contreras (2002)—recognized by researchers in the field of teacher training as seminal authors—provide insights for analyzing the curriculum documents produced in Brazil that regulate teacher training.

CURRICULAR DOCUMENTS REGULATING TEACHER TRAINING DURING THE 2001–2024 PERIOD

An analysis of the development of curriculum guidelines for initial and continuing teacher training from 2001 to 2024 requires, as a methodological starting point, a rigorous definition of the normative and guiding documents to be included in the study. Initially, the time frame of 2001–2024 was selected, as it was during this period that the Brazilian government expanded the production of normative documents governing public education policies, particularly those aimed at teacher training. Felipe et al. (2021) state that “public policy is an arena of struggle where social groups and sectors seek to represent their demands and choices, and whose outcomes depend on the power relations established in the processes of policy formulation” (pp. 128–129).

To identify the documents establishing the national curriculum guidelines for the training of teachers intended to work in Basic Education, a survey was conducted on the official platform of the Ministry of Education (MEC). This initial search process resulted in the identification of a broad and diverse set of 22 documents addressing different aspects of teacher training. The documents were initially classified into three main categories, according to their legal nature and regulatory function: opinions, decrees, and resolutions.

After collection, the 22 documents were reviewed in a preliminary reading to select those that aligned with the study's focus. The final selection of documents consisted of opinions and resolutions regarding teacher training policy in Brazil. These documents were prioritized because they are, as a rule, more robust from a conceptual and descriptive standpoint. They contain the theoretical foundations, debates, and justifications that clarify the regulatory body's (the National Education Council—CNE) understanding of the nature of teaching, the desired professional profile, and the principles that should govern the curricular structure of teacher training programs.

This selection and filtering process resulted in a final document corpus consisting of a total of four opinions issued by the National Education Council (CNE). The following table provides a detailed description and contextualization of the selected curriculum documents (Table 1).

Table 1.

Curriculum documents on teacher training produced since the 2000s

National Curriculum Guidelines for Teacher Training	Year
CNE/CP Opinion No. 9/2001, approved on May 8, 2001 – National Curriculum Guidelines for the Training of Basic Education Teachers at the higher education level, including teaching degree programs and full undergraduate programs.	2001
CNE/CP Resolution No. 2, dated July 1, 2015 – Defines the National Curriculum Guidelines for initial training at the higher education level (teaching degree programs, pedagogical training programs for graduates, and second teaching degree programs) and for continuing education.	2015
CNE/CP Opinion No. 22/2019, approved on November 7, 2019 – National Curriculum Guidelines for the Initial Training of Teachers for Basic Education and the National Common Framework for the Initial Training of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-Formação).	2019
Opinion CNE/CP No. 4/2024, approved on March 12, 2024 – National Curriculum Guidelines for Initial Training at the Higher Education Level for Teaching Professionals in Basic School Education (teaching degree programs, pedagogical training programs for non-teaching graduates, and second teaching degree programs).	2024

Note. Research data (2026).

An analysis of Table 1 shows that changes to the curriculum guidelines occurred consistently, with varying time intervals between one document and the next. The only exceptions are the 2001 and 2015 guidelines, which had an implementation period of 14 years. These short time intervals make it difficult for a public policy on teacher training to be established, consolidated, and evaluated with the quality and accountability required by any educational project. Policies for implementing and consolidating curricular changes must be

monitored by the Ministry of Education and the universities' Internal Evaluation Committees (CPA) through various strategies, as well as evaluation and self-evaluation.

EXAMINING THE EROSION OF THEORETICAL CONTENT IN INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING IN THE SELECTED CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS

Based on a review of the selected curriculum documents, it became clear that teacher training has evolved into a field of contention between different educational projects, such as neoliberal technical rationality and the critical-transformative perspective. The reports highlight that the development of these documents involved varying levels of participation, sometimes guided by public consultations and other times by discussion forums involving universities, research associations, unions, social movements, and other segments of society.

Another aspect that stands out in the various documents is the emphasis on organizing the curriculum around competencies rather than theoretical knowledge. Teacher training has come to be understood as the result of acquiring a set of competencies that undermine theoretical content. These competencies are used to structure the curriculum and, subsequently, as assessment indicators.

The rise of the notion of competence as a principle of curriculum organization is linked to the neoliberal model; to changes in the process of capitalist production and accumulation; to the paradigm of flexible production, which entails ideas of autonomy, flexibility, transferability, and adaptability to new situations; and to knowledge that has come to hold high value in terms of capitalization. Thus, current forms of social organization, scientific and technological transformations, changes in the organization of production systems, the development of employment policies, and the pursuit of flexibility in companies have led to the emergence of the concept of competence—not as a new notion, but as one that has been redefined in its meaning and significance. (Silva & Cruz, 2021, p. 95)

The analysis of the data initially helped us understand the distribution of class time between theoretical and practical content; to this end, Table 2 was created. Another aspect that emerged from the analysis was the way in which the reports address the concept of practice.

Although the documents treat theoretical content with a certain degree of disdain—since it is not considered to have direct application in school practice—or, conversely,

emphasize the importance of the relationship between theory and practice, what is observed in Table 2 is a significant increase in the number of class hours allocated to practical training.

Table 2.
Course load and distribution in teaching degrees

Reference document	Course load	Course load distribution
Opinion 9/2001	2,800 hours	400 hours of practical training as part of the curriculum; 400 hours of supervised curricular internship; 1,800 hours for scientific and cultural content; 200 hours for other types of academic, scientific, and cultural activities.
CNE/CP Resolution No. 2, dated 7/2015	3,200 hours	400 hours of practical training as part of the curriculum; 400 hours of internship; 2,200 hours of training activities in Clusters I and II; 200 hours for other activities of interest to the student (Cluster III).
CNE/CP Opinion 22/2019	3,200 hours	800 hours of Common Core (scientific and pedagogical knowledge); 1,600 hours of subject-specific content and pedagogical expertise; 800 hours of teaching practice (400 hours of internship + 400 hours of practice in the components of Groups I and II).
CNE/CP Opinion 4/2024	3,200 hours	880 hours of General Education (common core) 1,600 hours of subject-specific content • 320 hours of Outreach Activities (AAE) and 400 hours of Supervised Internship.

Note. Research data (2026).

An analysis of Table 2 shows, first, an increase in the course load from 2,800 hours to 3,200 hours for undergraduate teacher-training programs. The distribution of the course load in these programs highlights a distinction between practical and theoretical content. Thus, the understanding of the unity of theory and practice is compromised by this distinction between theoretical and practical content. While the LDB 9394/96 specified that the internship workload was 300 hours, the guidelines regulating initial teacher training expanded it to 400 hours. All guidelines issued after the LDB also added specific hours for practical training, such as “Practice as a Curricular Component” in the guidelines of 2001, 2015, and 2019. The 2024 Guideline excludes “Practice as a Curricular Component” and adds 320 hours of Outreach Activities, which must be conducted in person—including in distance learning courses—to ensure interaction with the school community (Brasil, 2024). It is understood that practice should permeate the entire educational program, occurring even within specific content-based courses, which also have their own practical dimension.

Table 3.*The concept of practice in the documents*

Document	Selected excerpts on the concept of practice
CNE/CP Opinion No. 9/2001	“Conceiving of practice more as a curricular component implies viewing it as a dimension of knowledge that is present both in teacher-training programs... and during student teaching.” “The general methodological principle is that all action involves reflection, and all reflection involves action.”
CNE/CP Opinion No. 22/2019 (BNC- Formação)	“It is through practice—as a parallel between processes—that the teacher-candidate experiences, during the course of their training, the same learning processes that they are expected to facilitate with their students.” “Teaching practice is the continuous connection between the object of knowledge and the object of instruction.”
CNE/CP Resolution No. 2, dated 7/2015	“V – the integration of theory and practice in the teacher-training process, grounded in mastery of scientific and pedagogical knowledge, recognizing the inseparable nature of teaching, research, and community engagement.”
CNE/CP Opinion No. 4/2024	“Initial training must be based on an organic relationship between theory and practice, achieved by integrating the latter into the former, which provides essential tools for planning future teaching practices.” “...teaching work, organized through praxis as an expression of the integration between theory and practice.”

Note. Research data (2026).

The documents analyzed criticize the training model in which the university classroom is the setting for theory and the internship is the isolated setting for practice.

Opinion CNE/CP 9/2001 defines practice as inseparable from theory, establishing that all courses (not just those in education) must include a practical component that must be addressed (Brasil, 2001). To address this supposed “emphasis on theoretical training at the expense of practice,” “Practice as a Curricular Component” (PCC) was proposed and established in 2001; this required that practice take place within specific areas of knowledge, rather than solely in “Teaching Practice” courses. Kuenzer (2024) points out that

The most relevant issue to discuss, however, is the centrality of teaching as the cornerstone of teacher training, rather than the centrality of the science of education—a debate that has been conducted in depth and with great intensity since the mid-1990s. Even though the texts of the resolutions affirmed the necessary integration between theory and practice, the disregard for the epistemological principle that defines this relationship ultimately manifested itself, in the curriculum proposals analyzed here, in a pragmatic-utilitarian stance, in which only what is useful is recognized: academic knowledge and methodologies. (Kuenzer, 2024, p. 7)

Opinion CNE/CP 22/2019 (BNC-Training) introduces the alignment of processes, requiring consistency between how teaching is conducted at the institution of higher education (IES) and how teachers will perform in schools (Brasil, 2019). This practice must be present from the outset of teacher training and integrated into the curriculum components.

From this perspective, teacher training programs should fundamentally base their curricular organization on the competencies established in the National Common Core Curriculum. It is worth noting that this curricular document ignored the contributions made by universities through their graduate programs and by associations such as the National Association for Educational Research (ANPED) and the National Association for Teacher training (ANFOPE). Thus, practice was treated as the instrumental and technical application of knowledge, which hindered the development of a curriculum that would promote teacher training guided by the principles of scientific research. Felipe et al. (2021) emphasize that, in initial teacher training,

Teachers must be intellectually equipped to engage with the challenges of their time and provided with the conditions to act pedagogically in diverse and pluralistic educational contexts. Research is a fundamental component of this process, both for improving educational practices and for constructing, innovating, and disseminating knowledge in this field. Training for autonomy is what will give teachers the best tools to deal with uncertainty and novelty, as well as with the concrete problems of educational institutions—problems that are so complex they defy simplification into professional profiles. (Felipe et al., 2021, p. 149)

Resolution CNE/CP No. 2, dated July 2015, emphasizes the importance of the relationship between theory and practice in university education, which connects scientific and pedagogical knowledge, based on the inseparability of teaching, research, and community outreach (Brasil, 2015). This curriculum document has already benefited from broader societal participation through universities, associations representing the field of education, labor unions, and social movements.

Opinion CNE/CP 4/2024 reaffirms the inseparable link between theory and practice. It defines practice as a tool for constantly improving pedagogical practice, integrated with curricular components and extension activities (Brasil, 2024). Extension activities are understood as a way to promote the understanding of scientific knowledge combined with the goal of transforming reality. It also clarifies the term “educational praxis” as a means of integrating theory and practice.

Tables 2 and 3 show the distribution of course hours between theoretical and practical curriculum components, neglecting the understanding of the unity of theory and practice.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reflections presented here reveal that the educational policies implemented by the Brazilian government are aligned with the principles of neoliberalism and the guidelines of multilateral organizations such as UNESCO, the OECD, and the World Bank. These principles and guidelines highlight the role of schools and teachers in preparing well-rounded, flexible individuals who can adapt to the new demands of the workforce. Consequently, over the past three decades, teachers and their training have come to occupy a central place in curriculum documents.

The overall objective of this article was to analyze the trend toward theoretical hollowing out in the formulation of curriculum guidelines for teacher training from 2001 to 2024. This analysis was based on a selection of four curriculum documents, namely: Opinion 09/2001, CNE/CP Resolution No. 2 of July 2015, Opinion CNE/CP 22/2019, and Opinion CNE/CP 4/2024 (Brasil, 2001, 2015, 2019, 2024). The documents were selected for the robustness of the information they provide regarding the conception of teacher training.

The first specific objective sought to understand the contested field of teacher training. In a neoliberal context that demands the training of increasingly flexible, versatile, and adaptable individuals, teachers and their training have become the subject of competition among different educational and societal projects. Although education plays an important role in transforming society, this transformation must be regulated to meet the demands of the world of work. This, therefore, diverges from critical-emancipatory conceptions of education.

The second specific objective was to examine the curriculum documents regulating teacher training produced between 2000 and 2024. From these curriculum documents, four policy statements were selected that indicate the type of teacher training and the kind of teacher intended to be trained. In general, the documents propose a technical-instrumental training based on the development of competencies and with a significant portion of the curriculum dedicated to practical experience. They thus reaffirm the dichotomy between theory and practice, rather than their unity. With regard to the teacher, the aim is to train a “superteacher,” with an extensive list of competencies that must be developed through teacher training programs.

As for the third objective, the aim was to examine the similarities among these documents and their impact on teacher training. Of the four documents analyzed, the 2001 and 2019 reports were produced by center-right governments, while the 2015 and 2024 reports were produced by left-wing governments. In both sets of documents, an alignment

with the guidelines of multilateral organizations is evident, as noted throughout the study, particularly when they critique the “theoretical knowledge” present in university-level teacher training.

The 2015 and 2024 reports, however, differ in that they were developed in a more participatory manner and respect the scientific knowledge produced by the field of education. These documents more clearly highlight the importance of helping teachers understand their training and the teaching profession in a more reflective way, supported by historically developed scientific knowledge.

This study has limitations, as it is understood that a deeper understanding of this process of stripping away theoretical content from teacher training and the teaching profession could be further explored in other studies, focusing on other categories of analysis, such as teaching practicums, practical training as a curricular component, and outreach activities, among others. There would also be opportunities to further the collection and analysis of data from course-based pedagogical projects, as well as interviews with administrators, faculty, and students in teacher training programs.

Thus, this study is understood to contribute to problematizing the hollowing out of theoretical content in initial teacher training and to highlight the need to intellectualize teacher training and the teaching profession. From this perspective, the study seeks to move beyond the technical-instrumental rationale that underpins teacher training programs.

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