



## Editorial

### **Education in the Brazilian federal system: Federalism, laicism and religion**

The terms federal, federalism, federation, are part and parcel of the linguistic day-to-day jargon of Brazilians. However, their political denotation or historical stances frequently are beyond the comprehension of the common people. People experienced in historical knowledge are frequently thrown back to the “distant” 19<sup>th</sup> century, the specific period in which Brazilian federation emerged through the 1891 Republican Constitution. It seems that at that instance the issue would have been solved and Brazilians were collecting the fruits of independence reaped by the States, coupled to the benefits of co-participation and co-responsibility of all in the conformation of Brazil, which started representing the federation units. However, the above impression does not correspond to facts and the construction of the federation became a challenge during the First Republic and in the following years. Currently, we are faced with themes in the news, political party programs, vindications of social movements, bills of law – featuring state and regional inequalities in the access to richness, divergences in tax indexes demanded by the states, conflicts by enterprises or the concession of benefits – which reveal the issue of federalism and the need for reflecting on the issue as a contribution to our role as citizens.

Disagreement, however, lies not only in the political and economic fields but encroaches also on education. Issues and proposals featuring local and regional characteristics are highlighted and involve items such as inequality in the accession to education, illiteracy indexes, contents to be transmitted to students, budget percentages to invest in education, the search for joint ventures among the states and municipalities or between municipal administrations, all demanding from the central government, characterizing the complexity and the importance of political and educational relationships within the Brazilian federation. The above problems are actually historical although their emergence arises from Independence and especially from the proclamation of the Republic. Featuring negatively the educational situation during the imperial regime, centralizing and decentralizing trends vied with each other with victories on the latter in the Republican period when the federative regime was installed. In spite of Republican efforts, access to education was limited. A stalemate affected the state and the country. Federalism affected education which was considered the prerogative of the states at the onset of the Republic. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the central government passed the educational complex to the states. A gap in an otherwise unified educational system occurred which impaired the progress and the homogenized formation of the entire nation. These issues came to the fore only much later.

The issues related to decisions by the central or state government in Education compounded others related to them, such as the funding of education (and its free stance), school for all children (compulsory for all), laicism and the State's responsibility in conducting the educational field, with the disruption or distancing from the Catholic Church which conducted education in the country during several centuries. Such issues emerging from the past impose themselves in the present and make necessary constant discussions on these issues to understand and seek alternatives. This background is highly relevant for the discussions below.

Current thematic issue of the scientific journal *Acta Scientiarum. Education* comprises 10 articles: six deal with *Education in Brazilian Federation: Federalism, laicity and religion*, challenges/dilemmas/ perplexities/stalemates that face society since the 19<sup>th</sup> century; four articles are the result of investigations within the educational field. It should be highlighted that all researchers teach in undergraduate and post-graduate courses in different higher education institutions in several Brazilian states.

The above-mentioned six articles related to the theme within a multidisciplinary perspective, or rather, the historical and educational stance of different educational experiences lived within the context of Brazilian federative system, focus on a critical analysis of initiatives on Education within relationship of states with the municipalities and both with religious organizations.

In spite of the several theoretical approaches and investigated items, a common axis underlies the articles. Research focuses on a uniting factor for the historicity of educational phenomena analyzed in the light of historical transformations and persistence, including the most recent ones. Analyses on the 20<sup>th</sup> century prevail but there are also many contributions on the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Coupled to the diversity of approaches, the multiplicity of the institutions of the authors of the articles in this thematic publication is an asset. It makes explicit the exogenic features of production and the catalyzing power of the scientific journal within the scientific community and its importance for Brazilian scientific publications.

The texts that comprise the issue trigger a discussion on the historical and educational landscape of the many educational forms experienced within the Brazilian context in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which are marked by intense conflicts between the Catholic Church and the Liberal State which established itself in Europe and reached our shores. It inspired modern education (public, lay, free of charge) and challenged the Catholic Church on these same principles.

On the other hand, the 19<sup>th</sup> century may be examined from several contact points, cooperation and complementarity between the Catholic Church and the State in spite of the ideological divergences and disputes for the hegemony on teaching and schooling. The concept and the reality of civil society emerged slowly and in a fledging manner in the midst of conventions between the Papacy and the States and other movements of several political segments. To illustrate and explicit such conflict as a historical construction, it is relevant to analyze spaces and distinct moments within the state-religion relationship. In fact, it reconstitutes and confronts different modalities in mobilization while defining the tensions that marked the stance of “Brazilian illustration”. The political discourses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century attributed an extraordinary regenerating power to Education due to its stance as a transforming force for the agent. The school was not conceived as a reflection of the general situation of a country; contrastingly, the country would be a consequence of educational development. These ideas became prevalent among liberal intellectuals and politicians who established methods which were capable of providing tools capable of implementing reforms that “improved public instruction”. Consequently, a new reality fermented through the formation of a “new mankind” which was capable of promoting and warranting a society within its new moldings. The effervescence of the “Brazilian illustration” has been characterized by Roque Spencer Maciel de Barros (1959, p. 23-26), when he underscored the movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries:

People of the 1870s and 1880s actually wanted to ‘illustrate’ the country; ‘illuminating’ it by Science and Culture; the schools would be ‘focuses of light’, from where a transformed nation would emerge. [...] It was generally believed during that time that a country is what Education made of it [...] these people

sought the tools capable of integrating them forever within the great European-American community instead of integrating the country to a supposed Brazilian reality. They sought to establish it by the educational activity of law, school, press and book.

The 1889 Republic brought about a new constitutional, political, economic, social condition, coupled to a disruption / revision of the liaisons between the State and the Catholic Church. The proclamation of the Republic did not bring only the suppression of the Monarchy but a new pattern in public administration and political organization which required the re-ordering of ideas and power relationships at the internal level: Federation. Or rather, the formation of states instead of provinces and their autonomy, very different from what had occurred within the centralized environment of the Empire. The states would be elements of liberal inspiration that would help in the propagation of ideas on civility, order and progress.

The Republic fortified the states which structured themselves singularly through several reformist actions in the following years, especially in the politically relevant units such as the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. The states contributed towards the decentralization of power and reform of education. It may be stated that the Republican period was above all a period of proposals and attempts for change in education: on the one hand, the result of the havoc situation inherited from the times of the Monarchy and, on the other, the result of discussions that pervaded the space of the nation and triggered “enthusiasm for education” with the over-estimation of the educational role in the renewal of the economy, values and society.

Stalemates between centralization and decentralization persisted throughout the whole process of educational renewal since decentralization signified that states could have their own school system parallel to that of the federal government – the latter limited to secondary schools and higher education, under the control of the central administration. When primary education was decentralized, the federal government did not provide the states with the mechanisms to improve quantitatively and qualitatively elementary schooling in a period in which illiteracy reached 80% of the population and when illiteracy was thought to be the main hindrance to social and economic development. Or rather, something that was incompatible to the formation of the citizen and republican society. Incoherence included the fact that republicans did not make schooling a means for integrating the people to the nation nor did they promote schooling organized according to the interests of the project of a new political order. The school should reach the entire society so that, with universal instruction, it would consolidate a new educational proposal coherent to the start of a new period in educational history, the result of the eclosion and dissemination of the New School movement which aimed at adapting scientific and rational teaching to all Brazilians. The bases of the school had to be modified – this caused deep criticism by the Republican Party during the Monarchy – it was a proposal that the New School wanted to execute, especially through conferences, books, publications of articles in specialized journals, to spread and make available its thoughts and methods within the school.

If people's education was a way to integrate it to the nation, it was also a manner to amalgamate society and co-opt the population in taking part in the republican project for the country's development. The educational stance of the proposal became subprojects in several states whose administrations tried to make feasible reforms in public education through the establishment of a modern education for the promotion of popular education. As a rule, legal dispositions were the liberal principles of education, establishing compulsory free primary education, the lay feature of teaching and the formal commitment of the administration to increase educational opportunities through the dissemination of schools and the rise in school enrolment. The states started to commit themselves more in providing a budget for the functioning of

schools, especially the building of school premises or rented houses funded by the state, even though expenses were frequently shared by the municipalities too.

Trust in the regenerating and formation power of the school became a diffused and shared representation in society – up to the present. Different aims and wide expectations were attributed to primary education, such as the forming of children's character – future workers and political agents – driving into them not merely the main instruction on literacy, mathematics, science, but also the important moral virtues and values, patriotic feelings and norms of civility.

The competence of the school extended to the consolidation of Brazilian nationhood with civil and patriotic bases that foregrounded the development of future generations and fomenting their love for one's country. School organization became different in each state, or rather, it followed the conditions predominant on other areas which impacted the consolidation of the public school desired by the republicans.

Although the Brazilian State committed the state governments with the effective implementation of elementary education, it foregrounded the new teaching system by successive reforms throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which influenced education at all levels: primary, secondary and higher education. In the 1920s a new reforms was implemented in several states influenced by the New School and bringing innovatory perspective for national education and consolidating a critical basis that would foreground nationwide reforms which started in the 1930s – including the establishment of the Ministry of Education – affecting all levels of education till the promulgation of Law 4024 in 1961, the first Guidelines and Bases for National Education.

As from the 1930s, Brazil experienced a series of initiatives that would make feasible the formation of bases of the national system of teaching through the establishment of Universities and the Statute for Higher Education, teachers' formation with the establishment of undergraduate courses and the reorganization of secondary schools, the need for a law and a national education plan, the concern for the internal needs of the school such as organization, inspection, curriculum, textbooks and others. This was significant when the liberal principles of education included in the *Manifesto of the New Education Pioneers* and in other documents were adopted, with special reference to compulsory, cost free, laicist education. The debate deepened when the 1946 Constitution determined the elaboration of Guidelines and Bases of National Education whose project, prepared by the Ministry of Education, was sent to Congress in 1948 and promulgated in 1961 after violent discussions.

Throughout all this period involving the generalization of popular education and the slow and segmented expansion of secondary and tertiary education, a debate persisted between public and private interests. The Catholic Church and other religious denominations took a stand in the 1930s and reached dramatic levels in the 1950s, especially before the promulgation of Law 4024.

With this scenario in the background, the first article of current thematic issue titled *Federalismo e educação no Brasil republicano: dilemas da organização educacional (1889-1930)*, “follows the debate on the public school in Brazil within a milieu marked by a new government system, to understand how education was ‘accommodated’ after the formation of the Brazilian federation as from the promulgation of the 1891 Republican Constitution”. The article analyzes issues of centralization and decentralization, political and educational, with special emphasis on “the relationships that the new State establishes with the units of the federation (states or municipalities), figuring as “a Brazilian form of federalism”.

The second text titled *Município e autonomia política local* analyzes recent educational policies in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, linked to the Airton Senna Institute. It presents “the municipality as occupied space,

municipal policies concerned with the quality of basic education”. It also investigates different forms of local political autonomy in the municipal educational policies as from events identified in several cases causing discontinuities”.

The article “*Estado em ação*” e a relação com a Sociedade: notas sobre a produção de políticas estatais “traduzidas” como políticas públicas ends the first group of articles. It discusses “public policies as a historical product and as an expression of production determined by the manner of production of material life”.

The relationship between the State and the Catholic Church is the focus of the second group of essays. The text *O ensino religioso na escola brasileira: alianças e disputas históricas* aims at forwarding “analytic elements that relate processes of juridical regulations and the control of the school with regard to the teaching of religion” throughout a long historical period, from the colonial period to the 1930s. “Alliances and debates on the teaching of religion in the history of Brazilian education were enhanced from the start due to the influence of the Catholic Church and the ecclesiastical authorities, coupled to other institutions and intellectual defenders of religious values and principles”.

The second text titled *Estado, Religião e Educação do Cidadão* debates “the hindrances and conflicts between the State and religion and current perspectives on the development of such a relationship with the education of the citizen. The paper investigates the foundation of the Modern State and its influence on the formation of modern and contemporary society and evidences the impacts of the separation between religion and the State foregrounding on the fact that the education of the citizen becomes illuminated”. Thus, the author makes clear the importance of public education during the process.

The third article on the relationship between public education and the Church, titled *A educação nas páginas da imprensa católica (Ribeirão Preto–SP, 1949–1959)*, overviews contemporary education in the Catholic press in a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo and deals with “its approach of childhood, the aims and expansion of elementary schooling, the insertion of the popular classes in the schools, the Campaign of Adult Literacy and the aims of the preparatory or professional secondary schools with conservationist positions, based on civic and patriotic values and on religious formation as the basis for family and society”.

Four articles complete the current issue of *Acta Scientiarum. Education. História da meninice afro-brasileira: disciplinarização, aprendizado e ludicidades oitocentistas em mananciais literários* is a reflection on the “Afro-Brazilian child within the educational pathway, its insertion in a European cultural milieu, its experiences, its toys and games” in 18<sup>th</sup> century Brazil. It also tries to show the historical conditions of “the children of a negro child during the slavery period in Brazil, with the terrible consequences of the institution on the present”.

*Eugenia no contexto do atual desenvolvimento das tecnologias genéticas: as deficiências em foco* investigates “the eugenic discourse within the context of current development of genetic technologies based on the presuppositions of Theodor W. Adorno on the concept of progress within a society marked with lack of sensitiveness in the use of genetic interventions on the body of subjects which are considered imperfect/deficient”.

Further, *Finitude – raiz da educabilidade do ser humano* investigates the education phenomenon from the point of view of Heidegger’s doctrine (finitude, meaning of being), to show “the basis of such an [education] in the original openness of the human being, in the character of the project, have-to-be, which are proper to humans and absent in other beings”.

The issue is complete with the article *Interdisciplinaridade escolar no ensino médio: domínios epistêmicos como possibilidade para elaboração e avaliação de um trabalho coletivo*, which demonstrates “the importance of interdisciplinarity in the school and in collective work between teachers by means of data retrieved from an

interdisciplinary project undertaken in a government-run school". The study reveals progress in "collective work since teachers and professors of different disciplines aim at a common evaluation and dialogue among themselves with the emergence of ideas and possibilities on interdisciplinarity".

Through the current issue, the scientific journal *Revista Acta Scientiarum. Education* continues its important task in scientific promotion and spreading of research in the historical and educational fields. Current issue is a set of articles with significant contributions for educational problems based on history, which are currently debated on federalism, laicism and religion. The importance of the theme is proved by the quality of the essays and by the theoretical and methodological stances of the authors from several regions of Brazil, and by their profound experience in the field.

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## Referencias

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