

The introduction of breaks in primary schools in Paraná: the place of body education, senses and sensibilities in school

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ABSTRACT

This article covers a wide range of documents with the purpose of problematizing some approaches to the renewal of public primary schools in Brazil, highlighting the social construction of playtime. Analyzing academic discourse within teaching, as well as records produced by public school teachers of Paraná during the first decades of the twentieth century, this study seeks to demonstrate how playtime, as part of the curriculum, has arisen informally out of teachers' worries about the burden which schools put on pupils to later transform into a constitutive element of the standards that would define the organization and management of knowledge within schools. From a diffuse understanding of its meaning to precise understanding as an important aspect of training processes, playtimes mobilized time, space and knowledge, and were articulated with other elements related to the renewing wave of education, such as methods, school subjects, practices and knowledge which affected the desire to establish a new sensibility, according to the sources. These were based on rhetorical stances which affirmed activities, experience and work, either as a means or as the goal of public primary education.

KEYWORDS

history of curriculum; playtime; education of the senses.

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A INVENÇÃO DOS RECREIOS NAS ESCOLAS PRIMÁRIAS PARANAENSES: O LUGAR DA EDUCAÇÃO DO CORPO, DOS SENTIDOS E DAS SENSIBILIDADES NA ESCOLA

RESUMO

O trabalho problematiza algumas ênfases sobre a renovação da escola pública primária no Brasil, dando destaque à construção social dos recreios escolares. Analisando retóricas de autoridades no âmbito do ensino, bem como registros deixados por professores das escolas públicas paranaenses das primeiras décadas do século XX, procuramos demonstrar como o recreio, enquanto dispositivo curricular, surge de maneira informal da preocupação dos professores com o peso que a escola teria sobre as crianças até converter-se em um elemento constitutivo das normas que definiriam a organização do conhecimento no âmbito escolar. De um entendimento difuso sobre o seu significado até a sua prescrição como aspecto importante dos processos de formação, os recreios mobilizaram tempos, espaços e saberes e se articularam com outros elementos afeitos à onda renovadora da instrução que incidiriam sobre o desejo de se fundar uma nova sensibilidade que afirmava a atividade, a experiência e o trabalho ora como meio, ora como fim da educação pública primária.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

história do currículo; recreios escolares; educação dos sentidos.

LA INVENCION DE LOS RECREOS EN LAS ESCUELAS PRIMARIAS DE PARANÁ: EL LUGAR DE LA EDUCACIÓN DE LOS CUERPOS, DE LOS SENTIDOS Y DE LAS SENSIBILIDADES

RESUMEN

El trabajo problematiza algunos énfasis sobre la renovación de la escuela pública primaria brasileña, destacando la construcción social de los recreos escolares. Analizando las retóricas de autoridades en el ámbito de la enseñanza y los registros dejados por maestros de escuelas públicas de Paraná en los comienzos del siglo XX, intentamos demostrar cómo el recreo, como un dispositivo curricular, surgió de manera informal, a partir de la preocupación de los maestros en relación a los efectos del cotidiano escolar sobre los niños, hasta convertirse en un elemento fijo de las normas que definirían la organización escolar. De un entendimiento difuso sobre su significado hasta su prescripción como aspecto importante de los procesos de formación, los recreos movilizaron tiempos, espacios y saberes y se articularon con otros elementos afines a la ola renovadora de la instrucción. Dichos elementos incidirían sobre el deseo de que se fundara una nueva sensibilidad que afirmara la actividad, la experiencia y el trabajo como medio y como objetivo de la educación pública primaria.

PALABRAS-CLAVE

historia del currículum; recreos escolares; educación de los sentidos.

INTRODUCTION

As part of an effort to innovate and modernize schools and education, in 1921 the General Inspectorate of Education of Paraná State published the *Programa dos Grupos Escolares do Estado do Paraná* (The Program for Group Schools in Paraná State). This document presents important elements for constructing the curriculum history of primary schooling in Paraná. Firstly, because it indicates the recognition by state school authorities of a dualism in relation to the provision of primary education in isolated schools on one hand and in group school on the other, as well as the development of different curricula for each. It is clear that the curricula for the isolated schools were imitations of those for group schools. Secondly, because the document reveals the intensification of a trend towards a pedagogical rationalization strongly centralized in the state, which had deep repercussions on the form of organizing schools and their practices through the use of devices focused mainly on controlling time and space, and by establishing detailed determinations for internal routines.

In this sense, the Program of 1921 brought an important and original element: the emergence of a timetable for school activities. Found in the portion of the report about “instructions for executing the schedule and program”, these timetables prescribed and conditioned each lesson according to a time, distributing each schooling activity throughout the weekly school days, articulating various dimensions that could be characterized as a social construction of school times (Viñao Frago, 1996).

A third important element, which is closely related with the others is the appearance of the item *recess* in the normative documentation for Paraná’s primary schools. In this sense, the 1921 document can be considered as the legal-institutional *invention* of school recess in Paraná, to the degree that it institutionalized recess by setting specific times and spaces, and established routines and attributions to the actors in the schools.¹ We understand that this appearance of recess says a lot about the historical construction of Brazilian primary school and its social meanings.

Although the 1921 *Programa dos Grupos Escolares* established the form and meaning of recesses in Paraná schools, very similar, in fact, to what we see today, the document buried an ample and diversified debate on the theme. From the perspective of historical investigation of curriculum as a social artifact, it is of fundamental importance to capture the exercise of its organizing and selective function according to certain priorities, purposes and social subjects. Thus, it is “necessary to revive the history of past curricular conflicts” (Goodson, 1991, p. 17), In the process that preceded and led to the appearance of recess in the curricular documents of Paraná, can be found a meaningful set of priorities and social subjects that were silenced in the definitions established by the written curricula, which can be seen as the result of important changes in the standards of sensibility of those subjects.

1 We found evidences that there had been recesses since, at least, the 1880s, but ‘informally’, by the initiative of some teachers that were more aware of students’ tiredness. But, in the period we studied, recesses become part of the curriculum; it was then regular and regulated.

We know that curricular document, like the program in question are far from stable. They are expressions of social arrangements that flourished in a terrain of tension over political, pedagogical, cultural, and intellectual priorities that denoted a slow process of cultural selection (Williams, 2003). One of their characteristics is precisely to unveil the knowledge that emerged victorious due to the situation of social forces at play at a certain time and place, but to rarely capture the tensions and the set of different forces in dispute (Goodson, 1991).

In this sense, analyzing the experience of teachers from Paraná in the first years of the twentieth century by investigating their written reports provides an important way to problematize the curriculum selectivity, since it offers a chance to denaturalize certain impressions transmitted in the curricular documents, when these are considered as data. This understanding is certainly based on the assumption that teaching experience and action cannot be satisfactorily comprehended only by institutional constraints but should consider all dimensions of their experiences, as warned by authors such as Goodson (1995), Nóvoa (1995), Sacristán (2000) and Viñao Frago (2001).

In the first years of the twentieth century, and even in the final years of the nineteenth, many teachers referred to the recesses of students for which they were responsible in comments in annual reports they made to the school administration, in short notes about school facilities, or in teaching programs, and in digressions about teaching methods or about what they called the *march of teaching*. These reports allow us to construct an overview of the diversity of practices, knowledge, subjects, times, and spaces that were mobilized by what teachers indistinctly called *recess*, and are an excellent index for understanding what we could call the education of sensibilities. Moreover, both for the emphasis that the teachers gave to those practices, and mainly by the rhetorical effort through which they aimed to introduce the recesses in the reasoning about the school's formative role, it is also possible to identify a series of evidences on the different meanings attributed to those practices.

Despite the frequent occurrence of the term, the set of declarations made by the teachers denote that the idea or notion of recess was still under formation. The teachers' declarations do not present a regularity or normalization about what was called "recess", whether in relation to the practices, the time, or the school spaces. An example is given by teacher Julia Wanderley Petrich who alluded to a "general half-hour recess" given daily, and to other "exercises" conducted "twice a week" (Paraná, 1908a, p. 11). Meanwhile, teacher Lindolpho Rocha Pombo commented about the "5-minute recess" in "each daily session" (Paraná, 1908b, p. 142). But most teachers did not have a concern for locating these practices in relation to the school schedule, informing only that they tried to realize them. Teacher Lourenço S. de Souza, for instance, reported simply that "the time allotted for recesses [...] is not the same in all schools"² (Paraná, 1908c, p. 132).

2 We use the term "school" to refer to the fundamental unit through which the system is organized. "School Group" was an institution that combined a few schools or "seats of learning", yet maintained autonomy in relation to the others.

The documents reveal a similar inconsistency regarding the school spaces where these practices took place. One teacher, Josephina Carmem Rocha identified the “sides and rear parts” of the school grounds as being suitable for recess. She also refers to a “room [...] reserved for recess on rainy days and for indoor gymnastic exercises” (Paraná, 1905a, p. 127).³ Many other teachers commented generically about “patios” or “gardens”. Teacher Julia Wanderley Petrich refers to a “spacious garden, where students conduct daily health exercises outdoors, during the time dedicated to recess” (Paraná, 1908a, p. 11). In the Group School Xavier da Silva, the school inspector Benjamin Lins distinguished the places used for summer recesses and the rooms used during the winter, which were covered “by tiles” (Paraná, 1908d, p. 71). The teacher Maria da Luz Mello, whose school – a *Escola Promiscua da Vila Morgenau* – was outside the more urbanized area of Curitiba (the capital of Paraná State), wrote that each day “during the class breaks”, the students did “various marching exercises and small movements” in the classrooms, between the rows of chairs (Paraná, 1908e, p. 18). The classroom was also a recess space in the class of Amélia França Gomes, a teacher in the *Escola Promiscua do Batel*. She reports that “after two hours of study, the pupils marched in the classroom, executing some gymnastic exercises with raising and lowering of arms.” (Paraná, 1905b, p. 64).

However, the irregularity of what the teachers called the “recess” or “break” in the initial years of the twentieth century is more emblematic when trying to observe the large and diversified set of practices, activities, and exercises that, under these names, were undertaken by teachers in their schools. Using the name “recess” teachers referred to the periods when students did “marching exercises”, “let themselves go freely in the movements”, “played outdoors”, “sang different hymns”, did exercises of “indoor gymnastics, marches, and chants”, practiced “children games”, “formation and singing movements”, or “sang, marched, ran, and did several school gymnastic exercises”, or even “respiratory exercises” (Paraná, 1905a, p. 126; 1905b, p. 61-68; 1908a, p. 6-19; 1908e, p. 17-23; 1908f, p. 103-108; 1908g, p. 81-87).

Frequently, the idea of “recess” combined with other practices and/or knowledge that had their own school legitimacy statutes, and even with regular content or subjects. This is the case of *gymnastics* and *singing*, to use two examples that seemed to be more common. But there was also “reading out loud” and “recitation” exercises that teacher Julia Wanderley reported doing with her students in the breaks between classes to develop, strengthen, and rest members and organs, especially those “of the respiratory system” (Paraná, 1908a, p. 9). The same teacher alludes to “manual work”, suitably distributed in relation to school work, as a “powerful aid to education in general” and an excellent “attraction for children”. This way “sewing, crochet, different types of embroidery, learning how to serve drinks, drawing and cartography exercises” were, for this teacher,

3 “Escola Promiscua” was the name given to coeducational schools, in which boys and girls studied together.

a characteristic type of *entertainment*, that ease, by the variety of the exercise, the tired organ [...]; in addition to the assistance they provide to intellectual education, they *are very useful in life, exercise the eyesight, and inspire a taste for symmetry and aesthetics*" (*idem*, p. 9-10; emphasis ours).

It is important to highlight that many of these practices were prescribed by and were present in the schooling legislation as part of female education under the name "Needlework and homemaking", being a part of the annual exams for approval for passage to the next grade. In turn, "exercises of drawing and cartography" also appeared in primary education programs, especially for boys.

Whether from the perspective of scheduling, or of the demarcation of space, or even the normatization of practices, it is impossible, from the declarations of teachers in the early twentieth century, to establish any minimum regularity of recess in Paraná's elementary schools. But this does not indicate that there was not a meaning that pervaded these practices and activities. All of these reasons prevent understanding recess in these years as a curricular component of primary Paraná schools, at least in the perspective of the written curriculum. Thus, the understanding of recess is more of a category or a pedagogical statement that involves a series of practices, routines, and school activities, which would comprise a set of concerns about possible effects of schooling on children's health, and on their interest, motivation, effort, curiosity, *life*, etc.

Thus, it seems that an idea or notion of recess was forming among Paraná's school authorities and teachers, although it was unstable at first. The idea was not part of the school legislation, although this does not indicate its significance.⁴ The idea or notion that was being developed around recess was frequently associated with corporal practices in school, and related them with the "recreational" capacity inherent to those practices. In the declarations of many teachers, we can see the intention of *modernizing* school and society.

Therefore, to understand what was done and said about recesses in Paraná's primary schools in those initial years of the twentieth century allows us not only to identify new and important evidences that help analyze pedagogical innovations and cycles of educational reforms, but, particularly to reflect on the place and meanings of education of the body in school and the curricular arrangements and definitions regarding the knowledge and practices that would affect the form of educating the senses and sensibilities.

4 Normative texts, in general, have their own working dynamics, but our objective here is not to analyze this. About the theme of law as a historical problem, see Thompson (1987). On the development of this perspective to the history of education area, see Faria Filho (1998). About the relation between school legislation and reports produced by teachers – the main source used in this study about recess, especially in the first decade of the twentieth century see Taborda de Oliveira and Meurer (2007).

RECESS FOR THE BODY, REFINEMENT OF SENSES?

In the diversified set of activities, alluded to by the teacher Julia Wanderley by raising the theme of school recesses, her declarations indicate her expectations that they would be able to “develop and strengthen members and organs” to “carefully develop the sensory organs” (*idem*, p. 9). The teacher Josephina Carmem Rocha added, to her information on school recess, her conviction that they were necessary

[...] to extinguish the fatigue from sitting for too long and are also useful for the exclusive development of one part, which causes as a fatal consequence the annihilation of the other, [so as] to simultaneously develop intellectual and physical education, while correcting certain flaws, we provide moral education without forgetting the civic” (Paraná, 1908f, p. 105).

The same teacher, on a previous occasion, writing for the pedagogical magazine *A Escola*, had already indicated the need to organize in each school:

a garden where the children can play freely, contributing to the physical education that should accompany intellectual, moral, and civic education, which should be instilled in the spirit of the children from a young age, giving them examples of politeness, love, and dedication to our dear country (Paraná, 1908f, p. 103).

Expressions like these are common in the educational debates in the early twentieth century and appear, in different ways, in the declarations of Paraná primary school teachers. Schools, more than apparently “kidnapping” children from their families, seemed to share with the family the challenge of producing the student’s interest in caring for its education. Thus, educating the corporal senses would predispose the student to a school experience, denoting a clear project of forging a sensibility, which based on art and recreation, would launch students into the universe of knowledge that school intended to infuse. It is in the broad spectrum of different senses evoked by those practices that the notion of *school recess* was sustained and developed among the actors in primary schools in those years, not only as a compensatory element, but as a time and space for the new educational project that was being produced and disseminated. It was an issue that could be considered as a touchstone of a much broader set of initiatives aimed at the modernization of schools as a route towards social modernization.

In their annual reports, teachers constantly referred to moral, intellectual and physical educational plans, in which they sought to place recess and, to some degree related to a moral and aesthetic sense. These are indications that can be used to understand the *meaning of education* held by Paraná’s primary schools at the time. This education can be best expressed by the words of the teacher Julia Wanderley Petrich. In her opinion, primary school should aim to “perfect the feelings and form the character” of its students, “through the complete and harmonious development of intelligence [...], strength [...], the heart, or moral instinct that inspires our actions” (Paraná, 1908a, p.9).

This recurrence to the notion of complete and harmonious development of the child, conducted suitably by caring for three aspects – the physical, intellectual and moral – was common in the statements of those concerned for the “cause of public instruction in the state” at that time, indicating the influence of psychology on the development of educational themes (Monarcha, 2009). At several moments the meaning of this education was captured by the expression “*Mens sana in corpore sano*”, which was widely used by teachers and education and political authorities when talking about the triple nature of education.

This notion, and particularly the treatment it received by the subjects who evoked it and operated with it, seem to approximate us to the social, cultural, and political expectations projected on primary school at the beginning of the century. These expectations juxtaposed issues such as *progress* and *social order, citizenship and nation* building, among others, that were so dear to the idea of the young Brazilian Republic with more pedagogical issues, such as *methods* and *the march of teaching*. In the articulation of those dimensions the premises were raised for a new sensibility that would be considered *modern*.

The magazine *A Escola* [The School]– distributed to Paraná’s teachers – was an important space for the manifestation of teachers’ opinions and ideas during the decade of 1900. Created to support teachers’ education, by keeping them up to date with teaching concepts methods and practices, the magazine stimulated teachers to participate in the discussions it promoted. The magazine published translations of well-known foreign thinkers; texts on public instruction by important people in Brazil and Paraná, and emphasized medical-hygienist concepts; opinions of Paraná’s educational authorities, with a propagandistic tone coupled with a normative intention. The magazine frequently gave space to the opinions of Paraná primary school teachers’, at least those most present in the public debate, generally those in group schools in the state capital.

It was in the magazine *A Escola*, in 1906 (p. 23), that the teacher Alicia Moreau expressed the opinion that the “objectives of education [were] to form a better man for the future and a different society [...]; to form a man with a living sense of beauty and independence, a future soldier” it was essential to “educate in a way as to develop strong muscles and energetic will”. Her opinion partially echoed the words of the General Director of Public Instruction Arthur Pedreira de Cerqueira, in the “state of Public Instruction in Paraná State”, which was published in the same issue of the magazine. Most of the text reproduced his report sent to the state government. Addressing Paraná’s teachers, the director presented his thoughts regarding primary education.

Facing Education in its triple aspect and considering the child as composed of body and soul, the teacher must never forget the child’s physical nature, dealing first with caring for the body. “*Mens sana in corpore sano*”. The teacher should address the students’ physical education, to keep them healthy, developing their muscles and strengthening their members. The *education of the senses* is also important, exercises are needed in the classes, during excursions, and on all suitable occasions.

The faculties of intelligence should also be developed, including *perception, attention, good sense, memory, and imagination*. In the moral sphere should be developed sensibility and *will, moral conscience, ideas of duty and of good, and a sense of dignity and honor*. (Paraná, 1906, p. 19-20. Emphasis ours)

According to the director, it is the teachers' duty to:

with a strong hand, with no hesitation and uncertainty, draw an education plan [for the children], to develop in them good tendencies and correct bad inclinations. Kindness and affection towards the pupils, patience, punctuality, and zeal should be fundamental and indisputable characteristics of a teacher (*idem, ibidem*).

Referring to education in its triple aspect as the “main source of exalting peoples”, the general director of public instruction tried to set the tone of an educational program that intended to appeal to the senses, touch emotions, and reach the heart, giving schools the ability to produce and mold sensibilities. It was, thus, in tune with many discourses of the period about the purposes of public instruction. The project's political implications also became evident, to produce sensibilities that were clearly connected to the themes of the republicanization of society and the re-foundation of the nation. For Pedreira de Cerqueira, the school was fundamentally responsible for “preparing man for the family, the individual for society, and the citizen for the country” (*idem, ibidem*).

Although we cannot presuppose an intellectual passivity led teachers to adopt without questioning the perspective promoted by the direction of public instruction, it cannot be denied that his words were echoed, at least in the teachers' declarations. For instance, when asked by the director of public instruction to give his opinion on the books used in Paraná's primary school, the teacher Lourenço de Souza also understood that it was the primordial purpose of the school, as well as the teacher's job, to “educate for the country and family”. To reach this aim, the school had the task to “perfect the feelings and form the character of students”, to “correct vicious habits” (Paraná, 1908h, p. 16).

Sebastião Paraná, another important figure in state public instruction,⁵ affirmed that the school's duty was to form “strong, healthy citizens, educated in the principals of a healthy morale”, that is, to awaken in children the qualities of a “sensitive heart, delicate inclinations, a lively and subtle spirit [...] providing them firm and safe rules of conduct” (Paraná, 1901, p. 178).

Seven years later, the teacher Julia Wanderley Petrich wrote in her report that, taking advantage of *all that was happening in her school*, she aimed to “instill in her students the wish to do good deeds, as someone that happily fulfills a sacred duty

5 At that moment Sebastião Paraná was a supervisor in State Public Instruction. In the documents he produced, Sebastião identifies himself as a “visiting teacher”. His job, however, went beyond those of a regular school inspector, as he intended to produce a ‘diagnosis’ of school reality in the state.

that is imposed by their own conscience”. Since in her opinion, the main objective of teaching was the education of the senses and of will, the school should be a place for “order and discipline”. Therefore, she affirmed that she made great effort so that these aspects were not neglected in her class “not demanding, however, the forced submission of the students”. To the contrary, she wanted them to “voluntarily” sacrifice “their will to the general school discipline” (Paraná, 1908a, p. 10).

This entire broad set of ideas on the purposes of education in Paraná’s primary schools – in addition to showing the intention of offering a moral education, with the school as an institution that produces sensibilities – also presents elements for a discussion of an issue of fundamental importance to the history of curriculum and schooling processes: the relation that the school should have with knowledge. The hypothesis can be proposed that the so-called cultural contents would be secondary to the intention to shape hearts and minds through the mobilization of a dimension that we could characterize as sensitive. This will help us to understand the strength of school recess and the presence in it of much of what would become content in various school disciplines. Many elements in this tension about the formative aims of schools can be captured by the recurrence of the notions of *education* and *instruction* in the documents, which permeates the debate on the modernization of public education in Paraná.

Education, in the sense assumed in the debate in association with *instruction*, refers to a certain sense of formation that would affect students’ sensibilities, spirits, and morals. If instruction was connected to a more strictly intellectual approach, referring to the acquisition of knowledge, education was understood in a broader sense: to involve intelligences, emotions, and sensibilities. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the school to, in addition to instruct, develop the students’ intelligence, to awaken in them “the knowledge of fidelity, the sense of duty, love for country and family – everything that can entail a perfect or good education, which was, is, and will always be the best appanage for youth” (Paraná, 1905c, p. 106-109).

Similarly, the school inspector of Paraná’s coastal schools, Ismael Alves Pereira Martins, participated in the debate on the issue *instruction-education* in his report to the general directory of Public Instruction in 1905. He understood that it was not enough to simply “engrave in children’s minds the limited sum of notions that, combined, will only equip the memory of the pupil with the simple art of reading and writing”. For him, this was only a small part of the attributions of Paraná’s primary schools.

[...] the purpose to which we should engage all our forces is much farther and much nobler. We should methodically develop a boy’s intellectual capacities, without neglecting the physical aspect, so that when the body is in full possession of its strength, the spirit can know and judge for itself, thinking with complete independence.

[...]

According to the illustrious pedagogue, it is thanks to the influence of great masters and philosophers that education no longer follows the old routine models; it stopped being instructive to be suggestive; it stopped being diffuse

to be coordinated, harmonic, concentrated; it stopped being a tiring task for the teacher, ungrateful and unnerving for the disciple, to *become a suave, useful, and fertile discipline, an elevation and expansion of the spirit*, one of the most noble and dignified pleasures in life (Paraná, 1905d, p. 68-69; Emphasis ours).

Evidently, this school inspector was attributing to school a very broad sense of education. This discussion, present in the documents, encompasses the very complex question of the type of relation the school would have with society, knowledge, and culture in general. What was in question was even the delimitation of school knowledge, what knowledge would be transmitted in school, and how. The previously quoted report by Vidal Natividade da Silva (Paraná, 1905c) helps to reveal this issue. We can notice that the use of rhetoric that alluded to a relation between the desire to shape new individuals in line with a certain model of social organization could not be based on appeals to the civic and moral order, but also to psychological and aesthetic ones. In the precursor to the Escola Nova (or New School, the name given to the progressive education movement in Brazil), an old-fashioned Brazil was still restless before the challenge of preparing the new generations (Monarcha, 2009).

The greatest problem of Paraná's primary schools, that prevented them from becoming *truly* capable of corresponding to their expectations was, according to teacher Vidal Natividade da Silva, an indetermination or a mistaken definition of the nature of the knowledge that it should transmit. She observed that the "fundamental flaw in education" was to "want to turn each boy into a poet, a philosopher, an orator, or a statesman."

I understand that instruction and education should be given to the boy so as to give him the conditions to better fulfill his life destinies. The preceptor cannot foresee if the pupils are destined to this or that career, if the education given will be completed by a simple professional education or by higher education. The teacher should place the students in a state in which they can easily adapt to any honest way of life, moving on to the position reserved to them by circumstance, destiny, the competition among men, their natural means, or their advantage [...]

I think that the preceptor has the duty to instruct and educate through words and a rigorous example; the obligation is imposed on him to correct the students' mistakes, vices and excesses, not to transform the meaning of words, not to deform the minds of the young. Physical education should not, in any way, be abandoned, following the example of many countries and, especially, Greece, where it originated [...]. (Paraná, 1905c, 107-108; Emphasis ours)

And continued:

Convince the fathers that they should, above all, make their sons good men. This primarily involves *illuminating the spirit, educating the heart*, seeking mainly to create good citizens for the country, imbuing their soul with the belief of noble

and generous *feelings of love for virtue, work, and duty*. Instruction is certainly an indispensable necessity in all social positions, but it is necessary to, first and simultaneously, awaken and develop civic feelings.

Experience has shown me that elementary education should limit itself to essential truths, the ones that are necessary for a pupil to know what he should understand. Teaching should have an essentially practical aim so that it could be truly applied to life's various needs; it should pass from the simple to the complex, from the abstract to the concrete, from lessons about things to speculative knowledge – thus preparing children to win the struggle for survival against misery; filling them with hope for the future. (*idem, ibidem*, Emphasis ours)

The defense made by the teacher, of a school based on the utilitarian dimension of providing access to knowledge, was in keeping with aspects such as the slow expansion of educational opportunities, the development and dissemination of a work *ethos*, the effective acceptance of the distinctions that marked the place of each individual and of each class in the cultural sphere. In this sense, one can observe a group of emphases that are not always convergent on the purposes of school education. Even if “modernizing” appeals of Brazilian society were frequently used, including a discourse about the renovation of education.

But, if we think of an education for work, as observed in the document and in many other records of the time, we must ask to what degree this emphasis did not consider work as a dimension of active life, in which individuals would take in their own hands the responsibility for the production of life, against other forms of tutoring. In other words, an ambiguity of the period – an angst, perhaps, as suggested by Hobsbawm (2010) or Gay (2001) – in which morality, aesthetics, patriotism, and health interconnected to form the framework of what would be a school education necessary for the *new times*. In it, bodies and senses would provide the density needed to produce the new desired sensibilities in a way not always as homogeneous as we are accustomed to accepting.

In many of the declarations of Paraná's teachers the idea stands out that it was a grave mistake, in terms of the social objectives of schools, to emphasize the elevated regime of reading and writing in education or to see it as a purely intellectual process. Rather, the nature of school education should involve all dimensions of human existence and be based on the *principle of usefulness to life* and be devoted to the “moral principles for a better education”, making man capable of “sacrificing abnegation for the sake of the family or the society in which he lives”. The subjects, the lessons, the explanations given by teachers should “be simple, but with the highest possible sum of useful knowledge”, to “correct certain flaws” in the students, to make them understand the “duties of a good son and brother [...], the delicate feelings of love and affection” (Paraná, 1905b, p. 127; Paraná, 1907a, p. 9). These ideas were present both in the lessons that would constitute the curricular disciplines, and in the times and spaces of school recesses.

We can take as an example the teacher Carolina Pinto Moreira, of the 4^a *Cadeira Promiscua da Capital*, part of the Group School Xavier da Silva. She wrote in her 1908 report that she always aimed to “transmit to her students the highest amount possible of useful knowledge” (Paraná, 1908i, p. 122). In turn, teacher Julia Wanderley Petrich reported that “when teaching all subjects”, her main aim was to “prepare pupils for practical life, providing them with utilitarian notions from which they can take maximum advantage” (Paraná, 1908a, p. 7). The teacher Josephina Carmem Rocha had similar concerns, reporting that she made “constant practical applications of all the knowledge students acquired so as to experience the sensations of beauty and fairness, and dedicate themselves even more to their studies” (Paraná, 1908f, p. 107).

Therefore, it seemed to be a common concern among teachers in Paraná in the early twentieth century that primary school should not have the false pretense of focusing teaching on the *high spheres* of literate culture. If in the group of manifestations some clearly tended to see school as a place to offer an “average popular” culture, a “small culture” (Pessoa, 1914, p. 122) based on a sense of abnegation, patriotism, and labor, others understood that school should, fundamentally and devotedly, distribute among the students a culture that would go beyond the prevailing intellectualism. Of course this did not involve a moral and intellectual elevation of the masses, but the necessary rudiments that would allow the *debarbarization* of society and its affirmation as an organic unity. Both cases apparently recognize that education could compose a broad project for social reform through the production of individuals doted with a new sensibility for living. Situations in which these two perspectives connected, combined or annulled each other are not in the scope of this work, even though we recognize that the understanding of what was a useful education was different at that time.

AN EDUCATION USEFUL FOR LIFE

At the beginning of the twentieth century Paraná’s primary education teachers demonstrated the conviction that the purpose of elementary school was to educate students based on the *principle of utility for life*. They were probably not alone, as we can see by the broad discussion on the topic in the annual reports, which it must be remembered, were directed to the authorities of Paraná’s educational system. It was thus through a logic based on utility, from a “practical” sense, that schools should organize their knowledge, actions, and practices. Understanding the meanings evoked by these expressions, as well as their implications for schooling, is fundamental for analyzing the place that is constructed for school and curriculum in Paraná society in the early twentieth century. It is also vital to understanding the place of school practices and knowledge, as presented in each subject, and how recess was organized in relation to them. Even the idea of recess and breaks was justified by the principle of “utility”, and the teachers showed that they were concerned with imbuing these practices with an “essentially practical purpose”.

Criticizing schools and their procedures was a popular way of considering the reform of Paraná’s educational system in the first decades of the twentieth

century. Many people, from different positions, engaged in this task and expressed themselves in various spaces. One example is criticisms offered by a Dr. José Maria de Paula in response to discussions at a “Freemason Congress”. Defending public education as the route to social progress, the author admonished readers to consider if schools were able to “correspond to their purposes”, that is, if they were successful in realizing a “minimal constraint to a maximum individual and collective benefit”. The family, he wrote, should prepare the child for school, the same way as the school should prepare “the citizen for society”. If both failed in their responsibilities, the causes of school failure were well known. These causes rested in the teacher

who does not know the physical and psychological needs of his students, indistinctively subordinating classes to the torture of exhausting programs, true Procrustean beds, to which, after much memorization and little understanding, they become zealous mental cripples destined to be exhibited in ostentatious final exams.

The teacher aims to dazzle the child, not to reach down to them, does not try to know them. For the teacher, it is the program that is important, the schedule, and the exams. The child, the student, is not important. What is necessary is that the classes are given, the schedules followed and that, at the end of the year, the student’s brilliant exam reveal not so much the pupil’s capacities, but the high pedagogical qualities of the teacher (Paula, 1912, p. 21).

As a “man of science”, José Maria de Paula was clear about the position from which he spoke, with the authority that being a physician could give him. If teaching was not going well, it was because teachers did not know the “psychological and physical needs of their students”. He could have simply said that the teachers did not know the scientific principles that should guide teaching, or that teaching was not scientific enough.

Even after decades of discussions on pedagogical innovations and reforms of teaching processes, the physician still saw a certain “traditional” way of educating in Paraná. This was based on the “torture of exhausting programs”, in which there is “much to memorize and little to learn”. Opposed to this, José Maria de Paula defended an education in which the teacher knows the student “as a whole” so that education is not “simply instructive, but suggestive and directive”. According to him, this education could only be possible if education walked hand-in-hand with humanity’s scientific progress and became a true *ciencia pedagógica* (*idem*, p. 22).

Although José Maria de Paula sought to support the contrary, many teachers were aware of the scientific pretension in Paraná’s primary school education and participated actively in discussions about modes of innovation. The way teachers constructed their discourses is only one of the results of this process. In their reports, and in other documents they generated, they made general allusion to the “analytical and synthetic” faculties, as well as “physical and psychic” ones, the “laws of psychology”, “principles of physiology”, “rules indicated by modern hygiene”, etc.

Many teachers were at ease with this “scientific-pedagogic” vocabulary and based on it they discussed, questioned, and gave suggestions regarding many themes such as teaching methods, didactic material, furniture, times, and spaces. They thus contributed to conceptualizing the creation of more rationalized school routines, one of the latent aspirations of the pedagogical discourse of the time. The confluence of this set of themes constituted what teachers called the “march of teaching”, which was very dear to them. Because it was exactly based on their concerns that we can check the pedagogical justifications and the meanings connected to the emergence of school recess in Paraná primary schools, given that in the reports, they are directly connected to those concerns.

In his 1907 report, Francisco Tavares da Rosa, a teacher of boys in the municipality of Antonina, wrote that “as a preventive hygienic measure”, in the form of brief rest periods for the children’s intelligences, “physical exercises, recommended with very good reason by educational authorities, [...] gave excellent results”. This care connected with a concern for the suitability of an intuitive teaching method, in which “the example followed by the lesson – the expositional, experimental, reproductive, and integrated forms – provide, without causing great fatigue, the tender minds, the matured fruits” (Paraná, 1907b, p. 192).

We can see that, regarding the corporal activities alluded to by the teacher Tavares da Rosa, many of the justifications for school recess are closely connected with the debate on the renovation of teaching methods. Recesses emerged both as an opportunity for students to restore their energy, and as a moment for experimentation. Thus, the emphasis on the body, on manual work and on the senses was not by chance. Education would take place through experimenting with things that surrounded the students and that were part of their experience.

One can notice by the debate around the questions about teaching methods or even the “march of teaching” that, mainly based on “scientific” references that intended to inform educational practices – the “laws of psychology” “hygiene” or of physiology – the pedagogical statements now recognized a certain *childish nature*. Educating for childhood presupposed paying attention to certain specificities

The sole attenuating factor, that makes me tolerate and have patience with teaching, is the age of the first childhood – the innocent and sweet moment in life that man is happy and ignores the hardships of the world. To blemish this happiness, so sweet and fleeting, with hard punishments is a sin that, as a teacher, I will never commit; that is exactly why I consider motherly education the best help for the teacher. (Paraná, 1907, p.8).

To teach a child it is essential to make ourselves a *quasi* child – this is the basic principle of the method I adopt: which consists in the development of the child’s intellectual faculties by the methodic and progressive exercise of the physical senses that is the intuitive method par excellence that I distribute [sic] simultaneously in various classes. (Paraná, 1906, p. 83).

To teach the child “by methodical and progressive exercise of the physical senses”. This is how Francisco Tavares da Rosa characterized the fundamental statement of the entire discussion on the reform of teaching processes in Paraná’s primary schools. This statement, in a bit broader form, was on the horizon of those teachers who said they were aiming to “make education easier and more attractive”. The child-like spirit, these “tender brains with very soft slopes”, were not prone to excessively abstract operations, to the “imaginative flight of intelligence” (Paraná, 1907c, p. 171). These statements express the understanding that education and schooling were not processes *natural* to children, but, to the contrary, demanded considerable effort from them. The “memorization of compendia” or lessons, as the criticized schooling procedures were represented, was not very productive when considering the “practical” and “useful” purposes of education. Thus, the sense of recess became a basic component of the learning process.

From the perspective of teaching that focuses on the children’s sensibilities, which some teachers such as Francisco Tavares da Rosa, seemed to understand well, the practice of “filling memory with many memorized things”, of “knowing like a parrot”, was not effective, since it did not involve all the *faculties* of the child. Those practices could only go against the objectives of the school, making it hard to teach since they only “frightened” the children. From the “fun and so useful” that it should be, education based “solely on the exercise of memory” became “tiring [...] exhausting, and had minimal results, because a child’s brain forgets information as easily as it retains it” (Paraná, 1908f, p. 105). This statement by teacher Josephina Carmem Rocha, in an appeal to provide Parana schools with didactic material appropriate for teaching based on intuitive principles, highlights the fundamental concern that connected school recesses with the discussion on the “march of teaching”.

In opposition to those “old fashioned” practices, that were “unprofitable” and “discredited”, the “wise advice and translucent observations of psychology” (Gomes, 1914, p. 34) began to be established. Raul Gomes, in a series of articles published in the Curitiba press, wrote about the “enervation of mental initiative” which was formed in the “light” of this science. This science made possible the appearance and diffusion of works from educators such as Spencer, Fröebel, and Pestalozzi. The same “psychology” also called attention to the problem of “school hygiene”, which Raul Gomes considered to be neglected in Paraná’s schools.

The students [...] should be spared long work that requires prolonged attention and a vicious immobility of the trunk. The physical fatigue and psychic and somatic “toil” of students should be one of the main concerns of the school physician and the pedagogue.

Voluntary attention requires an evaluated effort for the children, from 30 to 40 minutes, during which the organism accelerates the functions to maintain the brain in the necessary conditions to perform the physic phenomenon of understanding or intellectual assimilation.

After this time period, the nerve cell suffers modifications in its nutrition caused by an accumulation of detritus. (*idem*, p. 62)

For Raul Gomes, one of the people who signed the Manifesto of 32, the value of these teachings was irrefutable for all teachers.⁶ It was “a capital issue” that concerned “children’s cerebral aptitude to pay attention”. This scientific knowledge should guide the educator to decide the “exact task to give each student [so as to] produce useful work” (*idem, ibidem*). To ignore these essential truths was to “contribute to the dangerous inconveniences of mental exhaustions, from an intellectual and physical perspective”. To avoid this, “recesses of a quarter of an hour should be effective” (*idem*, p. 63).

The principle of making the schooling process more pleasant, to make teaching more attractive, also sought to make school less “frightening”, to remove its “monastic” and “timid” aspect, as defined by the teacher Trajano Sigwalt. One of the more direct implications of this assumption was the concern for removing from teaching processes the “extenuating” and “tiring” aspects. This was one of the strong premises in condemning methods based on memorization and the defense of *intuitive* processes. The problem of students’ fatigue had become one of the main themes of discussion in the educational reform processes, presupposing several questions.

When complaining to the government about the inconvenience of the school furniture in the town of Clevelândia, the school inspector Ernesto Góes refers to fatigue:

The children sit in rudimentary benches loaned by private parties.

Of course, these benches have different heights, lengths, and widths. The children sit on them with a book in their hands and their arms raised to eye level to study their lessons.

In such an uncomfortable position, how can they not be tired?

Tiredness comes quickly and thus a disgust for study that does not allow them to appreciate anything (Paraná, 1909, p. 54).

Agents, such as school inspector Ernesto Góes and many others in Paraná’s primary schools, including teachers and high authorities, alluded to “hygiene recommendations” or to the “laws of psychology” to treat the weariness caused by educational activity. These subjects, in their own way and according to their expectations – which depended on the positions they occupied – appropriated and circulated the recommendations they were constantly receiving. Recommendations like those signed by a certain Dr. Guiraud in 1912, which dealt with the “physiological needs” of the children in schools and defended that “studies should

6 The 1932’ Manifesto was an expression of a large movement in defense of the new education in Brazil. It was written by Fernando de Azevedo. It defends state public school, secular, free and obligatory. Several Brazilian intellectuals signed the document.

be separated by breaks in which the child can *rest or play freely*” (Guiraud, 1912, p. 12, emphasis ours).

The text highlights once again the discussion of educational activity that goes beyond the transmission of content. To guarantee greater efficiency in schooling processes, the author evokes the “interest in children’s health”, their “corporal development” and urged those responsible for education to consider “exercises of the soul and body”. But the argument could go beyond this and fall on the triple aspect of education, as one can see in the report of teacher Julia Wanderley Petrich.

This teacher, one of the first to emphasize the importance of recess, reported that based on the “laws of psychology” and aware of the “students’ spiritual potential”, that she sought to “harmonically develop” intelligence and reasoning, strength and energy, will and affection that corresponded respectively to the intellectual, physical, and moral faculties. To do so, “depending on the level of development of each student, I apply more or less effort”. Recognizing a child “nature”, she explained how she sought to organize the teaching/learning processes to harmonize “this group of precious faculties”:

Not forgetting also that mobility is necessary to the nature of children, always giving them short and varied lessons, allowing them to go to the garden, once or twice a day, without, however, disturbing discipline and school work [...]

Considering the new school works that are attractive to the children, I consider manual work to be a helpful aid in general teaching.

Rousseu, Pestalozzi, and Fröebel advised short and varied lessons, *intermingled* with physical exercises and manual works. Experience has shown that very long intellectual work sterilizes the results obtained in the first hours, leading to adverse effects on students’ health. About this subject, Locke, in his work “Some Thoughts Concerning Education” says: “We are mistaken when we give the name of fun and recreation to these manual arts and to all the exercises of this genre, because recreation does not consist in being idle, but in alleviating, the tired organ by the variety of exercise (Paraná, 1908a, p. 12).

To mitigate the effect of the effort necessary for learning by the children, to avoid that teaching become a sterile process, teacher Julia Wanderley Petrich justified recesses and “children’s entertainment” interspersed in different lessons during the hours that the children spent in school.

For education to be more “pleasant, assimilable, picturesque, and fun from the start, so that it would excite in the child the desire to learn, to know, to discover”, Rocha Pombo wrote that the “march of teaching should be done according to the students’ gradual progress”, this way it would be possible to “cultivate in the child accurate observation habits, to capture his or her attention, the readiness to notice, the ability to classify, etc...”. To do so, mobility, activity – including corporal – was essential to the child (Paraná, 1908b, p. 141-142, original emphasis).

Therefore, recesses established themselves, in the broad set of themes that composed the framework of “innovation” stemming from the investment in

“modernization” of ways of teaching. Shifting from the almost intuitive experience of teachers to the regulatory initiatives of the state, which were based on a discourse with a strong scientific appeal, the statements of Paraná’s primary school agents that prescribe and/or address the issue of recess had the same base as those used to discuss a series of issues related to school “modernization”, such as teaching methods, the distribution of the time internal to the school, didactic materials and teacher training.

Therefore, it does not seem unreasonable that education agents attributed recess to the thoughts of some canonic thinkers of “modern psychology”, mainly because of the strong investment made in the experimental sciences, which occupied an increasingly distinguished place in the statements about education procedures. Regular recesses in Paraná’s primary school in the beginning of the twentieth century should attend what teacher Lindolpho Pires da Rocha Pombo understood as vital among the “eternal principals proclaimed by pedagogical science”: to “adapt the senses to the special characteristic of the context of education” (*idem*, p. 143).

Thus, recess seemed to occupy a very clear space in the educational plans of Paraná primary schools, which appeared to have as the main aspiration to shape their educational practice based on the experience of the subjects who they sought to educate, that is, based on the students’ interests, impressions and sensations, to connect teaching with people’s lives. Recess was thus clearly inscribed as part of a plan for school education through the sensibilities that seemed to have as a scope not only the reach of the intellectual/instructional activity of the students/individuals, but, to use Mirian Warde’s expression – “all human activity” (Warde, 1998, p. V).

From the improvised practices of the teachers in the late nineteenth century to the legal determination of recess in the 1920s, we observed an interplay of emphasis and omissions that affirmed some practices and knowledge over others, even generating an accommodation of certain subjects to the requirements of the legislation. It must be considered if this was due to the fact that the law was also capable of organizing demands that emerged from social experience, contemplating, in a way, what teachers considered as part of their mission.

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