



Cecilia Meirelles in the *Diario de Noticias*: the daily struggle for the *Escola Nova* (June 1930 to October 1930)

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ABSTRACT. In this article, we examine the work of Cecilia Meirelles in the 'Página de Educação', of the *Diario de Notícias*, of Rio de Janeiro, particularly the texts published in the 'Commentario' section, between June 12, 1930, when this newspaper was founded, and October 3, 1930, when the revolution commanded by Getúlio Vargas took place. During this period, Meirelles, in addition to divulging the principles of escolanovismo, addressing specific topics that could clarify it, dealt with problems that emerged with the Reform of Education of the Federal District realized by Fernando de Azevedo. In a way or another, she proved to be a combative author, who put herself in the front line for the renewal of education in Brazil, making daily comments on subjects that, in general, intertwined education and politics.

Keywords: New education, press, political and intellectual trajectory, educational reform.

Cecilia Meirelles no *Diario de Noticias*: a luta cotidiana pela escola nova (junho de 1930 a outubro de 1930)

RESUMO. Neste artigo, examinamos a atuação de Cecília Meirelles na 'Página de Educação', do *Diario de Notícias*, do Rio de Janeiro, particularmente os textos publicados na seção 'Commentario', entre 12 de junho de 1930, data da fundação desse jornal, e 03 de outubro de 1930, quando se verifica a revolução comandada por Getúlio Vargas. Durante esse período, Meirelles, além de divulgar os princípios do escolanovismo, abordando temas pontuais que pudessem esclarecê-lo, tratou de problemas que emergiram com a Reforma da Educação no Distrito Federal realizada por Fernando de Azevedo. De uma forma ou de outra, ela se mostrou uma autora combativa, que se colocou na linha de frente em prol da renovação da educação no Brasil, fazendo comentários diários sobre temas que, de um modo geral, entrelaçavam educação e política.

Palavras-chaves: educação nova, imprensa, trajetória política e intelectual, reforma educacional.

Cecília Meirelles en El *Diario de Noticias*: la lucha cotidiana por la escuela nueva (junio de 1930 a octubre de 1930)

RESUMEN. En este artículo, examinamos la actuación de Cecília Meirelles en la 'Página de Educação', del *Diario de Notícias*, de Rio de Janeiro, particularmente los textos publicados en la sección 'Commentario', entre el 12 de junio de 1930, fecha de la fundación de este periódico, y el 03 de octubre de 1930, cuando se verifica la revolución comandada por Getúlio Vargas. Durante este período, Meirelles, además de divulgar los principios del escolanovismo, abordando temas puntuales que pudieran aclararlo, trató de problemas que surgieron con la Reforma de la Educación en el Distrito Federal realizada por Fernando de Azevedo. De una manera u otra, ella se mostró una autora combativa, que se colocó en la línea de frente en pro de la renovación de la educación en Brasil, haciendo comentarios diarios sobre temas que, de modo general, entrelazaban la educación y la política.

Palabras clave: Educación nueva, Prensa, Trayectoria política e intelectual, Reforma educacional.

No one invents things, there are times when different things appear, and individuals, by which these appearances are made; but the determining causes of these changes lie not in the whims of a creature nor in its genius but are the answer to many lengthy questions that have embittered generations and generations (Cecilia Meirelles, 1929, *O Espirito Victorioso*).

Introduction

Escolanovismo scholars in Brazil rightly consider Fernando de Azevedo, Anísio Teixeira and Lourenço Filho as the main theoreticians and leaders of this educational proposal. After all, authors of texts that underpinned the *Escolanovista* movement in Brazil, which coordinated and deepened state educational reforms and the Federal District, which drafted their manifesto (Fernando de Azevedo) or directly participated in its elaboration (Anísio Teixeira and Lourenço Filho), these educators were at the forefront of the battle for the renewal of education in Brazil, that is, in favor of establishing the principles of the *Escola Nova*. However, it would be a great injustice not to highlight another character in the struggle for the diffusion and implantation of this educational proposal, Cecília Meirelles, mainly on the account of her fierce performance between 1930 and 1933 in the pages of the newspaper *Diário de Notícias* from Rio de Janeiro. In fact, her appointment to direct the page dedicated to education - this newspaper was the only one that had a page dedicated to this subject (Lamego, 1996a) - is in itself an indication of the consideration that she enjoyed with the partisans of the *Escola Nova*¹. This same author (Lamego, 1996a, p.18) points out that Meirelles's debut in journalism (between 1930 and 1933) "[...] was the most political of all her participation in the press".

To examine her work in this newspaper is to highlight a facet that is often obscured by the authors who, in the words of Lamego (1996b), consider her the 'diaphanous, fluid and ethereal muse of Brazilian literature'². Indeed, it is striking that scholars often exalt the poetess and children's book writer Cecília Meirelles, even those who were, as in the case of Alceu Amoroso Lima, in the late 1920s and in the first years of the 1930s, her stalwart opponents³. In so doing, these scholars put under shadow the fighter for the renewal of Brazil through the New School. Example of this procedure is the

publication of articles of an event commemorating her centenary of birth (Gouvêa, 2001). There are 17 texts, of which 13 deal with their poetry and only two intertwine politics, education and literature.

Nevertheless, during those years, Meirelles reconciled her activity of writer and poet with that of propagandist and defender of *Escolanovismo*; we can even say that, in this period, politics assumed the first plane of her activity. In addition, her subsequent abandonment of politics and her rise as poet can be credited, among other things, to the persecution that she suffered. Lamego (2001: 219) remarks: "The Cecilia we celebrate today in her centenary, the great poet, author of the *Romance of the Inconfidence*, did not yet exist. [...] Cecilia's recognition as a poet would come in 1938 [...]"⁴. We believe that the exclusive valorization of this author as a poet by historiography, which places her political activity in the background, is a victory of those who have fought her for being one of the most expressive fighters for the educational renewal of Brazil.

The importance of Meirelles in this struggle can be proven by Lamego's observation that the period in which she worked in the *Diário de Notícias* was the one in which the field of education, markedly *Escolanovista*, was delineated. The author also points out that this achievement was largely due to Meirelles: her page on education would have been a fundamental trench in the struggle in favor of the *Escola Nova*⁵.

Considering this importance and, at the same time, that in the studies about her, her educational preoccupations have been hidden by its artistic contribution, we defined as objective of this article to recover a part of her fight for the educational renewal of Brazil.

Initially, we will briefly discuss his work in *Diário de Notícias* until 1933, when she left the newspaper. Following this, we will analyze his political and intellectual trajectory from the founding of this newspaper in June 1930 until the outbreak of the revolution led by Getúlio Vargas on October 3 of that year. Dividing her trajectory in four moments, we will use as sources of analysis the articles published in the chosen period. In doing so, we are not disregarding the importance of her subsequent

¹ According to Ferreira and Rocha (2010, p. 94, note 5), Nóbrega da Cunha would have been responsible for the insertion of Cecília Meirelles in the *Diário de Notícias*. According to these authors, the *Escolanovistas* considered "[...] highly strategic to open how many trenches - as Fernando de Azevedo said - were possible to debate the reforms proposed and pleaded by them".

² In another text about Meirelles, in the same vein, the author observes: "If the history of literature does not know Cecília Meirelles of the political struggle, it is also unaware of the fact that she suffered persecutions of the censorship of Vargas, of Catholics and in literary contests" (Lamego, 1996b).

³ The first time Cecília Meirelles and Alceu Amoroso Lima came face to face was in the contest held at the Normal School of the Federal District in 1929, when she competed with an essay titled *The Victorious Spirit*. According to Goldstein (2001), the essay has three major subdivisions: the first is an introduction to the 'Modern School', focused, according to this scholar, on pedagogical issues and the principles of the *Escola Nova*; the conclusion contains a teaching proposal from and by literature. This proposal would be consistent with the pedagogical principles of the *Escola Nova*. Cecília Meirelles was not approved in the contest. According to Cunha and Souza (2011), Alceu Amoroso Lima, Coelho Neto and João Ribeiro, among others, participated in the examination.

⁴ Among the studies on Cecília Meirelles, those of Lamego (1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 2001) and Lôbo (1996, 2010) deserve special mention, precisely because these authors analyze her political actions in defense of the principles of *Escolanovismo*.

⁵ Before beginning her work in the *Diário de Notícias*, Meirelles was already recognized as a poet and educator. In the February 18, 1930 edition of *O Jornal*, she is so characterized by Nóbrega da Cunha (1930, p. 16). It should be remembered that her first poetry book, *Specters*, dates back to 1919 when she was 18 years old. For more information about Meirelles as a poet and author of children's books, especially before 1930, see Lôbo (2010), Lamego (1996a) and Cunha e Souza (2011).

performance in this and other newspapers nor the adverse conditions in which this action occurred.

There are several reasons for this choice. The first is that, in that first moment, the *Diário de Notícias* and Cecilia Meirelles were in great harmony, communicating, in general terms, the same aspirations and hopes. The second relates to the length of the present article. Examining the whole of her trajectory would imply sacrificing the analysis of important questions addressed by her, since a complete analysis would require a space larger than that of an article. The third refers to the characteristics of the analyzed period itself, as will be evident in the development of the text.

Cecilia Meirelles in the *Diário de Notícias*

Founded on June 12, 1930, by Orlando Ribeiro Dantas, the *Diário de Notícias* went out of circulation in 1974. Under the guidance of Dantas himself, Carlos Alberto Nóbrega da Cunha and Alberto Figueiredo Pimentel Segundo, journalists who had recently left *O Jornal*, the *Diário de Notícias* had a clearly defined political position. Liberal, fought the 'oligarchic structure' of the First Republic, sustaining the theses of the Liberal Alliance (Ferreira, 2015), which supported Getúlio Vargas. Because of this, it was characterized as 'the newspaper of the Revolution'. However, with Vargas's rise to power, according to Brazil (2015), the Diary "[...] preferred to adopt a fiscalizing stance of the new situation, waiting to see how he would emerge as head of government, giving him vote of confidence". According to this author, Vargas gradually became centralized and authoritarian when he assumed power, which led Dantas to step away from him, even to the disruption at the time of the *Estado Novo* decree. Because of his attitudes, according to Figueiredo (2012), he has become a symbol of the independence of the press. Silva (2009), for his part, points out that in a few years, the *Diário* had become the leaf with the greatest circulation of the then Federal District. During the *Estado Novo*, he would have been one of the few press agencies to refuse to receive grants from the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP).

Orlando Ribeiro Dantas, a journalist, was born in Rio Grande do Norte in 1896 and died in Rio de Janeiro in 1953. In 1922, he moved to the federal capital, taking over as director of the Commercial and Industrial Magazine. He became advertising director of *O Jornal* in 1926, after a short trip to Recife, where he founded the Brazilian Commercial Directory, of which he was director until 1927. In 1928, he moved to São Paulo, founding, together

with Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand and Rubens do Amaral, the *Diário de São Paulo*. Due to disagreements with Chateaubriand, he retired from society and in 1930 founded the *Diário de Notícias* in Rio de Janeiro⁶.

About Nóbrega da Cunha there is little information. It is known that he was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1897 and that he made a career as an educator in the public teaching of the Federal District and as a journalist in the Rio press. He collaborated, enthusiastically, for the reform of education in the Federal District, promoted by Fernando de Azevedo, between 1927 and 1930. He provided coverage in two newspapers, *A Noite* and *O Jornal*, for Azevedo's reform proposals (Rocha, 2003, p. 12; Cunha, 2008, p. 126). He was the political director of the *Diário de Notícias*. Also in the press, he acted politically, campaigning for the October Revolution of 1930⁷.

If there is little information about Nóbrega da Cunha, we find nothing about Alberto Figueiredo Pimentel Segundo.

It seems that the date of foundation of the *Diário de Notícias* is quite revealing. Summarizing the political and economic-political positions of the Journal, Brazil (2015) points out that this newspaper was sympathetic to tenentism, not committing itself to existing political parties; supported liberal banners such as the defense of the secret ballot, amnesty for political crimes and the restructuring of justice. It was in favor of legislation that would improve the situation of the working class, but made a point of separating its theses from Bolshevism, which it fought in its pages. It called for the establishment of the minimum wage and working hours, as well as guarantees on work accidents and retirement. It also defended the free play of supply and demand as a regulator of the market and prices; combating monoculture, which it singled out as responsible for the economic crisis, presenting suggestions for the diversification of national production and the promotion of agriculture. Finally, it was against customs tariffs, arguing that, with them, Brazil would not gain foreign markets, due to retaliation by the other countries.

It is true that we did not find in the texts of Meirelles some of these banners that were defended by the *Diário de Notícias*. However, her liberal stance, her commitment to an educational renewal and the belief that, with the 1930 Revolution, this would be achieved show that this author was in the press with

⁶ Information obtained at Fundação Getúlio Vargas / CPDOC website (Orlando Ribeiro Dantas, 2017).

⁷ We chose to provide some information about these characters until just the foundation of the *Diário de Notícias*.

whose editorial line she identified herself and could therefore freely expose her ideas.

In the launching of the newspaper, in the 'Education Page', it was published what can be considered a kind of platform on the educational issue. In the journal's own program, we emphasize the claim that it would defend the reform "[...]of education, with a modern basis and dictated by an accurate observation of the national environment [...]" (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930a, p. 6). But the text published on the page dedicated to education entitled 'Teaching and Education', written by Meirelles or, at least, written with her participation, is more extensive and explicit on the subject. In it we find the postulate that the debate on educational issues could not be restricted to specialists:

Pedagogical problems, questions of instruction and school subjects can no longer be debated at this time only in the specialized regions, because, as much interested in the faculty as in the people, they must appear, as a matter of general character, in the pages of the organs of the daily press (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930a, p. 3).

In the text is also evident what was intended with the 'Education Page':

By commenting impartially on the actions of the authorities, discussing the new ideas or judging the results of the intense experimentation that is being carried out in many schools in this capital and in some States, we will try to provide teachers with the elements to follow, more closely, the pedagogical renewal of the moment and to the lay people as an opportunity for a safe judgement on all new initiatives (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930a, p. 3)⁸.

Meirelles put this program into practice through tireless activity. According to Lamego (1996a), she would have published in the 'Education Page' between June 1930 and January 1933 about 750 articles. In another work, this same author (Lamego, 1996b) increases the number to 960 articles. Azevedo Filho (2001, p. XI), in turn, mentions "[...] more than seven hundred texts". Strang (2009) reports that the education records would add almost 800 texts and add that it was a production of breath. Ferreira (2007) lists 828 chronicles and 148 reports. Whatever the quantity, the quality of the texts she published is extremely significant.

Meirelles was the director responsible for the 'Education Page' of this newspaper since its first

edition on June 12, 1930. She was also in charge of a column, most often located on the left side of this page, which received the title of 'Commentary'. We believe that, even if she had not signed them from the beginning, the texts were her own. The 'Page' was published every day of the week, with the exception of Mondays. In only a few instances it has not come to the public. Meirelles commented daily on educational issues, often intertwined with those of a political nature. Carvalho (2007, p. 140) believes that, because of this activity, Meirelles was among the *Escolanovistas* most exposed "[...] to the slander of Catholic leaderships".

Her collaboration ended on January 12, 1933, because of the persecutions she suffered, especially from Catholics: "Those who commanded the batteries contrary to liberal education were Alceu Amoroso Lima According to Alceu, the proposals of the modernist educators were materialistic and communistic [...]" (Carvalho, 2007, p. 140). Carvalho also observes that Amoroso Lima was a cultured, well-read and informed man about what was happening in Europe and the United States (Carvalho, 2007) and therefore knew perfectly well that John Dewey was American and had nothing of communist. In fact, at that time, everything that did not fit the perspective of Catholics was considered by them, if not communist, at least as a door to communism⁹. An example of such an attitude can be seen in an article of the magazine *A Ordem*, unsigned, but attributed to Tristão de Athayde:

All the bourgeoisie and reformist pedagogues, however, who today are contaminated by naturalistic pedagogy, if they are not yet quite communist, are precursors and preparers of Lunatcharsky's pedagogy. The orientation they give to Brazilian public education is such that it is only possible to identify those who have no idea whatsoever of what is happening in the modern world. It is no fault, therefore, of Mr. Anizio Teixeira or Mrs. Cecília Meirelles, to say that none of them belong to the PC[Communist Party]. It is too soon for that. However, when they are in good faith, they only think of renewing Brazilian education, by the 'modern' spirit, by the 'modern' methods. And when in bad faith they try to mislead fools with their very meek reformism, with their willingness to call the parents to collaborate with the state, with their words of lambs of new education, certain that they are, as in the past Caillaux with the income tax, crushing family education, free, Christian, posing as its defenders (Athayde, 1932, p. 402).

⁸ In a letter to Fernando de Azevedo of April 8, 1931, Meirelles comments on the reasons that led her to journalistic activity: "The times and creatures have not changed sufficiently. And the lively feeling of my inefficiency in any school, by the direct knowledge of the atmosphere that would surround me, led me to the journalistic action, perhaps more advantageous, of more repercussion - because it is a stubborn hope this, that is for the public to read and understand [...]" (apud Lamego, 1996 a, p. 58).

⁹ Lamego (1996a) considers that there is no evidence that Meirelles had been pressured to leave the *Diário de Notícias* for political reasons, but considers that this hypothesis is not at all unreasonable since, in her correspondence with Fernando de Azevedo (11/15/1933), Meirelles manifested her 'horror' to journalism (Lamego, 1996a).

The mention of Cecilia Meirelles, next to Anísio Teixeira, is not without reason. Extremely combative, during the period in which she was at the head of the 'Education Page', she fought for the renewal of education in Brazil, whose process would be based on the principles of *Escolanovismo*. This made her stand out against the adversaries of this new educational proposal, especially the Catholics.

At the end of her collaboration with this newspaper, Meirelles published her last comment, entitled 'Farewell'. Arguing that the "[...] Pagina was, for three years, a stubborn, uncompromising, inflexible dream of building a better world, by the more adequate formation of the humanity that inhabits it [...]", Meirelles pointed out that she maintained the hope of struggle: "[...] this Commentary does not end at the end [...]" ; on the contrary, "[...] it leaves in each reader the hope of a continuing collaboration. In this successive death and rebirth, which daily journalistic activity teaches more than any other, there is the notion of hope that, through death and resurrection, walks towards the destiny that life suggests or imposes". Thus, "[...] the work may cease, the worker may disappear, so that he may no longer be seen or to reappear further: but the energy which all this balances, this energy remains alive, and only waits to be felt, in order to once again model its fullness" (*Diario de Noticias*, 1933a, p. 6).

Even if she tried to keep the flame of the battle going on for the *Escola Nova*, her departure from the *Diario de Noticias* was probably the second battle lost by *Escolanovismo* in the struggle waged by the church against it since the 1920s and which continued with more intensity on the next. It is a fact that in 1931, with the decree signed by Getúlio Vargas and Francisco Campos, then Minister of Education and Public Health, on religious teaching in schools, the church achieved a great victory in its commitment to the 're-Christianization' of Brazil and, consequently, on the partisans of the *Escola Nova*. This would have been, in our view, their first lost battle. The third would have been in 1935: Vargas and the Catholics, allies, waged a war against the *Escolanovistas*, especially against Anísio Teixeira. This moment, in our view, was that of its defeat, at least as far as its main line is concerned.¹⁰

¹⁰ Although the educational ideal of the renovators did not prevail in Brazilian education (Rocha, 2003), they were defeated, especially with regard to the pedagogy proposed, the fact is that, under the political aspect, they achieved at least a partial success. The public school for all, unique, that is, equal for all, breaking with the traditional school, which was focused only on the privileged sector of society, coeducation, all this came to be realized, although in a progressive and not complete way. The school that came to be established, partly as a proposal of the *Escolanovistas*, opened prospects for the denominated low classes, that saw in her an opportunity of social ascension for its children. Thus, if they were not annulled, social conflicts were at least mitigated, and the threat of socialism, which presented itself as an alternative to an extremely closed society,

In the edition of *Diario de Noticias*, on January 13, 1933, the day after the publication of the text 'Farewell', it was reported that Meirelles had ceased to appear in its editorial staff. It adds that her removal did not imply a change in the educational program launched by the newspaper: "The Education Page will continue to carry out its apostolate, taking forward the beautiful battle for the sound ideas of the new school, which the *Diario de Noticias* has maintained until now as one of the main columns of its journalistic program" (*Diario de Noticias*, 1933b, p. 6). However, in the same communiqué, significant changes were announced in the journal's policy: "Instead of the daily commentary, we adopted another plan, a specialized article signed by the biggest names in the group of pioneers of the new education, for which we have already made the respective contacts" (*Diario de Noticias*, 1933b, p. 6). However, this promise was not fulfilled. After a while, the newspaper began to publish excerpts from national and foreign authors who, although they dealt with issues related to the *Escola Nova*, had no immediate connection with the events of national politics, which until then had been criticized by the journalist practically everyday. With the exclusion of the Commentary section and the departure of its editor, the newspaper lost, in regard to education, the combative character that had characterized it until then¹¹.

According to Lôbo (2010, p. 52), after leaving this newspaper, Meirelles "[...] resumed her educational activities in the regency of classes and became one of the main collaborators of the administration of Anísio Teixeira as head of the Public Instruction of the Federal District (1931-1935)". However, the proof that her departure from the *Diario de Noticias* was motivated by the fact that her work was very uncomfortable in some political and religious sectors is that, after saying farewell to the 'Page of Education', she returned to the press. This time, it was for the Rio newspaper *A Nação*, hired on the condition that she could write about everything, except about politics. Lamego (1996a, p. 109-110, emphasis added) cites Meirelles's letter to Fernando de Azevedo, dated November 15, 1933, in which she addressed the subject: "They have just invited me to make the first page weekly of the

offered no prospects for all individuals. Thus, since then, although there has been no complete extinction of an education which, as formulated in the Manifesto, was in keeping with the "[...] interests of classes, to which it has served [...]", the new at least in part, "to constitute a privilege determined by the economic and social condition of the individual [...]" It is true that it was not possible to recognize "[...] the right to be educated to the extent that [...]" allowed "[...] their natural abilities, regardless of economic and social reasons" (Manifesto, 2010, p. 40). It has, however, opened the way to a more democratic school.

¹¹ According to Lamego (1996a, p. 110), the 'Education Page', under the responsibility of Atilio Vivacqua, after Meirelles's departure, was maintained until 1934, "[...] with a visible loss of combativeness."

nation's supplement, which should appear with another Sunday feat coming every eight days. I have not yet accepted or refused. But perhaps I will accept it, because it is about writing quick impressions about the weekly events - *except politics*, they told me [...]"

The political and intellectual trajectory of Cecília Meirelles

The study of the political and intellectual trajectory of Meirelles in the pages of the *Diário de Notícias* is extremely valuable to understand important aspects of the struggles that the *Escolanovistas* had in the early 1930s for the establishment of their educational proposal, having as their main opponent the Catholics, led by Alceu Amoroso Lima / Tristão de Athayde. This process includes the publication of the Manifesto of the New Education Pioneers in the main newspapers of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo on March 19, 1932, the decisive moment of this struggle¹².

The course of Meirelles, during the period in which she collaborated for the *Diário de Notícias*, has deserved several studies. Some of them divide this period into several phases, in an attempt to establish the particularities of each one of them, to better understand the author's political and educational thinking. In two works, for example, Lamego (1996b, pp. 33-34, 2001) makes proposals for dividing her itinerary in the 'Education Page'. Lôbo (2010), in turn, divides Meirelles' articles published in the *Diário de Notícias* into themes that would characterize different stages of his trajectory between the mid 1930s and early 1933s. In our view, her trajectory can be divided in at least four periods. The first covers from the founding of the newspaper in June 1930 until the October Revolution of 1930¹³. In it, Meirelles devoted herself, with great emphasis, to the diffusion of the ideology of *Escolanovismo*, addressing specific issues of education. The second comprises the period between the October

Revolution, in which Meirelles had great expectations, and the decree of April 1931, which instituted religious teaching in public schools, much criticized by her. The third extends from this decree to the publication of the Manifesto of the Pioneers of New Education. The fourth and final covers the period between the publication of the Manifesto and the departure of Meirelles from the *Diário de Notícias*.

In this article, we will study only the texts she wrote for the 'Commentary' column during the first period¹⁴. During this first period, Meirelles' texts aimed at diffusing the principles of the *Escola Nova*, addressing different points of view. Among these, we can mention from the lack of contact between the school and the family to the use of the cinema for educational purposes; from books dealing with the *Escolanovista* ideology to the teacher's attire; the role of the press in shaping the people to the responsibility of the reformers; from educational experience in other countries to practices that were in the opposite direction from that of *Escolanovismo*; from teaching music to comments on teaching Portuguese and mathematics; from the lack of children's books to organize a library to Scouting, and so on.

There is, however, a question to which Meirelles put great emphasis: that of the problems arising from the implementation of the educational reform of the Federal District under the guidance of Fernando de Azevedo between 1928 and 1930 (Penna, 2010; Piletti, 1994)¹⁵. A crítica, ao mesmo tempo, mostra que a autora estava empenhada em lutar pela implantação da proposta. The critique, at the same time, shows that the author was committed to fighting for the implementation of the proposal. She drew attention to the fact that, two years after the start of the reform, there were still problems of various orders, ranging from the inadequacy of the buildings where the schools were located to the educational function¹⁶ to the lack of teachers prepared for the new requirements.

The approach to these themes suggests that Meirelles was not only on the doctrinal level, but

¹² In fact, it is a methodological procedure that does not consider the historical process to take, for analysis, the Manifesto of the Pioneers in itself; in other words, to examine the Manifesto without taking into account that it is a decisive moment of the political clash held around *Escolanovismo*. It was not by chance that it was directed to the government and to the people. To the government, because its signatories still sought to bring Vargas to the side of the supporters of *Escola Nova*. Since at least April 1931, with the decree he had on religious instruction in the primary, secondary, and normal courses of public schools, the government was allied with the church. To the people, because the *Escolanovistas* tried to clarify to the population their proposals in a document that exposed them in an articulated way. Meirelles vehemently opposed the decree in the *Diário de Notícias* pages and through conferences, generally promoted by the Anticlerical League of Brazil (Moraes, 2016).

¹³ Strictly speaking, the first period could be extended until October 29, 1930, even though the Revolution took place on the 3rd of this month. We recall here that it was only on October 30 that Meirelles published a commentary that referred to the revolution: 'Children and the Revolution'. It is true, on the other hand, that the fact that the author does not mention the revolution except on this date must have a reason. However, for the moment, we find nothing in her writings that can give at least a partial explanation.

¹⁴ It should be remembered that it was only after August 28, 1930 that the comments were signed. Nevertheless, as we pointed out, as she was responsible for the 'Education Page', Meirelles most likely was in charge of writing the texts in the 'Commentary' section. Azevedo Filho (2001), who organized the Education Chronicles of Meirelles (2001), inserted comments not signed by her, attributing them to her.

¹⁵ Fernando de Azevedo was director of the Public Instruction of the Federal District between January 17, 1927 and October 30, 1930, when he was exonerated from office. Thus, throughout the period we studied, Fernando de Azevedo was in charge and, therefore, was responsible for the progress of the educational reform. In this case, it was a reform of primary education.

¹⁶ It is worth mentioning excerpts from the commentary 'The School Environment' of June 25, 1930 (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930b): "[...] we were reminding the poor interiors of our primary schools, deprived, in general, of everything they could have to attain the child and stimulate the deep life" or "Not to mention the school buildings, which hitherto have always been detestable [...]"

was attentive to practical issues, thus enriching what we could call the *Escolanovista* theory¹⁷. In fact, the author herself drew attention to the problem when moving from theory to practice. It was when the difficulties arose: “The greatest difficulty that an ideological reform finds is the impossibility of fulfilling it on the practical ground, by the lack of elements that comprehend it or that are capable of carrying it forward” (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930c, p. 5).

Before analyzing some of the problems she examined, placing them in the process of establishing education reform in the Federal District in 1928, we will address a fundamental question that precedes the others: it is a passage from one time to another in respect to education, that is, the change in education situation with the reform promoted by Fernando de Azevedo, in the Federal District.

In the untitled commentary from June 24, 1930, Meirelles remarked that it became more and more difficult to be a teacher every day. This difficulty lay in the inability of teachers to adapt to the new demands placed on them by the reform. From their point of view, many were, before retirement, accommodated to a bureaucratic situation, conducting their activities in an automatism that she characterized as easy, pouring into the students’ minds what the programs determined to be necessary to know. Suddenly, however, the situation had changed. The sleepy state of the routine was abandoned and it was proclaimed, as a new attitude, the active school. Many teachers reacted to the novelty, stating, among other things, that they were already doing what was required. They had not, in fact, understood the new time. Precisely for this reason, because of the difficulty of accepting the new demands, the author reaffirmed what she had said at the beginning of the comment: every day, it became difficult to be a teacher.

According to Meirelles, this was not surprising. In the comment of June 26, 1930, it was observed that nature has in particular the fact that in childhood she is ready for all transformations. However, at maturity, it begins “to calm itself, in placid molds, where it will rest definitively stationary, if the individual is not bent of a special temperament that is always compelling to new attitudes and curiosities” (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930c, p. 5).

It was not without reason, therefore, that the author considered one of the most significant themes the adaptation of teachers to the new times, especially those who were entering the teaching

profession. It was believed that the older teachers, by knowing the previous reality, had elements of comparison between the past and the present. Therefore, precisely because they knew the existing realities, they could be transformed. The problem lay with the teachers who were being formed, although it was thought that the possibility that they would face the situation and solve the problem of the new education would be greater, since nothing would have to be removed. From his point of view, however, the Normal School was not preparing its students for the future. This is what she said in her commentary ‘The Modern Teacher and Her Formation’:

It should be like thus. It should be, if the Normal School were already preparing its students for the future that will be their present. But to date, what has happened is that, except for the little contact that the senior students have in their practice of the Application School, these young women arrive at the graduation without the vision of the problem that awaits them, without comprehension or intuition nor a passion for children’s psychology, to which, in the meantime, they will have to constantly appeal. (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930c, p. 5).

The teacher’s training to meet the requirements of the Escola Nova was again addressed in the commentary of July 8, 1930. Assuming that the modern school depended first and foremost on the teacher, Meirelles stated that she had been surprised by the fact that, after two years of reform, the young women graduating from the Normal School did not know what the reform of education meant. Thus, although the Normal School was to solve the problem of the future teacher, the present indicated that there were as yet no masters for the master.

The crucial point of the question of the Normal School was treated in the commentary of September 21, 1930, under the title: ‘The Normal School of the future’. According to Meirelles, the Normal School ran the risk of sheltering the opponents of the *Escola Nova*. Based on the motto ‘in new times, new criteria’, Meirelles observed that those who accompanied the pedagogical movement knew that the New Education, which was being established throughout the modern world and which in Brazil was expressed by the reforms of Fernando de Azevedo, could not be put into practice efficiently if it were not accompanied by the necessary transformation of the Normal School, which would thus adequately train teachers for the new regime.

She argued that the professors to be nominated should be subject to examination not only of their specialty, but also to demonstrate, in practice, their modern ability, that is, according to the principles of

¹⁷ It should also be noted that some of the themes addressed in this period appeared in the 1932 Manifesto of the Pioneers of Education.

Escolanovismo, to teach their specialty.

But, she remarked, that was not what was happening. The greatest example was the literature contest that had put the reform in bad shape, threatening the Normal School not to have masters who knew the needs of primary school and that acted aptly as teachers of future teachers.

This was not a fortuitous event, but a case that obeyed political dictates, which Meirelles called 'malicious misdirection'.

That was even what she pointed out in the commentary on the next contest, that of sociology. According to her account, when she debated the contest table, she had stood against the participation of church representatives, arguing that, by the very dignity of the office, they could not leave the 'cassock', that is, that they would act as religious: "It is in their interest and in their religious obligation to defend their creed. And in their opinion, they do it very well indeed. However, the opinion of educators is different. And this has to be respected, because the Normal School is a pedagogical institute and not a seminary" (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930d, p. 4).

She went on to complain that the candidate for sociology had participated in the literature contest as an examiner, stating at the time that spirituality on earth could not be admitted as long as there were secular schools. She asked, then: "[...] with what exemption of spirit can one teach sociology who in an argument proves to be so incapable of considering the problem of Teaching within the limits prescribed by the New Education?" (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930d, p. 4).

In conclusion, she pointed out that the defenders of *Escolanovismo* would wait for the outcome of what she called a 'scene, with its premeditations', to know what would be the point of view of the director of instruction, in this case, Fernando de Azevedo.

Meirelles' concern with teacher training was not only institutional. In the June 18, 1930, commentary entitled 'The June Vacation', the author recommended that, in addition to seeking to recover from the wear and tear suffered during class, favoring their physical conditions to perform their duties better, the teachers prepared, equally, their technical conditions. She proposed to them to reflect on their experiences, comparing the results obtained with the experiences found in the foreign and national literature. She advised them to be vigilant of what was happening in modern education, so that what happened to the careless teachers who were satisfied with the acquired knowledge and clinged to the routine would not happen to them. Finally, she wished them the 15

days off to be 15 days of restful study.

However, it was not only the lack of preparation of the masters to meet the new demands placed by the implantation of the *Escola Nova* that afflicted those who were engaged in the implantation of the *Escola Nova*. The family was also a cause for concern. In the June 14, 1930 commentary, two days after the beginning of the newspaper, Meirelles had already addressed the problem of the incomprehension of parents and students about *Escolanovista* proposals. In the commentary, whose suggestive title was 'School and family. How to make their intimate approach', she pointed out that the methodology of the *Escola Nova*, in contrast to the monotony of the old school, surprised and scandalized the parents of students and the students themselves.

She added that for those who were devoting themselves intensely to the new experiments, it was deeply discouraging to find in the students' families an often hostile environment. However, she stated that she did not give up. Parents' circles could be a solution, despite the difficulty in making them work. Rich parents did not go to school easily because they thought it was a demotion of condition. The poor, on the other hand, did not go either, but by a completely opposite feeling. Yet she insisted that if it were possible to achieve a high frequency, one should not adopt a practice that would alienate the parents, make speeches in a language beyond the average culture, or discuss the methodological advantages of the *Escola Nova*, for lack of elements of comparison between the two schools and so on. She considered the small meetings to be more advantageous, presided over by the class teacher and only with the parents of the students in that class. She emphasized that the main point of all this was precisely not to isolate the school from society, but rather to make the family, informed by the presuppositions of the *Escola Nova*, contribute to education.

On September 16, 1930, in the commentary 'Teachers and parents', the author resumed the theme, stating that "[...] modern education, to be a living reality, depends on the understanding of teachers and parents, so that the work of the school and of the home is unified in a common intention [...]", she affirmed that "[...] everything that is done by the approximation of these two factors and the harmonization of their interests will be for the benefit of children and for benefit of nationality" (*Diário de Notícias*, 1930e, p. 4). However, considering that a gap between school and home was opening up because parents, due to material impossibility, lack of interest or ignorance of the true meaning of education, did not contribute to the

necessary environment for the development of childhood, rested on an example of another nation. Meirelles described the activity of teachers at a school in Montevideo, Uruguay, where they had created a small magazine that was distributed free to parents and sold only to teachers and school institutions. The issues addressed could give families what they needed to know to cooperate in the task of educating their children.

We are not going to address the escalation against the *Escolanovistas*, and especially against Meirelles, but we want to record some events. In 1934, she was appointed by the Education Department of the Federal District to run the newly founded Children's Center at the Mourisco Pavilion. As Dal Farra (2006) points out, political intrigues, which never left her alone, raised suspicion about the moral and educational legitimacy of the books that made up the library's collection, claiming that it contained pernicious works for the training of children. According to this scholar, one of the examples given as proof of accusation was the presence of Mark Twain's book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, which was said to contain 'communist connotations'. According to Lôbo (2010), in 1935, it had become difficult to continue the work of the Mourisco Pavilion. Finally, in October of 1937, the pavilion was invaded by the police of the New State, fulfilling orders of the federal interventor, that disabled the library in 1938.

The persecutions of the partisans of the *Escola Nova*, carried out by the Vargas-Catholic Church coalition, which most probably had as one of its high points the exit of Meirelles from the *Diário de Notícias*, also turned towards Anísio Teixeira. After resigning from the position of director of the Public Instruction of the Federal District (Rio de Janeiro), on account of accusations made to him and that placed Pedro Ernesto, intervener of the Federal District, in a delicate situation, he was arrested and, finally, went on a self-exile from Bahia for ten years, between 1935 and 1945, only returning to public life with the fall of Getúlio Vargas¹⁸.

Final considerations

In the article, we tried to show that the comments published by Cecilia Meirelles in the *Diário de Notícias* during the period under review have a specificity: to discuss the problems arising

from the educational reform of the Federal District promoted by Fernando de Azevedo and to divulge the principles of *Escolanovismo*. The examination of these comments forms an image of a combatant convinced that the solution to the problems of Brazilian education was in the adoption of the presuppositions of the *Escola Nova*. Her texts show that it is with this conviction that she examined and tried to solve these different problems and obstacles.

A little more than two years after the reform began, there were problems to be faced and solved: from the opposition of certain sectors of society to incomprehension on the part of parents and students of what was at stake; from the lack of preparation of teachers to understand and face the new situation to the fact that the Normal School is not preparing them according to the needs placed by the *Escola Nova*; from the lack of buildings to serve as schools, to the lack of children's books that would support the new educational proposal and so on.

Through the reading and analysis of his comments, we can follow the struggle that was ongoing for the renewal of education, placing, on the one hand, the supporters of *Escolanovismo* and, on the other, those who were bound to what came to be characterized as a traditional school, those who defended the Catholic project and, finally, those who, accommodated to the situation, resisted, not because they had a different project, but because they were attached to the routine.

As Meirelles made clear in the pages of the *Diário de Notícias*, the reformers, given that they had an intention that went beyond the conditions of the moment in which they worked, found resistance by those who, in a carefree way, solved the daily problems according to the established practices.

The most important of all is that, from the comments written by Meirelles, a person emerges convinced that not only the solution to education was in the establishment of the principles of the New School, but also that of society itself. This conviction led her to defend her assertions firmly, but without any shadow of intransigence or radicalism. Rather, in addressing the issues and problems that emerged with the educational reform in its uniqueness, she showed that she did not share the idea that there was a complete and finished formula to answer all issues.

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¹⁸ The persecutions to Anísio Teixeira were not restricted to the Federal District. The *Diário de Notícias* published two pieces of information about him. The first, dated January 18, 1937 (*Diário de Notícias*, 1937a), reported that he had been exonerated from the position of professor of the Normal School of Bahia. The second, dated November 25, 1937 (*Diário de Notícias*, 1937b), informed that his name was taken from a school in Bahia.

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