

# Mixed-gender schools during the Brazilian Republic: In the shadow of educational history

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**Abstract:** Developments within the policy of the democratization of education during the early Republic are discussed, by describing the history of the Rural Mixed-Gender School in the Felipão district near Campinas, Brazil, between 1920 and 1960. The theme is high important in spite of the poor visibility that this form of public primary school had on educational historiographical production when compared to other schools. Research is based on the selection and analysis of photo and documental sources, mainly on written and oral history through interviews with former students and teachers. Their narrative, interpreted by school culture, revealed ambiguities in the process, since duality of different school models within the rural and urban contexts caused educational inequality.

**Keywords:** Mixed School, history of brazilian education, education in the Republic, school culture

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# Escola Mista na República: um lugar na sombra da história educacional

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**Resumo:** O objetivo deste artigo<sup>1</sup> é discutir alguns desdobramentos da política de democratização da educação na República, tomando por base a história da Escola Mista rural que existiu no bairro Felipão, no município de Campinas, entre as décadas de 1920 e 1960. Leva-se em conta a pouca visibilidade angariada por essa modalidade de escola pública primária na produção historiográfica educacional, se comparada aos grupos escolares. A pesquisa pautou-se na seleção e na análise de fontes documentais imagéticas e escritas e principalmente na história oral, por meio de entrevistas com ex-alunos e ex-professoras cuja narrativa foi interpretada pela via da cultura escolar. Constataram-se ambiguidades nesse processo, já que a dualidade dos modelos escolares, diferenciados para os contextos rural e urbano, gerou desigualdades educacionais.

**Palavras-Chave:** Escola Mista, história da educação brasileira, Brasil República, cultura escolar

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<sup>1</sup> Apresento aqui uma síntese de minha tese de doutorado *Na transição rural-urbana: a passagem da Escola Mista do bairro Felipão na história da educação pública campineira*, defendida no DELART (Grupo Memória) da FE/Unicamp, sob a orientação da Prof<sup>ra</sup>. Dr<sup>a</sup>. Vera Lúcia Sabongi De Rossi.

# Escola Mixta en la República: un lugar en la sombra de la historia educacional

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**Resumen:** El objetivo de este artículo<sup>2</sup> es discutir algunos desarrollos de la política de democratización de la educación en la República, llevando en consideración la historia de la Escuela Mixta rural que existió en el barrio Felipão, en el municipio de Campinas-SP-Brasil, entre las décadas de 1920 y 1960. Se toma en cuenta la poca visibilidad que esta modalidad de escuela pública primaria tuvo en la producción historiográfica educacional, comparándose a los grupos escolares. Esta investigación se basó en la selección y en el análisis de fuentes documentadas imagéticas y escrituras y principalmente en la historia oral, a través de entrevistas con ex alumnos y ex profesoras cuya narrativa fue interpretada por la vía de la cultura escolar. Se averiguaron ambigüedades en este proceso, ya que la dualidad de los modelos escolares, diferenciados para los contextos rural y urbano, generó desigualdades educacionales.

**Palabras Clave:** Escuela Mixta, historia de la educación brasileña, Brasil República, cultura escolar

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2 Presento aquí una síntesis de mi tesis doctoral “*Na transição rural-urbana: a passagem da Escola Mista do bairro Felipão na história da educação pública campineira*”, defendida en el DELART (Grupo Memoria) de la FE/Unicamp, bajo la orientación de la Prof<sup>a</sup>. Dr<sup>a</sup>. Vera Lúcia Sabongi De Rossi.

## Introduction

Urbanization and industrialization, landmarks in Brazilian society in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, defined the schools as an important place within the historical modernizing track. Since the start of the Republican period, the mission of the modern school with democratic features comprised the fomentation of culture, the molding of attitudes and the formation of mentalities.

Up till the 1950s, half of the Brazilian population was illiterate with significant changes in the 1960s when the urban population became numerically larger than the rural one. The transformation occurred under the urban-industrial aegis that required a rise in people's education level.

In the case of the state of São Paulo, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, economic and social changes triggered by the coffee boom underscored the onset of a long rural-urban- transition process that affected Brazilian society. The process brought about the end of slavery, the start of European immigration, mechanization, railway transport, commercialization and improvements in people's life, public sanitation, waged labor, the development of the internal market and others (Martine & McGranahan, 2010).

However, social transformations towards modernity occurred through exclusion and revealed the contradictions within the process. Although educational expansion was done under the aegis of equality, different scales for the urban and rural sectors hierarchized access to publish schooling, with strong privileges for the high social classes.

Current paper discusses the development of the democratization policy in education in Brazil based on the history of a mixed-gender school in the district called *Felipão*<sup>3</sup>, in the municipality of Campinas between the 1920s and the 1960s. Focus has been given to this particular school due to the low visibility that the modality featured in government-

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<sup>3</sup> Heavy migration was preponderant for the cities' development. It was the case of this specific community established by Italian immigrants at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the recently built Catholic chapel was also the public school. It lay on the outskirts of the city, in the old district called *Felipão*, renamed *São João* in the mid-1950s. The chapel and the school were separated some years after, but during the last hundred years they existed on the same site on the now *Avenida das Amoreiras*.

run public schools and in educational historiographical production. In fact, little information on mixed-gender school exists in the municipality's educational historiography. They are practically anonymous, mentioned only as numbers, without names or addresses, or rather, without any identity.

The category 'school culture', greatly underscored in educational historiography of the 1990s, places the school under the focus of research. Factors of the school's day-to-day life comprising symbols, representations and subjects in their manner for performing their distinct roles were valorized. The history of schools during the Republican period was a pioneer event due to its modern representation in politics, culture, social changes and pedagogy.

The state of São Paulo, Brazil, heralded the above educational model and was copied throughout the country. Numberless mixed-gender school (also called isolated school and rural schools) were active, concomitantly with groups installed in the towns and cities. The model referred to as 'the small humble rural school' already existed as the 'first letters' public school and continued its activities throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, these schools were almost invisible, perhaps due to their negative representation: as a rule, premises were shanty and provisional; the physical and pedagogical structure was precarious, simple and rather rudimentary. Further, only one or two teachers and the students were extant. Its characteristics comprised mixed-gender classes, multi-year classes and their compact curriculum was limited to the literacy level.

As a researcher, the current writer became interested in the government-run school *Prof. Luiz Gonzaga da Costa* in 2008. Similar to what happens in Archeology, the old school which had functioned for 40 years within the district's Catholic chapel, was discovered. The mixed-gender school was established in 1920 but transformed into a primary School in 1963. It was moved to a new premise in 1974<sup>4</sup>. However, its mixed-school condition was unknown by the educational administration and by students and teachers alike. In fact, no document is extant on the school files.

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<sup>4</sup> The school was renamed *Grupo Escolar Professor Luiz Gonzaga da Costa*, as a homage to one of the educational inspectors of the 1930s.

However, its history lives in the memory of its ex-students and its ex-teachers, the protagonists of an experience that represented the type of state education (nationalist style) in the 1930s and 1940s when modernity emerged and disseminated itself rather ambiguously.

### **Making the nation modern: the unequal expansion of the Primary School during the early Republic**

The year 1930 is a landmark of the modernization of the Brazilian state when, according to Bosi (1992), the policy of mass education was established through the instigation of the seemingly democratic government. However, the idea of ‘rebuilding the nation’ also brought authoritarianism and nationalism that was to highlight the New State (1937-45).

However, the modernization of education in the state of São Paulo was already a fact during the First Republic during which educational reforms expanded primary education to the people, based on a liberal stance. Through the First Reform in Public Education (1890-96), primary schools were established and thenceforth this model disseminated widely throughout the country. These primary schools were established in the great cities and were characterized by the grouping of single classes within a single premise of great proportions. They were administered by a single headmaster and by a team of teachers giving lessons simultaneously, involving serial and progressive contents. The primary school comprised children at the same schooling level, separated by gender (Hilsdorf, 2006). It had large classrooms at floor and first story levels, with toilets, masters’ room, lockers, headmaster’s office, library, administrative staff and servants.

Contrastingly, with the rural environment and with different characteristics, several mixed-gender schools were disseminated throughout the state, with the sole aim of teaching the children in rural areas how to read and write. Within the context of a predominantly rural Brazil, mixed-gender schools were the ‘solution’ for the teaching of children in faraway places where the number of children was insufficient to establish a school with classes separated by gender. In fact, this type of school was contrary to the multi-series ‘model’, and was limited to the first three years (and thus incomplete) of primary education,

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, primary education policy in the state of São Paulo was twofold, with two different models, one for the rural category

and another for the urban one. Since primary schooling was concluded in the monumental schools of the cities, children educated in rural schools could not receive their primary diplomas (Demartini, 1989b).

Urban primary schools – symbols of the educational reform – revealed the State's investment policy in the professionalization of teachers and in the establishment of a pedagogical structure for citizen formation, even though still far off equalitarian principles. Teachers' Training Colleges formed teachers and initiated the teaching carrier, with qualified teachers for such an important mission within the modernizing project of Brazilian society.

Although coexisting with urban schools, the rural mixed-gender schools were greatly different in physical structure, pedagogical guidelines, didactic and material resources, teachers, curriculum, teaching program, school timetable and space, rhythm, the use of school uniform and others. Such differences caused inequalities (Souza, 2009).

The negative social representation of 'isolated schools' should be underscored and understood since they were thought to be of a lower category. One should also problematize the fact that the rural/agricultural identity was not always the curriculum parameter of these schools, or rather, the schools followed the same curriculum, albeit compacted, as that of urban ones although these primary schools were in the countryside

Consequently, the educational differences within the same school network revealed the distinct social places occupied by the protagonists who lived in the city and in the periphery – farms and plantations, hamlets and districts in faraway peripheral localities. Similarly, they showed that the town or city was the organizing center of modern living and sectioned living modalities.

## **Research and the school's historical narrative**

Several researchers have revealed that there are few studies on the history of education of the Brazilian extensive rural area investigated as periphery. Or rather, the production on multi-year schools, schools with only one teacher, isolated schools and/or rural schools is small localities (Almeida, 2005; Souza, 2006; Cardoso & Jacomeli, 2010).

Several other historians problematize that, within the history of the democratization of primary schooling, especially through the aspect of educational reforms, it may be said that this process has not been caused merely by urban Primary Education. Due to their underscoring in

academic production, urban Primary Schools have dimmed the role of the numberless rural schools dedicated to literacy during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century even though their structure was inferior to that of urban schools and which would have placed at a disadvantage the people attended to (Souza & Faria Filho, 2006; Shieh, 2010). The above fact perhaps explains why the history of peripheral school institutions, albeit official and government-run, is still unknown, as occurred in the case of now extinct mixed-gender schools.

The narrative on this specific public school in Campinas, Brazil, is circumscribed to the educational history of the state of São Paulo, Brazil, and is the product of a research undertaken between 2008 and 2011. Current research is foregrounded not merely on the selection and analysis of images and documents but also on the methodology of oral history based on the affidavits of ‘common people’ (Portelli, 1997). The informants are eleven former students belonging to the working class, elderly people aged between 60 and 90 years, with only a few years of schooling (three years in the rural school under analysis), mostly the offspring of Italian immigrants residents of the district and who attended the Catholic chapel in the locality. There is also the deposition of a former teacher, 97 years old, from Campinas, trained at the Teachers’ Training College Carlos Gomes, and worked on the premise in the 1940s.

Valorizing memories from the underground empowers the periphery. According to Pollak (1989), through oral history, the protagonists would be salvaged from the anonymity that foregrounded their hidden and scantily revealed histories, albeit relevant and important. Memory, as a collective work filled with events and interpretations of the past, may reinforce feelings of belonging. Reference to the past maintains the group’s cohesion and defines its place.

Owing to its mission in teaching the basics of reading and writing and other lessons in the formation of the citizen to the children of workers, probably the mixed-gender school represented a popular primary education modality in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The school in the *Felipão* district emerges within this context as a social asset provided by the state which assumed it after its establishment by the teacher Balbina and other members of the first Italian families in the district. The Missio and Lovato families actually established themselves in the space neighboring the chapel. The symbols school/chapel, state/church and education/religion are all mixed up within the context of the



construction of the modern world and reveal that laicism frequently occurred merely on the formal plane.

It is important to underscore that the foundress Balbina Cesarino Silva (1885-1928) belonged to a family of Negro teachers in Campinas. Her grandfather Antonio, the offspring of a freed slave during the Brazilian Empire, had founded a college for females in which the members of his family lectured. One of the female teachers was Balbina's mother, also called Balbina, who taught her nephew Antônio F. Cesarino Jr. (1906-1992) at home. He was the first Negro student in the College Culto à Ciência and became a famous professor at the University of São Paulo (Barbosa, 1997).

Through generations, the Cesarino family became a traditional Campinas family whose members, in spite of poverty, were different from other Negroes in the town due to their social commitments. In fact, it is the history of a Negro family, the Antonios and the Balbinas, in the municipality. According to local history, teacher Balbina remained single, took residence in the distinct and died when 42 years old. Perhaps due to her Catholicism, she was accepted by the members of the community. The monumental State School lies in the street that bears her name.

. The institutionalization of times and spaces with definite characteristics for the school that educates new generations of people within societies, expresses the modern school culture which reproduces itself through modernity's political and pedagogical projects (Boto, 2003). The public school of the district *Felipão/São João*, an almost centenary institution in the periphery of Campinas, features a history made up 'of parts and sections'. In its first phase, as a mixed-gender school, it did not have its own premise and thus it lacked social prestige. The above may partially explain its 'erasure' from the history of new generation of people. The school culture inherited from the old school took its roots from there and the reflections on negative representations did not impair its continuity pervaded by constant changes in its history.

The community of the district *Felipão/São João* was foregrounded on the original founders: according to the patriarchal model, the abundant offspring helped their parents on the farms by cultivating grains or in the brick-manufacturing industries.

The chapel and the school were the community's central point. In fact, it flourished on the coffee plantations and, during several years, followed the railway. Witnesses that worked in the potteries as children

narrate that, when they heard the train's whistle, they used to run, wash their hands and pick up the teacher at the station on the Sorocaba line: a common scene in the former students' memory.

Boys and girls conciliated their family tasks with school activities. In his affidavit, Mr José Primo underscores the concomitant study and work in the children's experience: he and his seven brothers used to work in the family brick industry near the river Capivari in the 1950s.

So, you attended First, Second and Third Year ...

Then, it ended [...] on the third year, schooling finished. I had to work, Madame.

Photo 1 shows laborers at the gate of the Cerâmica Mingone. One may observe men, women, boys and girls in uniform; on the right side of the photo; working children, students at the rural school, may be seen.

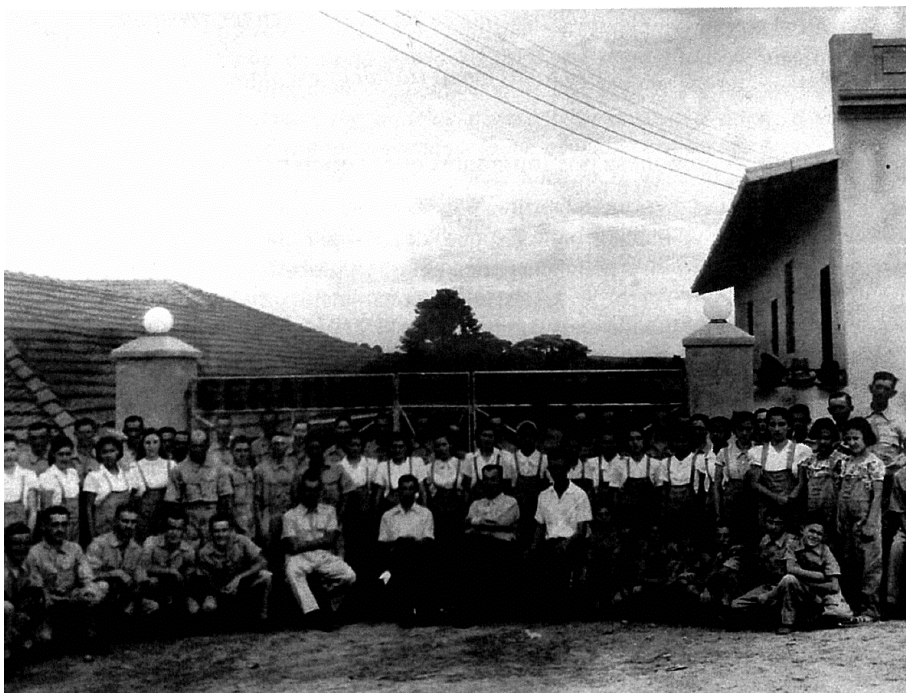


Photo 1. Laborers at the Cerâmica Mingone – (undated).

Source: Archive of the Mingone family

Communities of foreigners made a great impact in the 1930s by disseminating state primary schools through a policy of nationalism that aimed at transforming into Brazilians the children of immigrants. Since it exalted Brazilian nationality, the new education “[...] should be based on the proper use of Portuguese spoken in a uniform and stable manner throughout the entire nation” (Schwartzman, Bomeny & Costa, 2000, p. 157). In current local history, the school had an important role in the socialization of these children. In fact, former students stated that they learned Portuguese at the school.

The history of immigrant families that went to Campinas and resided in the district under analysis as laborers in coffee plantations reveals a narrative of their individual and collective life, or rather, their identity as subjects. Besides formal education stimulated by the family, the Catholic religion symbolized a relevant cultural mark maintained by tradition. Similar to the Church and other institutions, the school represented a cultural and social symbol of belonging. In other words, through their experience in the Church, the subjects also participated in the affairs of the city and society which received them.

Another phase within the history of the district was the arrival of immigrants hailing from the northeast of Brazil and from other regions in the 1960s and 1970s, especially from the state of Paraná, and remained in that specific locality in Campinas. They were mostly born rural laborers and, at that moment, they transformed themselves into factory workers. They formed a diversity movement with regard to the traditional Italian families of the district. In fact, the latter used to establish a segregation stance with the newcomers. In the process, the urban model of work established itself definitely and marked new times, new calculations, a passage between one period and another, whose alterations and continuities appeared in life experienced.

### **In three years only ... lessons learned**

What value had the rural school for students and teachers who experienced it, after the onset of urbanization? Traces of school culture of the mixed-gender school express the educational concepts that flourished officially and composed the pedagogical stance in the institutions: its curriculum, lessons, didactic material, space organization, rules, assessment and other day-to-day elements. In spite of the short school experience, the memoirs of the people on lessons and school life are significant and reveal a section of its culture.

Viñao Frago (2001) defines school culture as a type of sediment formed by layers, over time. It reflects concepts, ideas, habits and practices shown in traditions followed and transmitted by generations of people. In the author's view, when historians weave the history of school institutions, they take the archeologist's role and in such 'excavations' and discovery of traces, they identify marks that remain, in spite of educational and other determinations, followed or not by the subjects in their activities.

Several sources report that the mixed-gender school of the *Felipão* district comprised approximately 40 boys and girls who shared the same educational experience in the multi-year class. Photo 2 shows teacher Marina and her mixed-gender class on the steps of the chapel/school. Several children seem to have been touched by her smile. One may note the predominance of white, fair-haired children, the offspring of European immigrants (and the evident social exclusion of Black children).



Photo 2. Teacher Marina and pupils – 1949.

Source: Archives of Mr. José de Lima

Due to the small efforts and scanty investments by the State, these schools did not award the diploma of Primary Education to the children, since Year 4 was non-existent. In the affidavit of the former student Angelo, who was in Year 3 in 1938, three years of study were enough for the subject's training – naturally family tradition will make him a farm laborer.

In those times, we who worked on the farm did not consider much learning as important. Working with a hoe, on the farm, was our profession when we left school, wasn't it?

Therefore [...] it was enough.

Civic education had an important role in the curriculum. It formed the child's character and taught the principles of discipline, respect for order and towards the institutions and love of one's country. Arithmetic, Language, History, Geography and Drawing were the bases for Years 1, 2 and 3, which prepared children within that context. Further studies were the privilege of a handful of children whose parents could afford pay the transport expenses to the 'city'.

All the interviewed people remember the visit by the educational inspector and underscore that the teacher prepared the students for the encounter: they had to wear clean clothes and shoes. The inspector assessed pupils' performance and repetition of the year by pupils if they failed in assessments. He represented authority within the school system when he supervised the enactment of rules and norms of the State.

In their simplicity, the words of Mrs Lourdes (Year 1 in 1941) reveal the normative act of the inspector's function:

The exams? Do you remember anything on the exams?

An inspector used to come by. He applied the examination. During the year, the inspector used to come and see [...]

According to Demartini (1989a), in the 1920s, the school inspector<sup>5</sup> became a relevant factor within the educational system. The educational

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<sup>5</sup> 'School inspection' became 'teaching supervision' in the 1960s and 1970s, within the context of the military dictatorship, a period known as 'technicism in education'.

inspector used to follow the teacher's work and controlled several aspects in the functioning of the school, such as absenteeism, frequencies, performances, teaching methods and others.

In fact, these were the characteristics of the rural school who received boys and girls, almost always barefooted. Several times, when the train failed to come, the children could not attend lessons; there was a lunch break without a lunch; school material was carried in a cloth bag; student wrote with a pen; the textbook was not renewed yearly; handwriting, drawing and exercise books were extant; a kitchen garden existed in the school as a renovation factor in teaching methods, at the instigation of the New School so that the children learned while doing things.

In the 1940s, teacher Ana Maria Guedes de Tullio and another teacher directed the school 'on their own', without the follow up of the headmaster or other authorities: they were responsible for the school and interacted directly with the families concerned. She describes the school as a very simple structure, rustic, with desks made of unpolished wood.

We took care of the school.

Were there no servants?

No, no, no. We had to wash and clean things. I do not know if we ever painted the school [...] The school was rather pretty. That white curtain full of dust, [...] as I was saying: the school was a pleasure.

The teacher insisted on the children wearing uniform and underscored that the students should be the example of the younger ones. She also gave guidelines for the care of the exercise books. She revealed that didactic material was acquired with great difficulties. Further, teacher *Aninha* described the school environment as highly pleasing in spite of the precariousness.

You could not imagine the zeal with which they cleaned the classroom, their joy in polishing the desks. Happiness pervaded everything. I was really proud.

Normatization (wearing school uniform, rules), hygiene (cleaning the school premises, clean uniform and wearing shoes) and nationalism (lesson contents) expressed the new civility concepts established by urban/modern parameters. The public school teacher had a social role in



the formation of citizens: she was almost a sort of missionary for the current modernity by disseminating knowledge and values to the pupils.

Contrastingly to the negative social representation on isolated schools, Mrs *Aninha* reported that frequency was high even on rainy days. She disagrees with the predominant (even official) idea of that period on the lack of interest of the students in rural schools.

Did you suspend class when it rained?

No, no, no. I used to go to the school; the children used to go too and they never missed lessons. Frequency was high. I praised God every day [...]

[...] students at the *Felipão* were unbelievably enthused! They were happy and never missed classes... even though they were poor.

In spite of the lack of interest by the State, the workers on the farms vied for the schooling of their children: they acknowledged that schooling was a form of overcoming difficulties since the acquisition of culture could improve life conditions (Demartini, 1988).

The members of the families interviewed studied in this school. Remembering the name of the text books and conserving school material as souvenirs reveal the appreciation that people had for their school period. Referring to the school file, Mr Angelo remarks:

Have a look: you may see all my school tasks. This is a summary of the last year at school. You may see the Math problems, language, handwriting, history; everything is here ...

I kept everything as a souvenir; You have here all I learned in school [...]



Photo 3, School file of former student Ângelo Piton – 1938.

Source: Person file of Ângelo Piton.

Even though former students are full of praise for their school, the lack of teachers was a recurrent issue in rural schools and frequently they were on sick leave. After one or more years teaching in these schools, many asked for transference. For instance, teacher *Aninha*, who worked in the *Felipão* mixed-gender school between 1942 and 1945, was transferred to a primary school in the city. The history of the public school as an institution and the community's heritage was the maintenance of cultural/symbolic representations of the past and reinvested in the present, a guarantee of its presence in that locality.

### **Provisional, but a long-lasting school**

The historical process of the democratization of education in Brazilian and the São Paulo society, within the rural-urban transition, reveals that duality in education privileged certain urban social groups to whom full primary education was available and, in contrast, simplified restrictively and incompletely the same educational level for people coming from the rural working classes.



The *Anuario do Ensino do Estado de São Paulo* (1936-1937), the government announced the diffusion of primary schools, the comprehensiveness of primary education and equal opportunities to all children between 8 and 14 years old. It was also announced that there was a single system for the rural and urban schools. Further, the same government document criticized the model of the mixed-gender school in the countryside and confessed that it was inferior when compared to the urban primary school. The isolated schools were classified as non-functional, administered by unprepared teachers: “[...] they should be an exception and briefly they will be eradicated [...]” (Kirchner, 2010, p. 102), although this event was hard to come.

The history of mixed-gender rural schools represents the inclusion/exclusion policy for working class children, especially the offspring of immigrants: the schools attended nationalistic aims, or rather, to inform values and to serve as a base for work and social life but not to provide the primary school diploma. This fact warranted the group’s non mobility by fixing them within their social layer. Consequently, policy dictated the limits of inclusion: “[...] time for school should not jeopardize the working period [...]” (Faria Filho & Pineau, 2009, p. 103). In other words, instruction is important but only for the integration of the immigrants’ offspring to integrate within society. Receiving the Primary School diploma was not a right for the sons of the working classes, not even in the allegedly democratic modern republic.

According to the presupposition of Liberalism, primary schooling level was the only type of instruction that should be extended to all and gradually the opportunity to access school would be widened by the government. In the projects that enhanced the broadening of education through its expansion, one may note the contradiction between liberal and republican principles, the guidelines for a reforming political discourse, and social reality. When the duality of school models/curricula was instituted in the educational system to attend the urban and rural social categories, the projects legitimated segmentation and enhanced educational inequality.

Since educational reforms reveal such ambiguity, the history of mixed-gender school was ‘erased’ so that they would not be seen and analyzed. The above may explain the lack of knowledge on the first phase of the *Escola do São João* by the people, and the lack of documents on its existence.

The modernizing onset of Brazil occurred in the 1930 between the interface of the Republic, populism, dictatorship and liberalism. Needless to say, it became modern for the very few, with the gradual expansion of rights till contemporaneity. In quantitative terms, basic education was extended to all only by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 2010 Census showed a 96.9% school attendance rate for children between 7 and 14 years old (Rocha, 2014). Within terrible contradictions, the greatest challenge is the quality of public education accessible to all Brazilians.

Foregrounded on the history of mixed-gender education, we may now understand why a percentage of aging laborers do not have a complete primary education. The government failed to provide primary education to all. Further, in rural school, Year 3 was the last year of schooling. The argument shuns biased interpretations that certain social segments (workers) quitted studies through lack of interest or because of labor exigences. There was no historical possibility of other options in education. These data have been revealed by the experiences narrated by the protagonists, people with memory, culture and history, on themselves and on their world (Von Simson, 2000; Teixeira, 2004).

According to Saviani (2005, p. 12), if the term schools corresponds to the “[...] history of the public school [...]” and the Republic is the watershed, more visibility should be given to the mixed-gender school which instructed for many years the majority of the Brazilian population. When politics enhanced the Primary School in the wake of Republican propaganda, it also erased the history of mixed-gender schools.

The urban Primary Schools took decades to replace the mixed-gender schools in São Paulo, which disappeared during the military dictatorship. If these schools, supposedly ‘provisional’, lasted for more than half a century, one should correct the remarks <sup>6</sup>: “With the establishment of urban Primary Schools to replace the isolated schools [...]”; “the first Primary Schools... pioneer school institutions in the state of São Paulo [...]”. Neither all isolated schools were replaced immediately nor urban Primary Schools were pioneering or the predominant modality in Primary Education. This is true only for modern urban institutions. In fact, the theme need revision within educational historiography.

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<sup>6</sup> These phrases were retrieved from recente proceedings, books and accademic papers (Cf. Anais do 7º Seminário Nacional..., 2012, p. 142).

Urban Primary Schools established themselves definitively over time but they were unable to maintain the same original pattern due to rapid expansion and lack of planning (Souza, 2008; Souza & Faria Filho, 2006). The 1971 educational reform transformed the small primary schools into state schools for primary education, comprising Years 1 – 8 for all.

As the history of a century-old schooling institution in the periphery of Campinas, Brazil, shows, the community waited for more than 50 years for the long rural-urban transition process so that it could have a proper premise. More than 40 years had to pass for the establishment of Year 4 that would give students their primary education diploma. Through the long waiting period, the inhabitants did not quit the *Escola do São João*, a public institution and a heritage of the locality.

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