

HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON EDUCATION IN THE PERIOD OF THE CIVIC-MILITARY DICTATORSHIP: as a presentation and debate

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It is dark, but I sing,
because the morning will come.
(Thiago de Mello, 1981)

Education was one of the sectors most impacted by the authoritarian regime instituted in 1964 in Brazil, not only by the violence, repression and truculence directed at students and teachers, but also by the uses that the military governments made of educational institutions and school culture as an instrument of control and ideological indoctrination, in addition to the profound transformations that they imprinted on the structure of the education system with the 1968 university reform (Law No. 5.540/68) and the reform of primary and secondary education (Law No. 5.692/71), whose implications we still experience today. The panorama is similar, but not the same, in other Latin American countries, a product of the Condor Plan, which disseminated government techniques on populations in political, economic and pedagogical terms.

In recent years, a growing number of researchers have focused on the study of the history of education in the period of civic-military dictatorships, interrogating this historical period with new questions and from different approaches. Undoubtedly, the renewal of the field of History and History of Education has contributed enormously to the broadening of the researchers' questionnaire. The expansion of research sources, the relationship of history with other fields of knowledge such as Anthropology, Psychology, Linguistics, the look at culture and notions of practices and representations have enriched a multiplicity of themes and interpretations (Barros, 2011). But the study of the dictatorship period has difficulties, as it dialogues with the current political debate and is immersed in disputes over memory.¹ In addition, it is involved in controversies of a theoretical nature in the disciplinary fields themselves.

¹ According to Bauer (2012), the proliferation of private memories and redefinitions of national identities intensified in the late twentieth century, with the appearance of new memories in the public space derived from the affirmation of identities and the search for recognition of silenced memories. In France, in the 1990s, the expression "duty of memory" emerged, directly linked to the notion of memory policies, that is, "as a possibility to recognize and repair traumatic episodes of the past, such as dictatorships, genocides, wars and human rights violations" (Fernandes, 2022, p. 21).

The purpose of this dossier, now published by the *Revista Brasileira de História da Educação* (Brazilian Journal of History of Education), is precisely to deepen knowledge on the subject and to open the way to the debate by questioning different analyzes about this historical period and its implications for education.

The new historiography of the Brazilian dictatorship – studies such as those by Motta (2014, 2021), Ridenti (2008), Reis (2000), Ferreira (2009), Rollemberg (2003), among others – called into question established interpretations of the period and introduced new possibilities for examination, provoking theoretical-historiographic debates.² In the field of History of Education, this debate has been less heated, but still very thought-provoking, as can be seen in the works of Azanha (1992), Warde (1990), Nunes & Carvalho (2005) and Oliveira (2002).

However, this first important critical literature produced on education in the period of the civic-military dictatorship cannot be disregarded, that is, the texts of Freitag (1979), Ribeiro (1978) Saviani (1983, 1987), Romanelli (1980), Germano (2011), Arapiraca (1982), Santos (1980), among others, which had great dissemination in Brazilian pedagogical culture, some of them being used as manuals in the Pedagogy degree and undergraduate courses. Based on historical-dialectical materialism and macrostructural assumptions, privileging economic determinations to explain the functioning of capitalist society, these studies established a given interpretation of the educational policies carried out by the military.

More recent historiography, in dialogue and/or in opposition to these interpretations, has questioned this historical period from another place, that is, one that accentuates the agency of historical subjects, the correlation of forces, the internal functioning of schools and the historicity of educational processes. This historiography has valued more the empiricism and the work in the archives and made use of the memory policies that made it possible to open the archives of the Delegacias de Ordem Pública (Public Order Police Stations) – DOPs – in different Brazilian states.³

A historiographical balance about the production of research on education in the period of the civic-military dictatorship is yet to be made and requires laborious research and analysis, in view of the multiplicity of themes that have been studied. A simple consultation of the Capes Thesis Database in Brazil using the descriptor "educação na ditadura militar" (education in the military dictatorship) listed the

² See, for example, the in-depth discussions carried out by Fico (2004, 2017).

³ Filipe Fernandes (2022) attributes to the year 1995 the beginning of memory policies in Brazil when, for the first time, the Brazilian State took responsibility for having tortured, murdered and disappeared with people during the regime. Subsequently, in the 2010s, the National Truth Commission was installed in 2012 and the DOPS files were opened. Other advances can be mentioned, such as Law No. 10.639/2003 making it mandatory in elementary and high schools, official and private, to teach Afro-Brazilian History and Culture, aiming to promote anti-racist education and the installation of the National Truth Commission in 2012.

existence of 452 works.⁴ Evidently, this expressive set of research refers to different themes and different theoretical-methodological references. Within the limits of this text, it is not up to us to make the state of the art on the subject, but to point out some trends and open possibilities for research.

Not by chance, the questions interposed by the history of school subjects have constituted very innovative studies on education in the civic-military dictatorship. In fact, the curricular changes were significant in this period with the introduction of a new curricular design for the teaching of primary and secondary education, establishing the common and diverse part and the differentiation between activities, practices and disciplines. Not only were new curricular theories adopted, but the organization and content of the subjects were also redefined (Palma Filho, 2020). It is worth remembering the suppression of History and Geography being replaced with Social Studies, as well as the new meanings and instrumentalization attributed to subjects such as History, Moral and Civic Education, Studies of Brazilian Problems, Social and Political Organization of Brazil and Physical Education. Operating with the notion of school culture postulated by Julia (2001), Escolano (2006) or Viñao (2001) and with the theoretical perspectives of Chervel (1990) and Goodson (1997), research has paid attention to the configuration of disciplines (Martins, 2000), educational practices and the memory of educators (Oliveira, 2003), as well as to the various forms of resistance, appropriation and inventiveness of teachers in teaching these disciplines (Alves, 2022; Prado, 2004). The studies of school subjects have also problematized textbooks, understanding them, according to the propositions of Chopin (2004) and Bittencourt (1993), as objects of culture responsible for the transmission of knowledge connected with school culture. Also noteworthy is the understanding of books as commodities, subject to the interventions of publishers and the conditions of production, circulation and consumption, and, in Chartier's interpretative key (1985, 2011), books, readings and readers constituted at the confluence of practices and representations. Therefore, the researchers' interest in Moral and Civic Education, an icon of the ideological indoctrination of the military regime in Brazilian education, is remarkable. But studies on this subject have advanced by demonstrating nuances, differentiations and different appropriations of curricular prescriptions (Filgueiras, 2006; Santos, 2020; Klingbeil, 2025).

There are, of course, new studies on educational reforms, but they are few in number, attesting to the researchers' restricted interest in political history. Regarding the university reform, we can point out, for example, the studies of Rodrigo Patto (2014) and Celeste Filho (2006). However, the reform of primary and secondary education has received little attention. The mandatory 8-year schooling had

⁴ Checked on February 25, 2025. See Catalog of Theses & Dissertations - CAPES. As an example of the exponential growth of theses and dissertations, in the period from 1993 to 2018, 201 works on education in the dictatorship were found, while from 2019 to 2023, 251 were found, showing that, in the last 5 years, more theses and dissertations were produced than in the entire last quarter of a century.

administrative, financial and pedagogical implications. It was necessary to bring together, in the same school, institutions of different traditions, such as primary school (school groups and isolated schools) and high school (gymnasiums and secondary schools), resulting in a reorganization of the school network and the teaching career with great social repercussion (Frattini, 2011). In addition, it required financial contributions and the reconfiguration of the State Departments of Education, releasing new educational guidelines reinterpreted by education technicians and professionals.

The question, long proposed by Tyack and Cuban (1995), is of enormous relevance, that is, to understand how schools change reforms. In this sense, the hypothesis suggested by Souza (2009) around the constitution of a new school culture from the 1971 reform suggests research of medium duration, covering the period of the dictatorship understood in its relationship with previous and subsequent periods.

Carlos Fico's warning (2017, p. 30) drawing attention to the fact that “we should not reduce the history of Brazil between 1964 and 1985 to the history of the military dictatorship”, that is, “the fact that not everything that happened in those years derives from the circumstance of having a military dictatorship”, is an important warning to avoid the sometimes recurring misconception of abstracting the history of education from that period by circumscribing it in itself without problematizing the continuities, changes and ruptures with previous periods. This is the case, for example, of the curricular changes introduced in secondary education by the first Law of Guidelines and Bases (Law No 4.024/1961) emphasizing the sciences to the detriment of the humanistic training prevailing at this level of education. How have schools incorporated such changes? What was left of this reorganization after the 1971 reform?

The 1960s were marked by several innovative educational experiences, such as experimental classes and vocational gymnasiums (Dallabrida, 2023; Chiozini, 2010). Evidently, the consequences of these initiatives were diverse during the military dictatorship with the repression, suppression and resignification of previous propositions. What we are saying is that looking back may be useful to better understand education after 1964, taking into account the action of educational subjects, political and institutional actors (Diniz; Souza, 2023).

This is also true for the problem of the expansion and “democratization” of primary and secondary education that has given rise to controversial explanations. Faced with the paradox of the high increase in enrollment in an authoritarian and unusual period, the analyzes reiterate the assumption of the interests of the military governments of ideological inculcation and promoting precarious expansion in order to meet the needs of training workers for the market in accordance with national development, as well as with the requirements of security and modernization in Brazil.

However, a more detailed analysis of the data and the ways in which the expansion of secondary education (junior high and high school) occurred in different

Brazilian states in the 1950s and 1960s, as was done by Diniz (2020) and Santos (2022) and also within the scope of the network project entitled “Secondary Education in Brazil in a Historical and Comparative Perspective (1942-1962)”, coordinated by Eurize Pessanha⁵, warns of the need for more refined and complex interpretations taking into account the social and political actors, in addition to the Church and the local public authorities involved in the expansion of education. These studies have avoided generalizing interpretations and highlighted regional/state differences and inequalities. Although in the period of the dictatorship we had a greater intervention of the federal government in the scope of primary and secondary education, it is necessary to have in mind the way state education networks were configured with their numerous specificities.

Finally, we point out other topics still little explored by education historians in relation to the period of the military dictatorship, such as the progressive institutionalization of daycare centers and preschools in municipal education networks; changes in teacher training, especially the Specific Qualification for Teaching and undergraduate degrees; changes in rural primary education, particularly nucleation policies; the indiscriminate closure of rural schools and the working conditions and training of lay teachers. It is also worth remembering the consolidation of Education Sciences and educational research.

Historical research on education in the military dictatorship imposes the confrontation of ideological disputes and the historiographic review under debate. It is, therefore, a political, epistemological and methodological challenge whose confrontation requires attention to conflicts, contradictions, different representations in disputes and, with regard to memory, the salutary warning of Jacy Seixas (2004), that is, the need to go beyond voluntary memory, considering other aspects in the study of memory, such as the affective and discontinuous dimension of human, social and political experiences, as it is necessary to recognize the creative function inscribed in memory in the updating of the past. It is important to advance the understanding of how the profound changes desired and formally implemented by the authoritarian regime were incorporated and recontextualized by teachers and education professionals within schools. It is important to overcome binaries and be more aware of the protagonism of social and political actors, the resistances, the experiences and tactics, the multiple trajectories and the various productions of meanings and disputes for narratives and memories.

This dossier presents different dimensions of education during the period of the dictatorship, subjected to military authoritarian control, but also by expressive movements of resistance. The papers gathered here analyze several educational aspects of this period and reveal how different social groups reacted to the reality to

⁵ This is research funded by CNPq, the results of which can be found in the books organized by Pessanha e Silva (2021) and Pessanha, Dallabrida and Souza (2022).

which they were exposed. Focusing on the reported experiences allows us to understand the duality of the educational field, especially in Brazil, but also in other contexts, which was sometimes configured as an authoritarian space, sometimes as a *locus* for building democratic alternatives.

The paper “Free territory: the student occupation of Colégio de Aplicação (São Paulo, October 1967)”, by Bontempi Júnior and Frizzo, offers a detailed analysis of an event of educational resistance at the University of São Paulo. The authors revisit the facts of the occupation and analyze the institutional tensions that preceded the event, revealing that the relationship between the Colégio de Aplicação and the University of São Paulo, in the pedagogical and administrative scope, was already conflicting. They point out that the press of the time contributed to transforming a specific revindication into a case of subversion, creating the conditions for the authoritarian action of the Departamento Estadual de Ordem Política e Social de São Paulo (State Department of Political and Social Order of São Paulo) - DEOPS. They also emphasize that the model aspect of this episode anticipated other repressive measures taken by the military government, which would intensify after the AI-5 (Institutional Act number 5).

The paper by Barreto and Faria Filho, entitled “Politics and education: women's political formation and action during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship”, advances the understanding of non-formal educational processes and strategies of resistance to repressive impositions. The authors analyze the trajectories of left-wing political activists from Pernambuco, demonstrating how women developed a pedagogy of resistance that combined theoretical training built by their experiences, readings and *embraced causes*, creating networks of contact and support to overcome repression. The analysis of how gender and class were articulated in these experiences stands out, showing that female militancy developed its own characteristics in the face of the double oppression of the patriarchal authoritarian regime.

Andrade's study, “The military dictatorship and integration of rural populations: Mobral and its community social action (Brazil, 1970's)”, offers important analyzes to understand social control strategies in rural areas, through a minimum school education. The author demonstrates how the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL) was part of a broader project for *the development of capitalism in Brazil in conditions of elimination of political resistance and maximum expansion of the profitable use of the rural workforce*, which sought at the same time to prevent the peasant organization and create bases of support for the regime. The investigation into partnerships with the Army is especially revealing, showing the militarization of educational policies and their role in the national security apparatus.

Rossi and Braghini's analysis of “The student movement and the MEC-USAID agreements in the pages of *O Estado de S. Paulo* (1962-1970)” highlights the role of the media in building authoritarian common thoughts. The authors, in addition to

denouncing the alignment of the newspaper with the regime, point out how the discursive construction that associated educational modernization with submission to the interests of the United States took place, opposing the student manifestations contrary to the American interference in the reformulation of higher education. The study also reveals how the press contributed to criminalizing the student movement, creating the image of the *subversive student* that would justify violent repressive actions against university students.

Then, the paper on university teachers in Paraná makes an innovative contribution by focusing on everyday resistance within higher education institutions. Ribeiro, Renk and Ilkiu, in the paper “University teachers in the process of resistance to the dictatorship in Paraná”, when analyzing the DOPS documents, reveal the gender character of repression, exposing how teachers were often monitored not only for their political activities, but also for allegedly *abandoning* their domestic role. The authors showed how teachers developed opposition tactics, ranging from the organization of seminars, alliances between teachers, students, politicians and society to strengthen the fight for defended rights to the creation of protection networks for persecuted colleagues. The authors also highlight how the struggle for better wages and working conditions assumed, in the dictatorial context, a clear political aspect of resistance.

Bittar's research on the memory of the coup among university students offers a fundamental counterpoint to historical studies. Her differentiated method, based on spontaneous responses, reveals how the dictatorial past is interpreted by the new generations. The results show the persistence of uncritical views on the 21 years of the military dictatorial regime in Brazil by undergraduate students. The author highlights the gaps in historical education about the period, problematizing the notion of historical time, showing how past and present are intertwined in the perceptions of young people.

Focused on the analysis of Henriette Amado's educational project in Guanabara during the dictatorial period, Costa and Vilaça reveal how innovative pedagogical projects were systematically criticized by Rio de Janeiro's society and destroyed by the regime. They also point out that the repression was not limited to explicitly political groups but reached any initiative that challenged the authoritarian educational model. The analysis of the DOPS inquiry reveals the *modus operandi* of repression, from the infiltration of agents to the use of informants. The paper also contributes to the history of pedagogical ideas, showing how progressive proposals were censored in the name of “national security”.

Finally, the paper “Between repression and resistance. Policies and pedagogy in the ICUF institutions during the last civic-military dictatorship (1976 – 1983)”, by Ana Diamant, brings a comparative perspective when examining the Argentine case during the so-called Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (National Reorganization

Process). The author analyzes how Jewish institutions linked to the ICUF (*Idisher Cultur Farband*) became spaces of cultural and educational resistance in the face of authoritarianism. Diamant reveals the sophisticated alternative education network that worked on the margins of the official system, showing how Jewish schools, libraries and cultural centers developed critical pedagogies under constant repressive threat. The documentary analysis and the testimonies of the survivors expose the double character of these institutions: as spaces of containment for a persecuted community, they were also centers of political and cultural organization. The study is particularly relevant for showing how Argentine repression, characterized by its violence, failed to completely eliminate educational alternatives, which survived through strategies of camouflage and passive resistance.

Reading this set of papers allows us to perceive not only the crucial aspects of the relationship between education and dictatorship, but also offers analytical tools to think about the current challenges of Brazilian education, which requires, on a daily basis, the daily and permanent struggle for democracy in educational spaces, requiring us to be vigilant against the signs of authoritarian actions that still permeate politics and our institutions.

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