

# Educação Pública no Brasil: a democratização inconclusa<sup>1</sup>

## Public Education in Brazil: an incomplete democratization

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Recibido: 13-03-2022

Aceptado: 04-06-2022

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### Abstract

As a way of thinking the Brazilian education in the ephemeris of Brazil's 200 years of independence, we have selected as an object of analysis the trajectory of public education in Brazil since the expansion of its school system. Inspiring in the historical research method from documentary and bibliographical research

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and sources as laws, decrees and statistical data, the article was divided in two parts: The first part concerns to the Brazilian public education irresolute pathways, after its announced political independence from the Portuguese kingdom. Then, the second part concerns to the basic education dissemination long trajectory conquest in the 20th century. The result makes us question the future of public education in the face of the elections in the emblematic year of 2022.

**Keywords:** Brazil, bicentennial of independence, education, schooling, history of education.

## Resumo

Como forma de pensar a educação brasileira na efeméride dos 200 anos de independência do Brasil, elegemos como objeto de análise a trajetória da educação pública no Brasil a partir da expansão da sua rede escolar. Com base no método de investigação histórica a partir de pesquisa bibliográfica e documental e tendo por fontes, leis, decretos e dados estatísticos, o artigo foi dividido em duas partes: A primeira, dedicada aos irresolutos percursos da Educação pública do Brasil, depois de sua anunciada Independência política do Reino Português. Na sequência, discorre sobre o longo trajeto de conquista da universalização do ensino fundamental no século XX. O resultado nos faz questionar o futuro da educação pública frente as eleições do emblemático ano de 2022.

**Palabras-clave:** Brasil, Bicentenario da independência, educação, escolarização, História da Educação.

## 1. Introduction

The celebration of an ephemeris such as the Bicentennial of Brazilian Independence is a festive act, but also symbolic that gives rise to a deep reflection on our past as a sovereign nation and, especially, the betterment we desire. Celebrating, as Pierre Nora (1993) rightly observes, is par excellence a gesture of revival and memory construction and it is in his perspective that the contribution of this text is situated, that is, an interpretation among as many as possible, on the paths of the sociocultural construction of public school in the country, choosing as focus of analysis the Elementary School, one of the levels of Basic Education,<sup>4</sup> of compulsory enrollment, comprising the schooling of

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<sup>4</sup> The guidelines and bases Law currently in force in Brazil (Law No. 9.934) was sanctioned on December 20, 1996, establishing the organization of national education divided into two school levels: basic education comprising early childhood education, elementary education and high school and higher education (Saviani, 1997).

children between 6 and 14 years old, lasting 9 years, currently structured in two cycles: the initial years covering the 1st to the 5th grade and the final years, from the 6th to the 9th grade. As a result of the institutional transformations of the old primary and secondary education carried out from the second half of the 20th century, this is the only stage of Brazilian education accessible to most of the population.

Therefore, it is a recent achievement of Brazilian society. In this trajectory, the strong link between school education and the construction of nationality gave room to the citizenship education affirmation based on social movements and met the interests and needs of popular classes.

For these 200 years of education in Brazil analysis, the proposed analysis in terms of general trends focuses on the democratization of that problematized school education in view of the school network expansion and inclusion/exclusion of different social groups from school access. This text was divided into two parts in order to explore the Brazilian' education expansion trajectory, access and inequalities that forged the Brazilian public school. The first part concerns to the Brazilian public education irresolute pathways, after its announced political independence from the Portuguese kingdom. For this, prescriptions, engagements, and their results to the field of Education in Brazil. Then, the second part concerns to the basic education dissemination long trajectory conquest in the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, highlighting the primary and secondary education transformations that culminated in the expansion of compulsory education configured in the current Elementary School, the debates in defense of the public school, the democratic advances achieved in recent decades and the current confrontations.

## **2. The public school hesitant paths from the Empire to the Republic**

There were many factors competing for the public school implementation need in Brazil, which stand out three: First, it was necessary to effectively end the economic and cultural dependencies from a country that was being born as a free nation; second, the eminently illiterate population could not penetrate the evoked and prestigious civility in other nations and so necessary to achieve progress; third, because the country needed a national identity that not only valued the singularities of the land and the people, but that boosted it to the due development in the 19th century.

On the backdrop of the discussions that drove the Brazilian modernization is a range of projects, on which today we understand as intellectuals, who not only thought of Brazil from their formative experiences, but above all from the ideal of country that was intended. There are many lawyers, doctors, engineers,

and teachers who have proposed, in the political field, one of the most emblematic alternatives to Brazilian problems. Either for political questions, what it encompasses the slavery and other countries relation' agreements, or economic, social and cultural questions that encompass education, we had people that were distinguished by proposals. There are many country's projects gestated after and even before the independence of Brazil. Many of them studied by the researchers' group around the four project editions "Modern, modernity and modernization: the education in Brazil's projects (1822-2022)"<sup>5</sup> and it lies on

The understanding that the education was in these projects constitution basis - and that these projects had been defended by an intellectual that occupied the Brazilian sociopolitical scene to express his/her desires, disputes, strikes and dilemmas - (...), either by means of public offices occupation, the periodical press usage, or the books, manuals, dissertations or thesis production around an understanding construction and a projection of what should be a modern Brazil whose ideology of modernity aimed the Europeans and north Americans nations (Mesquita, Barreto, Nogueira, 2015, p.14)

From this group research' results, it is clear to notice how hesitant was the education path, especially by the public school in Brazil. In this process, characters and needs previously seconded by policies began to be considered for the modernization process. Therefore, not without reason, concerns about children, freedmen, women, and the poor were highlighted. After all, how can we conceive a free country if their characters are smeared or even untreated? How can a country advance with only one category of people with power arising from it, it is necessary to emphasize, not only their noble and fortunate origins, but above all by what such a social level could offer in terms of training, positions etc.? What do we do with most of the population? How can we reach the progress facing barriers as slavery, the linking with the Catholic Church, the poverty and illiteracy? Questions that still make sense at the present time, even considering the past 200 years.

Such concerns, directly or indirectly they were part of the expectations of many educated people who became politicians and turned to the new country problems. The solution found, as evidenced by the historiography of education

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<sup>5</sup> The researchers of the interinstitutional research program "Modern, Modernity and Modernization: the education in Brazil's projects – 19th and 20th centuries", coordinated by Luciano Mendes de Faria Filho, with 4 phases in about 11 years, had, among their objectives, to investigate the intellectual relationship, public space and education in the projects of Brazil in a long duration 1822-2022. The investigations' result is written in 5 books journal articles, program fruits, as well as in the fruitful experience that has been developed also in a network called Portal do Bicentenário. Which the purpose is being a space that "aims to produce, edit, curate, organize and make available content about the 200 years of Brazilian Independence and its consequences." To learn more access: <https://portaldobicentenario.org.br>

dedicated to the period, it was the education, especially school education. When we enter the draft bills also in the discussions held in the Court and in the provincial assemblies, it is possible to perceive not only projects and defenses, but the arguments mobilized in the proposals. For that matter, we notice how the legislation, the press, the Universal Exhibitions, the instruction congresses and the official reports prepared by ministers and inspectors of education were fundamental for the incorporation and sedimentation of certain ideas and actions, among them, the instruction as a means of intellectual and economic ascension.

Rogério Fernandes, when analyzing “the Portuguese nation courts and the public education”, he also analyzes the “Brazilian deputies’ interventions” from which it is possible to understand the Brazilian demands in 1821, a key year for what culminated on September 7, 1822. Among the deputies requests, from north and south, it is noteworthy the need to build their own education system in Brazil; the primary schools multiplication need, female schools and Medicine, Surgery, Veterinary, Zoology, Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Elementary Mathematics, Mineralogy, Horticulture, Principles of Arithmetic and Portuguese Grammar practical classes, library establishment, a certain Church “support” for the “rude people” instruction, as well as the foundation of education schools and higher education institution, and, above all, that the precise content on the establishment of schools in the “United Kingdom of Brazil” should be ignored (Fernandes, 2014, p.27).

History allows us to observe that such requests were not met as desired, even though the Prince Regent of Brazil promised “(...) a national code of public instruction” that would “successfully germinate the talents of this blessed climate”. (Dom Pedro I apud Fernandes, 2014, p. 31). These claims are added to others of an economic order and culminate in the separation of the two kingdoms that, in the case of Brazil, it is legitimized by means of the “Decree of Independence” on September 7, 1822, signed by Princess Maria Leopoldina, who temporarily assumed the government. The next step was to give this new country a constitution, which in turn would define the powers and functions, as well as systematize the independent country political-institutional foundations organization. At first this function fell to a Constituent Assembly which, for trying to diminish the emperor’ powers, it was removed by him, granting himself the first constitution, dated 1824, leaving Brazil under a constitutional monarchy system.

In its Art. 179, the Constitution (1824) makes clear “The Brazilian Citizens inviolability of the Civil and Political Rights, which is based on freedom, individual security, and property” stating that this is “guaranteed by the Constitution of the Empire” which in turn also guaranteed, in item 32, “Primary Education, and free of charge to all Citizens”, as well as in item 33

“Schools, and Universities, where the elements of Science, Fine Letters, and Arts” will be taught. In view of such legislation, the following questions would be asked: Who were the “Brazilian citizens” worthy of the independent Brazil’s education? Did the Constitution guarantee the schooling of native people, young children, women, freed black men and women, immigrants, young people and illiterate adults?

As a result of this Constitution, the first General Law of Education in Brazil was published in 1827, which ordered “the creation of primary schools in all the cities, towns and the Empire most populous places”. Two months earlier, on August 11, the Law Schools were created, one in the North (in Pernambuco province) other in the South (in São Paulo province), that together with the existing Medical Academies of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, which also hosted the Polytechnic School, and the School of Minas de Ouro Preto composed the higher education in Brazil.

According to the 1827 law, in its Art. 5:

For mutual education schools will apply the buildings, which fit with sufficiency in their places, arranging with the necessary utensils at the expense of the Public Treasury and the Teachers who do not have the necessary teaching instruction, they will be trained in the short term at the expense of their wages in the capitals’ schools.

Amid the legislation’s prescriptions, in accordance with Faria Filho (1998) understood as a “pedagogical process legal ordering” and a “discursive repertoire” it is possible to notice the intentions of those who were behind such precepts. In this case, when we add the prescription of the mentioned law, the criticism in that period along with the Additional Act (1834) that amended the Constitution (1924) and gave more powers to the Provinces, granting them the right to legislate “Upon public education and its own establishments to promote it” (Art. 10 § 2) except higher education, it is clear how public education was thought, who were the schoolable subjects and what place was destined to it in the independent Brazil’s political history. Once, on the one hand it was seen as a way of if arriving at the progress, on the other the way as it was made possible does not fulfil such expectation.

Limiting the citizen school access - in other words, the free and Brazilian person born or naturalized; ordering schools creation without the proper conditions of existence; teaching by the mutual method; leaving the teachers training on their own expense ; and some time later (additional act of 1834) giving autonomy to the provinces to levy consumption tax in order to finance the public school, in addition to encouraging private initiative were at the time the conditions found, considering the country scarce resources - many of which spent on national security before the internal and external uprisings, such

as, respectively, the confederation of Ecuador (1824) and the Cisplatina War (1825-28) and later the Paraguay War (1864-1870). However, there were many impacts such decisions affected the Brazilian history, mainly when we analyze the rates of the excluded people schooling processes profiles.

It is not without reason that they are in the country's intellectual and economic emancipation main problems, Black people, native people, and women. Each one in his/her own way has been and comes throughout the Brazilian history creating their emancipation mechanisms, certainly gradual and graduated, but also quite significant from the social ascension point of view. When we consider knowing how to read, write and count as an element of distinction, and how, therefore, mechanisms are activated in the education's name, even under strong violence and domination experienced in Brazil throughout its history, it is easy to see how the history of education became elitist. Therefore, we cannot deny the impact that this "process planning" had on Brazilian education. Moreover, the discursive repertoire triggered by the school and what it could provide to those who went through it. Also, it is not without reason that the school access is discussed and defended so vehemently until nowadays, as demonstrated in the second part of this text.

Gondra and Schueler (2008) make clear what "education forms" and school and non-school experiences were implanted in the empire from political and private initiatives such as elementary schools boarding schools and nursing homes, schools and Lyceums and universities and higher academies. The authors' analysis allows us to glimpse how the institutions achieved profiles were being thought. The result leads us to an X-ray of that schooling period and the need to

(...) problematize the school education models circulation processes, based on the civilization and progress ideals, and consider the unique historical experiences of implementation in a mestizo society, which appropriated foreign models in a plural and hybrid cultural context. Thus, it is necessary to understand how the education school model defender's movement for a nineteenth century Brazil, which, in general, implied the appropriation and remodeling of spaces, knowledge and values proper to institutions and conceptions of education, how it acted in the sense of creating and producing the school as a specific place, destined to the education of children and young people.

From a population-literacy relationship point of view, it should be considered that in 1822 the Brazilian population was about 4.7 million inhabitants, which was doubled in 1872 to 9.9 million inhabitants, an increasing situation that reached in 1900 the number of 17.4 million Brazilians. (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2000) namely, in the nineteenth century the Brazilian population almost quadrupled and many of its inhabitants were immigrants, as Kreutz (2014) attests by stating that between 1819 and

1947, about 4,900.00 foreigners of various ethnicities arrived in Brazil. If we consider what Rui Barbosa exposes about the illiterate people percentage in 1876, that from 8,419,672 inhabitants, 78.11% (5,579,945) were illiterate, we can understand how insufficient the prescriptions, especially since 1889, the year of the Brazilian republic proclamation with more than 75% of illiterate population.

It is not without reason that the history of the eight hundred Brazilian ideas are recorded, singular initiatives such as those of Pretextato dos Passos e Silva, as well as, in the second half of nineteenth century, Leôncio de Carvalho, Rui Barbosa, Tobias Barreto de Menezes, Maria Firmina dos Reis among other characters who proposed school and teaching models in order to endowing Brazilians with essential elements to the development of a country that had in their horizons of expectations the destined instruction to the workplace so valuable to free countries. Pretextato Silva opened a school in Rio de Janeiro for “Blacks and Browns”, Leôncio de Carvalho, even under strong criticism he was responsible for opening higher education to women, Rui Barbosa was the main promoter of the intuitive method implementation in Brazil, Tobias defended the women education for work and Maria Firmina dos Reis opens in northern Brazil the first mixed school. (Fonseca; Pombo, 2016, Barreto 2022, Valdemarin, 2004, Muzart, 2014))

Although the proposals homogenizing risk, neglecting the singularities of each one and especially of the chronotope in which it was generated, it is possible to affirm that in the midst of this and many other projects were: the teaching secularity, the poor, the child, the woman, the freedmen, the disabled, immigrants and especially illiterate adults education who demanded, as Nogueira’s studies (2016) attest, a special program and consistent methods. This is because it was not enough to consider in the bills the primary school need, originally thought from religious precepts and especially destined for white people, but in contents and methods that correspond to the scientific productions of modern pedagogy and as effectively the school would assist in the nation progress, in addition to the necessary infrastructure for its operation.

As fruits of such initiatives are those involving black and indigenous men and women, women in general and young children. Because legislation discredited or even vilified people from any right to access school in the first decades of the empire, such historical subjects managed in the gaps left by the system or even cracking the imperial structure to reach trajectories that, as Gondra and Schueler (2008) reveal involve other ways of learning and teaching, during multiple non-school educational processes and crafts learning institutionalized mechanisms or not.

The native people, the “owners of the lands” considered as indolent and lazy by the colonizers were the most discredited in the educational process.

On the one hand acculturation initiatives were initiated, sometimes through Jesuit catechesis, other times through the “Directory of Natives” Pombaline project of 1755, both in colonial Brazil and whose purpose was “civilization”, on the other hand the processes that forged the native people’s education in the nineteenth century, whose main fruit is the 1845 Regulation, they are all based on violence, whether physical or symbolic. Forbidding the native language, forcing the colonizer’s language use, naming as sins and therefore condemning rituals, beliefs, and traditional customs, taking their lands, or forcing their use according to colonizing determinations, were elements that the school should encompass, especially because it was considered that native as well as the Black people were subjects of work therefore their activities and learning should develop in it.

Not without reason the Regulation of July 24, 1845 (Decree no. 426) of the Empire Business Ministry created to the General Missions regulation, it had the purpose of reintroducing catechesis and for this purpose it orders to create primary schools in the entire empire villages with the mission of teaching to read, writing, counting and a profession linked to land or the “mechanical arts” and military work. On the one hand, a native people schooling policy was created considering their cultural singularity through their own schools, on the other hand, according to scholars, this was considered a form of government control that, in turn, guaranteed the least possible resources.

If the native people main problems were in the lands expropriation and in their belief system extinction, with Black people, especially the enslaved, the situation was as cruel as it. After all they were linked to the person-thing idea and so their origin was one of the decisive point for all the policies that accompanied their journey in the country. Enslaved, Creole, for rent, for houses, for lida, freed, free all adjectives to Black people associates reveals a facet of the history and struggles that involved him in the Brazilian empire. From the education point of view, history reveals to us a series of phases that goes from enslavement, therefore, from non-citizenship to the place occupied after its abolition. There were many episodes that involve this story that receives more and more pages and reveals several movements on behalf of freedom and emancipation, as well as the Black people condition that lies into a particular initiative of schooling, since instruction was considered strategy and distinguishing factor, as Fonseca assures for whom “This reveals a Black people leading role, indicating that they did not stop counting education as an element of social space formation and affirmation.” (2016, p.48). Initiatives that compared to those of a governmental nature reveal how the “pedagogical process’ legal order” was insufficient and partial. However, even dishonored by educational policies, the enslaved people under clear mechanisms of subordination and control they triggered other ways of educating themselves

and created spaces of enunciation as the quilombos and the various revolts.

To women the motherhood and reproduction traditionally reserved place were always under of the most emancipatory school processes. Once the idea was to sanctify customs the catholic religious institutions have always been open-door with doctrines involving morals and good customs arsenal willing to teach. For this reason, some members of the upper class could have been literate and taught in the Christian rules. A different situation that did not happen with the rest of the women. After the law of 1827, which allowed despite under strong cultural resistance the opportunity for women to access education once there was in the country women schools. The access was not unrestricted and was conditioned to several elements that involved since the existence of an institution at the place, once that there were not many women's schools in the empire; the parents or husbands' permission even the family economic condition, among other elements that embraced opinions about women's education and how she could apply the learning.

A situation that became even more neuralgic with the demands of several women living from north to south who wanted to attend higher education and become doctor, lawyer or engineer (the offered courses at the time). Emperor Pedro II himself faced the resistance of parliamentarians to approve the entry of women in Brazilian courses, he also paid for the first Brazilian doctor graduation in the United States. Emperor Pedro II himself, faced with the resistance of parliamentarians to approve the entry of women in Brazilian courses, paid for the formation of the first Brazilian doctor in the United States. It was only with the reform headed by Leôncio de Carvalho in 1879 that women were allowed into the academy and despite permission, many barriers had to be faced or even knocked down so that today, according to data from the last school census, they are the majority in basic education, higher education, teaching profession and as researchers in the humanities. (Barreto, 2022).

It is noteworthy to mention how the child was treated during the empire and how his/her education was thought, since childhood was not the same for a markedly unequal society, either from an economic point of view or from a regional point of view, after all the poor children did not have the same conditions as the rich. When this difference is added to its locality the divergences are even greater, because at that time, although discussions, discourses, and initiatives for poor, orphaned and forsaken children were already a reality, the empire financial conditions and those related to that moment's pedagogy were still very incipient in Brazil.

While researching childhood in Brazil in the 19th century, Kuhlmann (2014) demonstrates how they were created, under what conditions and who financed day care centers, second-childhood nursing homes and then kindergartens, institutions understood - for dedicating themselves to children

in early childhood - as complementary to primary school. The conclusions of the author clearly show the creation of supportive philanthropic institutions and the absence of “Kindergartens” with its modern pedagogical proposals destined for the poor children. Although, these institutions types have been created in countries such as France, Switzerland, Austria and Germany to fulfill the need for working mothers, in Brazil “(...) there is no evidence of its creation during the 19th century” and the institutions created in that period were restricted “to a few schools catered to privileged social sectors children (2014, p. 75). Thus, the evidence found by the researcher makes us understand the child place, especially the poor child, in this Brazilian’s schooling process, making it clear how despised were the arguments of those who saw in the children education, from their younger age, one of the most important elements to embrace in that political moment in Brazil.

Such hesitating paths of school access were certainly the impetus for those who fought for the Republic and who saw the education as a progress of the nation indispensable element. Recognizing the school as an emancipation and freedom place and having education as a patriotic element, since “educated people” does not submit to tyranny, was the tonic of those who longed for new airs and a more democratic political system.

### **3. From primary education to elementary school dissemination: an incomplete achievement**

Not without reason in the nineteenth century final decades, the republican system establishment in the country put the people schooling need and the primary school importance on the agenda Republicans of different ideological shades and from different regions of the country praised popular education as a political and sociocultural purpose to civilize the Brazilian people, train workers and prepare them for political participation by voting. It would be up to education to promote the Brazil’s progress, economic development, and modernization, in addition to building nationality through moral and civic-patriotic values dissemination.

In the wake of federalism and ratified decentralization by the Constitution (1891), state governments sought to modernize public education by assigning enormous centrality to teacher education with reforms that focused on Normal Schools and primary education, the only level of compulsory education, lasting 4 years, with the modern teaching processes adoption such as the intuitive method or lessons of things, programs expansion with the introduction of the physical and natural sciences, history, geography, singing, manual labor, gymnastics exercises and moral and civic education. The primary education

modernization also involved the institutionalization of new types of primary schools, such as school groups and reunited schools. Despite the educational reforms carried out by the states, there was still many out-of-school children and a secondary education restricted to the elite a few public gymnasiums (secondary schools) and high schools located in the state capitals, paid and private schools maintained by the private initiative especially by the Catholic Church, even after the secularization implemented by decree 119-A in 1890.

Regarding to the childhood schooling, multiple differentiations marked the gradual expansion of the network of primary schools in the country, in the First Republic and throughout the twentieth century, deepening several inequalities. On the one hand, differences in the educational opportunities' expansion between the country states and regions were aggravated by the urban and rural schools' distinction. On the other hand, ethnic-racial and gender inequalities and the existence of different schools serving different social groups demarcating unequal access and learning and permanence in educational institutions social limitations.

Araújo, Valdemarin and Souza (2015) are right to affirm the need to consider in the republican Brazil primary education history, there are three articulated dimensions: decreasing illiteracy, progressive rural exodus, and demographic growth.

In the Brazilian independence centenary celebrations (1922) the public education situation was not very auspicious. Illiteracy still reached about 70% of the population estimated at 30 million inhabitants. In despite of the public education several reforms carried out by state governments, little progress had been made in the primary education dissemination in the country. Even in the state of São Paulo, a federation unit that stood out for its economic strength, the education situation was extremely precarious In 1920, the school census directed by Sampaio Dória opened up the depth of the problems to be faced; because, in a total of 547,975 school children (between 7 and 12 years old) living in this state of the federation, only 31.6% were enrolled in public or private schools; the remainder, 372,141 children (69.4%) did not attend schools (Dória, 1920).

The public school's dissemination demanded the identification of illiterate centers, schools' creation, vacancies number expansion and conditions for the teacher's establishment in rural areas schools, in addition to a greater number of resources for education in the face of these problems. Thus, the public education expansion in the first decades of the twentieth century was slow, reaching more urban than rural areas. The policies for primary education allowed greater women access to school culture, but not the full integration of black and indigenous children.

Therefore, in the 1920s, amid the growing dissatisfaction of political

actors with oligarchic coffee domination, public education once again agitated the national debate, once again pointed out as a solution to the social issue and the immigrants' nationalization. It was necessary to overcome illiteracy seen as an expression of national backwardness and to educate urban workers to guarantee social order. In this regard, Marta Carvalho (1998) analyzed how the Associação Brasileira de Educação, founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1924, was involved in the civic campaign for the "educational cause", understanding education in its relationship with the themes of health, morality and work rational organization.

The Union omission and responsibility in the primary education diffusion in the primary school was questioned again. One of the federal government first interventionist efforts in this regard was the I Conferência Interestadual de Ensino Primário convening held in Rio de Janeiro in 1921, whose results "(...) enshrined the Union constitutional mission principle to interfere in the dissemination of primary education, with the illiteracy combating objective." (Nagle, 1976, p. 135). In that way, the constitutional revision (1926) followed ratifying the indispensability of the Union's intervention in the public education development; however effective actions were only carried out in the following decades.

In spite of the state action, it cannot disregard the immigrants' initiatives, social and workers movements in education favor. As mentioned before about the imperial period, in relation to the First Republic (1889 - 1930) period, the historiography of education has also pointed out the multiple educational experiences carried out by the Black movement, the initiatives undertaken by workers and the labor movement to promote their self-instruction and the education of their children, such as the creation of workers' schools, popular libraries, Social Studies Centers and Modern Libertarian Schools, and also the immigrants schools very present in the country southern and southeastern states (Luizetto, 1984; Jomini, 1990; Mazotti, 1995; Santos, 2012).

To the expansion of educational opportunities in Brazil development in the middle of the twentieth century. Four trends marked the primary and secondary education democratization gradual process between the 1930s and 1970s: 1) a greater Union intervention through specific educational policies; 2) the schools and enrollments unequal expansion in different states and regions of the country; 3) the presence of the renovating movement based on the New School with pedagogical organization and educational practices implications; social movements and the educators struggles, intellectuals and the population for school.

The most federal government incisive presence in education was intensified, not by chance, during the President Getúlio Dornelles Vargas 15 years government, especially during the civil dictatorship period called Estado

Novo (1937-1945) erected based on the power centralization, authoritarianism, and nationalism. The Brazilian State reorganization in that period sought to break with the oligarchies power prevailing in the first decades of the republican system established in Brazil in 1889 and sparked the conditions to the consolidation of the industrial modernization ideals. At that juncture, educational policies were prominent with emphasis on the education nationalization, the development of technical and professional education, the women education and restraint, the secondary and higher education reform and primary education financing measure.

The national and educational reconstruction was a recurrent theme at that time and mobilized the intellectual and political debate. Amid intense disputes over nation and education projects, it is worth highlighting the manifesto launched in 1932, entitled the Educational Reconstruction in Brazil: to the people and the government (known as the Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova), which represented the inflection of the most progressive positions defended by the liberals. The Manifesto was developed by Fernando de Azevedo and signed by renowned intellectuals, the educational reconstruction plan emphasized the defense of public schools as a right to all citizens and the state responsibility for education. It also proposed the New School as a fundamental pedagogical reference, the articulation between all levels of education, the school integration to the social environment, the scientific teachers training at a higher level and the universities modernization through new careers opening based on the tripod - teaching, research, and extension. This Manifesto had great national repercussions, provoking contrary reactions of the Catholic intellectual thought and, on the other hand, becoming an unavoidable reference in the Brazilian educational debate in the following decades (Xavier, 2004).

Marlos Rocha (2005) also identified this modern educational political actor in the Constituent (1933-1934), mobilizing the debate around the branches and levels of education, in the right to education affirmation by financial resources guarantee and by the Union's supplementary action and the discussion about the education secularity. The Federal Constitution (1934) meant an important step towards the consecration of the right to education in Brazil to ensure the primary public education gratuity and obligation and establish for the first time a specific provision for education in rural areas. However, the educational deficit remained high as the education expansion did not keep pace with population growth.

Statistical data recorded on the series "O Ensino no Brasil" first volume, referring to the year 1937 pointed out the existence of 38,829 primary school buildings in the country, most of them maintained by state governments (18,439 units corresponding to 47.4% of the establishments), also highlighting the municipalities participation 11,592 units (29.8%) and the significant number

of units maintained by private individuals equal to 8,754 (22.5%). At that time Brazil had 2,447,007 students of both sexes enrolled in primary schools at the end of the 1937 school year, but the enrollments distribution throughout the national territory pointed to a marked regional differentiation. Most of the students were enrolled in urban schools (62.2%), although most of the population lived in rural areas, 68% country's inhabitants (28 million people).

In the secondary education case, according to Dallabrida (2009) the Reform Francisco Campos, in 1931, and the Reform Capanema, in 1942, sought to print greater rationality and standardization in the youth general formation. Especially the Reform (1942) (Organic Law of Secondary Education) reaffirmed the humanist curriculum based on classical and modern languages and the restrictive destination of this level of education destined in the perspectives of legislators, "to the preparation of conductive individuals, that is, of men who must assume the greater responsibilities within society and the nation..." (Brasil, 1942, p. 23). According to this perspective, secondary education was divided into two cycles: the first one called middle school encompass a general training course, lasting four years and taught in educational institutions called Gymnasiums, and the second cycle, lasting three years encompass two parallel courses - the classical and the scientific, taught in the Colleges.

The number of enrollments and secondary schools' significant growth since the 1930s has been pointed out by the historiography of education as the beginning of this level of education democratization in the country. According to Geraldo Bastos Silva (1969) in one of the pioneering works on the expansion of secondary education in Brazil, in 1933, there were 66,000 enrolled students in this type of education, a number that rose to 466,000 in 1952, reaching 991,000 enrolled students in 1961.

The gymnasiums and public schools' expansion were a tax of the social sectors mobilization and the performance of political agents in converting the educational aspirations of the population into electoral political interests (Dallabrida & Souza, 2014). Recent studies have highlighted the municipal action in the expansion of gymnasiums in various country regions, whether leading to the state government local demands, whether taking responsibility for the creation and maintenance of schools or acting in a complementary way assisting the state government by offering the counterpart (land donation or building construction) and even financing private schools with the exemption of taxes and granting scholarships (Diniz, 2021; Santos, 2022).

In the mid-twentieth century, in addition to the persistent educational deficit, other problems of Brazilian education came to the fore denounced by educators and intellectuals, such as the exclusionary and selective character of the school attest by the high rates of repetition and evasion. The new teaching methods and processes adoption also remained under discussion. The pedagogical

renewal for the New school, widely spread out in the states' education systems, mainly, the primary school constituted a plural and fragmented experience. The new active school didactic orientation had great reverberation in pedagogical production disseminating the advantages of a globalized teaching, centers of interest, excursions, and rooms environments, considered expressions of educational innovation.

Many school auxiliaries' institutions were disseminated as children's library, educative cinema, cooperative, children's newspaper, school bank, garden, agricultural club, ensemble, parents and teachers' association, school cash, dental assistance, and others.

Nevertheless, the new educational practices have been adopted in different schools and by the action of several teachers, in many country areas they lived with a school culture based on traditional standards emphasizing the nationality ideal, memorization, verbalism, the exams rigidity, teaching programs fulfillment, the merit appreciation, discipline and civic-patriotic values.

The educators, intellectuals and politicians' criticism about the education situation pointed to many problems such as the lack of vacancies, the absence of school materials and buildings suitable for schools, teachers' unpreparedness, the teaching methods archaism, the large number of lay teachers working especially in rural schools and the mismatch between the education system and the needs of Brazilian society before socioeconomic development.

The rural education issue was serious, as can be seen in the President Eurico Gaspar Dutra statement in a Message to the National Congress in 1949:

The educational assistance crisis presents a worse aspect in rural areas. In fact, from enrolled children in the primary course, 36% belong to rural centers, 50% to urban areas and 12% to district areas. In addition to general and specific factors resulting from demographic rarefaction and low social and economic level, the lack of adequate buildings and the insufficiency of qualified teachers contribute to this situation. At this point, according to the last survey from 28,302 school buildings intended for primary education, only 4,927 belonged to public authorities and only 70% of these buildings had been built especially for school purposes. (...) (Brasil, 1949, p. 118 – 119)

The selectivity problem reached all education levels, and it was even more solid in high school, as can be seen in the communication presented by Jayme Abreu, technician of the National Department of Education, at the Secondary Education Inter-American Seminar held in Santiago/Chile, in 1955, promoted by the Organization of American States (OAS). Abreu (1955) highlighted the secondary school conservatism in Brazil attached to the propaedeutic purpose an "intellectualist" feature and stressed the incongruity of the humanist curriculum before the school public characteristics that had been diversifying with the public secondary school expansion opening to the presence of students

from the lower classes. Based on statistical data, he stated that, in 1954, there were 535,775 students enrolled in the two high school cycles in the country, spread across the 1,771 existing schools. However, this number corresponded to only 6% of the school population (aged between 12 and 18 years) estimated at 9,100,000 people. Another worrying fact was the difference between the number of enrolled students in the first and second cycles. There was a large concentration of students in gymnasium cycle (459,489 students corresponding to 85.8% of enrolled) while in the gymnasium second cycle there were only 76,286 students (14.2% of those enrolled in secondary education). Most schools were maintained by the private initiative, serving 392,310 students (73.2%) while the public school system was responsible for 26.8% of the students (Abreu, 1955).

From the data presented by Jayme Abreu, it appears that secondary schools were predominantly urban, located in the state capitals and larger municipalities, serving more male students than female students and with a minority presence of Black students, in addition to the absence of native young people.

The education theme for national development underpinned the growing vacancies expansion movement in primary and secondary education in the 1950s and 1960s, becoming the focus of several academic productions and educational debates serving as a justification for the federal government to promote initiatives such as: the National Rural Education Campaign (CNER), the Adult Education Campaign (CEAA), the National Campaign for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (nowadays Capes), the Textbook and Teaching Manuals Campaign (CALDEME), and others.

The Brazilian education democratization challenges were contemplated in the conflicting discussion around the National Law of Guidelines and Bases. The troubled processing of this law was based on clashes about the centralization and decentralization of teaching and in the late 1950s, before substitutive amendments to the original project, by a debate great polarization between public school and private school supporters. As Freitas and Biccas (2009) point out part of the Catholic intelligentsia used the state monopoly of education inquiry to defend private school and education freedom. Such clashes triggered another educational manifesto publication in defense of the right to education, entitled “Once again called”, again captained by Fernando de Azevedo, with the pioneer educators’ support. They also led to civil society movements such as the Public-School Defense Campaign, (which launched Brazilian education in the most varied social groups concerns sphere. The engagement of educators, intellectuals, university professors, the student movement and workers associations and popular awareness put the public-school defense in the core of democracy issue.

After 13 years of proceeding in Congress, the first Law of Guidelines and

Bases of National Education – LDB (Law 4.024) was approved in December, 1961, representing a compromise solution between the trends in dispute and ensuring both the responsibility of the State for public education and the freedom guarantee for education. The law included the extension of compulsory primary education to 6 years of length, a measure defended by many Brazilians and by international organizations such as UNESCO. Another great progress for the Brazilian education organization advance was the articulation between the various branches of high school, especially secondary education, and general culture with vocational courses, eliminating the historical duality between these types of education. It is also worth mentioning the secondary education curricular change consolidating the replacement of the humanist curriculum by the scientific curriculum.

Nevertheless, the elementary school dissemination continued to be a challenge. From this diagnosis, the first National Education Plan (1963 - 1970) was developed by a group of educators coordinated by Anísio Teixeira, in 1962. The discouraging frame recorded 12 million children at school age, but out of school, and only 18% of the primary school 1st year enrolled students reached the 4th grade, while two thirds of the students did not exceed the first two grades. In addition, only one third of primary school enrollments corresponded to students from rural primary schools, while the rural population, in the early 1960s, corresponded to 54.91% of the country's inhabitants, that means 38,987,526 people. Therefore, one of the Plan's goals was the primary education spreading (the enrollment up to the fourth grade of 100% of the school population from 7 to 11 years old) and the enrollment expansion of the other school levels - "enrollment of 30% of the school population from 11 and 12 to 14 years old in the gymnasium first two grades; enrollment of 50% of the school population from 13 to 15 years old in the gymnasium last two grades; and enrollment of 30% of the school population from 15 to 18 years old in the gymnasium grades."(Plano Nacional de Educação, 1962, p. 3)..

The public school affirmation broad spectrum as the democratic education political program foundation had a great repercussion in Brazilian society, but it was suffocated by the military civilian system established in 1964 in Brazil. Education was affected not only by censorship and repression, but by the State spurious intervention in the education reordering in line with the economic policy of development and the national security ideology, dispensing the society debate. In addition to the University Reform established in 1968, the 1st and 2nd Grades Teaching Reform (Law 5.692/1971) based on the principles of the Human Capital Theory and the MEC/USAID agreements impacted the primary and secondary education administrative and didactic-pedagogical organization. The law instituted the First Grade Education, that means the 8 years mandatory schooling extension configuring the institutional bases of the current elementary

school. This level of education was constituted by the primary education with the gymnasium course (first cycle of secondary school) union. The gymnasium course (second cycle of secondary school) became High School. In fact, the 1971 Reform made an unprecedented reversal in Brazilian education by establishing the High School Education compulsory professionalization, a measure justified by the social and economic needs of work qualification.

The 1st and 2nd school grades great expansion held during the military civil dictatorship (1964 - 1985) period was accompanied by the school material precariousness, the teachers light training and education quality issues obtained through the high rates exclusion - evasion and repetition - and school selectivity.

Moreover, as stated by Freitas and Biccás (2009), the educational inequalities in 1970s and 1980s, in Brazil, in quantitative and qualitative terms resulted from social developments of the recessive economic plans that increased the income concentration and consequently the Brazilian population poverty levels. In 1960, the schooling years average number in the country varied between regions; the lowest index was found in the northeast equal to 1.1 and the highest in the north-central west and southeast regions, equal to 2.7. Twenty years later, in 1980, under the 8-year compulsory schooling (Elementary School), this average remained well below the desirable: 2.2 years on average of schooling in the northeast and 4.4 years in the southeast. According to the authors, these inequalities remained: "The situation remained submerged in the waters of precariousness until the end of the 20th century, since at the end of the 1990s, the indexes revealed that only 18% of the country's population had completed elementary school; 13% had a high school education and 8% had a college education." (Freitas; Biccás, 2009, p. 189).

Important advances happened in the Brazilian education after the democratic system restoration, in the late 20th century and in the early years of the 21st century. Reactions to the policies implemented during the military civilian dictatorship put on the agenda issues such as the education democratization, education for citizenship, the urgency of curricular changes in primary education, democratic management, and the school role in transforming society (Cunha, 1991). Social movements, teachers' associations, political parties, and the trade union movement played an important role in the educational debate.

The Brazilian Constitution (1988), called, not by chance, as a Citizen Constitution, guaranteed several social rights for the population, enshrining among them the right to education: "Education, health, work, housing, leisure, security, social security, protection of motherhood and childhood, and assistance to the destitute are social rights, as set forth by this Constitution." (Art. 6, Brasil, 1988). The Constitution also established the dissemination of elementary education and the eradication of illiteracy and ensured, for the

first time in the country, educational rights for native people respecting their specificities: “to native communities the use of their mother tongues and their own learning processes.”

Another important milestone was the New Law on Guidelines and Bases (Law No.9.934/1996), the disputes and wide debate result in civil society. This law structured education in Brazil in two cycles: 1) Basic Education constituted by Early Childhood Education, Elementary School, and High School and 2) Higher Education. The basic education conception encompasses in the legislation redesigned the present and future problems for the right to education realization in Brazil. Undoubtedly progressive, According to Dermeval Saviani, the education implied “(...) an important achievement in the sense of moving towards a true national system of comprehensive and universal education, that is capable of guaranteeing full education to the entire country population.” (Saviani, 1997, p. 210). Not only the elementary education dissemination come to be advocated, but all basic education ranging from the education of young children to high school teenagers and young people.

In this perspective, the balance sheets about Brazil’s educational indicators on the threshold of the 21st century (1990s), involving sort of positive positions pointed to considerable advances, but also many problems to be faced. According to Castro (1999), the population aged 7 to 14 net schooling rate increased from 67% in 1970 to 95.8% in 1998. The elementary education dissemination was in a execution process despite the permanence of regional differentiations. Nevertheless, despite the access expansion, the Brazilian educational system remained quite tapered, since only 30.4% of the population aged between 15 to 17 years was enrolled in high school, in 1998 (the majority, 54.8% concentrated in night courses) and a smaller number in higher education.

For some analysts such as Bomeny (2003) and Schwartzman (2005), despite the advances great challenges remained, such as the illiteracy eradication, the teaching quality, age/grade distortion, full-time school implementation and the access democratization to all young people to high school.

While the quantitative and qualitative challenges of basic education remain, we cannot forget, however, some consolidated democratic achievements at the beginning of the 21st century that profoundly changed education in the country with relevant sociocultural repercussions.

The observation applies to the national curriculum guidelines that sought to associate the areas of knowledge traditionally present in the elementary school curriculum (Portuguese, Math, History, Geography, Science) with content related to citizen life (health, sexuality, family and social life, environment, work/consumption, science and technology, culture, and languages).

It is also important to highlight affirmative policies such as racial and social

quotas for higher education to correct injustices and promote social inclusion by eliminating discrimination and inequalities. In the same direction, programs to combat racial discrimination and recognize ethnic diversity are highlighted, such as the introduction to Afro-Brazilian and Native people History and Culture studies as mandatory content to the education systems. In addition, expansion policies of compulsory elementary education to 9 years (6 to 14 years); the high school compulsory education, as well as inclusive education policies and gender education and sexual diversity, and similar things.

However, since the advancement of conservative forces in the country, in 2016, all these democratic achievements are under constant threats. Consequently, for education, the Bicentennial of Brazilian Independence ephemeris of imposes high alert and concern. In addition to the necessary advances and confrontations recognition for the construction of a republican and socially referenced quality public school, it is necessary to fight for the achievements guarantee and for the democracy reestablishment.

#### **4. Advances and setbacks on the Bicentennial of Brazilian Independence threshold: by way of conclusion**

As we have argued throughout this essay, since the beginning of the history of independent Brazil, the education and nation building walked together. Recalling the beautiful analysis of Gondra and Schueler (2008), in the institution of the Empire of Brazil, the public education through schools or first letters chairs was considered fundamental for the nation forging political project, constituting bonds and identities. The first Brazilian Constitution granted in 1824 established education as a right to prescribe that “primary education is free to all citizens”, but in hierarchical and enslaved society, exclusionary citizenship based on social, gender and ethnic-racial distinctions prevailed among the inhabitants of the nascent national state (Brasil, 1824).

Throughout the nineteenth century debates and disputes over a public, universal, free and compulsory education were powerful, they were principles that guided the constitution of national education systems in advanced countries. Although sharing the contemporaneity of the educational political projects in circulation, the school for everyone effectiveness in Brazil faced instabilities and configured trajectories marked by inequalities and discrimination. It can be said that the struggles for education followed the history of the country; from a restricted service to a large-scale coverage in almost two centuries. In this crossing, as Freitas and Biccás (2009) pointed out the elementary education dissemination due to public policies, but also to the struggle of social groups and the action of educational subjects.

It remains, however, the realization of the right to basic education, which ratifies the consideration of this trajectory as incomplete democratization. The Bicentennial of Brazilian Independence celebration takes place in a not very auspicious scenario for education marked by worrying and reckless setbacks for the democracy future. In addition to cutting funds for education, it is worth mentioning other initiatives such as government support for the Non-Partisan School (EsP) movement, the civic-military schools program, the high school reform and the imposition of the National Common Curriculum Base, the arbitrary adoption of the phonic literacy method, recessive policies concerning to special education, prohibitions on gender education, the priority given to the regulation of homeschooling and the tuition charge in public universities among other atrocities committed, only in the educational field.

What does that leave us? That is the question to which there is no right answer. This is because no country has gone further with the education discredit than Brazil with the victory of the current president, whose cuts in science, technology and education are revealing his country project. His project, if we can call it something done randomly, in the absence of experts and with a strong neoliberal trait, it is not a return to the nation project forged in 1964 and so praised by him, but a random, incipient, unconcerned way devoid of any commitment to current and future generations. It is undoubtedly a step backwards. It is not just about authoritarianism and palliative public policies with quick and ephemeral results, but a country project based on misogyny, prejudice, public sectors corruption, the Judiciary Branch dismissal, the ecosystem destruction, disrespect for differences and mainly the idea of impunity and the myth construction.

However, in this year that celebrates the Bicentennial of Brazilian Independence, depending on the results of the presidential elections, we can also celebrate the end of a bad experience and the beginning of a new phase in which education is actually democratized, with access and permanence of all children and teenagers in schools that provide qualitative learning, that the National Education Plan goals are implemented and that the 11 million illiterate Brazilians have the school as a space where learning and teaching are guaranteed.

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