



## The experience at a new school education with abnormal children: Farias de Vasconcelos (1880-1939) in the context of special education

Ernesto Candeias Martins

*Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco, Av. Pedro Alvares Cabral, 12, 6000-084, Castelo Branco, Portugal. E-mail: [ernesto@ipcb.pt](mailto:ernesto@ipcb.pt)*

**ABSTRACT.** We approach the escolanovista Faria de Vasconcelos, in the context of modern pedagogy, the experience - School of Biérges (Belgium) and the special education with school abnormal children. Using hermeneutic and historical-descriptive analysis on his pedagogical thought and action, the goals of this study are: deepen the experience with Biérges, integrated into the ideals of the new school, which involved students for inclusion, the power of initiative, the observation, experimentation and integral culture, associating thought-action; analyze of the contributions to the education of abnormal pedagogical children and to schools, from mental and pedagogical reeducation. The theoretical framework of analysis is based on the works of Vasconcelos. Teaching always included the practical application, the learning by inquiry, problem solving and the working doing, developing the basic dimensions of the child: physical, intellectual, moral and civic cooperation. The special attention given to abnormal, which at the time had no special school, was a huge contribution to special education, conducting psych pedagogical examinations, diagnostics and interventions, which provided a useful guidance to schools and teachers. Much of what the escolanovista made has encouraged schools at that time and formed free, productive, citizens with a general culture and professional formation. The proposals of Vasconcelos fit some guidelines of special education and psychological support.

**Keywords:** new school, special education, integral education, abnormal scholars.

### Da experiência numa escola nova à educação com crianças ‘anormais’: Faria de Vasconcelos (1880-1939) no contexto do ensino especial

**RESUMO.** Abordamos o escolanovista Faria de Vasconcelos, no âmbito da pedagogia moderna, da experiência na escola de Biérges (Bélgica) e da educação especial, com crianças anormais escolares. Com uma análise hermenêutica e histórico-descritiva, sobre o seu pensamento e ação pedagógica, pretendemos como objetivos: aprofundar a sua experiência em Biérges, integrada na Escola Nova, que envolvia os alunos para a inclusão, o poder de iniciativa, a observação, a experimentação e a cultura integral, ligando pensamento-ação; analisar os contributos dados à educação das crianças ‘anormais pedagógicas’ e às escolas, desde a reeducação mental e pedagógica. O marco teórico de análise assenta nas obras de Vasconcelos. O ensino partia sempre da aplicação prática, da aprendizagem por indagação, resolução de problemas e no trabalhar ‘fazendo’, desenvolvendo as dimensões básicas da criança: física, intelectual, moral e a cooperação cívica. A atenção especial dedicada aos ‘anormais’ que, na época não tinham escolas especiais, foi um contributo enorme à educação especial, realizando exames psicopedagógicos, diagnósticos e intervenções, que davam uma orientação útil às escolas e professores. Muito do que fez o nosso escolanovista estimulou escolas na época e a formação de cidadãos livres, produtivos, com uma cultura geral e formação profissional. As propostas de Vasconcelos enquadram-seem algumas diretrizes da educação especial e apoio psicopedagógico.

**Palavras-chave:** escola nova, educação especial, educação integral, anormais escolares.

### De la experiencia en una escuela nueva a la educación con niños ‘anormales’: Faria de Vasconcelos (1880-1939) en el contexto de la enseñanza especial

**RESUMEN.** Abordamos al escolanovista Faria de Vasconcelos, en el ámbito de la pedagogía moderna, de la experiencia en la escuela de Biérges (Bélgica) y de la educación especial con niños anormales escolares. Con un análisis hermenéutico e histórico-descriptivo sobre su pensamiento y acción pedagógicos, pretendemos como objetivos: profundizar su experiencia en Biérges, integrada en la Escuela Nueva, que

involucraba a los alumnos para la inclusión, poder de iniciativa, observación, experimentación y cultura integral, conectando pensamiento-acción; analizar las contribuciones dadas a la educación de los niños 'anormales pedagógicos' y a las escuelas, desde reeducación mental y pedagógica. El marco teórico de análisis se basa en las obras de Vasconcelos. La enseñanza partía siempre de la aplicación práctica, del aprendizaje por indagación, resolución de problemas y en el trabajar 'haciendo', desarrollando las dimensiones básicas del niño: física, intelectual, moral y la cooperación cívica. La atención especial dedicada a los 'anormales' que, en la época no tenían escuelas especiales, fue una contribución importante a la educación especial, realizando exámenes psicopedagógicos, diagnósticos e intervenciones, que daban una orientación útil a las escuelas y los profesores. Mucho de lo que hizo nuestro escolanovista estimuló escuelas en la época y la formación de ciudadanos libres, productivos, con una cultura general y formación profesional. Las propuestas de Vasconcelos se encajan en algunas directrices de la educación especial y el apoyo psicopedagógico.

**Palabras clave:** escuela nueva, educación especial, educación integral, anormales escolares.

## Introduction

Antônio de Sena Faria de Vasconcelos e Azevedo (1880-1939) is a central pedagogue of the new school movement, one of the greatest Portuguese pedagogues in the History of Education and/or Pedagogy of the 20th century, with a great European and Latin American prestige, disseminator of the foundations of 'child science' (pedologia) and psychopedagogy in the growth of the child (Alves, 1967), a pioneer of the education of the future, who continues indisputably, still today, updated in many aspects of his thought (Figueira, 2001).

He studied at the School of Espírito Santo (Braga), graduated in law, following the family tradition, but felt a deep vocation in the area of social sciences, namely of pedagogy. In his book 'Problemas Escolares' (School Problems) (1929) explains what he understands by (contemporary) pedagogy, considering it with a character and a spirit clearly scientific and experimental. Pedagogy should be the efficient means to elevate learners to individualized and simultaneously socialized spheres (Brazil, 1969). Education was for our New School pedagogue, an integral whole that develops harmonically, for the formation of the 'integral man' - integral and inclusive education. And this sense of mental education, a concern manifested on a large scale, which was the firm foundation on which all other types of education must be built on.

This study will not focus on analyses of aspects that have already merited monographs and in-depth investigations or systematization of their thinking (Alves, 1967; Cunha, 1997; Vasconcelos, 2012). Heuristically, we used his *Complete Works* (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation edition), gathered and analyzed by J.H. Ferreira Marques (1986, 2000, 2009), in addition to other documents gathered in the *Studies of Castelo Branco: Journal of History and Culture* (Brasil, 1969; Dias, 1969), scattered articles, secondary sources and academic dissertations (National Library Archives, Torre do Tombo

(National Archive), municipal libraries of Castelo Branco, Cascais and Library and the Theater Museum Library, scientific repositories, etc.), in order to centralize all our analysis in the scope of the contributions: the experience and actions in the new school; to special education in the organization of schools, methodologies/techniques of diagnosis and intervention with the 'abnormal' (sic) children.

Based on a reflection of a hermeneutical and historiographical-descriptive aspect, centered on the figure of Faria de Vasconcelos "Pioneer of the education of the future[...]", as he was described by A. Ferrière in the Preface to his work *Une École Nouvelle en Belgique* (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 3-4) (Figure 1), we will have the following objectives: analyze his pedagogical contributions to the History of Education (Contemporary Pedagogy, Pedagogical Movement of the New Education or 'New School') derived from the Bièrges experience, classifying them in the principles of the New School; analyze his perspective of education to abnormal children (special education) or delayed, fitting in the medical-pedagogical movement of the time. The education of these 'abnormal scholars' was seen in the perspective of an integral education (social, intellectual, moral and physical), being a preoccupation in his writings, since 1909, including the delinquents (Vasconcelos, 1936), besides addressing the organization of special schools, general and professional culture supplemented by post-school activities, medical-pedagogical assistance and support to the needs of those underages. At that time, there was the section of the Medical-Pedagogical Institute of Casa Pia in Lisbon (1915) and the Prison Colony for Children of S. Bernardino (1912), with prominent action of Aurélio da Costa-Ferreira and Fernando Palyart Pinto, the institute of catholic nature 'Florinhas da Rua - Condessa de Rivas' (1922), which we discussed in another study (Martins, 2016).

The single school, the education of abnormal minors, coeducation, childcare, school and social hygiene, schools and outdoor activities,

psychoanalysis, the use of active methods, etc. boosted contemporary pedagogy, whose principles in the first half of the 20th century appear expressed in several systems of education embodied in innovative educational methodologies and techniques, which led the children to be active, to use observation and intuition in their learning. Faria de Vasconcelos (1923, p. 223) bets on the spiritual value of man, in his capacity as an active being, because “[...] it’s worth being a man [...]”, the fruit of an integral education.

### Innovative pedagogical experience in Bruges (Belgium): the psycho-pedagogical and social in the students’ integral culture

When Faria de Vasconcelos arrived in Belgium in 1902, in order to advance his studies in the social sciences and especially in psychology and pedagogy, he was involved in the cultural and educational movement (new pedagogies, new schools) which circulated in Europe. He enrolled at the New University of Brussels where he will do his doctorate and, in 1903, edited a small book of psychological and social content, entitled *La Psychologie des Foules Infantiles* the fruit of a university study. A year later he completed his doctorate in Social Sciences, with the thesis *Esquisse d’une Theorie de la sensibilité sociale*, which was awarded the rare classification of ‘*La plus grande distinction*’. He exerts teaching positions as Professor of Psychology and Pedagogy at that University, in addition to teaching ‘Dramatic Literature’ at the University Extension of Belgium.

Taking advantage of a vacation, he came to Portugal in 1909 for a series of lectures at the Geography Society of Lisbon, whose texts are collected in a volume titled ‘*Lições de Pedologia e Pedagogia Experimental*’ (Lessons in Pedology and Experimental Pedagogy) (1909), as well as his lessons at the Higher Normal School. In these writings, he analyzes what he means by pedagogy, the historical evolution of experimental pedagogy, the contributions of experimental pedology and child psychology to future teachers.

From 1911 to 1914, he was the Director and founder of the New School of Biérges-les-Wavre, his *École Nouvelle à la Campagne*, on the surroundings of Brussels. This experimental school turns out to be one of the most advanced examples of the New School which, in Ferrière’s opinion, in the Preface to his work (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 3) “[...] was one of the best achievements of the New School”. In the words of J. Lopes Dias (1969), Georges Rouma, Director General of Instruction at the time, who later went on an educational mission to implement the ideals of the New School (in Sucre), at the invitation of the Bolivian Government, he considered this School of Biérges, as a “[...] laboratory of practical pedagogy, where its founder applied integrally the principles of scientific pedagogy” (Dias, 1969, p. 88). Rogério Fernandes (1978) refers to this School, where 28 of the 30 principles proposed by the movement were applied as a practical example of a New School, claiming to have been a pedagogical experience of unquestionable interest in the history of education (Vasconcelos, 2012).

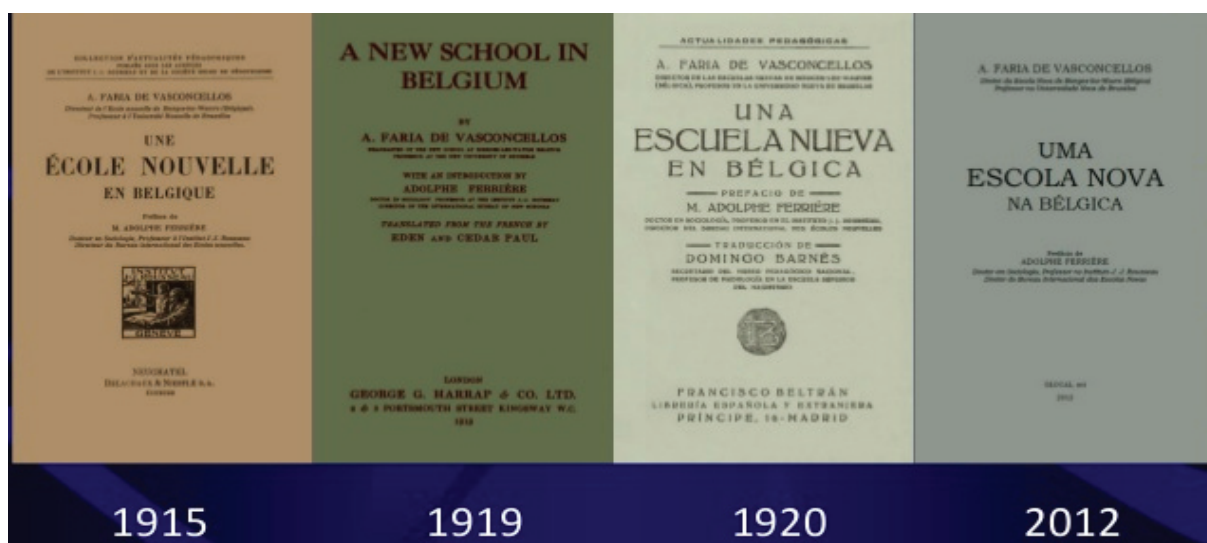


Figure 1. Some publications of *Une École Nouvelle en Belgique*

Sources: National Library of Lisbon (1915).

In Portuguese “Escolanovista” (is the term applied to followers of the Escola Nova – ‘New School Movement’) applied his innovative pedagogical ideas at the Biérges School (1912-14), namely at the level of class/classroom, physical education (recreational, pedagogical gymnastics), handwork, non-formal and community education activities (tours, museum visits, activities with other youth and adults, etc.), among others. He went to the detail of the school furniture, linking the comfort, for example, of the desks with the students’ learning. He also refers that school desks deformed the body of the child, giving rise to vicious attitudes and diseases – scoliosis, myopia, etc. – imposing an immobility contrary to its nature, to its needs for movement and physical-motor freedom, and thus tiring excessively and barbarously the child (Vasconcelos, 1921).

For the creation of this experimental school, Faria de Vasconcelos sells a large part of his assets, which is understandable in view of his educational ideal, in addition to his unshakable character and strength of dedication to innovative education. He was well-placed in Belgian society, in such a way that A. Ferrière (Vasconcelos, 2012) considers Faria de Vasconcelos as ‘Belgian’, even by marriage, because he married a citizen of that country, with whom he had a daughter who would come to die. According to J. Ferreira Gomes (1980b, p. 255), also in Cuba (between 1915 and 1917), he was known at the time as “[...] the great Belgian educator [...]”, so that he integrated the group of Belgian pedagogues (influenced by Ferrière and Claparède), invited in Teaching and Reform Mission to Bolivia (period of 1917-20)<sup>1</sup>.

The experience of the Biérges-les-Wavre school ensures the necessary connection to nature (pedagogical naturalism) and the calmness of rural life in the urban environment, whose motto was ‘School to children’ (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 14-15). In it he introduces almost all the guiding principles of the New School, insisting on “[...] teaching methods that grant an identity” (Gomes, 1984, p.

123) compared with other experiences of the time<sup>2</sup>. Although without coeducation, neither separate single-family houses for groups of 10 to 15 students, with a family environment, under the material and moral direction of an educator (Vasconcelos, 1915), it represented for Ferrière a sui generis model of a new school. The fundamental characteristics of the School of Biérges were based on the following pedagogical ideas (Meireles-Coelho, 2005):

★-The school is a laboratory of practical pedagogy integrated in pedagogy or modern psychology, both in the means that it puts into action, in the necessities of the material and spiritual life and in the objective that fixes on its activity.

★ -The new school was a boarding school (housing, locker rooms, rooms, bathrooms, pavilions for classes, pedagogical farm, etc.), with influence of the surroundings in which the child develops and performs an effective integral education.

★-The new school was located in the countryside surrounded by nature, whose influence favors the growth of the child and allows to perform “[...] tasks and works in the field, physical culture and moral education, in addition to other resources with an impact on the intellectual culture” (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 16-17).

★-The new school organizes handicrafts for the students, “[...] obligatory community tasks, with a professional and educational purpose” (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 114). They practice games, sports activities, tours, scout-style camps, etc. which satisfied the children’s manual needs and to awaken interests, aptitudes and tendencies that allowed them to know better and better guide them in their inclinations and interests: “[...] personal and school guidance” (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 22-26).

Among the handiwork, we highlight woodworking, agricultural cultivation, animal husbandry, weaving, modeling (Figure 2), pottery, binding, working with wood and iron (Figure 3), etc. which contributed to physical and intellectual development.

★-Body and corporeality were cultivated, guaranteed by natural and pedagogical gymnastics, games and sports, articulated with trips on foot and bicycle, tent camps, visits to museums, monuments and factories, etc. (Vasconcelos, 1915; Vasconcelos, 2012).

<sup>1</sup> The documents of the Ministry of Public Instruction of the Bolivian Republic of 1917 indicate that in 1911 the Government hires teachers to the Normal School of Teachers in Sucre, for example: Constant Lurquin and Adhemar Gehain. A year later they invited Raymond Hoffmann to direct and reorganize the National Institute of Commerce of La Paz, as well as teachers for that teacher training establishment, professors Raymond Lurquin and Elie DeLulle (Dias, 1969). In 1913 it was the turn of Emile Jacobs, Júlio Fischer, Terese Réquile, Julia Degand, Emile Cambier, Henri de Genst, Adrien Hock, Henri Mettwie, Adolfo Lambert, Lea Leroy, ‘A. S. Faria de Vasconcelos’, Emile Siroux and Maurice Sluys. At the same time, they invited other teachers of various nationalities, for example: the French Andrée Dubois-Niboyet, Louis Busch, Julio Harriague, Eugene Bultingaire, Cossec and Guy de Chazal; the Italians Prieto Bruno, Domenico Cartesegna, José Bacigalupo and José Torreggiani; the Germans and Austrians Federico Kiessling, Antônia Maluska and Elene K. de Schneider; the Polish Roman Koslowsky; the Peruvians Germán Morales and Roberto Valverde; the Argentine Bernabé Sosa and the Spanish Juan Bardina (Marques, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>For example: *Abbotsholme School* (England), founded by Cecil Reddie, in 1899 who applied in practice the theories of Herbart’s interest; the public school of coeducation *Bedaes School* (England), founded by J. Haden Badley, in 1893; the *Landerziehungsheim Hermann Lietz Schule* (Germany) created by Hermann Lietz in 1898; the *Odenwaldschule* (Germany) who following the pestalozzian principles (‘forming the head, the heart and the hand’), created by Paul Geheeb in 1910; the French school *École des Roches*, founded by Edmond Demolins in 1899; etc. (Martins, 2015, 2016).



**Figure 2.** Working in the modeling room – School of Bièrges, 1913.

Source: Vasconcelos (2012).



**Figure 3.** Working the iron in the forge – School of Bièrges, 1913.

Source: Vasconcelos (2012).

★-The new school developed intellectual education, through a general culture, developing the critical and observational spirit (scientific methodology), in a range of obligatory areas promoting “[...] integral education” (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 50).

★-General culture is completed with a professional, spontaneous and systematic

specialization to develop the interests, abilities and faculties of the students oriented in a professional sense (Figures 3 and 4), according to age “[...] professional guidance for a job” (Vasconcelos, 1915, page 51).

★-The teaching was based on facts and experiences of the students, acquiring useful knowledge from natural and participant observations and induction (theory followed practice) by placing them in contact with the “[...] forms of life and human labor” (Vasconcelos, 1915, p.102).

★-The teaching was based on the personal activity of the child, supposing the association with the intellectual study (drawing, manual works, mathematical initiation, notions of arithmetic, metric system and geometry), that is, an educational instruction, in an individual effort of research and discovery/inquiry (Vasconcelos, 1915). In fact, teaching was based on the spontaneous interests of the child, giving him/her themes that interested him/her and which were within his/her reach, coming from the surrounding reality: “Let the child freely tell in his/her own way what he/she sees, does and thinks, to allow his/her initiative to be manifested, his/her person to express his/her skills” and “[...] should sincerely reflect his/her personal preferences” (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 96).

★-The new school promotes, on the one hand, the student’s individual work, based on observations, experiments and personal notes of record, whether in the field, in “[...] studios or in laboratories” (Vasconcelos, 1915, p.53) and, on the other hand, the collective work, in the ordination and/or common logical elaboration, through phases of programming the project work.



**Figure 4.** Working in the carpentry and in laboratory – School of Bièrges, 1913.

Source: Vasconcelos (2012).



★- Moral education, as the intellectual, is done from the inside out, through experience and oriented practice and gradual, with critical sense and freedom. The ideal of the new school was the application of the system of 'school republic' or 'school self-government' (used in schools in the 1920s by Antônio Sérgio and in a community and familial mode from the 1940s on the Casas do Gaiato -Obra da Rua by Padre Américo) (Martins, 2016). For Faria de Vasconcelos (1915, p. 117-118), 'Physical and intellectual education are not only the prelude to moral and social education; well-oriented, constitute the widest and most effective preparation', that is, the qualities of character, the spirit of initiative, autonomy, the sense of personal responsibility, self-governing, so that "[...] the orientation, type, value of the environment in which the child is called to develop is one of the most considerable factors in his/her moral evolution". The child was allowed "[...] to practice social life and to acquire the feeling of collective life" (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 126-127).

★-In the new school, there are positive prizes or sanctions consisted of opportunities given to creative spirits to increase the child's creative capacity and power of initiative, providing him/her with free and interest free works/tasks (Vasconcelos, 1929). Negative punishments or sanctions were in direct correlation with faults committed, once "The important thing is to help the child become better" (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 132). Emulation was applied by comparing the child between his/her present work and past work and not by comparing his/her work with his/her friends (unlike the Jesuit model in school teaching).

★-The school constituted a means of 'beauty' (meaning of E. Key) in which order was the first condition and starting point (Martins, 2016). Thus, the industrial art practiced and that surrounded the daily life of the children led to the pure art, proper to awaken the artistic sense and the noble feelings. Hence, music, singing and the orchestra exerted a deep and purifying influence on them, creating in children positive emotions: "[...] everyone learn to sing and choirs are the most beautiful effect of the parties and concerts we organize at school" (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 138).

★-The education of the moral conscience consisted of narratives that provided spontaneous reactions, judgments of value that articulate the relationship of the Self with others (practice of "[...] hour of tales [...]" and "[...] night readings" (Vasconcelos, 1915, p.94).

★-The education of practical reason (Kantian influence) consisted of reflections and studies on

natural laws of spiritual, individual and social progress, i.e., to appeal to collaboration, power of initiative, curiosity and personal interest, since "[...] strengthens the spirit of tolerance and charity" (Vasconcelos, 1915, 134).

All those pedagogical characteristics, experimented in Biérges, will guide F. Vasconcelos (1929) at the Institute of Mental and Pedagogical Rehabilitation (1929) to deepen the methodologies of analysis/diagnosis and intervention with the abnormal children at school.

Antônio S. Nóvoa (2005, p. 83) points out that after a "[...] century of pedagogical theories [...]" it was important at the time to concretely explain what was being done, hoping that this illustration would be inspiring and contribute to sow the 'seed' of the new school. This sowing metaphor is, since this time, the one that best characterizes the discourse of pedagogical innovation. It was necessary to move from ideas to practices and, at the same time, to transform practices into a laboratory of experimentation. Not everything should have the right to call itself 'new school'. For this reason, Ferrière used the Preface of the work of Faria de Vasconcelos (1915) to publish the thirty points of the new school and establish a minimum program to be respected: Family internships, in the field, where the child's personal experience is at the base, both intellectual education (in particular by the use of manual labor) and moral and social education, through the practice of the system of relative autonomy of students. Here were the four core points of the new education: the relationship with nature and a healthy life; the child, his/her experience and his/her interest as central elements of the pedagogical work; the defense of an integral education, if possible in boarding schools that recreate the family environment; the principle of self-government. For a school to be considered new, it had to satisfy at least 15 of the 30 requirements/principles defined by the *Bureau International des Écoles Nouvelles* (Meireles-Coelho, 2005).

Faria de Vasconcelos (1915) conceived the system of autonomy according to the following pedagogical foundations: the creation of a well-organized set of rules, physical activities, habits and moral customs; the creation of a true social spirit through the "[...] rational division of labor and the real and effective cooperation of the student in school life" - this allows him/her to learn to live in society and "[...] to acquire little by little the feeling of collective life" (Vasconcelos, 2012, p. 208-209). In addition to this social organization, he cultivated feelings of initiative, independence and personal

responsibility. They were supporters of leaving the child in great freedom. He was not an apologist for any authoritarian discipline that would impose on the child moral habits of which he/she neither understands reason nor purpose. He allowed each child to create for himself/herself an inner rule, the result of his/her personal experiences, and the result of spontaneous adaptation to school life, social life with colleagues and teachers. In all areas of school, in physical life, in manual work, in classes, he appealed to active collaboration, interest, curiosity, initiative and individual effort. He believed in freedom of movement and action, in creation, organization and research, in everything the school had for the student. The student does not abuse the freedom granted. This does not mean that there was no authority (Vasconcelos, 2012).

It is interesting to note that Faria de Vasconcelos (1909), in relation to education, appealed to the self-esteem and self-knowledge of 'being a person', because this aspect had a positive influence on the child, to make him/her live in a climate without oppression and recriminations. He says that, in Biérges, children are led to pay attention to their own progress, to measure their strength, to appreciate and compare their intellectual work and/or moral effort as to achieve lovers. Individual emulation is emphasized, not forgetting the social emulation that, used with great tact, became a lever of moral education (Alves, 1967).

### **Educate in a special and inclusive way the 'abnormal pedagogical' children**

In the 19th century, pedagogical classes for abnormal children in Casa Pia began to develop special education for these children, although in the 18th century some experimental lessons had already begun. In some of these institutions, for children known as delayed or abnormal, there was a 'Pedagogy for the abnormal (sic) children', but in parallel with that of normal students, advocating the possibility of a special education, since this determination of limited abilities will condition the possibilities and the advantages of a special pedagogical technology that improves the correlative possibilities of educating them.

This differentiated pedagogy also served to recognize the abnormality (screening) and to facilitate the work of the teacher in the classes, the determination of a basic pedagogy to apply to the normal student, which would allow the construction of a special pedagogy that should be individualized and integrating these 'school abnormalities'. These groups were the retarded

intelligence, the unstable and the mixed. This idea is the result of a national history of teaching for abnormal children, where everything is shown according to the advances of medicine (psychiatry) and psychology, integrated in the medical-pedagogical movement where the figure of Aurélio da Costa Ferreira (Martins, 2016) stood out. The results of one and another pedagogy are introduced in the educational practices of the so-called normal students who, therefore, gain from this experimental research the distinction between what is normal behavior and what is not: from the deviations the special educational needs of students (school children) are defined.

One of the (social) issues that Faria de Vasconcelos questioned, after the Geneva Declaration in 1926, was society's duties towards these abnormal children and young people, since the document mentions in paragraph 5 'Protection of the destitute, abandoned and abnormal', insisting on the fulfillment of the duties to these children, since: "[...] it is not only a duty of defense, since the contact of these children constitutes for the normal ones a manifest danger, beyond the dead weight, of the formidable burden that they represent later to society itself if an appropriate adequacy [...]" (Vasconcelos, 1929, p. 20-21).

In addition to his activity as a teacher - at the Higher Normal School until its closure, and at the Faculty of Letters until his death, the activity linked to popular education, education reform, vocational guidance, scientific research, his participation in Congresses, etc., another idea encouraged the "Escolanovista" from Castelo Branco: to dedicate himself to the education of the abnormal ones, idea that comes to him since the first times which he lived in Belgium. He defines, from the theses of O. Decroly and Yonckeer and the 'pedagogical anomalies', whose delay in development was caused by a long illness, an irregular school attendance or a weakness of spirit, of a special nature. There is in this definition the distinction between the ignorant and the 'delayed'. The latter term seems in many cases to be the perverse result of a social and family environment (promiscuous, irregular, unstructured) that causes delays in the development of children. He demonstrates how the school, understood as social organization, can cause dysfunctions in the development of those children. He assumes that the school works well for the students and that the possible delay in the studies could be a good indication of difficulties derived from failures in the nature of their intelligence. Thus, a two-year school delay could lead to a different educational regime and should be the

subject of special schools of improvement. All these observations are the concrete result of his work in 1903 on *La Psychologie des Foules Infantiles*.

We know that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries a new paradigm (medical-pedagogical) emerges in the country, which articulates and makes coherent the knowledge of psychology and pedagogy (pedologia – ‘Child Science’), as we understand the intervention of Faria de Vasconcelos (1909) on the problem of protection and education of abnormal children, analyzing and comparing the various types of abnormalities (with several international classifications, for example that of S. Hall) and establishes their classifications (investigations at the Institute of Vocational Guidance and expressed at the Bulletin of the Institute), indicating the social solutions adopted in several countries, mainly based on the studies of O. Decroly. It is worth mentioning that he brings to Portugal a knowledge of the psychology of abnormal children (psychopedagogical principles of screening and intervention) and proposes the creation of several types of schools: asylum-schools for idiots and deep imbeciles; special schools for mental and pedagogical backwardness. These schools were supported in the medical-pedagogical (doctor and school nurse, school and social hygiene) and care (child and family) aspects. In a long report he explains the feasibility and advantages of his “[...] project of organizing special education for abnormal children” (Gomes, 1980a, p.68).

Although it was not a novelty (just remember the activity developed by Aurélio da Costa Ferreira at the Medical-Pedagogical Institute of Casa Pia in Lisbon and the Prison Colony for Children of S. Bernardino - Peniche), his coexistence and contacts with the work of Decroly, in Brussels, and other French-speaking pedagogues, will have fueled his interest in special education, including the specific training of teachers, is that interest in the education of the abnormal child was the starting point of the most interesting for the new pedagogical research (Martins, 2016).

The presence of the ideas of the New School, which was linked to the study of the deviations of the psychological normality (psychopedagogical of the students in the school) was already very evident, with knowledge about the studies of Decroly, which brought back in the country an attention to the Special Pedagogy (differentiated and individualized), from the observational analysis and diagnosis of the deficiencies, forcing the change of the pedagogical paradigm in force. This knowledge was most evident in the teaching of the blind and deaf, but also made it possible to create the social need for

protection of juvenile delinquents, who were also children and young people at moral risk, and hence the collaboration of the Institute of Vocational Guidance with Children Courts and their Children Protection Observatories annexes (1911-1919) or reformatory schools (from 1919 onwards), which merited some studies (Martins, 2015).

In 1903, Faria de Vasconcelos wrote a *Memoir on the Psychology of Children's Multitudes*, defending a reorganization of all schools, in order to control this emergence of children's criminality at the time. For him these ‘abnormal’ or delinquent children progressed by the methodology of intervention and individualization of collective processes (inclusion). He took advantage of the project that he had done on the special teaching of the abnormal, assigned by the Directorate General of Primary Education and made, at the invitation of the League of National Education, at the facilities of the Geography Society, a conference on ‘Abnormals’. In April 1909, he presented a thesis on ‘Pedagogical Abnormals’ at the 2nd Pedagogical Congress (Lisbon) and collaborated on the drafting of the most important conclusions, voted by congressmen. Faria de Vasconcelos (1909) discloses his learned and experimented psychopedagogical knowledge during the stay in Belgium, Switzerland and Bolivia. He shows well what has been thought by a great variety of psychologists and pedagogues about these ‘anomalous’ aspects of the children, who should be worked as a team, with doctors, to detect what must be medical-pedagogical work and what should be work of medicine and psychopedagogy, in addition to social workers and other technicians (Vasconcelos, 1924). He believes in the effectiveness of the school, since some empirical data proved that the percentage of cured or improved by psychopedagogical methods was 75 to 80 percent at the time.

The creation, in October 1929, of the Institute for Mental and Pedagogical Rehabilitation (Vasconcelos, 1931), under the sponsorship of the National Board of Education and in conjunction with the Institute of Vocational Guidance, was aimed at children: with severe or minor deficiencies in their mental capacities (intelligence, attention, memory, will, language, etc.); the delayed both in their mental development and in their studies (learning); the ‘normal’ but who needed a special education and training scheme (psychopedagogical supports). In this establishment were performed: clinical, physiological, mental and pedagogical examinations for the diagnosis of the causes, nature and amplitude of the defects and delays; Interventions, treatments or corrections of behavioral



anomalies, in harmony with the results of the exams, through special exercises, within an organic plan of activities and studies (Figure 5: one of the seven laboratories of the Institute).



**Figure 5.** Apparatus from the Laboratories of the Institute for Mental and Pedagogical Rehabilitation.

Source: Municipal Library of Lisbon (1929-1932).

For the Portuguese ‘Escolanovista’, there was the advantage of creating a good school organization and, therefore, it proposes a system of education for the pathological and pedagogical backwardness, as we have already said:

a)-creation of Asylum-Schools for idiots and deep imbeciles and special schools for mental and pedagogical delayed children (schools with boarding school or semi-boarding school, special classes attached to primary schools, but separated from these for specialized intervention).

b)-exclusion of students from normal schools must be determined by a medical-pedagogical committee (diagnostic report), with a “[...] medical, psychic and pedagogical examination of the child” (Vasconcelos, 1928, p. 53).

c)-distribution of ‘abnormal’ students in classes should be made, according to the diagnosis made, but privileging, if possible, their inclusion in the normal classes (maximum classes of 20 students) (Alves, 1967).

d)-education should be simple, concrete, practical, individualized, adapted to the physical and psychological state of the child and to his/her social use (adaptation).

e)-mixed, compulsory and free education, with a soft but firm discipline, valuing the physical-motor,

cognitive and manual work scopes, reducing the theoretical aspects to very short classes.

f)-completion of a medical-pedagogical examination (semester), with systematic records (observational and intervention) in a book school, with the support of the doctor and the pedagogue, in constant collaboration.

g)-the teachers of special schools must have a special preparation, but with the possibility of being extended to other teachers and doctors (and auxiliary staff).

h)-organization of an annual statistical service on these abnormal children, who must have, at the end, a professional classification when leaving those schools

i)-creation of post-school protection committees, in order to exercise a discreet and friendly guardianship with the children.

Children, who had serious anomalies and required special treatment, had only such support and intervention in an asylum-school, hospital or a specific school, as was done with the blind, deaf and dumb (Martins, 2015). That is, it was necessary to cover all the deeply affected physical anomalies, the deep idiots and imbeciles, the abnormal by severe hysterical neurosis, epilepsy and the moral anomalies as the infantile criminals, giving them a special education. All children who, in general, had minor, mental, moral or physical anomalies should be eliminated from primary schools, which implied an incomplete or irregular physical and psychological development, in order to be admitted to special schools, avoiding the teaching of ordinary processes and methods in primary schools. The delayed is a child whose psychic processes are slow, weak, difficult and superficial, that is, he/she was a light imbecile.

In a detailed analysis, mental abnormality did not constitute a single species, it was manifested in various forms. Faria de Vasconcelos (1921) recalls that Soller divided into two categories: idiots (organic brain lesions) and imbeciles (simple functional disorders without organic lesions). However, neither idiocy and imbecility, nor mental retardation, are strictly delimited clinical entities, and so the difficulty, at the time, of classifying mental anomalies was understood. Thus, the “Escolanovista” distinguished: delayed as a child whose physical processes are slow, weak, difficult and superficial; he/she is a light imbecile; the unstable as an unbalanced intellectual, a exuberant, disconcerting physical-psychic mobility, in such a way that the family/parents called him/her ‘nervous’, the ‘undisciplined’ teachers and the doctor sees mental defects in this neurosis; the asthenic as an

apathetic, depressed, intellectually and physically inactive, inert, who the teachers and the family call 'lazy'.

Each country and each line had its own classification, and each classification had different points of view and purposes, ranging from the pedagogical, to the medical, to the legal, to the psychological, according to the professional analysis. The truth is that the pedagogical backwards, not being mentally abnormal, could however be exposed to the influence of the school, the multiple factors and phenomena that occur in it, becoming moral, vicious, undisciplined abnormalities (Vasconcelos, 1936). The school, or its material conditions, or the methods it applies, or the regime it imposes, can develop latent anomalies or create them (Gomes, 1980b).

In this work at the Institute for Vocational Guidance and the Institute for Mental and Pedagogical Rehabilitation, he maintains contact with Belgian friends in scientific cooperation, such as A. G. Chistiaens, who was the director of the Institute for Vocational Guidance in Brussels and an active member of the Belgian Pedagogical Society, occupied in "[...] school and professional orientation of schoolchildren" (Alves, 1969, p.58). He is concerned with the lack of useful knowledge of young people, the result of an education that "[...] acts more on memory than on intelligence" (Marques, 1986, p. 93) and, therefore, fought for a discipline of infant psychophysiology in the training of teachers in Normal Schools in accordance with ideas about the problem of protection and education of abnormal childhood (Vasconcelos, 1909). He showed, therefore, that educational science was based on the scientific study of the child, on the effective association of the doctor-teacher/school, on the sincere collaboration of the family-school, and finally on the habilitation and training of the teacher.

It is noteworthy that in the Congress of the International Association for the Protection of Children (October 1931, in Lisbon), he participated in his work with a multifaceted role, proposing that alongside mental training and knowledge acquisition, it was necessary to understand physical and moral culture of the child in a special way. This proposal was approved in this scientific event and was in tune with the services of school, social and professional orientation, in order to give the Portuguese pedagogic system a professionalizing and humanizing way. Later, in 1937, Faria de Vasconcelos participated in Paris at the 12th Session of the International Association for the Protection of Children, presenting the communication *Les sanctions en éducation, leur légitimité, leurs modes, leurs*

*résultats*, published by the Jean Vromans Publishers in Brussels, where he insists on the guiding principles of psychic functions in child development (Alves, 1969).

### Final considerations

We analyzed the main features of the New School movement applied in Biérges by Faria de Vasconcelos (1915), with pedagogical impact at the time, of which we highlight: school located in the countryside, in the middle of nature but close to the city; a pedagogical model that values manual work, physical culture and practical and experimental training, along with intellectual and scientific education in which theory always follows the practice (not the opposite), from the individual interests and work of each student, completed by group work, by trips and camping; a student-centered learning based on facts and experiences; the development of a general culture supplemented by a specialization, the first spontaneous and then systematic; a moral, personal, and social education not imposed from the outside to the inside, but built from the inside out by the experience reflected in the critical sense and in the exercise of freedom; an education that values individual progress, in which each compares his/her present work with his/her own works in the past and not with the works of his/her companions; an education for the autonomy in which students learn to do, namely their own meals; a school that develops effective aid and participatory democracy; a liberating, purifying, and creative art education that develops the noblest emotions; a school which is a "[...] laboratory of practical pedagogy, grounded on scientific research and the development of spiritual and material life" (Vasconcelos, 1915, p. 73).

This school of Biérges and its educational practice was a stimulating challenge for us to understand the expansion of innovative pedagogical ideas and methodologies and their repercussions that have been extended to us (Alves, 1967; Cunha, 1997). It was a cooperative school, of effective mutual aid and a participatory democracy, and therefore was considered a laboratory of practical and active pedagogy, based on observation, experimentation and scientific research, favoring the integral education of students.

In relation to the contributions to special education of the so-called 'abnormal' children, for the pedagogue from Castelo Branco the principle of the pedagogy of the anomalies consisted of providing and adapting the teaching to the physical and psychological status of the children. The

physical, muscular and sensory education of the abnormalities preceded their intellectual education (Vasconcelos, 1909). Special schools should think more about education, the social value of 'abnormal' than on their actual instruction, implementing in them a manual, technical, professional education, because it is from this integral education that the abnormal has to live and it is through it that the abnormal socializes.

For Faria de Vasconcelos, special schools could be called schools of improvement, since they comprised three types: autonomous schools with boarding school; autonomous schools with semi-boarding school; special classes attached to primary schools, but completely separate from them. The exclusion of children from primary schools and their admission to special schools should be determined by medical and pedagogical commissions, which are responsible for carrying out the medical, psychological and pedagogical examination of the child. The distribution of the children in these special schools was made in relation to the diagnosis of the medical-pedagogical commission (Vasconcelos, 1928). The problem of the protection and education of abnormal childhood was of paramount importance to the country and its solution constituted a social duty (prophylaxis and valorization) and solidarity. It was in this sense that at the invitation of Counselor Marques Manoel, he elaborated a project to organize the special education of abnormal children, which was not materialized, but the ideas were innovative for history.

## References

- Alves, M. (1967). *A ação pedagógica de Faria de Vasconcelos* (Tese de Licenciatura em Ciências Históricas e Filosóficas). Universidade de Coimbra. Faculdade de Letras, Coimbra.
- Alves, M. (1969, julho). Compilação de obras do Prof. Faria de Vasconcelos. *Estudos de Castelo Branco: Revista de História e Cultura*, (30), 112-119.
- Biblioteca Municipal de Lisboa. (1929-1932). *Arquivo do Boletim do Instituto Reeducação Mental e Pedagógica*. Lisboa, PT: IRMP.
- Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa. (1915). *Faria de Vasconcelos 'Une École Nouvelle en Belgique'* (Arquivo do Instituto do Livro). Neuchâtel, SW: Delachaux & Niestlé.
- Brasil, R. (1969, julho). Faria de Vasconcelos e a evolução da pedagogia portuguesa. *Estudos de Castelo Branco: Revista de História e Cultura*, (30), 38-46.
- Cunha, A. (1997). *Faria de Vasconcelos: pensamento e ação pedagógica* (Dissertação de Mestrado em Filosofia da Educação). Universidade do Minho. Instituto de Educação, Braga.
- Dias, J. L. (1969, julho). Itinerário biobibliográfico de Faria de Vasconcelos. *Estudos de Castelo Branco: Revista de História e Cultura*, (30), p. 83-109.
- Fernandes, R. (1978). *O pensamento pedagógico em Portugal* (ICALP/Coleção Biblioteca Breve). Lisboa, PT.
- Figueira, M. (2001). *Um roteiro da educação nova em Portugal* (Dissertação de mestrado em Ciências da Educação). Faculdade Psicologia e Ciências da Educação. Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa.
- Gomes, J. F. (1980a). *Uma proposta de lei para a criação de 'escolas novas' apresentada no parlamento da 1.ª República – Estudos para a História da Educação no séc. XIX*. Coimbra, PT: Almedina.
- Gomes, J. F. (1980b). A. Faria de Vasconcelos. *Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia*, 14, 231-255.
- Gomes, J. F. (1984). *Estudos de história e pedagogia*. Coimbra, PT: Livraria Almedina.
- Marques, J. F. (1986). *Faria de Vasconcelos: obras completas* (Vol. I., 1915-1920). Lisboa, PT: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Marques, J. F. (2000). *Faria de Vasconcelos: obras completas* (Vol. III, 1920-1925). Lisboa, PT: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Marques, J. F. (2009). *Faria de Vasconcelos: obras completas* (Vol. IV, 1925-1933). Lisboa, PT: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Martins, E. C. (2015). *A infância marginalizada e delinquente na 1.ª República (1910-1926) - de perdidos a protegidos... e educados*. Coimbra, PT: Palimage.
- Martins, E. C. (2016). *Crianças 'sem' a sua Infância: história social da infância: acolher/assistir e reprimir/reeducar*. Lisboa, PT: Cáritas.
- Meireles-Coelho, C. (2005). *Educação contemporânea*. Aveiro, PT: Universidade de Aveiro.
- Nóvoa, A. S. (2005). *Evidentemente: histórias da educação*. Lisboa, PT: Asa.
- Vasconcelos, A. Faria de (2012). *Uma escola nova na Bélgica* (Carlos Meireles-Coelho, Ana Cotovio e Lúcia Ferreira, trad.). Aveiro: Glocal - Associação Científica Internacional. Tradução de Une École Nouvelle en Belgique. Préface de A. Ferrière. Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1915.
- Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1909). *Lições de pedagogia e pedagogia experimental*. Lisboa, PT: Antiga Casa Bertrand.
- Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1915). *Une école nouvelle en Belgique*. Neuchâtel, SW: Delachaux & Niestlé.
- Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1921). *Problemas escolares: 1ª série*. Lisboa, PT: Seara Nova.
- Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1923). *Didáctica das ciências naturais*. Paris, FR: Livraria Aillaud.
- Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1924). *Lições de psicologia geral*. Lisboa, PT: Livraria Ed. Guimarães.
- Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1928). O exame psicológico. *Boletim do Instituto de Orientação Profissional (Lisboa)*, 1ª série, (1), 51-65.
- Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1929). *Problemas escolares: 2ª série*. Lisboa, PT: Seara Nova.

Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1931). *Monographie de L'Institut de Reeducation Mentale et Pedagogique*. Lisboa, PT: Imprensa Lucas.

Vasconcelos, A. S. F. (1936). *Delinquência e inteligência nos adolescentes*. Lisboa, PT: Livraria Clássica Editora.

*Received on August 27, 2015*

*Accepted on October 26, 2016.*

License information: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.