

The education of a people: ruralism and new possibilities

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Abstract

The aim is to understand the trajectory of pedagogical ruralism in Brazil, understand how the historical and social development of pedagogical ruralism occurred, contribute to preserving the history of pedagogical ruralism in Brazil and analyze the importance of a primary school in rural areas, since the conditions of life in the countryside require a differentiated education. The work is based on the documentary research method. Referring to pedagogical ruralism, it developed and established a proposal for training rural workers based on the idea of resettling rural people through pedagogy. Thus, the proposals supported by the rural movement revolved around three fundamental components of different training: teachers, teaching methods and curriculum. The idea of creating, in rural areas, a primary school different from the urban school meant delimiting the contents that until then were available to all Brazilian children.

Keywords: Pedagogical ruralism. Teacher. Curriculum.

Educação de um povo: ruralismo e novas possibilidades

Resumo

Busca-se compreender a trajetória do ruralismo pedagógico no Brasil, entender como ocorreu o desenvolvimento histórico e social do ruralismo pedagógico, contribuir para preservação da história do ruralismo pedagógico no Brasil e analisar a importância de uma escola primária no meio rural, já que as condições de vida no campo exigem uma educação diferenciada. O trabalho se fundamenta no método de pesquisa documental. Referindo-se ao ruralismo pedagógico, este desenvolveu e estabeleceu uma proposta de formação do trabalhador rural a partir da ideia de reassentar o homem do campo por meio da pedagogia. Assim, as propostas apoiadas pelo movimento rural giravam em torno de três componentes fundamentais de diferentes formações: professores, métodos de ensino e currículo. A ideia de criar, no meio rural, uma escola primária diferente da escola urbana significava delimitar os conteúdos que até então eram disponibilizados a todas as crianças brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: Ruralismo pedagógico. Professor. Currículo.

1 Introduction

Since the publication of the first democratic constitution in 1891, Brazilian education has undergone a significant number of reforms, carried out in almost every state of the Confederation. Among the important reforms of this period was that of Benjamin Constant, whose aim was to replace a humanistic curriculum model with a scientific one. These changes were aimed at reducing government spending on education, as well as limiting the number of places available to students at the time. In addition, there was a broad campaign to eradicate illiteracy, in order to meet the needs of the country's entire population (Roberto, 2022).

During the republican campaign, the school issue gained new impetus compared to the previous period, above all because it was one of the banners of the opponents of the monarchical regime, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, liberalism and positivism. However, the changes proposed by the Republicans were not implemented immediately with the announcement of the new system, as the conservatism of the dominant political forces was still very high (Jurt, 2012).

The problem faced by the people was also the low number of schools and, consequently, the number of places, which remained the same as under the previous regime, without any effort being made in the early years of the republic to democratize the spheres of power through education. Another important factor influencing the organization of education and the formation of nationality, providing the younger generations with the knowledge, values and symbols that help them identify themselves as members of a community, is the educational legislation in force during a given period, in this case the first half of the 20th century. The laws obliged rural landowners to invest in the education of the children of employees on farms dedicated to crops and livestock, in other words, in the education of the children of workers in general. Following the educational changes of the 1930 Federal Constitution, farm owners were obliged to provide education (Freitas, 2014).

Pedagogical ruralism is a practice created with the aim of keeping people in the countryside due to various factors, including the rural exodus, and with the idea that Brazil was an agricultural country, thus establishing an ideal of a rural normal school. These

points addressed by pedagogical ruralism have been perpetuated since the movements that took place in the 1930s, with the desire to renew education, known as the new school. This movement put forward the idea of combining practice and experience, in which students would be led to reveal their potential (Santos; Paludo, 2022).

Before the school was founded, teaching took place in royal schools, which began to emerge in 1860, the first of which was run by the chaplain teacher Father Antônio de Almeida, with others founded later. The school catered for those who wanted to become rural teachers. The syllabus was divided into three parts: primary school, which lasted five years; the complementary course, which lasted two years; and the rural normal course, which lasted three years and included agricultural practices in its subjects (Soares; Pedroso, 2016).

The activities that took place in the school environment were linked to aspects of the countryside, but also to preparing students for everyday life. For example, the subject of educational psychology aimed to prepare students through moral, civic and intellectual education.

The problems with education seemed so serious at the time that Miguel Couto (1927) argued that there was only one national problem in Brazil: the education of the people. This statement highlights the crucial importance of education in solving a series of social, economic and political challenges faced by the country. Couto emphasized that by investing in the education of the population, Brazil could promote social, economic and political development, enabling citizens to face the challenges and contribute to the progress of the nation.

The lack of interest in education resulted in it being easier to exercise control over the instruments of power, since literacy meant the acquisition of political rights was guaranteed for the population in general, since, according to the Constitution, the illiterate could not express their will by voting. In this context, although we had moved on from census voting to universal suffrage, the lack of education still contributed to keeping power in the hands of some members of the diadem oligarchies that existed in Brazil.

Another fact that cannot be overlooked when looking at the low literacy rates is the fact that rural children entered school at the age of ten and left school at twelve, especially those who contributed to the production process with their parents, both to support the family and to expand production for the market, according to the opinions of educators at the time (Barros *et al.*, 2021).

Sud Menucci believed that urban planning laws in Brazil were an obstacle to people settling in the countryside. For him, the fact that all legislation was eminently formulated for cities, especially that dealing with health issues, contributed to driving people out of their rural habitat. He denounced the fact that, in the entrance exam for the course for health educators, held regularly every year in São Paulo at the Institute of Hygiene, the fact that the candidate was a rural teacher was the reason for getting the lowest marks, since in all the schools the legislation, like the educational reformers, was urban in nature (Silva, 2023).

In this case, it was understood that the educational practices provided by the state had become great allies of the currents that wanted to favor urban mentalities and the migrant proposals that took shape there. It was felt that all the conditions to which agricultural wage earners were subjected were adverse, leaving no room for them to seek their political and economic autonomy. The way in which the school's objectives are presented involves human and pedagogical creations that are not always in line with the intentions explained by the teachers.

The first major objective of the village school is to gain the reputation of the people in the community. At the time this concept was expressed, reputation was generally considered to be the public opinion or perception that people in the community had of an individual. It was a subjective assessment based on various factors, such as behavior, character, social status, personal achievements and contributions to the community. However, the pragmatism and prejudices displayed often jeopardized possible works of authentic human value. Primary education in the countryside, first and foremost, is the main factor in evaluating a person in terms of the environment in which they live.

On the other hand, there were frequent proposals to restrict the content provided in elementary school, many of which were considered superfluous, especially when they were not directly linked to professional practices. The idea of creating an elementary school in rural areas that was different from urban schools meant limiting the content that had been available until then to at least the right of all Brazilian children, since the conditions of life in the countryside required a different kind of education (Lúcia *et al.*, 2009).

The government considered it a matter of principle to keep men in the countryside and thus avoid immigration. It promised to create colonization centers, where workers would be supported and compensated by the government with the discipline of methodical and persistent work. Vargas advised against fleeing to the city, denouncing the illusion of an easy and comfortable existence that encouraged immigration.

Education programs should be aimed at the conscious and final integration of the individual, instead of giving him unnecessary general knowledge. Brazilians approached modernity in different ways and suffered from the attraction and anticipation of the city-state. Even so, the government's ideologues tried to persuade the paisanos of what the government thought was most interesting economically and politically, which didn't always meet the real needs of the workers. Thus, they presented agricultural activities as offering the best life prospects for the individual and the nation.

2 Methodology

This study adopts the documentary research method as a methodological approach to investigate rural education. The documentary research method is based on the critical and interpretative analysis of documentary sources, which include historical documents, official records, texts, images, reports, among other materials relevant to the research. Documentary research is a methodology widely used in historical studies, sociology and other areas of the social sciences, allowing access to valuable information for understanding and analyzing a particular theme or research problem (Marconi; Lakatos, 2017).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the quality and relevance of the selected documents. For inclusion, the documents must present information relevant to the research topic and be considered reliable and authentic. For exclusion, documents that were out of date, irrelevant or of poor methodological quality that did not contribute to the research objectives were discarded.

The search for documents was carried out in academic databases, including the CAPES Journals Portal, ERIC and Scielo. Keywords related to the research topic were used, as well as Boolean operators to refine the searches and find the most pertinent documents. The search was conducted systematically and comprehensively, taking into account the availability of documents in Portuguese and English.

The selected documents were accessed through the available online databases and also through visits to libraries and physical archives. The materials collected were organized and catalogued according to the research theme, facilitating the analysis and retrieval of information relevant to the study.

The documents were analyzed in a critical and contextualized way, with the aim of understanding the contexts, events, processes and social relations relevant to the research problem. Patterns, trends and gaps were identified in the documentary literature analyzed, contributing to the enrichment of scientific knowledge on the subject under investigation.

3 Results and Discussion

In order to allow for some changes in the educational system, although the previous foundations were maintained, important educational reforms were carried out, among which Benjamin Constant's reform stands out, mentioned above, which had freedom and secular education as its guiding principles, as well as free primary education, as established in the constitution. One of the clear intentions of this reform was to transform the education of students training for higher education. The reform was harshly criticized both by positivists, who said that it did not respect Comte's educational principles, and by defenders of literary primacy (Veneu; Ferraz; Rezende, 2015).

The relations of production were drawn from the system based on the yoke, and there was a big gap between the speeches and practices of the new administrators on education in the early years of the republican system. Men with the same vision as President Marechal Deodoro da Fonseca publicly confessed the need for changes in public education and even said they were considering them, reforms that were hindered by the absence of specific laws. These laws, despite the change of regime, remained the same as in the empire (the lack of changes could even be justified by the shortness of the republican period and the absence of a specific constitution for the new regime), which to some extent could have contributed to delaying the expansion of the registers and the attendance of important sectors of the population (Sylvia *et al.*, 2022).

Seen by some teachers and a large part of the population as one of the possible means of access to power, it was believed that education would be one of the most important facilitators of social ascension, since both the emerging middle class and the proletarian class had begun their educational process. The democratization of education, from this perspective, would inevitably lead to political and social changes, especially with regard to the distribution of income, knowledge and power, elements that the oligarchies of a country that had just been abolished would never admit, at least legally (Santos; Paludo, 2020).

The expected political advances came with the promulgation of the Magna Carta of 1891, the first legal framework of the Brazilian Republic, which enshrined a concept of federalism in which public responsibility for basic education became decentralized, leaving it to the provinces and municipalities. The association reserved the role of encouraging these activities, since this area had assumed a greater presence in secondary and higher education (Sérgio; Pierro, 2000).

If the education provided did not prepare the student for life, the school served to distribute certificates which, according to certain detractors of the time, did not correspond to the reality of the country. In this sense, in 1918, the then president of the republic, Venceslau Brás Pereira Gomes, denounced the existence of a "diploma distribution industry", stating that, in a country where professional training was deficient, the laws in

force increased secondary education, which was already overabundant, leveling good and bad secondary and higher education institutes, and even a diploma industry was created (Almeida; Grazziotin, 2016).

At a time when relations of *coronelismo* (a political practice in which the colonels forced their employees to vote for their candidates in order to remain in power) predominated, especially in the regions considered more backward, as was the case in the Northeast, a regionalist policy prevailed whose organizational bases did not differ much from the previous system, mainly due to its structural agrarian-commercial basis. *Coronelismo* was a political system marked by power concentrated in the hands of a few local leaders, the colonels, who exercised authoritarian control over rural communities and profoundly influenced electoral processes and public policies in their regions. For these reasons, it was difficult for the central government to invest massively in a sector considered by the elites to be of little use to the country's economic development, as was the case with education.

In this sense, President Artur Bernardes' intention to guarantee that the states would allocate at least ten percent of all their revenues to primary and normal education can be seen as a major stimulus for the development of education. In order to put his proposal into practice, the duties and obligations of each party would remain distributed as follows: the union would be responsible for paying teachers and overseeing education; and the states would be responsible for providing school premises and the necessary school materials. Another basic prerequisite of the project was to oblige countries not to reduce the number of schools in their territory and to spend at least ten percent of their income on primary and regular education (Roberto, 2018).

As for vocational training, it turned out that it didn't bring the results expected by the hegemonic layers of the country's ruling elite. New measures were then proposed, with suggestions of re-educating society through literacy, which they interpreted as a necessity in order to measure the nation's greatness thanks to its literary development. Contrary to the idea of literary studies in particular, President Artur Bernardes argued that the trend presented as more modern at the time was an affront to literary culture, which results in

practical learning of applied sciences. Following this line of reasoning, Artur Bernardes affirmed that technology had a relevant place in the education of people who were at the forefront of civilization, although he considered it a serious mistake to assert that the study of the humanities should be considered a waste of time. According to him, in countries considered practical and distinguished by their great industrial development, it was precisely where cultures with a greater appreciation and depth for classical studies were seen. For him, what happened was that they stopped erecting the almost exclusive program of spiritual education, while retaining an honorable place within it (Saviani, 2013).

The difficulties of political organization were directly reflected in the educational process. Thus, the number of places guaranteed to students from the working class was almost non-existent, which denotes the authorities' great disdain for the working class, mainly due to the agrarian interests defended at the time. The reservation of five places for poor students seems to have been a great advance on the previous period, especially when you consider the interest of the colonels in the education of the people. In this sense, Bernardes stated that, far from making it difficult for poor students to enter university, the new law created five free places for them in each year of the course, three of which would be chosen by the students (Colistete, 2019).

As part of an urbanized society, our rulers abandoned the countryside and directed their investments towards the urban sectors, places where people who worked in industry were concentrated and which, by not dissipating, considerably reduced their easy appeal to future voters, as mentioned. In addition to the difficulties in adapting rural teachers, who were trained in urban schools, there was an even more aggravating factor of loss of time that rural workers didn't always understand: for more precise training, they would have had to stay in the city-state for months, or even years. This would have led to a difficult dilemma, whether to invest in training rural workers to be teachers in their own region or to accept someone from an urban background. Both solutions were rejected by rural workers, either because of the time needed to train the former or because of the urban ideology imbued by the latter (Hirata; Melo; Oliveira, 2022).

Pedagogical ruralism in the *Estado Novo* was pragmatic in more ways than one: firstly, because it constructed the idea of a school focused on practical tasks and the immediate needs of poor rural populations; secondly, because it rewrote the notion of valuing the human being and the development of human nature, pretending to believe that less was worth more, in an ideological discourse that was widely accepted and legitimized, referring in other words to the systems of hegemonic social groups (Silva, 2023).

When analyzing other documents, it is stated that "Pedagogical ruralism must seek the emancipation of rural subjects, strengthening their identity and autonomy" (Leite, 1999, p. 35). This quote from Sérgio Celani Leite highlights the aim of pedagogical ruralism to seek the emancipation of rural subjects. He stresses the importance of strengthening the identity and autonomy of these populations, which suggests an educational approach that values diversity and the active participation of rural communities. This implies an education that contributes to the empowerment and social transformation of rural peoples.

Referring to the notion of pedagogical ruralism, it was developed and established to define a proposal for training rural workers based on the idea of resettling rural people through pedagogy. Thus, the proposals supported by the rural movement revolved around three fundamental components of different formations: teachers, teaching methods and curriculum (Souza-Chaloba, 2023).

Rural ideology rejects the convergence of school forms and offers different schools that meet the educational needs of each social reality. Ruralism should promote education that combines regional conditions and subsidizes rural families. Consequently, this ruler had to cancel various privileges guaranteed by the 1934 constitution in order to prevent dissidents from intervening and overthrowing his government. Thus, rights such as freedom of expression and demonstration, guaranteed by the 1934 constitution, were revoked. To this end, the solution Vargas found was to articulate with certain social groups in favour of his government, a coup d'état against the radicalization of both the left and the right, thus establishing a new period of government, called *Estado Novo* (Rios, 2016).

It is a key moment in teacher training, socialization and professional development. In this process, it can be understood that basic education is a unique moment in terms of

the scientific, cultural, social and pedagogical development of teachers. Development which, in the case of rural teachers, must be articulated and in accordance with the cultural matrices and identity marks of the rural population (Cavalcante, 2010).

Thus, the rural school offered people the conditions for a productive life, in line with the dominant values, while also providing them with immaterial advantages. There were emphatic but vague allusions to the advantages that rural schools offered farmers. It is worth mentioning the hypothesis that, with a more rational knowledge of working methods, the rural man would earn a higher income and thus make his home more comfortable and his work less onerous (Celeste Filho, 2019).

Illich (1971, p. 12) states that "Education is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge, but a process of constructing knowledge, of constructing people, of constructing a society." This quote highlights the importance of education as a process of construction, rather than just the transmission of knowledge. Illich emphasizes that education should be seen as a process involving the construction of knowledge, people and society, which implies a more participatory and critical approach. This suggests that education should be seen as a process of change and development, rather than just the transmission of information.

The concept of education is associated with the ideology and interests of the United Parents group, which Vargas built up in order to capture rural men with the political and economic aim of occupying sparsely populated rural areas. Changing and adapting people to their environment was a recurring goal that rural schools were supposed to achieve. The value of the rural school mentioned here has been translated into civic, economic and patriotic work. The return to the countryside is largely attributed to this institution, through which they battle against urban prejudices, the result of a school practice that, in fact, suggests to the paisanos a path to the city. The literate, instead of being useful, have become a support for the harvest, toxic and extremely powerful and violent (Andrade; Rodrigues, 2020).

The aim of the rural school is to form, in a certain way, the state of mind of the countryside, the student according to the educator's opinion. It was difficult for rural

elementary school to train students who, as adults, would take over the management of local affairs, from municipal administration to the management of private affairs in agriculture and livestock. Thus, the fate of rural children depended on elementary school creating the conditions for those living in the countryside to adapt to economic, moral and social conditions. Rural male settlement had to be voluntary, through literacy school activities. The educators seemed to be particularly concerned about rural-urban migration, and it's true that not only they, but also the government and other leading groups. In any case, the insistence that characterized the intervention of spokespeople for the federal government, the president himself and educators suggested that there were immediate questions about protecting the attachment to rural areas (Duarte; Campos, 2020).

"Rural education must be closely linked to the life and needs of the community, valuing its traditional knowledge and practices" (Brandão, 1982, p. 25). This quote from Carlos Rodrigues Brandão highlights the importance of rural education being aligned with the life and needs of the community. He emphasizes valuing traditional knowledge and practices, which suggests a more contextualized and relevant approach for rural populations. This implies education that recognizes and values the culture and way of life of rural communities, rather than imposing urban models.

One of the main causes of the rural exodus is the lack of comfort, education, sanitation and medical resources, as well as the lack of distractions, etc. The recommended solution is education. The *Estado Novo* aimed not only at the idea and desire to settle people in the countryside, but also invited Brazilians to colonize the interior of Brazil in order to achieve economic exploitation and cultural life through settlement. Until then, expansion had been limited to areas legally owned by the government.

The interest in the rural areas of Brazil was twofold: on the one hand, it was economic and aimed at expanding markets and creating them in areas where the presence of capitalism was out of step with urban centers. In other words, it was a question of updating rural capitalism, bringing it back to the 1930s and 1940s. At the same time, the state's political project could not do without incorporating rural areas into its field of influence and control, especially in times of war, since the *Estado Novo* lasted six years.

Therefore, both economically and politically, the state could not forget its role as economic manager in social formation, which was necessary for the incorporation of land and rural people (Novaes, 2018).

In other documents analyzed, it is described that "Rural education must be a space for dialogue and exchange of knowledge between scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge" (Molina, 2006, p. 45). This quote from Mônica Castagna Molina emphasizes the importance of a dialogue and exchange of knowledge between scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge in the context of rural education. She suggests an approach that values and integrates different forms of knowledge, recognizing the legitimacy and relevance of local knowledge. This implies an education that promotes the encounter and interaction between different perspectives, contributing to the construction of broader and more contextualized knowledge.

One method proposed to facilitate the occupation of rural areas through schools is the creation of colonial schools, in which the hinterland will be colonized and settled by families, while the state will provide basic infrastructure. As a justification for their creation, the low population density was remembered as one of the important political obstacles aimed at cleaning up, educating and socializing these areas. Thus, the core of the rural population was spread out and separated by great distances. The creation of school colonies would work as a means of training future rural workers, coordinating their health conditions and socializing them according to the ideals of the *Estado Novo*, thus integrating them into citizenship in the hegemonic sense (Souza; Ostermann; Rezende, 2020).

There was an expectation on the part of the subjects of the hegemonic discourse that the school would civilize in a very broad sense, socializing in terms of educational practices, health care and the ideology of the school state. There was a consensus assessment that socio-economic conditions in rural areas were extremely unstable.

The biggest reason for such failure is the inability to adapt to the environment in which the school is located. Thus, the scattered schools in rural areas have become the most destructive factor in environmental degradation, as they are a flawed educational apparatus, placed in the hands of incompetent teachers who are unaware of the main

problems of low-income rural education, which was a view held at the time. The rural education discourse reaffirms the importance of rural school pupils to the Brazilian economy. But they see traditional working methods as a barrier to increasing their productivity (Novaes, 2018).

For coherent or sociological reasons, the concept of human beings at that time was extremely negative. Country people were seen as disrespectful to animals. The texts depicted extremely foolish men and girls, subject to all kinds of submission: religious, professional and sanitary. The rural man was seen as a goat herder who burned, razed and destroyed wealth; and the school, which didn't do its part to teach love of nature, knowledge of the value of agriculture, as well as the techniques that would make work more productive, ended up creating the conditions for men to abandon the fields (Souza, 2017).

In short, a clever and attractive ideological formulation, aimed at compromising certain practices and certain points of the population's life, attracted them to a network of national cooperation and commitment to the *Estado Novo* government. It also aimed to provide a public space for socializing, in an area that until then had been strictly private. The same applied to teaching home economics. Education, at least at the level of explicit discourse, took on an important role as a vehicle for a process of modernization that invaded people's lives, involving them in a network of relationships whose main referent was the authoritarian and paternalistic state, which in this way deepened the anti-democratic character with which modernity and citizenship were introduced into the existence of the Brazilian working class.

4 Conclusions

The trajectory of pedagogical ruralism in Brazil reveals a significant attempt to promote a differentiated education for rural communities, recognizing their particularities and specific needs. Throughout the historical and social development of pedagogical ruralism, there was an effort to create an elementary school adapted to the rural context, offering a curriculum and teaching methods that considered the realities and demands of

the countryside. Preserving the history of pedagogical ruralism is crucial not only for understanding the country's educational past, but also for reflecting on the challenges and opportunities present in contemporary rural education.

Finally, the analysis of the importance of elementary school in rural areas highlights the ongoing need for educational policies and practices that recognize and value Brazil's cultural and socio-economic diversity. Living conditions in rural areas demand a differentiated educational approach that promotes not only academic learning, but also the holistic development of students, enabling them to face challenges and contribute to the sustainable development of their communities. Reflecting on pedagogical ruralism therefore invites us to rethink the role of schools in rural areas and to look for effective strategies to guarantee quality education for all, regardless of the context in which they live.

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