

ARTICLE

The abnormal child and the proposals for school education in the Minas Gerais state press (1930-1940)

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ABSTRACT

The present article displays a research on the concept of abnormal child disclosed in a set of articles published in Minas Gerais *Revista do Ensino* (Journal of Teaching), in the 1930s. Articles that express the way an abnormal child was understood by their contemporaries were outlined. From the analysis of the texts, two categories turned out: classification of abnormal children, their characteristics and causal explanations of the abnormality, and the role of the school in the education of abnormal children. We used contributions from Koselleck's conceptual history, whose concepts express aspects of experience and the theoretical dimension of subjects in specific historical contexts and times. The research showed that the articulation of this assumption included concepts based on debates about environment and heredity, on the knowledge developed by psychology, and on the debate about the role of the school and the education of new generations.

KEYWORDS

special education; abnormality; psychology history.

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A CRIANÇA ANORMAL E AS PROPOSTAS DE EDUCAÇÃO ESCOLAR NA IMPRENSA MINEIRA (1930-1940)

RESUMO

O artigo apresenta pesquisa sobre o conceito de criança anormal divulgado em um conjunto de artigos publicados na *Revista do Ensino* de Minas Gerais, na década de 1930. Foram levantados artigos que expressam como a criança anormal era compreendida pelos contemporâneos daquela época. Da análise dos textos, emergiram duas categorias: classificação das crianças anormais, suas características e explicações causais da anormalidade; o papel da escola na educação das crianças anormais. Utilizamos contribuições da história conceitual de Koselleck, segundo a qual conceitos expressam aspectos da experiência e da dimensão teórica de sujeitos em contextos e tempos históricos específicos. A pesquisa demonstrou que a articulação desse conceito incluía concepções fundamentadas nos debates sobre ambiente e hereditariedade, nos saberes elaborados pela psicologia e na discussão sobre o papel da escola e a educação das novas gerações.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

educação especial; deficiência; história da psicologia.

LOS NIÑOS ANORMALES Y LAS PROPUESTAS DE EDUCACIÓN ESCOLAR EN LA PRENSA DE MINAS GERAIS (1930-1940)

RESUMEN

El artículo presenta la investigación sobre el concepto de infante anormal divulgado en un conjunto de artículos publicados en la *Revista do Ensino* (Revista de la Enseñanza), de Minas Gerais, en la década de 1930. Han sido buscados artículos que expresan cómo el niño anormal era comprendido por los contemporáneos de aquella época. Del análisis de los textos, han emergido dos categorías: clasificación de los infantes anormales, sus características y explicaciones causales de la anormalidad, y el papel de la escuela en la educación de los infantes anormales. Utilizamos contribuciones de la historia conceptual de Koselleck, según las cuales los conceptos expresan aspectos de la experiencia y de la dimensión teórica de los sujetos en contextos y tiempos históricos específicos. La investigación ha demostrado que la articulación de ese concepto incluía concepciones fundamentadas en los debates acerca del ambiente y de la herencia, en los saberes elaborados por la psicología y en la discusión sobre el papel de la escuela y la educación de las nuevas generaciones.

PALABRAS CLAVE

educación especial; deficiencia; historia de la psicología.

Sectors of the Brazilian state and society, as well as those of other countries worldwide, have currently been engaged in the development of projects aiming at the education and schooling of all children, regardless of their characteristics, whether related to gender, color, socioeconomic status, social vulnerability, disabilities or disorders, consisting of a movement toward what we presently call inclusive education (Assis and Santiago, 2016; Delors, 2010; Lourenço, 2010, 2017; MEC/SEESP, 2008). In view of this, there are several challenges in the daily life of schools, which are increasingly induced to build mentalities and environments that can welcome all children, in equal ways (Azambuja and Carloto, 2015; Freitas *et al.*, 2006; Junkes, 2006; Lourenço and Turci, 2017; Nozi, 2010).

In this context, the development of inclusive school projects runs into obstacles of various kinds. One of them is the positioning of subjects in relation to the historical construction of concepts such as normal, abnormal, deficient, adapted, unadapted, adjusted, maladjusted, health and illness. A succession of explanatory models of abnormality, maladjustment, and disability may be observed throughout the twentieth century. These models are anchored in individualistic approaches, which focus on the subject and its innate biological characteristics up to even more psychosocial models, which evaluate such phenomena as multidetermined, taking into account, in addition to the genetic and neurological aspects, those of psychological, social, cultural and pedagogical nature (Jannuzzi, 2012). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to observe how models that place on the children, solely and exclusively, the burden of their own adaptation to the educational system, are still often present, permeating the ways of thinking of families, educators, and society in general.

The tensions and challenges brought about in the education realm raise questions about the history of psychology. The psychological sciences were strongly involved in the development of the Brazilian educational field, especially with regard to special and inclusive education. Thus, studies on the history of psychology may contribute to the understanding of how concepts and categories associated with the current field of special/inclusive education¹ have been elaborated over time. From this perspective, this article presents a research whose objective was to investigate the concept of “abnormal child”² disseminated by the press culture in Minas Gerais in the first half of the twentieth century, when a special education

1 It is important to highlight that special education differs from inclusive education, with the latter having a broader spectrum than the former. Today, special education is geared towards people with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities, disorders and high skills. However, the discussion about special education refers to inclusive education since, in Brazil, the proposal is that the special education public should be inserted, preferably, within the regular schools and that these schools meet the special and specific educational needs that this public demands (Lourenço, 2010).

2 Terms such as abnormal, idiots, morons, weak, retarded, among others that will be used in this article, are currently seen as pejorative, but were psychological and psychiatric classifications that lasted for a long time. We will keep in this article the words as they appeared in the sources analyzed in order to preserve the mindset of the period discussed in this article.

system was beginning to be formed in the country (Drumond, 2015; Lourenço, 2001; Petersen and Assis, 2017).

We chose the publication *Revista do Ensino* (Teaching Magazine) (1925-1940) as our source, due to the fact that it is a periodical published by the Minas Gerais state government as a strategy for the dissemination and circulation, among teachers of the state's public schools, of the pedagogical guidelines that were guiding the educational reform proposed by Francisco Campos and Mário Casassanta, from 1927 on (Assis, 2016; Assis and Antunes, 2014; Biccass, 2008; Guimarães, 2013; Lourenço, 2001). Among other aspects, this reform provided for the creation of special classes for the instruction of children who, in intelligence tests, had lower than standardized performance or other problems related to school adaptation, being considered delayed or abnormal (Borges and Campos, 2018; Lourenço, 2001; Petersen and Assis, 2017).

The concept of abnormality prevailing in the period covered by this investigation was broad and encompassed countless meanings when linked to the terms "child" or "student". From the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, the concept was subdivided into many others, but managed to bring together a broad spectrum of phenomena: physical and sensory disabilities; the idiots, retarded or stupid ones; the delayed ones or those with learning disabilities; the difficult child, that is, those with behavioral problems manifested in the school environment; and even orphans, abandoned or homeless ones living on the streets, due to their exposure to possible trauma experienced in environments of violence or extreme poverty (Borges, 2014).

Over time, attempts to classify the abnormal ones have been the scene of much debate, especially when the disorders of intellectual and affective faculties come into play. According to Berrios (2008), even back in the medieval courts, we can find discussions about the congenital and irreversible character of idiocy, a controversy that will reach the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when it is proposed to educate idiotic, stupid and retarded children. In the medical field, differentiations between madness, dementia, and mental retardation were developed, as well as attempts to understand to which extent these conditions were irreversible or could benefit from education (Rosa, 2017; Santiago, 2005).

In the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, psychology was the science that most produced subsidies for the education of the abnormal ones. In this field, there have been several efforts to examine intelligence in order to classify it. Furthermore, several elaborations about the abnormal ones, their learning, and their school education were also produced. Intelligence measurements through testing gained enormous repercussion. The Binet-Simon metric scale and its variant, Stanford-Terman, have been widely disseminated and adopted in Brazil, and in other countries, to identify abnormal children in order to educate them (Nicolas *et al.*, 2013; Rota Júnior, 2016). Thus, the use of tests that standardized what would be considered delay, normality or advancement in child development, as well as the experiences of early childhood education, proliferated.

All of these attempts to construct theories and instruments for classifying and educating children with motor, sensory or intellectual disabilities, or even with

delays to learn school content, worked with concepts of normality and abnormality or deviations from the norm. Therefore, in the field of special education and in the debate about what would be the best space for the education of children with disabilities or considered abnormal, lots of theories circulated in Brazil and the knowledge produced by several authors, such as Maria Montessori, Alice Descoedres, Ovide Decroly, Helena Antipoff, among others, was taken into account here.

In this scenario of theory circulation, this study means to present an analysis of the concept of an abnormal child, organizing the text as follows: we will present procedures and the method by which the analysis of the concept of abnormal child was performed, and then we will make a brief description of *Revista do Ensino*³ and its importance for the educational context of the time. Subsequently, we will present the results related to two categories: classifications and characteristics of the abnormal child and the role of the school in the education of the abnormal ones. Finally, some considerations will be made about the results obtained.

METHOD

Psychological theories related to child development and school education whave been widely disseminated by magazines and journals specialized in health and education. Thus, periodical publications, such as *Revista do Ensino*, have become important sources for historiographic studies because they are able to reveal concepts operated by groups in specific contexts and describe relationships established between these concepts and the knowledge that gave them support (Assis, 2016).

We believe, according to Koselleck (2006), that concepts or terms can express the social and political positions of a particular group in historical time. *Revista do Ensino* published conceptions about the abnormal child, showing, in the production of this knowledge, the presence of a group formed by technicians and teachers involved in the education in Minas Gerais during the 1930s and 1940s.

For Koselleck (2006), the conceptual language is, in itself, a consistent means to problematize the ability of experience and the theoretical dimension of subjects in specific contexts. In the context of this research, the government of Minas Gerais carried out an intense educational reform whose main pillar was the proposal of homogenization of school classes. The need to replace traditional education through adherence to knowledge produced mainly in French and English contexts was advocated.

In general, we can consider that, in *Revista do Ensino*, those children out of the norm were classified into three broad groups: the supernormal or gifted, that is, those whose intelligence scores, measured by the tests of the time, were above average; difficult or abnormal children who showed behavioral problems; the abnormal

3 The magazine *Revista do Ensino*, created in 1892 by the president of Minas Gerais state, Afonso Pena, was deactivated and then reinstated in 1925 by Fernando Mello Viana's government. It remained on until 1940 when its production and circulation was again interrupted due to the problems arising from the wars. Resumed in 1946, the magazine was extinct 25 years later, in 1971.

ones, among them those of inferior intelligence: weak, idiots, retarded and delayed, according to the nomenclatures of the time. When surveying articles relevant to the object studied in the 1930s, we found eighteen articles whose central theme was the child deviating from the norm. From this set, seven texts were chosen for the elaboration of this article, as they contain:

- definitions about the abnormal child, that is, those that were part of the group considered as having inferior intelligence or character problems;
- pedagogical and/or psychological practices performed with children considered abnormal.

Regarding the time frame, we adopted the 1930s because it is the period in which the journal publishes the highest concentration of articles on the abnormal child. We consider that this time is after the 1927 School Reform proposal and coincides with the opening of the Minas Gerais Teacher Training School and the arrival of Helena Antipoff in Minas Gerais, in 1929, in order to take over the psychology discipline and the Psychology Laboratory of this institution. Antipoff was responsible for imprinting the marks of active psychology in Geneva and Russian psychology in the state of Minas Gerais, being seen as a prominent figure in the field of special education (Campos, 2012). The educator developed specific projects for special classes and elaborated mental orthopedics, using the theoretical perspectives of Alice Descoedres, Alfred Binet, Ovide Decroly, Maria Montessori, among others (Silva, 2016).

The selected texts whose themes involved, specifically, discussions about abnormal children were: *As classes especiaes* (The special classes) (1932), written by Guerino Casassanta (education inspector for the state of Minas Gerais); *Experiências de uma classe de educação especial* (Experiences from a special education class) (1932), written by Benedita Mello (education technical assistant for the state of Minas Gerais); *Os anormaes na escola primária* (The abnormal ones in elementary school) (1933), written by Benjamim Ramos Cesar (education technical assistant); *A orientação profissional dos retardados* (The professional guidance of the retarded ones), article taken from the report of the Congress D'Yvetot (1935), communicated by the Association des Instituteurs Publiques d'Enfants Arrières and published by the director of the Institut Départemental de Perfectionnement de l'Enfance, in the magazine *Litterature, Philosophie et Pédagogie*, in Paris; *O ensino das creanças anormaes* (The teaching of abnormal children) (1936), transcript of a paper written by Vitor Fontes (inspector advisor of the education of abnormal ones in Portugal); *Creanças excepcionaes* (Exceptional children) (1936), unknown author, a kind of writing review by Beatrice McLeod, a senior specialist in the education of children with physical disabilities at the US Department of the Interior; *Os retardados* (The retarded ones) (1937), excerpt from Albert Edward Wiggam's work (author of *The marks of an educated man*, *The fruit of the family tree*, among others) and translated by Helva Vieitas.

From the reading and analysis of the sources, two categories emerged:

1. classification of abnormal children, their characteristics and causal explanations of the abnormality;
2. the role of school in the education of abnormal children.

The other texts found in *Revista do Ensino*, which will not be discussed in this article, provide information on topics that are beyond the scope of this article, such as: the foundation of the Pestalozzi Society, discussions about the super-normal ones, and a translation of the book *Educação das Crianças retardadas: seus princípios, seus métodos: O que todas as crianças podem dela aproveitar* (Education for retarded children: its principles, its methods: What all children can benefit from), by Alice Descoedres. Parts of this book were translated and published in several issues in the magazine. Though, approaching the retarded child, we chose not to work with Descoedres' translated work, whose analysis will be presented in a specific article.

THE 1927 EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND THE MAGAZINE *REVISTA DO ENSINO* AS A STRATEGY FOR THE EDUCATION OF TEACHERS

With the Republic regime established in Brazil, a set of political actions aimed at performing new bases for education in order to build a modern nation allied to progress. The school and its professionals occupied a unique place in this project due to its importance in the education of new generations. In the 1920s, Minas Gerais rulers drew attention to the need for an educational reform that would renew teaching methods, modify the conception of learning, and reformulate programs seen as “outdated from the modern practices employed in other countries, rendering all Minas Gerais people behind” (Lança, 2017, p. 29). Thus, on October 15th, 1927, Francisco Campos promulgated the Education Reform Law of Minas Gerais State. One of the most important aspects of this proposal was the training of Minas Gerais teachers based on the recommendations from the *Escola Nova* (New School) and the scientific elaborations on child development produced at the time. In this scenario, it was hoped that psychology could contribute to solving problems that arose in the Brazilian education, such as what to do with children who were late in acquiring school content or who exhibited behaviors that were considered inappropriate for the institutional environment, such as theft, goofing around, wandering, lying and aggressiveness. Thus, one of the challenges posed for the school was precisely the teaching of students that could be considered abnormal, as we can verify through the testimony of a teaching technique published in the *Revista do Ensino* in January and February 1936:

We were unable to know exactly the mental level of our students because we lacked the intelligence tests; however, due to the difficulty to understand they show and the childishness they unveil, their lack of intelligence is clear and the imbecility of many is easily perceived. What is learned today is forgotten tomorrow. Memory does not exist in our group, except for some young women and girls. In order to learn the fundamental operations of addition and subtraction we gathered all the resources we could and we did not manage to have them memorized except with the children. (Brandão, 1936, p. 73)

The decree, which regulated the 1927 reform, presented psychology as one of the subjects to be taught in the teacher training at the Belo Horizonte Improvement

School. Psychological measures, tests, the study and classification of abnormalities were mandatory contents. It was recommended to read the book *Noções de psicologia* (Notions of psychology) by Manoel Bonfim and the book *Tests — introdução ao meio científico de julgar a inteligência e a aplicação dos alunos* (Tests — introduction to the scientific way to judge the students' intelligence and application) by José Medeiros and Albuquerque (Lança, 2017). Bonfim's book presents, in an appendix, the characterization of school abnormalities. It is possible to observe, therefore, that the interest in the education of the abnormal was present, being necessary to educate the teachers and educational technicians to, first, be able to distinguish the abnormal ones among the other school students and, later, to construct educational proposals for them in the special classes.

Among the measures taken for the effective formation of teachers in the scope of the reform, the Secretariat of Interior, responsible for the Minas Gerais school education, strengthened *Revista do Ensino* as an instrument to spread the new educational ideology:

In face of the modern tendencies and postulates of the recent pedagogical science, which was the trend to be introduced among us, because it would be absurd, if not criminal, to choose what was old and scientifically repudiated and to neglect what is modern and positively experienced, — before the wave of new ideas, new principles, new processes, new didactic techniques, which were recommended in the downloaded regulations, it was indispensable to form a generation of teachers at a level to understand and apply them. (Orgam Official da Inspectoria Geral da Instrução, 1930, p. 11)

Thus, according to Biccás (2008), educational reform was intrinsically linked to this pedagogical form that was distributed to all public schools and many private institutions. From 1929 on, readers have gained access to the journal by two means: subscribing annually or monthly or reading at the educational institution where the reader worked. In addition to circulating modern educational theories, the editors' purpose, in the 1930s, was to use the *Revista do Ensino* as a channel for the dissemination of the Minas Gerais production carried out by the Belo Horizonte Improvement School, particularly with regard to experiments and theories elaborated by the Laboratory of Psychology directed by Helena Antipoff (Assis and Antunes, 2014; Biccás, 2008; Bravo, 2019).

The journal also published the translations of texts written by foreign authors in addition to Brazilian productions, as well as experiences and reports on the daily school life in Minas Gerais sent by educators of the time. Three of the texts analyzed here are reviews or transcripts of excerpts from foreign works or periodicals: *Os retardados* (The retarded ones) by Albert Edward Wiggam and *Crianças excepcionaes* (Exceptional children) by Beatrice McLeod, both US authors; *A orientação profissional dos retardados* (The professional guidance of retarded ones), an article extracted from the magazine, *Litterature Philosophie et Pedagogie* (Literature, Philosophy, and Pedagogy), from Paris. The remaining articles deal with experiences reported by technicians responsible for education in Minas Gerais. Next, we will see what this set of articles shows about the child considered abnormal.

CLASSIFICATION OF ABNORMAL CHILDREN, THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND CAUSAL EXPLANATIONS OF THE ABNORMALITY

As it is a polysemic concept, we will find, in *Revista do Ensino*, several classifications for the abnormal child: retarded, mentally weak, poorly endowed, extremely excited students, pedagogically retarded, undisciplined; mentally weak and excited; mentally weak and passive, deficient coefficient, weak brain, defective children; turbulent. Most of these appointments are directed at those with inferior intelligence. It was considered that mental weakness could be accompanied by excited or passive behavior, showing the establishment of correlations between intelligence and conduct. The most excited and undisciplined students, categories more focused on the classification based on behaviors, were also included in this group.

The paper *Crianças excepcionaes* (Exceptional children) is a short review of Beatrice McLeod's writings, an educator who participated of the United States Conference on Special Education, whose results were published in *The education of the exceptional children bulletin — Biennial survey of education in the United States* (1930-1932). This bulletin, published by the US government, advocated specialized education that was appropriate to the needs of children with physical, mental or social deviations. However, the author of the text published in *Revista do Ensino* did not specify from which writings he drew his arguments in order to present McLeod's position on the education of the exceptional. The review published in Minas Gerais was partly devoted to presenting a classification that, according to its author, obeyed the parameters of the White House Conference.

Thus, taking in hand the American classification, the journal *Revista do Ensino* published a categorization of abnormal children subdivided into eight groups:

1. The mangled ones;
2. the deaf and hard of hearing;
3. the blind and weak sighted;
4. the oral handicapped;
5. children of low vitality, suffering from anemia difficulties, pre-tuberculous or cardiac origin;
6. the mentally retarded;
7. the mentally gifted;
8. children with behavioral problems. (Secretaria da Educação e Saúde Pública, 1936, p. 225)

The author explained that the cases of students physically hindered to yield normal progress in their studies belonged to the first five groups. Children in groups six and seven could be understood as those who deviated from the students' normal intellectual average rate. Finally, the last ones were those characterized as unsuited to the school system. From these categories, the author discussed the need for school education for these children, a theme the American publication intended to focus on.

In the bulletin organized by the United States government, McLeod used the term exceptional child. In *Revista do Ensino*, however, the Brazilian author, when translating, used the term “abnormal schoolchildren”, a nomenclature used in the book *Noções de psicologia* (Notions of psychology) by Manoel Bonfim. The author of the review did not mention the change of nomenclature in the journal. However, at the time, the replacement of the name from abnormal to exceptional was related to a paradigm shift that criticized the weight of the word abnormal and proposed a model whereby exceptionalities indicated individual needs to which teachers should adjust (Borges, 2014).). Thus, it is curious that the word “exceptional” was used in the title of the review, but later abandoned and replaced by abnormal throughout the text, showing that the author probably made no distinction between the two terms.

In Minas Gerais, this “replacement”, which was already being done in other contexts, as the magazine article shows, was later proposed by Helena Antipoff. The Russian educator adopted the term exceptional so as to affirm the potentiality of children with disabilities that should not be considered abnormal or deviant, as they could develop themselves if they benefited from an education appropriate to their needs (Borges, 2014; Lourenço, 2001).

In *Revista do Ensino*, as it is a journal for teachers and education professionals, it was common that children’s classifications were discussed according to the student’s performance or adaptation to school, as demonstrated by Ramos César’s definition of abnormality (1933, p. 12):

This science [Pedagogy], with its modern orientation, has broadened the classification, considering it abnormal for the effect of the preparation of the individual, that the necessities of the vertiginous life of our days impose to be fast and complete, every student that, for whatever reason, sets themselves to a level of disadvantage and does not keep up with the collective level of educational development, which is why uniform classes are becoming an increasingly pressing imperative.

Benjamim Ramos César, an education technician in Minas Gerais, classified the abnormal as those who, besides presenting learning problems, trespassed discipline and hygiene in addition to being disobedient, rebellious, and savage. The technical teaching assistants were responsible for inspecting the schools, but also for encouraging teachers to adhere to the new pedagogical ideas. Good work at school depended on the conditions of hygiene, health, and diet. In the hygienic conception of the time, well-fed children, for example, had ensured their physical and mental development, as well as being more willing to work and more likely to succeed at school. On the other hand, nutritional problems could produce anemic conditions that, over time, fit the classification of “abnormal”. Thus, the health of the Brazilian child was a problem raised by several educators and politicians of the time. Fernando Azevedo, replacing Carneiro Leão on the Board of Public Instruction of the Federal District, identified the hygiene and physical health of students as neuralgic points of popular education. In this sense, educational reforms should focus on the hygienic protection and physical education of the school population (Oliveira,

2015). Teachers organized health teams governed by some premises, among them: the care of teeth, eyes, and ears; physical exercise; disease prevention and the obligation to keep away from cigarettes and beverages (Martins and Carvalho, 2015).

According to Ramos César, an important issue to be considered in the area of hygiene and the organization of special classes was that the school abnormal students were not necessarily those with clearly observable physical, mental or behavioral disabilities. Thus, he included among the abnormal ones those children who, over time, were causing problems to teachers, especially those who ignored modern psychology. Not knowing the psychology productions about the abnormal ones, these teachers could not perceive the anomalous characteristics that were not immediately presented to the observation:

When the problem of the abnormal ones, in their use as an object of a special pedagogy is put into the equation, comes to the layman's mind the idea of dealing with individuals concretely, physically stigmatized by morphological alterations or anomalies of psychic functions externalized into bizarre behavior. That is, the idea of cripples always arises. It is a hasty assumption. The abnormal one does not always reveal its deficient coefficients in the first contact. More often than it is supposed, the abnormal one appears to the investigation as or sort of an Eurhythmic. Bewilders; makes the preceptor indecisive; brings a fixed idea, despair. (Ramos César, 1933, p. 10)

Using words such as *cripples*, *eurhythmy*, *diathesis*, *enlightenment*, *encyst and calcify*, the author made it clear that the abnormal ones presented themselves, at school, as one that is out of pace. Showing a mismatch related to the school pace, this child could, for example, fail to advance in learning or disturb the discipline. Ramos César stated that, before this student, the teacher was undecided, as the abnormality confused the educator:

How often the teacher goes deep into perplexity and lashes out inwardly with an endless round of interrogations!

— “Why is my student refractory to teaching? Why are they rebel to selflessness and affection, which I erected in the educational system? Why are they recalcitrant to collective cordiality? (Ramos César, 1933, p. 10-11)

This child was making the school path without showing progress, until, according to Ramos César (1933, p. 10), they were evicted from social life due to their lack of interest or their noisy feats, without the educators being able to perceive the abnormality:

And often, this child goes through the school cycle like a sphinx, like an excrete, like a residue of educational functions. This is especially so when, in combination with a majority of normal types, in the functional set, they fall into their diathesis, unattended by the teacher who lacks the psychological knowledge. And after a novitiate of hard standardization, because sometimes it runs

smoothly and uninteresting, like the surface of a well, and then it goes shaken by noisy feats, the abnormal child is poured into the course of social life like a calcified foam flake and becomes, when not a degenerate, toxin-secreting bill — a dead weight. (Ramos César, 1933, p. 10)

In this text, the abnormal students were presented as follows:

- the abnormal ones due to somatic deficit only or affected in the complexity of physiological exchanges;
- the abnormal ones due to intellectual deficit (idiots, morons, partially retarded ones, without the clear characteristics of these blemishes);
- the abnormal ones due to sensory deficits (blind, deaf-dumb, dumb, stutter, etc.), those who bear subtle dysfunction of the sense organs;
- the abnormal ones due to affective deficit (the neuro-idiosyncratic and neuro-arrhythmic ones);
- the abnormal ones due to frank nerve damage;
- the ones deformed by the environment.

According to the author, this classification should be adopted for the selection of students in homogeneous classes.

The novelty of this form of classification, according to the Minas Gerais author, would be the insertion of the category “deformed by the environment”:

the lazy, sloppy, disobedient student is commonly a product of the family environment — a deformed one. They come from a home with open stigmata of an irregular and improper personality-forming regime, a regime sometimes dispersively condescending, frugal, languid, now punctuated by exaggerated severities and provoking the natural state of revolt into which the oppressed ones fall. (Ramos César, 1933, p. 13)

Thus, Ramos César placed the interaction between hereditary characteristics and environmental factors as the cause of disabilities and school problems, joining an idea formed by the establishment of relationships between hygienic and eugenic conceptions, very common in the period of time studied here (Lobo, 2008). In this case, along with the discussions about congenital and hereditary factors present in the child’s development and the theories of race degeneration, aspects related to the environment were understood as causes of abnormalities. The family environment was conceived as an indisputable source of deviations because it was an environment where characteristics related to race, habits, and customs were mixed. But, it was also seen as dangerous to leave children on the street, “a space where they would be subject to contracting all addictions and would eventually end up getting ready for all crimes” (Guimarães, 2013, p. 91).

The deformed abnormal subject, according to the education assistant technician, was a classification taken from Ovide Decroly’s work. These individuals had a curious feature: they could be disguised in their family environments, so their retardation would be perceived only when they began their school performance.

Even though attributing high value to environmental causality, at no time did the author propose any questioning about school as children's social environment, that is, it did not question the possible interaction between school and students' behaviors and learning, identifying only in the family the origin of school problems. However, the relationship between factors involved in teaching/learning and the production of abnormal students was an important discussion in the context of the psychological and educational sciences of the time, as we will see later when dealing with other texts from *Revista do Ensino*.

When closing his article, Ramos César made two important considerations. First, he attested a breakthrough in the education of abnormal children: the new classifications used by modern pedagogy and the possibility of organizing homogeneous classes allowed that children, previously admitted to sanatoriums, had the chance to attend school. For the author, the colonies and sanatoriums where children were hospitalized constituted places of isolation and a rather more therapeutic than educational work and, therefore, were not the best institutions for healthy development. Modern Pedagogy was in favor of the idea that many children classified as abnormal were usable in school and did not need to be confined in sanatoriums. The author's second consideration was about the importance of collaboration between pedagogy, psychology, and medicine, since it was essential that teachers have sufficient psychological knowledge to distinguish between normal and abnormal students in order to promote the prophylaxis of problems arising from abnormality.

Virtually in opposition to Ramos César's text, which drew teachers' attention to abnormalities that were not immediately visible to the observer, two articles — *Os retardados* and *O ensino das crianças anormais* (The retarded ones and the teaching of abnormal children) — discussed the consequences of early classifications of abnormality carried out at school. These two articles introduced criticism of the hasty manner in which students could be classified or seen as abnormal by their educators. The article *Os retardados* (The retarded ones) is an excerpt translated from a work, not specified in the journal, by Albert Edward Wiggam, an American author who wrote several papers on education, science, and psychology. Among his works, two are highlighted in *Revista do Ensino: The fruit of the family tree* (1924) and *The marks of an educated man* (1930). The text, translated by Helva Vieitas, described an experience attributed to Dr. Grace Fernald, MD, Department of Psychology, University of Columbia, USA. Fernald, upon receiving an 11-year-old child classified by her teachers as abnormal, took on the challenge of teaching her what she had not learned at school. After a while, the child learned to read and write. The author then questioned the school's responsibility to the methods used for teaching that student and drew attention to the dramatic situation in which education was in the United States:

more than two-thirds of children fail before reaching their last class. A third or even half of these failures are due solely to the fact that these children cannot learn to read. There is, however, nothing wrong with their eyes or their brains. (Wiggam, 1937, p. 68)

Throughout its arguments, the article criticized the way teachers and the school had been classifying students as abnormal before consistently assessing the possibility of children having different ways of learning. The solution, presented by the author, to the problems arising from the literacy processes was the development of specific methods for the child's learning needs. In the case reported, specialists elaborated the category of "kinesthetics", that is, children who only learned to read and write if they were taught by a method that used the senses of touch and gave the child the muscular experience of tracing letters with fingers. Thus, Wiggam argued that the failure to acquire reading and writing lay in the methods adopted by the educators and not in the students' abnormalities.

The article, *O ensino das creanças anormais* (The teaching of abnormal children) was taken from the Portuguese School magazine which, like the *Revista do Ensino*, was a scientific-pedagogical publication organized by the State, more precisely by the General Board of Directors of the elementary Education of Portugal (Borges, Campos e Duarte, 2011). The author Vitor Fontes, guiding inspector of the education of the abnormal ones in Portugal, conceptualized the abnormal child and, at the same time, questioned whether it would be right for the regular class teacher to make such a classification.

Abnormal is every child who reacts, as a rule, to requests from abroad in a way different from what is commonly seen in most children in identical life situations. As it turns out, the definition is very vague, but, in assumptions of this nature, the intention to establish greater rigor is foolish. (Fontes, 1936, p. 97)

The inspector continued his arguments, offering examples to the reader:

You have in your class a pupil who has been in school for four years regularly; at least apparently attentive during class and, despite that, has not yet passed the 2nd grade. The teacher, interested in the pupil, repeatedly calls him to the lesson, encourages him in his studies, and the child keeps on showing a low-level performance. This set of facts should lead the teacher to suspect an abnormality. [...] That other student cannot be quiet, peaceful, in the class; he laughs at his companions, speaks, rises from the seat, all this despite the teacher's admonitions; it is a case to be driven into the same suspicion. [...] As noted in the examples cited, in all of them we said that it was permissible to suspect that these were abnormal children, but, we emphasize, to suspect only and take no decision. And we highlight this fact, since sometimes these same children, placed in other conditions, such as a simple change of class, of teacher, will behave normally. Hence, as can be seen, an error that could have resulted from a hasty classification on such inconsistent bases. (Fontes, 1936, p. 97-98)

The citation indicates that behaviors considered inherent to abnormal children could cease if there were changes in the school environment, such as changing teachers, for instance. In such cases, it would not be appropriate to suspect the child's abnormality but to understand that the students' behaviors originated from a "dis-

turbing affective complex” associated with the teacher. Thus, the strange attitudes of the students would cease when the reason that caused them was no longer present.

From this perspective, the determinism that could accompany the abnormality classifications was questioned:

In the absence of understanding about this assumption among the teachers in general, pity on the student who was judged as abnormal by the early masters! It's a man overboard! It is enough noticing the air of contempt, of boredom, we have been observing; the way the teacher tells us, “This one is abnormal,” to see the lack of interest that the poor student arises. “He or she is abnormal,” they say; and as such he or she is totally set apart. (Fontes, 1936, p. 99)

Determinism, in this case, meant that the child, when considered abnormal, was placed at school in a difficult situation to change, for the following reasons: the teacher was not interested in the student, expecting nothing more from their school performance; the stigma of the student considered abnormal generated, around them, an environment of revulsion, contempt, and persecution by his peers. In this way, Fontes discussed the fragility of the concept of abnormal child and how the definition of abnormality involved complex problems in the school environment, including the psychological consequences that classifications might have on students.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL IN THE EDUCATION OF ABNORMAL CHILDREN

As we can see in the previous citation, the articles that presented the classification of abnormal children also pointed to the role of teachers and schools concerning these students. Guerino Casassanta, Education Inspector in Minas Gerais, stated in the article *As classes especiais* (The special classes) that there were, at the time, three positions on the education of abnormal childhood. Two of them argued that: educating such children would be a waste of strength and economic resources — for they would always fall short of what is required for the normal — and the abnormal could be educated, but this was a task for philanthropy. A third group, which included the *Revista do Ensino*, believed that the education of the abnormal student was essential for society. It could prevent future problems, as unsuitable children would easily turn to uselessness or criminality. *Weak ones* and *uneducated freaks* were the main groups from which *evildoers* were recruited (Casassanta, 1932, p. 40).

In the journal, it was common to link the abnormality to the formation of subjects harmful to society. Casassanta's text focused especially on the retarded ones, the weak-minded, and the ill-endowed, stating that, due to difficulties in adapting to the social environment, they could become a useless or vicious burden for the society.

The school had a social responsibility in the face of this problem and it would be its liability to provide such children with the possibility of a future and autonomy. The solution, for the author, would be in the organization of special classes, as was being proposed by Helena Antipoff in the Minas Gerais schools, so that the abnormal ones might not have their destiny linked to hospitals or prisons.

The functioning of these classes, according to Borges and Campos (2018), predicted that the classes should have a maximum of 15 students, prioritize outdoor teaching and offer written and oral language, calculus, and drawing, a special part with handicrafts, games, and mental orthopedics exercises. Thus, the need for the school to provide an appropriate environment for this initiative was evident:

In order to improve the lives of pupils in special classes, it is required to create an appropriate environment, providing them with appropriate tools and games, so that learning means to them a new way of doing things for their maximum growth. (Casassanta, 1932, p. 39)

Considering the experience of teachers who had been working in special classes, school activities were suggested to enable children with disabilities to live on their own strength. Craftsmanship such as carpentry, shoemaking, gardening, clothing construction, rural works, domestic work, and certain categories of handicrafts were recommended. The school should teach students to live honestly by teaching them a task that would exercise their senses and guide practical activities. Thus, according to the conception of the time, it would be possible to make the abnormal ones fit for social adaptation.

In addition to the work done by the school, Casassanta recommended the organization of civil society to protect and assist special classes. For him, it would be a mistake to attribute only to the State the problem of education, requiring the participation of the whole society in the formation of new generations. Such a society arose in the mid-1930s, in the city of Belo Horizonte by the initiative of Helena Antipoff and other collaborators: the Pestalozzi Society of Minas Gerais, which included the Pestalozzi Institute. According to Borges and Campos (2018), The Institute was run as a special school, where children with disabilities were offered schooling. In Brazil, the creation of these types of institutions gave rise to the process of constituting a special education system linked to the organization of civil society. Thus, over time, institutions offering special education began to serve children with disabilities, while special classes in schools “continued to serve those customers who could not be called exceptional and who, at the same time, did not fit the socially imposed normality criteria” (Borges and Campos, 2018, p. 74).

One way or another, the articles analyzed in this research dealt with the organization of special classes in schools as a possible solution for the education of children considered abnormal. The position taken by the magazine is understandable, since the Brazilian government, in several states, was carrying out educational reforms that included the organization of classes into homogeneous classes. Therefore, it was necessary that educational journals, among other instances, tried to convince and sensitize teachers, who worked in education or who were graduating for this occupation, for the work with special classes. However, the article *Experiências de uma classe de educação especial* (Experiences of a special education class) demonstrates that such persuasion was still far from happening and highlights

the resistance to these classes within schools. In it, the teaching assistant, Benedita Mello, recounted her experience when becoming responsible for one of these classes:

Driven by several reasons, I took under my guidance in a special way a class of abnormal subjects, which was considered horrifying by teachers and the principal, constituted for the good organization of the normal classes. It was very difficult to spontaneously find a teacher for that class. Simply showing the list or mentioning four or five names of senior students in the Group, and therefore well-known for their bad habits, could lead to a refusal, an irrevocable protest with the exalted manifestation of the true horror of assuming such responsibility. (Mello, 1932, p. 110)

According to the technical assistant, all eyes of the school focused on the students in that room and the teachers said they felt humiliated to their colleagues if they had to take over the class of thirty-five male students, ranging in age from 8 to 14 years. Among them were students who accumulated from two to seven repetitions and were classified according to their peculiarities and the resulting test scores, as follows: seven pedagogical retarded, thirteen pedagogical and unmanageable retarded, four excited mentally weak, and two passive mentally weak. Beyond these, there were the turbulent ones. The social origin of the boys also drew the attention of the technique, because they were poor children: "The social environment of these students is inferior; 14 have no means of subsistence and are children of: washerwoman (5); indigent (1); rural worker(6); cook (1); and bricklayer (1)" (Mello, 1932, p. 111-112).

With such heterogeneity, the situation for the educator was a major challenge. The first negative results were experienced early on: "Excitement was predominant, complete disorder reigned; frequent fights and screams. The lack of attention and interest was absolute" (Mello, 1932, p. 111-112). In addition, the students climbed the trees, the walls, whistled, and turned somersaults.

Despite the initial problems, the author reported the continuity of her efforts that turned out into new and good results. Mello began her work by trying to get to know the students, as recommended by the psychology of the time, and making daily plans with the teacher of that class. As pedagogical strategies, the educator used:

- many classroom activities and excursions;
- mental orthopedics exercises;
- gymnastics.

The results were gradually achieved. The students were kept in class, the gym classes had more order, attention, and interest. The children enjoyed the singing, the stories told by the teacher, and revealed more politeness. For Mello, her experience showed that it was possible to do a good job with weak, retarded, unmanageable, and turbulent students.

For the mental orthopedics exercises, Mello claimed to be based on Helena Antipoff's recommendations in her work at the School of Improvement. We can observe the preponderance of French-speaking psychology and the New School

ideals in this educator's speech, as she also cited Alfred Binet and Alice Descoedres, both authors appointed by Antipoff as the basis for the education of abnormal children (Petersen and Assis, 2017).

The articles *O ensino das crianças anormais* and *Crianças excepcionaes* (The Teaching of Abnormal Children and Exceptional Children), taking education as all children's right, specified the importance of teacher education. This formation should include the theories and activities necessary to work with the education of the abnormal ones, the principles of democratic education, and the critique of the identity of pedagogical processes and methods. This criticism affirmed the impossibility of adopting only one and the same method to teach all, since there were individuals who demanded the use of diverse teaching instruments and in an unequal way, either because they are "*superior to the normal mass of students*", or because they are "*physically, morally or mentally inferior*" (Fontes, 1936, p. 225, emphasis ours).

In this sense, as the article *A orientação profissional dos retardados* (The professional guidance of the retarded), methods and processes of the special classes should be distinct from those applied to the teaching of the normal ones. The education of the weak, according to the journal, should tend to professional education, taking into account the student's intellectual and physical possibilities, individual tastes, family situation and available paid activities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The articles analyzed show that the concept of abnormal children, at the time, was polysemic, as argued by Koselleck (2006), and, therefore, contemplated a wide range of very different phenomena, including knowledge about people with disabilities of different kinds, but also conceptions about schoolchildren marked by factors related to indiscipline, poverty and orphanhood, as we can observe in the experience reported by Mello, in 1932. If, on the one hand, the concept of abnormal implied a generalization that placed children with very different characteristics on the same level, at the risk of deepening labels, stigmas and masking conditions of inequality, on the other hand, for Borges and Campos (2018, p. 73, emphasis our), this appointment eventually allowed "*an extremely marginalized population to attend school*" through special classes, for which a differentiated teaching was advocated.

Even with the prescriptions given by the educational reform, Mello's text showed that the permanence at school of students considered abnormal was a challenge often refused. The special classes, although accepted for allowing the most difficult students to be removed from class and organized in the same environment, were not always longed by the faculty. Thus, the abnormals that brought together the population marginalized by disability, behavior, poverty, helplessness, among other things, seemed to occupy an ambiguous place in the school. This ambiguity was marked by a twofold certainty: it was up to the school to educate the new generations so that the society could prosper and, for that, the abnormals should also be educated; with an association between abnormality and the tendency to become "evicted from social life," children considered abnormal were little valued at school. And, despite the efforts of many educators involved in the special educa-

tion movements, especially poor, orphaned, and disabled children continued to be admitted to psychiatric hospitals, as presented by Helvecio Ratton's documentary *Em nome da razão* (In the name of reason) (1979).

In theoretical and practical terms, the concept of an abnormal child, as Fontes stated, was unable to mark the complexity that characterized the presence of a student in school. Thus, several questions were posed by professionals at the time, demonstrating the limit of the uses of the test and the fragility of the classifications given to students (Bravo, 2019; Guimarães, 2013). In this context, the adoption of the word exceptional, as we discussed earlier, seemed to express the attempt to elaborate a new concept more focused on the individual differences and potentialities of children. In fact, as a research by Bravo (2019) shows, knowledge about individual differences, systematized by psychology, was a mandatory subject in the curriculum of the Belo Horizonte School of Improvement.

The position taken in *Revista do Ensino* is undoubtedly that there was a contingent of children who could benefit from school education and who could not be abandoned in psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, among other mental health institutions. This idea was present in all articles analyzed, despite the differences between the authors in defining and classifying the child. The homogeneous classes — which included classrooms D and E — were the project built, at the time, by the state of Minas Gerais to cover this contingent of children classified as school abnormal. It was expected that organizing classes of students with similar levels of intelligence and learning conditions would enable the use of appropriate teaching methods for each audience. Thus, the proposal was for the school to be organized according to three types of students: supernormal, normal, and subnormal, whereas the norm is conferred by intelligence tests.

In the articles investigated in this research, the hypothesis emerges that the interaction between hereditary characteristics and environmental factors may be the origin of school problems. We see that in different discourses from *Revista do Ensino*, and more specifically in Ramos César's writings, abnormality is understood as the product of biological and/or hereditary factors. It was strongly conveyed that these factors combined with the poor environment of families, precarious from the hygienic perspective of the time, were at the origin of the deficiencies, difficulties and inadequacies presented by the children. Thus, the family environment, associated with the socioeconomic situation, became, within the school, the main explanation for the abnormality, and the organization and school time could be little questioned. Although a branch of the psychological, medical, and educational sciences has been relentlessly criticizing the model that individualizes school problems, considering a possible student disease responsible for the school achievement, the view that biological/hereditary and family/economic factors are the main factors responsible for "abnormalities" in students' learning skills is still very present in Brazilian schools (Conselho Regional de Psicologia de São Paulo, 2011; Santiago and Assis, 2018).

Finally, this research meant to contribute to the history of educational psychology and to the fields of special and inclusive education, investigating the concept of "abnormal child" and the role of the journal *Revista do Ensino* in the appropriation and circulation of psychological theories and knowledge that gave

subsidies for the construction of this concept in Brazil, especially in Minas Gerais. We identified the appropriation of knowledge from the United States and Portugal and from psychological theories produced by Helena Antipoff, Ovide Decroly, Alice Descoedres, and Alfred Binet. In addition, we have noticed the dialogue with eugenicist and hygienist conceptions, especially in the debates about the relationship between abnormality and the characteristics related to biology, race, habits, and customs. In this set of knowledge, however, the crucial problem was, as it still is today, the organization of a pedagogical environment capable of really welcoming everyone considering the diversity of each one.

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