

Processos da institucionalização da pré-escola no Brasil entre finais do século XIX e primeira metade do século XX

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Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo discutir alguns aspectos referentes aos processos de institucionalização da escolarização de crianças menores de sete anos no Brasil, jardins de infância e pré-escola, entre finais do século XIX e primeira metade do século XX. Primeiramente, a partir de uma análise sobre a educação “pré-escolar”, elaborada no início da década de 1940 na então capital do país, ressalta-se a importância dos estudos acadêmicos e dos movimentos sociais para o incremento das políticas públicas para a educação infantil do período. Em seguida, identifica-se, desde a década de 1860 até o início do século XX, experiências de escolarização de crianças menores de 7 anos em diferentes regiões do país. Por fim, são apresentadas reflexões sobre a problematização das categorias de raça e classe nos estudos sobre a história da escolarização de crianças pequenas. Como procedimento metodológico, foi conjugada uma pesquisa qualitativa sobre a temática em periódicos digitalizados que estão disponíveis para consulta na Hemeroteca Digital da Biblioteca Nacional junto ao levantamento bibliográfico pertinente ao assunto. Como perspectiva teórica optamos por seguir abordagens que consideram os sujeitos como agente da história e os eventos históricos pautados na compreensão de processo e experiências. Como resultados foi possível apontar para a necessidade de ampliação das pesquisas que tomem a temática da educação pré-escolar a partir de perspectivas teóricas e analíticas que tensionem as categorias de raça e classe a fim de alargarmos as compreensões sobre a complexidade do processo de institucionalização da educação pré-escolar no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: Educação infantil; história da educação; pré-escola.

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Aspects of the institutionalization of kindergartens and the so-called “preschool” in Brazil between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss some aspects related to the processes of institutionalization of schooling for children under seven years old in Brazil, kindergartens and preschools, between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. First, based on an analysis of “preschool” education, elaborated in the early 1940s in Rio de Janeiro, we emphasize the importance of academic studies and social movements for the increase of public policies for early childhood education in Brazil in the period. Then, from the 1860s to the beginning of the 20th century, we identified schooling experiences for children under 7 years of age in some different Brazilian regions. Finally, we reflect on the problematization of the categories of race and class in studies on the history of schooling for young children. As methodological procedure, qualitative research on the subject was combined in digitized journals that are available for consultation in the Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira of the Biblioteca Nacional together with the bibliographic survey relevant to the subject. As theoretical perspectives, we chose to follow approaches that consider subjects as agents of history and historical events guided by the understanding of process and experiences. As a result, it was possible to point to the need to expand research that takes the theme of preschool education from theoretical and analytical perspectives that tension the categories of race and class in order to broaden the understanding of the complexity of the institutionalization process of kindergarten and preschool education in Brazil.

Keywords: Childhood education; history of education; preschool education.

Aspectos de la institucionalización de los jardines de infancia y del llamado “preescolar” en Brasil entre fines del siglo XIX y la primera mitad del siglo XX

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Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir algunos aspectos relacionados con los procesos de institucionalización de la escolarización de niños menores de siete años en Brasil, jardines de infancia y preescolares, entre finales del siglo XIX y la primera mitad del siglo XX. En primer lugar, a partir de un análisis de la educación “preescolar”, elaborado a principios de la década de 1940 en la entonces capital del país, se destaca la importancia de los estudios académicos y de los movimientos sociales para el aumento de las políticas públicas para la educación infantil en Brasil del período. Luego, desde la década de 1860 hasta principios del siglo XX, se identifica experiencias de escolarización de niños menores de 7 años en diferentes regiones brasileñas. Finalmente, se reflexiona sobre la problematización de las categorías de raza y clase en los estudios sobre la historia de la escolarización de los niños pequeños. Como procedimiento metodológico se combinó una investigación cualitativa sobre el tema en periódicos digitalizados que se encuentran disponibles para consulta en la Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira da Biblioteca Nacional junto con el levantamiento bibliográfico pertinente al tema. Como perspectiva teórica, optamos por seguir enfoques que consideran a los sujetos como agentes de la historia y los acontecimientos históricos guiados por la comprensión del proceso y las experiencias. Como resultado, fue posible señalar la necesidad de ampliar investigaciones que tomen el tema de la educación preescolar desde perspectivas teóricas y analíticas que tensionen las categorías de raza y clase para ampliar la comprensión de la complejidad del proceso de institucionalización de la educación preescolar en Brasil.

Palabras clave: Educación infantil; educación preescolar; historia de la educación.

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Introduction

In the last decades of the 20th and 21st centuries, we have witnessed various debates focused on the institutionalization of Early Childhood Education as the initial stage of basic education within the context of public policies. Key legal milestones include the Federal Constitution of 1988, the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law of 1996, and additional documents guiding the organization and restructuring of Early Childhood Education, which shifted from a welfare perspective to an educational one. In these processes, it is essential to highlight the role of various social movements originating from civil society, academic organizations, and scientific institutions. By linking population demands to pedagogical, political, and social perspectives, they steered the construction of public policies to ensure children’s rights. Thus, what we now call "Early Childhood Education" is the result of decades of pressure from social movements throughout the 20th century and represents a right that has been gradually won. However, its full realization still depends on public policies and the efforts of various individuals and institutions to uphold the letter of the law.

Within the field of education, there are various domains engaged in extensive discussions on the subject, originating from "Childhood Studies," "History of Education," "Sociology of Childhood," among others, with a predominant temporal focus beginning in the 20th century. In this article, we have chosen to highlight certain individuals and educational experiences³ aimed at children under the age of 7, from the late 19th to the early 20th century, in cities from different regions of the country. This approach employs a methodological framework that combines an exploratory bibliographic review with research through digital resources available in the Brazilian Digital Newspaper Library of the National Library. We follow certain principles proposed by Digital History to structure an exploratory investigative path, seeking to uncover evidence within a dense web of information.

In light of these considerations, we followed a path that sought to articulate different methodological approaches, such as gathering sources through the digitization of newspapers and periodicals and consulting existing literature on the topic. Addressing this subject allowed us to raise some questions about the discourses and experiences regarding childhood education between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is worth noting, in turn, that the categories of child and childhood, as defined in the selected temporal context for analysis, are intersected by perspectives of race, class, and gender, as well as being georeferenced in urban contexts.

³ We operationalize the concept of "experience" as a category of analysis for historical and social processes. See Thompson (1981).

A tradição historiográfica e alguns questionamentos

In 1942, the magazine *Cultura Política*⁴ published an article titled "Children's Parks as Centers of Social Assistance for Preschoolers," authored by Mariana Agostini de Villalba Alvim (1909-2001)⁵ an inspector for the Child Assistance Service (SAM). Among the historical data presented on the formation of the preschool education field, centered in Western Europe, the United States, and Brazil, the author provided readers with an overview of institutionalized child care spaces, positioned within the fields of Hygiene, Childcare, and Education.

According to Alvim (1942, p. 40), in Rio de Janeiro (then the Federal District), there were 47 spaces dedicated to child care, distributed among child care districts (15), clinics (27), maternity hospitals (2), daycare centers (1), lactation centers (1), and a general storage facility (1), all under the responsibility of the Department of Childcare of the Federal District (DPDF). In addition to these, Alvim mentioned some institutions for the care of children under seven years old, such as "the Cradle Project, the Children's Home, the Poor House, and the Redentor Shelter Daycare." She also highlighted the existence of other institutions across the nation that were not mentioned.

Regarding preschool institutions, Alvim (1942, p. 40) states:

In our country, according to information from the Statistics Directorate of the Ministry of Education, it can be seen that, based on the latest statistical data from 1937, there were only 23 daycare centers and 753 kindergartens that year. These establishments employed 1,446 teachers and had a total of 40,793 students. [...] Considering Brazil's current population of 45 million, we would have a ratio of one enrolled student for every 1,103 inhabitants. The official establishments then numbered only 189 and contained approximately 17,813 students. Children aged 4 to 6 years at that time totaled 4,034,628. A simple comparison of these numbers is enough to demonstrate how far we still are from the necessary development of pre-primary education.

Referring specifically to the situation in the Federal District in 1940, Alvim (1942) pointed out the existence of 13 pre-primary/nursery schools, all private; of these, six had free enrollment and

⁴ The "Revista Cultura Política – Monthly Journal of Brazilian Studies" was published between 1941 and 1945 by the Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) — an agency created in 1939 during the Estado Novo by Getúlio Vargas's government, responsible for the political propaganda of the regime and also for conducting censorship. A total of 53 volumes of the magazine were published under the direction of Almir de Andrade (a law graduate, psychology professor at the Faculty of Law, journalist), who was considered an intellectual of the Estado Novo (CÂMARA, 2010, p. 51).

⁵ Mariana Alvim, daughter of the physician Álvaro Alvim, graduated from the Sorbonne in Paris, where she was a student of Henri Wallon (1879-1962). She later studied at the University of Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the United States. A pedagogue, psychologist, and social worker, she actively participated in the Brazilian context, including the creation of the Women's School of Arts and Crafts, serving as a social worker and psychologist for the SAM, and as head of the psychiatric social assistance service at the Institute of Psychiatry of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (MARWELL, 1999)

Aspects of the institutionalization of kindergartens and the so-called “preschool” in Brazil between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century seven charged tuition.⁶ Together, they served a total of 201 children. For pre-primary education/kindergarten, there were 248 educational institutions, of which nine were offered by the municipality and the rest were private. Among the latter group, 24 offered free enrollment. Regarding the total number of children served by the existing “network” of kindergartens in the Federal District, 6,245 were served by private initiatives, while 1,635 children were served by the municipality.

It is worth noting that the pre-primary schools created and maintained by the Federal District's municipality were distributed between the city's central region and neighborhoods in the South Zone. This fact neglected a considerable portion of the population living in the suburbs and rural areas of the Rio de Janeiro territory. Only three schools operated in their own buildings and had the capacity to accommodate a larger audience. The other municipal public kindergartens functioned within some school groups. In response to the increasing demand for kindergarten enrollments, the public administration adopted a two-shift system as a preventive measure (ALVIM, 1942). What initially began as a temporary measure became a practice in the educational school culture.

The data systematized by Mariana Alvim demonstrate that, in the 1940s, the schooling of children under 7 years old reached a very small portion of the population in what was then the capital of the country. Research in the field of the History of Education in the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo confirms that, until the mid-20th century, there were few initiatives aimed at children under 7 years old (Bastos, 2001; Kishimoto, 1986, 1988; Kuhlmann Jr., 2000, 2011 e Monarcha, 2001).

Although scarce, specific experiences constituted a repertoire that made possible the gradual expansion and legitimization of this stage of education. For this reason, we make a brief shift in historical analysis to the 19th century, seeking to identify indications of “pre-school education”⁷. It is possible to point to the 1860s as the (tentative) beginning of a process of schooling for children under seven, marked by the existence of discourses, proposals, and educational experiences in some cities. Due to traditions in historiographical production and the political and cultural forces at play, the experiences of school reforms undertaken in the urban contexts of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo

⁶ Although Alvim did not explain the meaning of the term “free enrollment” in her text, based on the organization of municipal education in Rio de Janeiro, we can assume it refers to the subsidized model. In this model, in the absence of state apparatus for educational provision, the municipal administration allocated funds to private institutions, the value of which was converted into enrollments for the child population. For further discussion on this, see Torres (2012)

⁷ We chose to adopt the term “pre-school education” rather than “early childhood education” because we believe the latter is laden with contemporary educational, political, and cultural perspectives that do not support a conceptual shift in thinking about the schooling of children under seven in the context of the first half of the 20th century. Additionally, the terms identified to refer to this educational level during the analyzed period generally include pre-primary education, pre-school education, nursery school, kindergarten, and infant garden. The terminology for the schooling of children under seven is vast, and each term carries with it elements related to its pedagogical perspectives.

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at the beginning of the republican period have been extensively investigated. These studies have become references for the development of "pre-school" education in Brazil (Arce, 2004).

However, there is a diversity of actions, projects, and experiences that have been undertaken in other regions of Brazil. The advancement of discussions in the History of Education in recent years has pointed to new horizons and active subjects in the field of "pre-school" education. Within the History of Education, we highlight studies from the states of Paraná and Bahia. In Paraná, there is the analytical perspective presented by Bida (2007) regarding a kindergarten established in Castro in the 1860s, and the study by Oliveira (2001), which analyzed the organization of education in Paraná at the beginning of the 20th century. For the Bahian context, Brandão (2006), Luz (2009), and Brandão (2020) discuss the topic based on educational experiences undertaken in the city of Salvador. Among the points presented by the authors, we highlight the translation of Maria Montessori's scientific pedagogy, translated by Alípio Correia Franca (1871-1957), a professor at the Escola Normal da Bahia, and published in 1924 in Salvador.

In a discussion on the dispersions and appropriations of pedagogical perspectives and the creation of pre-schools in the Fluminense region, Monção and Martínez (2020) and Monção (2021) analyzed the establishment of pre-primary schools in the context of the restructuring of the public educational system in the State of Rio de Janeiro in the first half of the 20th century. In this investment, the authors identified the circulation of individuals between cities and countries in the process of structuring educational institutionalization for children. These are some examples of research investments made in recent years regarding the work of individuals and experiences in the context of pre-school education in Brazil, among others not covered in this text.

In order to locate other traces and indications of the institutionalization of "pre-school," we opted to use the Digital Newspaper Library of the National Library (HDBN) as the universe for collecting and producing analytical data. Thus, through the digitized newspapers made available for public consultation, we selected several capitals and, using the automated search tool, aimed to highlight the potential for developing research on the subject. In an exploratory foray into the HDBN,⁸ periodicals, we utilized the terms "pre-school," "kindergarten," and "nursery school" as entry keys for the digital tool. The selection of cities was made randomly, avoiding those that have already been covered by the cited historiography.

⁸ The selection of the periodicals was made based on the highest and lowest number of occurrences within the established temporal framework for the analyses, which is the first half of the 20th century, as well as messages from presidents, governors, and vice-governors when available. The selected content aimed to provide a brief overview of important aspects to indicate peculiarities and parallels among the experiences undertaken in the field of pre-school education.

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In recent years, with advancements in digital technologies and systems for storing and accessing digital and digitized historical sources, the HDBN has emerged as a valuable tool for consulting digitized periodicals maintained by the National Library.⁹ The automated search tool for the digitized newspapers has proven to be a fruitful research avenue. Although the issue of Digital History (DH) is not new to us, as the first discussions in the national territory were identified during the 1990s, we believe that recent advancements in the use and intersection of digital resources in historical research can contribute to the structuring of a theoretical and methodological corpus that underpins a potential Digital History of Education (DHE).¹⁰

From our exploration of the HDBN, we collected data on the cities of Manaus (AM), Belém (PA), Fortaleza (CE), and Recife (PE), focusing on the context from the late 19th century, particularly starting in the early 20th century.

In the case of Manaus, the first mention we identified regarding kindergartens in proposals for public instruction in Manaus is found in the message from the state's vice-governor, José Cardoso Ramalho Júnior, in 1898. In his proposal for teacher training in the state, the Normal School was to be separated from the Amazon Gymnasium, so that it could be established in its own building with space for creating a kindergarten, to be integrated as a teaching section alongside the others, and regarding the establishment of a kindergarten at the Benjamin Constant Institute (MANÁOS, 1898). The topic of kindergartens and nursery schools appears in other messages in various subsequent years, becoming more prevalent in the 1920s as a prominent element in the organization of the local educational structure.

In Belém do Pará, the indications date back to the 1880s. The Pará newspaper *Diário de Notícias* published advertisements and comments about the existence of kindergartens and the sale of educational materials, such as the kindergarten at the American College directed by D. Anesia Mamoré, whose recommendation published in the newspaper was signed by José Veríssimo, the director of the institution (*DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS*, 6/6/1883, p. 2; 24/04/1884, p. 2; 25/4/1884, p. 2). In addition to this, there were also advertisements for the "Mixed School Kindergarten," under the direction of Maria d'Andrade Bentes (*DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS*, 13/1/1893, p. 2). In the newspaper *O Pará*, we found a notice published on its front page in 1898, which was a request for land transfer presented by Dona Esmeralda Cervantes Grossman for the construction of a kindergarten (*O PARÁ*,

⁹ Regarding the use of the HDBN in historical research, see Brasil and Nascimento (2020).

¹⁰ Regarding this discussion, see Monção (2021), Ruyskensvelde (2012).

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5/3/1898, p. 1). In the same year, in the magazine *O anjo do lar*,¹¹ an article signed by Henrique Rubim advocated for the creation of daycare centers and kindergartens in the state capital as an “invaluable advantage for the working class and, let us assert, even for the population in general” (*O ANJO DO LAR*, 1/9/1898, p. 3). Finally, another point identified was the complaint regarding the need to reform the normal school to offer preparatory and technical courses for training in kindergartens, made by Arthur Porto, the director of the private institution “Colégio Progresso Paraense” (*ESTADO DO PARÁ*, 4/5/1912, p. 2)

On the Atlantic coast, in Fortaleza, most occurrences regarding kindergartens are concentrated from the 1920s onwards. Prior to this period, it is possible to identify references and discussions on the subject, as well as advertisements for private experiences, such as the Kindergarten established by D. Josepha Sedrin in the 1880s (*CEARENCE*, 20/07/1887, p. 1; 14/12/1887, p. 2), and the American School, which in 1894 reported that it was expecting to receive materials from New York intended for the kindergarten class¹² (*A REPÚBLICA*, 19/01/1894, p. 4). In addition to the advertisements, we would like to highlight a notice published by the newspaper *Libertador*, which made public the receipt of “40 booklets” for kindergartens, donated by Dr. Virgílio de Moraes, inspector of public instruction, and offered to Dr. Adolpho Campello to enrich the collection of the Reading Office of São Benedito (*LIBERTADOR*, 5/10/1886, p. 2). Thus, following Julia's (2001) proposition, it is possible to consider that with the establishment of kindergartens and pre-schools, a material school culture emerges as a historical object. Access to these sources is of fundamental importance for advancing discussions on the education of children under seven and on the training of teachers to work in this segment.

Based on the exploratory qualitative approach to the various digitized newspapers available to date in the National Library's database, it is necessary to make some observations. The first pertains to the methodology used; through the manipulation of the digital tool, we identified experiences and discussions about the schooling of children under seven in other locations beyond the cities covered here, such as Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Curitiba, Vitória, Cuiabá, and others, in the context from the late 19th century and especially starting in the early 20th century. However, due to the limitations of this text, we present here all the located material that we consider most interesting for our analyses.

¹¹ The magazine *O Anjo do Lar*, published monthly, was linked to a network of “international asylums protecting childhood” and was directed and founded by Esmeralda Cervantes Grossmann. In the HDBN, only the first issue of the periodical is available, which prevents us from conducting a more in-depth analysis of its structure, articulation, and dissemination.

¹² The importation of educational materials from New York can be related to the prominence that educational experiences from that city had on the international stage. See the discussion in Monção (2018).

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Another aspect concerns the use of periodicals as a source for the history of education. The relevance of periodicals for investigating educational processes is indisputable (VIDAL, CAMARGO, 1992; CATANI, 1996; FERNANDES, KULHMANN JÚNIOR, 2012; HAENGGELE-JENNI, 2017). However, the recent digital turn and the employment of software in research invite us to reconsider processes and methodological approaches due to the (new) relationships established between historians and digital sources, the volume of data, and potential temptations regarding the speed and "practicality" in data production (HOEKSTRA, KOOLEN, 2018). Thus, new challenges arise for the historian's workshop (LUCCHESI, 2014; LOPES, 2018).

Additionally, through exploratory immersion, it was possible to identify that the agenda for the schooling of children under seven was present in public debates and proposals circulating in both the periodicals and in the messages from presidents, governors, and vice-governors of the provinces during the imperial context and of the states in the republican context. References to kindergartens and pre-schools are present both in the dimension of educational offerings made by individuals and private institutions and in the necessity for these offerings to be provided by public administration, as well as in discussions surrounding the training of teachers.

The 1920s can be seen as a landmark of a paradigm shift in the issue of pre-school education. This shift occurred both through the recognition of a greater state structure that began to offer kindergartens within the framework of school groups and through the change in the pedagogical paradigm due to the increased dissemination of the Montessori perspective, which began to occupy school spaces in place of the Froebel model (CAMPOS, 2017; MONÇÃO, 2021).

Expanding Analytical Perspectives for Writing the History of Pre-School Education

As a way to broaden horizons and adopt an investigative approach to the proposed theme, we find it necessary to point out some issues that have taken shape in the field of Brazilian History of Education in recent years and that we consider essential to (re)think: race and class.

Among the existing literature on the theme of kindergartens for the late 19th and early 20th centuries (KISHIMOTO, 1986; KUHLMANN Jr., 2011; MONARCHA, 2009), we notice a lack of concern regarding the race of the children and teachers who occupied the space of childhood education. While the issue of the social class of the children is indicated due to the purpose of these

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institutions, we also perceive the need for deeper exploration and continued discussion on the aspects of race and class of the teachers working in these spaces. In this same movement, we observe a lack of analysis concerning the race of the children occupying the school benches.

Regarding this topic, it is possible to understand that discussions of race were beginning to take shape in the field of the History of Education when studies on early childhood education emerged within the temporal framework we are addressing. Furthermore, we believe that this absence helps to consolidate a homogeneous narrative that contributes to the erasure of the historical and social complexities that shape Brazilian society.

Monção (2019), in analyzing historical documents related to the establishment of the first public kindergarten created in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1909, identified in a photograph included in the analyzed document collection the presence of Black and mixed-race children among the students of that institution, which was situated in the city's central region (image 1). For another kindergarten established during the same period, but in the Botafogo neighborhood, the presence of white children among the photographed students was predominant. The perception of the existence of Black and mixed-race individuals was also evident in the physical characteristics of the teaching staff, whose appearance and features indicated their mixed heritage (image 2). Additionally, to challenge the racial dimension, we must question whether those children were solely from bourgeois families or whether they came from working-class families living in those regions at that time.

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Figure 1: Group of students and teachers from the Campos Salles Kindergarten (Rio de Janeiro, 1909).

Photographer: Augusto Malta



Collection: Campos Salles Child Development Space. Digital reproduction.

For the reality of private kindergartens, the fragmentation of historical documentation has been a challenge for analyzing the class and race composition of students and teachers. Müller (2008) addressed this difficulty in the context of primary schools in early 20th-century Rio de Janeiro, and we can align our propositions to broaden the issue to include the context of pre-school education. For this challenge, Davis (1997) offers a theoretical approach to follow the flows of historical subjects belonging to non-hegemonic groups from the "margins." From a social perspective, the margins are occupied by subjects who do not occupy prominent spaces in official historical narratives; however, if we can evoke a metaphorical perspective, like rivers, the margins constitute fertile land, as they accumulate the substrates and organic matter necessary to generate life after periods of flooding.

The Black population, although a majority in Brazil, remains marginalized, suffering the impacts of inequality and racism. Regarding the category of "race," we have observed in recent decades the strengthening of theoretical and analytical perspectives that have given due importance to the theme of racial relations. This is a historically sensitive demand of Brazilian society that has reverberated in the arts, cultures, and human sciences. Barros (2022, p. 169) highlights that the

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“urgency of anti-racist education has driven changes in discussions about school education and contributed to advances in legislation.”

If the theme of racial relations in the history of Brazil constitutes a fundamental historical perspective, it was only at the dawn of the 21st century that the history of the education of the Black population began to gain ground. From this movement, we observe that in the last two decades of this century, there has been a significant increase in research on the theme, which has included “the broadening of sources, methodologies used, the extension of periods, localities, and the diversity of categories addressed” (BARROS, 2017, p. 18). In this process, the focus has prioritized Black subjects and their relationship with the school, selecting different categories such as workers, enslaved individuals, freedmen, women, quilombolas, teachers, and also children.

Regarding Black children, it is important to highlight the focus based on the category of “ingênuos” (innocents) in studies with a temporal scope confined to the second half of the 19th century. The “ingênuos” were those born after the Law of Free Womb in 1871, which stipulated that no one would be born enslaved in Brazil. This category of childhood highlights the experiences of subjects who were violated and erased from our history.

Daniela Portela (2012) delved back to the 19th century to investigate the schooling of Black children during the final period of slavery. In her master's research, she studied the “initiatives for attending to Black children in the province of São Paulo (1871-1888),” inquiring whether and how the schooling of free Black children occurred after the Law of Free Womb in São Paulo. Referring to Chalhoub (1990), Portela considered that, although imperfect, unjust, and even absurd, the law changed the relationships between the enslaved and their enslavers in Brazil, as the enslaved appropriated the provisions of the law, initiating actions for freedom to ensure their own freedom and the right for their children to be born free. Thus, within a slaveholding context, the “Law of Free Womb” inaugurated a “new category of childhood and child” (PORTELA, 2012, p. 151), referred to as “ingênuos” in the legislation.

Furthermore, according to the author, the province of São Paulo was remiss in relation to the schooling of the ingênuos, as these children were not delivered to the state; most were kept on farms and could not accompany their freed mothers. Free Black children were “relegated to a place of invisibility and abandonment for a long time” (PORTELA, 2012, p. 154).

However, the experience in São Paulo should not be viewed as a rule, as the schooling of free Black children was identified in the province of Paraná. In the context of Paraná, Anjos (2010) investigated “some practices surrounding the schooling of the ingênuos during the last decade of

Aspects of the institutionalization of kindergartens and the so-called “preschool” in Brazil between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century slavery, based on the third school district of the city of Lapa, motivated by the compulsory education law of December 3, 1883” (ANJOS, 2010, p. 14). In her research, she found that free Black children were enrolled in local public schools, with some remaining for a longer period while others stayed for a shorter time, likely because they had surpassed the compulsory age. Anjos (2010) recounts the case of an *ingênuo* boy who was enrolled by the teacher of the male primary school even before the law mandated it, a situation that demonstrates how individuals exercised their agency in the face of a complex social scenario of exclusion, hierarchy, and violence.

Studies on the schooling of *ingênuos* children show that the racial problematization of childhood allows for an understanding of broader political processes, such as resistance to slavery and abolitionist agencies in the fight for freedom. This complex scenario, following Davis's (1997) propositions, allows us to navigate the historical processes related to the institutionalization of the schooling of young children and makes it possible to escape a historical reading perspective based on “whiteness and methodological classism.” Consequently, it helps to overcome interpretations that take economically advantaged social groups as the standard for social organization and white individuals as validated historical subjects.¹³

Another example of racial problematization in studies on the history of the schooling of children is the work of teacher Hemetério José dos Santos (a Black man), an important figure in the educational and anti-racist landscape between the Empire and the Republic (MÜLLER, 2008; SANTOS, 2019). Hemetério was the owner and teacher of the Froebel kindergarten, located in the then Engenho Velho neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, during the 1870s.¹⁴ Given the few (and intriguing) traces that have survived the ravages of time and the constant erasure that official history imposes on the historical experiences of the Black population, it becomes crucial to ask ourselves about the race and class of the teachers and children who attended pre-school institutions in the first half of the 20th century across Brazilian territory (MONÇÃO, 2018).

Regarding this point, drawing on Müller (2008), by recovering photographs from the educational context of Rio de Janeiro produced in the early 20th century, we can identify the presence of Black and mixed-race teachers in the context of pre-school education. Silva (2021) argues that whiteness and class delineation were responsible for creating a social imaginary in which the lives of

¹³ The term is a proposition developed from the perception of “methodological nationalism” advocated by Lawn (2014), which is based on an approach to history where whiteness and class are considered stable elements and foundational filters for reading the world.

¹⁴ To learn more about the life trajectory of Hemetério José dos Santos, see Santos (2019) and Silva (2015)

MONÇÃO; MUNHOZ.

women (and teachers) "were permeated by biologizing perspectives on gender, race, and social condition" (SILVA, 2021, p. 72).

Regarding the teachers, it is worth questioning the indications of a non-homogeneous teaching body in pre-school spaces, such as through photographs and other historical sources, present in various Brazilian localities, in order to confront whiteness and methodological classism. To this end, the photograph below (Figure 2) helps us to challenge the narrative of whiteness within the teaching staff in the context of early childhood education. Although it is not possible to ascertain the social origins of the teachers, the mixed-race features presented in some of their physiognomies help us identify the presence of these individuals in the spaces of kindergartens.

Figure 2: Group of teachers from the Hermes da Fonseca Kindergarten (Rio de Janeiro, 1910). Photographer: Brun



Source: Fon-Fon Magazine, 1910.

It is possible to consider that not all teachers who worked in pre-schools during the analyzed period had the expected qualifications for this level of education. As *Monção* (2022) pointed out, in the Fluminense case, the first teacher training course and specific examination for teachers occurred through decree No. 2930, dated July 5, 1933, which established specific rules for the admission of teachers into pre-schools (MONÇÃO, 2022). In general, kindergartens and pre-schools were associated with Education Institutes, such as the *Instituto de Educação do Rio de Janeiro* (LEITE FILHO, 2011), which catered to a small group of children and, through the educational practices undertaken there, trained future teachers. In this state, the absence of normal schools serving the entire population in teacher training led to the creation of a specialization course aimed at meeting the

Aspects of the institutionalization of kindergartens and the so-called “preschool” in Brazil between the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century demand for pre-school teachers, whether they were exercising or had already exercised the role (MONÇÃO, 2022).

Regarding the class delineation, Monção (2019), through the analysis of data on the geographical distribution of kindergartens within the urban fabric of Rio de Janeiro, identified the existence of different educational services for childhood that catered to various economic groups present in the central region of Rio de Janeiro. Mixed kindergartens, as well as those exclusively for boys, with specific teaching staff and educational materials, were offered differently by the schools so that the tuition fees would fit within different family budgets. Moreover, as we saw earlier in the context of the 1940s, the existence of public kindergartens, private kindergartens, and free enrollments reveals a complex web of available spots and modes of schooling for young children.

Final considerations

The expansion of early childhood education has been investigated by researchers from various fields, such as Childhood Studies, Social Sciences, Social Work, Public Policies, Education, and others, highlighting the prominence of children as historical and social subjects, which enables a better understanding of the demands and social relationships established.

In this article, we present some aspects related to the processes of institutionalization of kindergartens and pre-schools in the context of the late 19th century and early 20th century. To this end, we refer to local experiences and initiatives undertaken by individuals involved in the theme. For the survey of these experiences and individuals, we primarily utilized digitized sources from the Brazilian Digital Newspaper Library of the National Library, in addition to the existing literature on the topic and the chosen scope.

One of our concerns in this work was to draw attention to aspects related to the race of the teachers and children who occupied kindergartens and pre-schools. To this end, consulting school documentation, school albums, and other possible types of sources could deepen and expand on some aspects and questions presented here. Without disregarding the existing historiographical production, it was possible to point out the existence of kindergartens and pre-schools in some cities across the country as early as the late 19th century.

Finally, by examining the geographical distribution and the diverse experiences and agencies of the individuals who advocated for the maintenance and expansion of institutions for children under

seven, such as Mariana Alvim and others, we can draw parallels and connections that have been previously neglected.

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