

### Brazilian key-thinkers on education

Vilela Ferreira, Ivan; Dittrich Wiggers, Ingrid

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*Article*

**IVAN VILELA FERREIRA<sup>1</sup>**

University of Brasilia, Brazil

**INGRID DITTRICH WIGGERS**

University of Brasilia, Brazil

ORCID 0000-0001-5412-7021

## **BRAZILIAN KEY–THINKERS ON EDUCATION**

**Abstract:** It is almost a consensus among the Brazilians that, in order to solve the social issues, the education must be improved. Thus, the present study aimed to analyze the Brazilian key-thinkers on education. Rui Barbosa, Fernando de Azevedo, Anísio Teixeira, Cecília Meireles, and Paulo Freire were selected because they worked to develop some aspects of education: politics, educational system, philosophy of education, childhood education and pedagogical methods. These intellectuals fought against powerful societal forces, but they did not give up on transforming the Brazilian education, and, consequently, the Brazilian society. Therefore, they were selected to represent the Brazilian key-thinkers on education.

**Key words:** Brazilian education; Key-thinkers; Right to Education; Children’s Education.

### **Introduction**

Every child has the right to education guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1954). Specifically, this right is conducted covering two assumptions (Lee 2013). Firstly, some children’s rights defenders ponder that, through basic education, children will develop cognitive, social and labor skills. Consequently, it will lead them to get a job, to be an active member of a peaceful community, and to have a fulfilling life. The second assumption refers to the fact that even guaranteed

<sup>1</sup> **Corresponding author:** University of Brasilia, Faculty of Education, Gleba B, Campus Darcy Ribeiro, Asa Norte, Brasilia, DF, 70910900, Brazil.

E-mail: ivanvilela74@gmail.com

as children's right, many of them do not get educated; consequently, the right to education must be acknowledged as others fundamental rights, such as the right to food or freedom. However, in some contexts, education is considered more than a fundamental right, especially in countries, such as Brazil, where the social gap is deep and wide.

The Brazilian history shows us that the education was – and still is – more than a fundamental right throughout; it is considered as a tool for the discriminated classes to strive for social improvements. The social aspects that permeated the Brazilian society since the colonial period help us to comprehend this phenomenon. As Curry (2002) points out, differently from European countries, the systematization of the education as a right in Brazil was slower, and it happened along with prejudices about race, ethnicity, gender, and others social inequalities. To sum up, the dominant classes conducted the systematization of education, so they could maintain the social *status quo*.

In 1824<sup>2</sup>, during the Brazilian imperial period, the systematization of education in Brazil was assured by the law, but there were only a quite limited number of schools and only the access to primary education (Ferraro 2008). Moreover, the enslaved people were forbidden to attend the schools. As result, the educational system proved to be weak and incipient; Ferraro (2004) demonstrates that the illiteracy rate for children up to 10 years old was around 80%. According to that author, after the transition from the imperial government to the republican government at the end of the 19th century, the illiteracy rates remained unchanged. Given this situation, regional initiatives throughout Brazil have emerged with the aim of transforming educational and cultural realities. Several intellectuals, inspired by philosophers and educators from other countries, have embarked on these initiatives (Lemme 2005). These proposals marked the consolidation of education as right which, in turn, was led by icons of Brazilian education.

Although this shift started at the beginning of the last century, it has taken place over the years, generating significant results for Brazilian education. Certainly, not all of the problems linked to education was solved, but those initiatives inspired and continue to inspire researchers, intellectuals and teachers to struggle to improve the Brazilian education. Therefore, considering the main Brazilian intellectuals, the aim

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<sup>2</sup> In 1822, Brazil declared independence from Portugal, and the Imperial government began. The Republic began in 1889 and last till the present.

of this study is to elucidate which were the main Brazilian thinkers on education. Important to note, there are many Brazilian thinkers on education; to descant about them would be an enormous task, and it is not possible to do it in one single article. We have selected the intellectuals who worked to develop the Brazilian education according to five important fields which, in turn, embrace the whole Brazilian educational system. Thus, these intellectuals were selected according to the following field of education: politics; educational system; philosophy of education; childhood education; pedagogy methods.

### **Rui Barbosa (1849 - 1923)**

Many Brazilians know Rui Barbosa due to his fabulous literary work or his extensive acting as lawyer. However, when we look at its political actions, we observe his historical and wide representativeness. Born in Salvador, Bahia, Barbosa dedicated his life to study. At 15 years old he finished the secondary school, but he could not enter college until he turned 19. Years later, he graduated in law and got involved in the Liberal party in his home state. In 1871, Barbosa started his political journey, and decisively contributed to Brazilian education with a right to children (Machado 2010).

During the transition between the Brazilian Imperial period and the Republican period, Barbosa acted as a Congressman, Senator, and Minister of State. Distinguished by his effort to consolidate a national education system, he was enthusiastic about European educational policies, and avid about pedagogical issues. He accumulated a vast knowledge of European pedagogical innovations and, based on that, carried out several studies in order to implement a national education system.

Already in the 19th century, he opposed to the predominant method which, in turn, was based on memorization and verbal education – methods of traditional schools as we know it today (Zarur, Stentzler 2009). To change it, he emphasized the importance to lead all the children to school, assuring to all of them a good education. For Barbosa, the good education should provide the country with intelligent voters so they could always seek freedom (Machado 1999). Aware of that, Barbosa also strived to create a teaching method which included the intuitive method, based on Pestalozzi's theories (Zanatta 2005). Another feature of Barbosa's educational work was the importance of scientific teaching (Machado, Melo, Mormul 2015). Guided by that interest, and in the position of Congressman, Barbosa wrote in a series of opinions on

Brazilian education (Machado 2010). Specifically, these opinions involved the inclusion of contents related to politics, economy, musical, culture, drawing, gymnastics<sup>3</sup>, added to the change of teaching methods:

This curriculum represented a profound transformation in school culture, that is, the replacement of a school based on the teaching of reading, writing, calculus and Christian doctrine, for a school based on the education of the body, science, moral values and civic and instrumental knowledge for work (Souza 2000: 25).

Barbosa's opinions considered that for a successful implementation of the education system, others social issues such as the electoral reform, the emancipation of enslaved people, and the development of the industry, should be also transformed in order to contribute to Brazil development (Machado 2010). Therefore, he alerted the Brazilian authorities to the importance of establishing a national educational system and along with the social improvements (Mormul, Machado 2013). According to Oliveira Júnior (2015), Barbosa's opinions already indicated the necessity to articulate the life in society with a pedagogic work focusing the scientific process; these features have a converging point to the pragmatism intellectuals from the New Education movement.

Despite all the efforts by Barbosa, the implementation of his opinions, which would mark the shift of Brazilian education, did not occur (Faria Filho, Inácio 2015). Perhaps, due to the political transition period, his opinions strength has been dispelled. However, a question emerges in order to understand it: in a country where social inequality is frighteningly large and stable, what would be the interest of politicians – most of them are members of the most privileged social class – to improve the educational system, fostering the lower classes and reduce social inequality?

Regardless the non-implementation of his ideas, Barbosa already made it clear his thoughts could be not defeated. He recognized such ideas were guided by morality, by the need for social transformation of his time, by the dignity of the Brazilians who, at the time, were divided by racism and low access to decent education. In this context, the education, like justice and administration, truly prospers and lives more from the truth and morality that we practice it than from the great innovations and beautiful reforms that consecrated them (Barbosa 1967).

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<sup>3</sup> Barbosa intent to implement the Swedish gymnastic to develop aspects regarding the pedagogy, aesthetics, military and medical issues (Moreno 2015).

## **Fernando de Azevedo (1884-1972)**

Born in Minas Gerais – a Brazilian State with a huge politic and economical influence – Fernando de Azevedo is considered as one of the most important Brazilians thinkers on education. His ideas and projects had a critical impact on the Brazilian educational system and it last nowadays. As we are going to expose below, the *Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova* represents Azevedo's main idea<sup>4</sup>. Very early in life, Fernando de Azevedo had a tendency for following the religious life, but after 5 years attending the *Companhia de Jesus's* novitiate he gave up on it and started the Law School in Minas Gerais<sup>5</sup>. He also taught Latin and Psychology in public schools of Minas Gerais. During this term, he realized about some issues related to the school practices; specifically, the physical education lessons caught his attention (Alves 2004). Hence, Azevedo started to analyze the physical education lessons and its infrastructure. After a careful analysis, he suggested the Agency of Education from Minas Gerais to hire specific teachers for the physical education teacher position. Surprisingly he was not hired for that position and decided move to São Paulo in 1917. In that city, Azevedo acted as teacher and journalist, and started to study the local educational system (see Alves 2004).

During his stay in São Paulo, he spent several years writing and studying pedagogical, sociological and philosophical aspects that involved education. For instance, Azevedo published an opinion about the primary school architecture corroborating that the school buildings and its architecture contribute on aesthetic education, and traditional schools did not reach these aesthetic precepts (Brito, Cardoso e Oliveira 2017).

Azevedo's main focus considered the education, asphyxiated by the stifling and rigid bureaucracy, was increasingly divorced from the social context, failing in its social and democratic aims, mounted to a vanquished conception, with an inadequacy between the “real reality” and the educational system (Penna 2010). These features are typical of the Brazilian education, in turn, was – and still is – the traditional school model. Aware of it, in 1926, Azevedo published others opinions, in the *Folha de São Paulo* daily newspaper, exposing his viewpoints, concepts on how the school should be. Despite restricted to São Paulo State, Azevedo's opinions had a massive impact

<sup>4</sup> Azevedo was the Manifesto's main articulator and author.

<sup>5</sup> Despite graduated in Law, he never worked as lawyer.

in Brazil, because, besides the local differences, the education problems were quite similar in the Brazilian educational system.

According to Penna (2010), Azevedo's opinions demonstrated features regarding the educational system at that time, such as the anarchic empiricism and the unpopular intervention of political parties which were always trying to explore the school reforms to satisfy their own interests. From another perspective, he pondered that the traditional school, rigid and sedentary whose symbol is the school desk, was almost an orthopedic instrument. As a result of these opinions, Azevedo was invited, in different periods, to assume the position of secretary of education in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo States. However, his great achievement was a specific document written with 25 other intellectuals: *O Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova* (The Manifest of The Pioneers of New Education).

One of the remarkable pillars of Azevedo's ideas on education – in turn, based on Durkheim's sociology theories – was his comprehension that the school as an institution attached to a given social environment and as a means of promoting up-to-date human moral and ideals pervades to the design our mentality (Paulilo 2014). Thereby, that manifest expressed one ideal for the Brazilian education: the new education which is certainly pragmatic and its aims not the classes interest, but the individuals' interest, grounded on the school's connection with the social environment. These ideas are conditioned by the current social life, but deeply based on human, solidarity, social service and cooperation (Azevedo *et al.* 1932). Furthermore, that manifest exposed the failures of traditional school in order to contradict it:

The traditional school, installed for a bourgeois conception, had kept the individual in its isolated and sterile autonomy, resulting from the doctrine of libertarian individualism, which, moreover, had its role in the formation of democracies and without whose assault the rigid cadres would not have broken of social life (Azevedo *et al.* 1932: 41).

This panorama illustrates how Azevedo and the others pioneers sought the solutions for the Brazilian education at that time. A profound shift in the way of thinking the education was necessary, once it was guided by those traditional features. However, these changes had not a lasting influence in Brazilian educational system. Nonetheless, given the governmental coup occurred in 1934, the Brazilian politicians were

inclined to accept that religious ideology on education; the new education ideology was dissipated giving the place to the ideas promoted by the Catholic Church (Penna 2010).

Acting in several faces of Brazilian education, Azevedo's effort to meliorate it is recognized nowadays. Since the basic education to the higher education, Azevedo worked to establish new pathways for Brazilian education in order to reduce the social inequality. To reach this aim, he wrote others works and helped to create the others educational institutions, such as the University of São Paulo. He was also president of the Brazilian Association of Sociology and the vice-president of the International Sociological Association.

Azevedo was selected as a key thinker on education due to his works which included the definition of some Brazilian education's aims, the integration between all the educational levels, and the articulation that involved the education and all the others sectors of our society. Although his tremendous endeavor, just a small part of his ideology is present in the current classrooms. Funnily, it is not rare in current discussions about the Brazilian education quoting his works and the 'The manifest of the pioneers of new education'.

### **Anísio Teixeira (1900 – 1971)**

Standing out as one of the protagonists of Brazilian education at the beginning of the republican period<sup>6</sup>, Anísio Teixeira presented a wide range of ideas and his thoughts still present at the current Brazilian educational system. Teixeira was born in the countryside of Bahia, within a family associated with some politicians. Strongly influenced by his father, he studied law at the University of Rio de Janeiro and concluded it in 1922. After two years, he was invited by the governor of Bahia state, Francisco Marques de Gois Calmon, to be the head of the public educational system of Salvador, capital of Bahia.

According to Teixeira, the main challenge was the reintegration of the nation to the modern civilization which accelerated the urban-industrial development (Wiggers 2003). The education was a pathway to solve these issues, but it should go through a reform. The difficulties regarding the educational system from Salvador was remarkable; there were just a few schools, and consequently, just a few children attended the

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<sup>6</sup> The republican period began in 1889 and last since then.



mandatory schooling; the teaching conditions were precarious, and the teachers were not so well prepared to teach (Nunes 2010).

Facing these issues, Teixeira traveled to New York, in 1927, in a pedagogical excursion seeking to for information to solve the educational problems in Salvador (Teixeira 2006). Teixeira spent seven months at the Teachers College of Columbia studying John Dewey's theories on education and he completely changed his perceptions about education (Nunes 2010). When Teixeira returns to Brazil, he is invited to be the secretary of education from Bahia. Based on Dewey's pragmatism, Teixeira started to develop a border education concept which finds echoes in the Brazilian current educational system (Cavaliere 2010).

His first notable achievement was to create, in 1950, the *Escola Parque Carneiro Ribeiro*. The pedagogical method of that school was are based on the Laboratory School by John Dewey. Since those days, the Brazilian schools usually worked in half period, and in the opposite period the children had to go back home. However, with the *Escola Parque*, the children in Salvador would be able to attend the school in the full-time period.

After the experience with the *Escola Parque*, Teixeira's work was recognized and he was invited to be the head of the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior*<sup>7</sup> and of the *Instituto Nacional de Estudos Pedagógicos*<sup>8</sup> (Nunes 2000; Souza 2016). Late in the 1950's, Anísio Teixeira is invited by the former President, Juscelino Kubitschek, to create the educational system of the future capital of Brazil; his main aim was to provide an educational system of the Brasília stressing the need to develop autonomous and creative citizens (Miglievich-Ribeiro 2017). Teixeira brings the idea of *Escola Parque* from his experiences in Salvador to Brasília, and he also creates an educational system which was divided into institutions from the kindergarten to the University of Brasília (UnB).

For the basic education system of Brasília, the schools were planned to work in an integrated way, wherefore children would study in full-time period. That system was planned with three<sup>9</sup> types of institutions considered almost a University of Childhood: *Jardim de Infância* (kindergarten); *Escola Classe* (primary and secondary schools) and *Escola Parque* (Teixeira 1961). The *Jardim de Infância* was responsible for de-

<sup>7</sup> The Brazilian Agency of Research

<sup>8</sup> The National Institute of Pedagogical Studies

<sup>9</sup> The fourth institution were the high schools, in turn, would have be a sort of combination between the *Escola Classe* and the *Escola Parque* (Teixeira 1961).

veloping the contents to children between four and six years old; the *Escola Classe* aims was to develop the intellectual curricular contents; the *Escola Parque* would develop children's physical, artistic and recreational development (Teixeira 1961).

In 1962, Anísio Teixeira was elected President of the UnB, because Darcy Ribeiro – UnB first president – was invited to become a minister of João Goulart administration. Regarding the context of that period, the government was working to reduce social inequalities. However, considering that the entire world was facing the Cold War, not all social classes agreed on that political guidelines. Two years later, the Brazilian Army set up a coup to take down the João Goulart administration. Due to that, Teixeira – a progressivist intellectual – was ejected from the position at UnB. Consequently, he decided to live abroad acting as a visiting scholar at the Columbia University (1964), New York University (1965) and University of California (1966).

After a few years, Teixeira go back to Brazil and continue to advocate for the progressivist education. Unfortunately, five years after his return, he was found dead<sup>10</sup> in the elevator pit in a building where one of his colleagues lived. At that time, the dictatorial government stated it was an accidental death. Curiously, the press back in those days was not free; thus, this case was considered far-fetched. His family sustains he was murdered by government agents because he was involved with some communist political parties.

Promulgating the education substantiated on democracy, Teixeira defended through his entire live the public educational system, and strived to decreased the distance between the social classes. According, to him: “[...] in a society like ours, traditionally marked by the deep spirit of social class and of privileges, only the public schools will be truly democratic and only these schools may have an educational process without prejudice to certain forms or works which are essentials to democracy (Teixeira 1977).

### **Cecília Meireles (1901-1964)**

Meireles was born in Rio de Janeiro and spent a big part of her life in that city. Considering that her mother was a primary teacher, the felling for education was present since she was very young. When she was only 10 years-old she finished the primary

<sup>10</sup> Only in 2016, a national committee specialized on revealing possible crimes during the military dictatorial government, emerged some facts which does not confirm the official version of Texeira's death, but this also does not affirm Teixeira's family version (Brasil 2016).

school and at 16 years old she concluded the teaching program (Lôbo 2010). It does not take too long since her graduation and Meireles is invited by the local secretary of education, in 1920, to take a position at the Public Teaching Program of Rio de Janeiro (Silva 2017).

In her first years as teacher, Meireles focused on writing poems and literary books, but the issues related to the amount and quality of the textbooks offered for the primary schools caught her attention. Seeking to offer a material to provide better instruction for the children, Meireles published a textbook *Criança, meu amor* (Child, my love). This book was a huge success, and it was used in the educational system of Rio de Janeiro and from others two states (Lôbo 2010). Describing the children as docile and obedient to their parents and others adults from schools and others social institutions, that textbook illustrated moralizing pictures from children.

According to Ferreira and Micarello (2017), two decades after releasing that book, Meireles – influenced by the pioneers of education – promoted an epistemological shift and started to write emphasizing two main aspects of children's education. The first aspect is related to the need for children to occupy the political and educational scene. The second aspect refers to Meireles' works for and about children, frizzing the relevance of adults creating strategies to listen to them, changing their places of learning to interpret the needs of the children. Interestingly, these characteristics about childhood and children's education defended by her – during the first half of the twenty century – were convergent to some current authors of sociology of childhood, such as Corsaro (2011), Sarmiento (2004), Brougerè (2000). Both Meireles and the childhood sociologists have convergent doctrines which state the comprehension of the children as individuals endowed with rights. Additionally, they also recognize the importance of listening to the children's voices through the educational process. Curiously, these similarities have a gap from almost 80 years.

Counting with a massive prestigious and supported by the Brazilian government, Meireles expanded, in 1934, her actions towards early children education and created the children's library *Pavilhão Mourisco* – which was the first library specific for children in the world not linked to an educational institution (Senna, Barbosa 2017). Offering large and colorful spaces, that library encouraged the children to read books specific to their age, to drawn, to create stories, etcetera (Ferreira; Micarello, 2017). Meireles conceived children's libraries, which should foster the affective dimension of readers, protect children from readings that they consider to be detrimental to their

development, but at the same time, nourish others capacities. In this way, this type of library provides reading that breaks with the idea of a simply moralizing literature (Tocantins, Ferreira 2015).

After three years since the Mourisco library inauguration, Getúlio Vargas installed a government coup supported by the Catholic Church; gathering forces both, Getúlio and the members of that Church, annihilated any opposite force. As consequence, all the activities in every single institution which was described as “communist” – in turn was considered as a threat for the nation – should be extinct. The police force invaded the library created by Meireles on the charge of disseminating communist literature; the book “The adventures of Mark Twain” by Tom Sawyer was the crime proof (Martins 2014).

Even facing monumental barriers to her creeds, Meireles did not stop to move toward an emancipatory education. After that invasion, she began to teach since the kindergarten till higher education. She was also invited to teach in institutions such as the University of Coimbra, University of Lisbon and University of Texas. Moreover, she published dozens of poems and books, becoming one of the most important Brazilian authors. She promoted new patterns for education, and explained that the modern education is a joint of harmonious mechanisms which correspond to all difficulties and possibilities commonly founded in all human beings (Meireles 2001).

Whether teaching, signing the Manifest of New Education or creating a library for children not linked, Meireles dedicated her life to education. However, the majority of Brazilians know her for her poems rather her works on education. That fact does not debunk her biography, but we highlight that she was not too recognized by her work on education, in turn, was predominantly dominated by men. Probably, this suppression of facts occurred due to the dominant chauvinist male Brazilian society; it may wrongly led to the thought that managing the education and designing its futures solutions it is not “work for women”. However, even with this tremendous hamper, Cecília Meireles is dawned as one of the main Brazilian thinkers on education.

### **Paulo Freire (1921-1997)**

Possibly emerging as the main Brazilian thinker on education, the work Paulo Reglus Neves Freire had worldwide repercussion. Born in Recife, Pernambuco, his family was middle-class. Surprisingly, in 1946, Freire graduated in Law but had never acted

in that field. After that, he had some experiences as a Portuguese language teacher at the same secondary school where he attended. In the next year, he was invited to be part of the education department of an institution called Serviço Social da Indústria<sup>11</sup> (SESI); he also took the position of SESI superintendent from 1954 to 1957. Since then, he also taught philosophy of education at the Escola de Serviço Social in Recife. In 1960, he got the doctoral degree on history and philosophy of education, and took the position of professor of philosophy of education, and history of education at the Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences, and Languages of the University of Recife (Beisiegel 2010).

His methods and work are translated to several languages around the globe; therefore, it is not our aim to describe step-by-step of it. Our aim is to indicate the importance of his work for Brazilian education. Freire's first recognized achievement was the adult's literacy method developed in his home State; due to its success, Freire was invited, in 1963, by the governor of Rio Grande do Norte State, to develop his method in a city named Angicos (Beisiegel 2010). Placing the students' interests and willing in the center of the pedagogical process, Freire's literacy method reached a tremendous status in Brazil when 300 workers were literate within, in total, 40 hours of pedagogical intervention. According to Germano (1997), besides being literate, those students were also politically educated; this last dimension has a strong influence on Freire's theories. As consequence, the President of Brazil at that time invited him to implement that literacy method in more than 20.000 spread all over the country. Unfortunately, due to military coup in 1964<sup>12</sup>, Freire was considered by the military government as threat to the nation, and he was arrested and forced to the exile outside Brazil. Therefore, that tremendous project of literacy never became into reality.

From 1964 to 1980, Freire worked in partnership with institutions all over the world – in the American, European and African continents –, in order to improve these local educational systems, action that his own country did not allow him to do so. In 1968, during his exile, Freire wrote his most famous book: *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed). Accentuating the features and further perversity of the traditional pedagogy – named in Freire's work as banking education –, he explained that, when the education does not provide autonomy of the pupils, the

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<sup>11</sup> That institution is responsible for promoting social welfare, cultural development and the improvement of the quality of life of industries workers.

<sup>12</sup> Previously, we briefly explained this military coup.

oppressed dream is to become an oppressor. In that masterpiece, he underlines the necessity for the educational actors to provide the dialogue and action; he titled these components *práxis* (Schrader 2018).

Once back to Brazil, Freire engages, from 1980 to 1988, in political movement, and in 1989, he is invited to be the secretary of education of São Paulo State – the largest city in Brazil. Even facing a difficult situation left by the previous administration, he had shown a great ability to manage the educational system of São Paulo city; he rose up the teacher’s salaries, reduced the school dropout, and initiated the process to reform the school buildings (Gadotti, Torres 1991).

In the 1990’s, Freire wrote some books, and one of them titled *Pedagogia da Autonomia* (Pedagogy of Autonomy) expatiates, once more, on pupil’s autonomy. An important part of his work’s approach is to listen to children, considering their previous experiences and valorizing their interests. Guided by these features, both teachers and children will work collaboratively, and, by doing so, they will educate themselves simultaneously.

Paulo Freire was firstly known for his work with adult’s education, but the critical educators will hardly forget his others ideas. From kindergarten to the higher education, Freire’s work echoes through different levels of education and contexts. Converging on the importance of student’s autonomy, critical thinking, and socialization, Freire’s theories will always echo in contexts divided by the social class ‘war’: “[...] it would indeed be a naive attitude to expect the ruling classes to develop a form of education that would enable the dominated classes to perceive social injustices in a critical way” (Freire 1984: 89). Considering it, his work is recognized in the entire world, and he earned several honors awards: 29 doctor *honoris causa* (in Brazil and others countries); UNESCO Education Prize for Peace; he was also nominated by the Brazil’s Congress as the Patron of Brazilian education (Brasil 2012). The last award concretizes what many of Brazilian educators already thought about him: a guider of emancipatory and democratic education.

## Discussion

Even with different backgrounds, aims, methodologies and ways of thinking about education, all the authors here selected strived to improve the Brazilian education; they acted in distinct fields: politics; educational system; philosophy of education;

childhood education; pedagogy methods. However, it seems there were two major issues that hampered their works. The first one is that the traditional school model and its *modus operandi* were a common target for the all the authors. Although acting in different areas, they made important statements which highlighted the need for thinking another institutional model of school; without this fundamental shift, it would not be possible to go on with their works.

Attached to the first issue, the second common aspect for them were the student's role through the educational process. The context of the traditional school does not foster pupil's active participation, and as we will see further, these the students play a secondary role in their own educational process; consequently, the teachers control and domain this process. Thus, these two major aspects will be discussed in the following topics with the purpose of comprehend the low impact of those author's theories.

## INSTITUTIONAL SCHOOL MODEL

Based on military, religious and medical institutions, the traditional schools – spread all over the world – were not specifically designed to attend the educational aims. Despite the gap of one century between the selected authors' works, all of them indicated the relevance of rethink the institutional school model. Since Rui Barbosa to Paulo Freire, it seems the traditional school's model is one of the greatest barriers to the educational improvements.

The traditional schools provide an environment which engenders pupil's subjection in order to produce docile bodies (See Foucault 2014). As consequence, the critical way of thinking is put aside, reducing the possibilities for the individuals to analyze and to participate of a democratic society. However, the traditional schools still prevalent in the Brazilian society, strengthening the barrier to critical education. Obviously, this issue is multifaceted and involves several aspects from civil society; it would be a mistake to think it has a simple solution. Given this complexity, the authors here selected endeavored to change this scenario in different perspectives.

Despite inserted in a society which supported the slaving with many illiterate people, Rui Barbosa stressed the importance of creating laws to increase the educational incomes along with others social aspects; it would engender citizens and workers required for a country that wanted to modernize itself (Mormul, Machado



2013). However, according to Patto (2007), Barbosa also considered the schools as a powerful tool to decrease the violence rates by supporting the idea of “more schools, less jails”. Attached to it, the teaching of gymnastics would another relevant way of controlling the pupil’s bodies, especially those from the lower income social classes (Patto 2007). In others words, Barbosa’s opinions could mean that the educational system designed by him could serve just for the “fill” the free time of those students from poor families, and putting them away from the criminality, instead given them abilities to work and to live in a democratic society.

Clearly, the Brazilian society from late 19<sup>th</sup> century had tremendous social challenges to be solved: slaving, social class gap, huge illiteracy rates, poorness, and late industrialization. In one hand, these problems had to be solved, and the education was considered one of the most important ways to do so. On the other hand, the schools at that time – with the traditional institutional model – was also a form of docilize pupils, leading them to maintain the social *status quo*, by only given them the abilities to work, and not allowing them the ability to think critically.

We ponder that Barbosa’s opinions remarkably pointed out the need to change the traditional school model and its pedagogical process by guiding it. Despite advocating for some pedagogical innovations such as the Swedish gymnastics – considered too rigid and strongly disciplinary (See Moreno 2001) – Barbosa’s opinions seek to change the traditional school model, fostering it with the inductive and research pedagogy. These characteristics are the opposite of the traditional school model. Interestingly, already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the same century which the traditional school was establish – Barbosa emphasized the low effectiveness of the traditional school. This fact shows us that the struggle of those thinkers to rethink that type of school is not recent.

Many decades after Barbosa’s opinions, Freire (2011) described the traditional schools as maintainer of the banking education: the pupils have to accumulate as much content as they are able to do so. In this context, the teachers act as they are the “owners” of the knowledge, and the students must follow the teachers and accumulate all the transmitted content. Antagonizing this perspective, Freire’s work considered both teachers and pupils as people who are teaching and learning at the same time. However, within the traditional school context, this possibility would be unthinkable. In this kind of school, the pupils are not considered as a character of the educational process.



Struggling in the field of philosophy, Freire's works represented an oasis in the middle of a desert full of discipline and conservativeness pedagogical ideas. This retrograde ideas about the schools reinforce concepts that maintain the hierarchical relationship between teachers and pupils. Consequently, the educational process will be fated to become the banking education, and the relations between teachers and pupils will become distance and less affectionateness. Nevertheless, Freire (2002) implied that the educational pact is established through the affectionateness between its participants. In others words, Paulo Freire highlighted the need to turn the educational process more humanist, exalting our emotions and considering each type of knowledge from both teachers and students.

Overall, Fernando de Azevedo, Anísio Teixeira, and Cecília Meireles – members of the *Escola Nova* movement – also sought the school as the most relevant apparatus for social justice. By fostering a sort of education which the pupils would be able to interpret the phenomenon by their own sight, they would be more autonomous, and free from alienation; they should also be prepared to face the job market in a society in process of industrialization (Teixeira 1999). It is quite common – within the traditional schools – teachers requiring the students to no talk each other, to do their activities by themselves, to not move out from their school desks. Differently from the traditional school, these objects would be achieved by the critical thinking based on research and collaboration.

As we will discourse in the next topic, all of these orders are in behalf of the pupil's best education, but the teachers do not consider the pupil's interests and wishes. Indeed, the traditional school might offer some benefits to the pupils. For instance, in this institutional model the students will be in touch with the vastness of knowledge produced by humanity (Leão 1999). The traditional schools somehow promote some advances – otherwise this institutional model would not survive till today. However, we highlight that we do not advocate for the traditional school and its methods. We question the form how this knowledge is learned by the students. Moreover, we question: considering all the problems involving the traditional schools, to whom may interest to keep with this school model? What is the real aim behind it? We are not able to answers it in this paper, but it is vital to keep asking it in order to strive to change the prevalence of that type of school.

## STUDENT'S ROLE ON EDUCATION

Narrowly connected to the traditional school model, the way how the students participate of the educational process were a converging point of the selected authors. To discuss about the student's role in that process, we must analyze the aims of the Brazilian education. The current Brazilian Constitution states that the education will focus on the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work (Brasil 1988). Although the Constitutions from the selected author's contexts did not expressed these aims (Vieira 2007), they struggled to reach those aims.

Dewey (2011) argues that the traditional school model is based on passing the traditions between the generations, from the adults to the children, and it also permeated by a hierarchical discipline once they must obey an educational process preconceived. In this scenario, the teachers delimit the school hourly grid, contents, assessment system, norms, etc., and some of these rules might be pupils might do not easily reveal themselves to students (Pinto 2003). As consequence, the students will always try to adapt to these wide range of norms and rules, but they will always to commit fouls both consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, it will generate a vicious cycle, and the only way to break it to bring the pupil's voice to the educational process.

The authors from the *Escola Nova* movement – based on John Dewey's work (see Dewey 1978) – corroborate that the pupil's interests should guide the pedagogical process. According to the *Escola Nova* perspective, by bringing the pupil's interests to the center of the pedagogical activities, there will be a higher chance to increase the meaningfulness learning. It implies that the teachers should listen each pupil's voice and interests throughout the educational process. Converging to this approach, Paulo Freire's works stressed the importance of considering the previous experiences of the students in the educational process. It requires from the teachers the ability to articulate the pupil's experiences with the content to be taught; Freire (2002) also corroborates that the students' autonomy is a key factor during this process, and respecting their autonomy is not a favor, it is an ethical duty. Specifically, this aspect converges to what Cecília Meireles argued about the early childhood education, but she did it many decades before Freire. Luckesi (1994) quote examples of activities which could break the traditional school paradigm: group activities would be more tangible for the students, consequently the learning would be more meaningful rather

through the traditional pedagogy (e.g. discussions, assemblies, voting, etc.). All these educational features are strictly associated to the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work – aims of education expressed on the Brazilian Constitution.

Despite the similarities between the *Escola Nova* authors and Paulo Freire, there are some points in which they differ in some aspects. Freire stressed that the educational process is also a political process and vice versa. Freire (1989) stressed the education is a political act because it acts in order to serve human beings, and because we teach in favor of who and what for – therefore we do it against whom and against what – it represents a political activity. This perspective reinforces the need to comprehend every pupil's social and economic background, and by knowing it the teachers would be able to act in order to attend their context. Indeed, Freire's works is completely attached to what the current Brazilian Constitution express on education, but we ponder it is even more connected with the preparation of the pupils for the exercise of citizenship,

These aspects reveal the importance of considering the students as protagonist of the educational process which, in turn, is totally denied in schools within the traditional schools. However, the concept of respecting each pupil's interest was not unanimous in the scientific field of education. In this sense, we stress the works by Demerval Saviani. Considering that each pupil has a different interest, and that each interest must be attended, it would generate a discrimination instead of promoting the democracy and justifying the social inequalities (Saviani 1999). His theory affirm that the pupils go to the school with a confused vision about the world – an incipient knowledge – and the teacher's role is to interact with them in order to mediate the knowledge, transforming that incipient knowledge.

Since the education must stimulate the pupils for living in a democratic society, it would be desirable for them to know that they have equal rights, but these rights should be beaconed by the differences between themselves. In Brazil, the basic education combines the equality (everyone has the right to education) with the equity (everyone must have his/her differences respected throughout the educational process) (Cury 2008). Despite Saviani's observations about children's interests, we ponder if one of the educational aims is to stimulate the pupils for living in a democratic society, listening to their voices is a mandatory task. Moreover, by doing it is to consider that the pupils have their own rights during the educational process, contrary to

the idea that they will turn citizen or they are in process of becoming citizen; we are citizen since the very first moment that we born.

## CONCLUSION

Selecting (some of) the Brazilians key-thinkers on children's education was a very tricky task because their works extrapolate the education as a social right. Considering that education is a tool of empowerment and social class combativeness in Brazil, those intellectuals' theories were strongly related to the several social problems that surround the Brazilian context. Certainly, they did not see it only from a restricted sight of a given educational level. They had also to create ideas about the whole educational system, so that, during and after the educational process, the citizens from the lower income classes could be emancipated to participate actively and critically in Brazilian democracy.

Rui Barbosa proved for the Brazilian authorities the importance of the implementation of a national educational system. Anísio Teixeira initiated the 'Childhood University' in which children should develop the intellectual, citizen, physical and social dimensions. Fernando de Azevedo outlined the first theoretical framework of the national education system and was the avant-garde of an intellectual movement. Cecília Meireles built the first library for children in the world and dedicated part of her life to improving the children's education. Paulo Freire redirected the pedagogy relationship between teachers and pupils, and impressed many educators when 300 workers were alphabetized, in 45 days, his method.

These intellectuals had struggled against the Church and the ignorance of the governments, but they did not let their thoughts succumb to such powerful opposing forces. Currently, the concerning about the education went through a globalization and it became more uniform around on earth, stressing the need for some features such as improvement of infrastructure of schools building, higher investments on teaching programs, the salary increase of teachers, etcetera. In the Brazilian context, the data has shown a remarkable evolution regarding the literacy, the access to the schools and the teaching programs since the Brazil empire. Additionally, the Brazilian government provided the democratization of the education offer, and expanded the access to education. However, it seems some of those forces which constraint the education progress of the key-thinkers here mentioned still almost untouchable.

The present Brazilian education system has failed miserably in reaching its goals. Supporting this assertive, we could quote the data regarding literacy: only 50% of the students enrolled in the higher education are proficient in Portuguese and mathematics; this number dramatically decrease to 41%, 8% and 2% regarding high school, secondary school and primary school respectively (Lima; Catelli Júnior, 2018).

Once facing that panorama, one may think that the effort to change it would take too many time and energy. Indeed, it is not rare to hear from a teacher or a researcher that, if we start right now the required changes need for the progressivist education right now, we would not be able to see these transformations in our lifetime. However, a long journey starts with a single step, and the work of those intellectuals foster our hope to change the current scenario of education. In that sense, we consider selected these key-thinkers on education because they stand up for a critical and emancipatory education more than one century ago when the barriers for that were more implied than today; it is a demonstration of courage and resilience which inspires us to keep striving these same goals.

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