



## The originality of Darcy Ribeiro's (1922-1997) diagnosis and criticism on education in Brazil<sup>1</sup>

A atualidade do diagnóstico e da crítica de Darcy Ribeiro (1922-1997) à educação brasileira

La actualidad del diagnóstico y de la crítica de Darcy Ribeiro (1922-1997) a la educación brasileña

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### Abstract

Darcy Ribeiro, a distinguished Brazilian anthropologist, educator and politician, is recognized for his concern with the indigenous issue and his struggle to defend a public and democratic education. In his writings, we can find references to the Latin American reality and to the participation of Indians, blacks and mestizos in the process of formation and socio-cultural development of the Brazilian people, in which he mentions very well the historical causes that are at the genesis of the levels of development and inequality in Brazil. Our focus in this text is to make explicit the diagnosis and criticism of Darcy Ribeiro in relation to education and the Brazilian public school, taking as main reference his book *Our school is a calamity*, written in 1984, in which it analyzes the situation of education and of the Brazilian public school at the end of the 20th century. From the author's provocations, we sought to consider the advances and setbacks of the current Brazilian education in relation to the problems presented at the end of the 20th century.

**Keywords:** Darcy Ribeiro. Public school. Democratization of education.

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## Resumo

Darcy Ribeiro, destacado antropólogo, educador e político brasileiro, é reconhecido por sua preocupação com a questão indígena e pela sua luta em defesa de uma educação pública e democrática. Nos seus escritos podemos encontrar subsídios sobre a realidade latino-americana e sobre a participação dos índios, negros e mestiços no processo de formação e desenvolvimento sociocultural do povo brasileiro, nos quais menciona, com muita propriedade, as causas históricas que estão na gênese dos níveis de desenvolvimento e desigualdade no Brasil. Nosso foco, neste texto, é explicitar o diagnóstico e a crítica de Darcy Ribeiro em relação à educação e à escola pública brasileira, tomando como referência principal o seu livro *Nossa escola é uma calamidade*, escrito em 1984, no qual analisa a situação da educação e da escola pública brasileira no final do século 20. A partir das provocações do autor, buscamos considerar os avanços e recuos da atual educação brasileira em relação às problemáticas apresentadas no final do século 20.

**Palavras-chave:** Darcy Ribeiro. Escola pública. Democratização da educação.

## Resumen

Darcy Ribeiro, destacado antropólogo, educador y político brasileño, es reconocido por su preocupación con la cuestión indígena y por su lucha en defensa de una educación pública y democrática. En sus escritos podemos encontrar subsidios sobre la realidad latinoamericana y sobre la participación de los indios, negros y mestizos en el proceso de formación y desarrollo sociocultural del pueblo brasileño, en los que menciona, con mucha propiedad, las causas históricas que están en la génesis de los niveles de desarrollo y desigualdad en Brasil. Nuestro enfoque, en este texto, es explicitar el diagnóstico y la crítica de Darcy Ribeiro en relación a la educación y a la escuela pública brasileña, tomando como referencia principal su libro *Nuestra escuela es una calamidad*, escrito en 1984, en el cual analiza la situación de la educación y de la escuela pública brasileña a finales del siglo 20. A partir de las provocaciones del autor, buscamos considerar los avances y retrocesos de la actual educación brasileña en relación a las problemáticas presentadas a finales del siglo 20.

**Palabras-clave:** Darcy Ribeiro. Escuela pública. Democratización de la educación.

## First considerations

In this article we focus on analyzing and understanding Darcy Ribeiro<sup>2</sup> vision related to Brazilian education system at the end of 20th century, overall in public schools, as well as in his campaigns and contributions for a more democratic school education. In the introduction of his book *Nossa escola é uma calamidade (Our school is a calamity)*, Ribeiro writes: “Education is one of the reasons of my life. That is why I talk emotionally about it, I do wear my heart on my sleeve” (RIBEIRO, 1984, p. 7). Although Ribeiro is optimist and hopeful regarding a positive future for Brazil, in a broader sense what he intends with his work is to fulfill us with indignation and to wake us up for the precarious state of Brazil’s education, especially at on its first stages (primary school).<sup>3</sup>

Darcy Ribeiro is regarded as one of the greatest intellectuals in the recent history of Brazil, for the originality of his work, his researches and his production as an anthropologist, educator and writer. He dedicated his life to observe and register Brazilian people’s needs, particularly from lower social classes, and he fought for a fairer and equal life for everyone throughout education. When he noticed the precariousness of teaching in Brazil, he decided to get entirely involved in the organization and management of education. His conclusion is that the problems in our education are not an easy task, because if they were, they would be solved. His starting point is the Progressive Education, strongly influenced by the American educator John Dewey and the Brazilian Anísio Teixeira. Ribeiro followed the Progressive Education, as an educator and a successor of it, along with Anísio Teixeira, he fought for a democratic and secular public school.

Likewise, the anthropologist dedicated a great part of his life in researching and writing about Brazilian sociocultural education, with emphasis on the life of the indigenous people. Through his writings, we can learn a good amount about life in Latin American, and the mix of races in the process of formation and sociocultural development of the Brazilian people. Some of his works, such as *O Processo Civilizatório (The Civilizing Process, 1998)*, *As Américas e a Civilização: processo de formação e causas do desequilíbrio cultural dos povos americanos (The Americas and Civilization: formation process and causes of unequal cultural development of the American peoples, 2007)*, *Os índios e a civilização (Indians and civilization, 2017)*, *O Dilema da América Latina: estruturas do poder e forças insurgentes (1979)* e *Os brasileiros: Teoria do Brasil (1975)*, were all written in the eighties and are considered, by the author himself, studies in civilization anthropology. These and many other publications of the author, most of them translated to other languages due to their uniqueness, allowed Ribeiro to build the theoretical foundation, which explained how Brazil really was. These foundations were also the core of his main work *O Povo Brasileiro: a formação e o sentido do Brasil (Brazilian people: the formation and meaning of Brazil, 2014)*, written in 1995.

These are the radical questions which point the author’s interpretation on the work about Brazilian people: who are we, Brazilians? What is Brazil? Moved by the ambition of “denaturing” the inequality of the Brazilian society, the author drafts an issue and a work/research hypothesis, aiming to show the subaltern places where the great majority of the

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<sup>2</sup> Born in Montes Claros (MG), in 1922. He worked as a writer, politician, an anthropologist and educator. He died of cancer in 1997, in Brasília, at the age of 74. According to Gomes (2005), Darcy was influenced by three great personalities in his life trajectory. As a naturalist, his major influence was the Marshal Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon; in the field of education, his inspiration came from Anísio Spinola Teixeira; and his political action was stimulated by the politician Leonel de Moura Brizola.

<sup>3</sup> Primary school, in most school jurisdictions, has become a reference that involves the basis of an official school education, or the elementary level of schooling. Even though from 1971 on it is no longer the nomenclature, in the Brazilian law, it is still recursive function to identify the process of basic education.

Brazilian people was conditioned to. Therefore, the point is neither the allegorical parade of ethnicities nor the several existing *Brazils* within Brazil but the building of power relationships among different social classes, cultural, and ethnic groups in the construction of Brazil.

Darcy Ribeiro seems to be willing to think the Brazilian problem: a) in the cultural interface, and then pose the eurocentrism problem; and b) in the economy interface, and then present the different ways and meanings of class domination that were established in Brazil during several economic cycles, such as: pau-brasil (Brazilwood), sugar, mining, livestock, agriculture, coffee, cotton, rubber, industrial, soybean and wheat cycles.

The challenge of writing the book *O Povo Brasileiro: a formação e o sentido do Brasil* (*Brazilian people: the formation and meaning of Brazil*, 2014) motivated the author to criticize the civilization process, as he points the world's movement as a conditioning process or produced by the expansion of the European culture, which silenced the voice and the cultural manifestations of other peoples. The focus is on culture. Concepts such as ethnic roots, facing worlds, civilization process, *criatório de gente*, *cunhadismo*, colour, judgment, race, ethnic transfiguration, *brasil crioulo*, *caboclo*, *sertanejo*, *caipira*, and *sulino* take us to this constitutive cultural dimension of Brazil's social and political history.

For the sake of this study, however, we will emphasize his most important work — *Nossa escola é uma calamidade* (*Our school is a calamity*) — written in 1984, which analyzes the reality of education and the Brazilian public school at the time. We will also resume some texts in which the writer deals with the elaboration of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education nº 9.394/96, which were recently published in the book *Educação como prioridade*<sup>4</sup> (*Education as a priority*, 2018), which encompasses the author's texts. This foray allows us to understand how Darcy Ribeiro assumed the educational problem as a central and priority issue for the development of Brazil as a nation, and how it became his flag in the continuity of Anísio Teixeira's work. It also shows us the legacy of an intellectual who participated in the nineteen fifties' clashes, as well as in the nineties, over the Laws of Guidelines and Bases of Brazilian education.

Although Ribeiro received criticism for not devoting himself exclusively to anthropology, he broadened his field of research and performance by producing literary works and texts on social, cultural and educational themes. He wrote approximately 30 books on such themes. His major challenge, however, was to elucidate and write a thorough, step by step on the socio-cultural evolution of Brazil as a whole.

In this regard, Ribeiro was an anthropologist, who thoughts about man and culture and tried to understand the life experience of the indigenous peoples that constitute Brazil. He was a historian, who delved into the historical and civilizational genesis of humankind, culture and society. He was a sociologist who cared about the structuring of a society in its interface with economic, social, cultural, historical and political life. He was a critical philosopher who wondered which our real identity was, and questioned the way we have been described by the official historiography. Finally, he was a politician, because he understood that history (and the course of the world and human societies), is being permanently written by men.

In his field as an educator, it is worth to highlight Ribeiro's commitment to create and to defend a contemporary and modern school. Something that goes back to the aspirations of *Manifesto dos Pioneiros da Educação Nova* (*New Education Pioneers Manifesto*), in 1932, and to *Manifesto dos Educadores Mais uma vez Convocados* (*Manifesto of the One more Summoned Educators*), from 1959. The projection of Darcy Ribeiro, one of the most active educators in the field of public education, challenges us to think about the continuity of the

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<sup>4</sup> The book *Educação como prioridade* (*Education as a Priority*), published in 2018, was organized by Lucia Velloso Mauricio and brings together several texts by Darcy Ribeiro. It is a collection that shows the educator's thoughts about different themes, as well as some of his actions in the field of education.

Brazilian education in the 21st century. To that end, we sought to understand his diagnosis for the education in the 20th century, and so we analyze his thinking on the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law, in order to open the doors to review the problems of education and school in Brazil's contemporary times.

### The education in Brazil at the end of 20th century

In *Nossa Escola é uma Calamidade* (*Our school is a calamity*, 1984), the author depicts a realistic account on the reality of Brazilian education at the end of 20th century. He begins by showing his amazement with the school system for reaching such a wide network with a huge amount of students who daily commuted to attend schools. At the same time, he showed his indignation with the huge amount of illiterate or functional illiterate (we will comment, in the second part, some statistics about this reality).

Darcy Ribeiro was looking for an explanation for this serious panorama and wondered, which could be the causes for this huge school failure: "How can Brazil be so bad at education?" (RIBEIRO, 1984, p. 22). And, trying not to be pessimistic, he used to wonder: Why is education in Brazil and in Rio de Janeiro so precarious? (idem, p. 36). The most likely answers for the causes of our scholar failure, according to him, "[...] are, probably in the deep roots of our national being and are related to the character of our society" (idem, p. 36), which is characterized by inequality and social injustice. His *Pequena Utopia* (*Little Utopia*) is to reach what some other, even less developed countries have already reached: jobs, nutrition, health and primary education for all the children. We are being prevented to reach it, though.

[...] because the class-based project of organization in our country is hostile to its own people. It did not reach it because, among us, everything is done to prevent the achievement of Brazilian people's true potential. What those who dictate and govern our economic policy sought and seek is not to meet the minimum needs of the population. It is to maximize business profits. Our ruling classes work much harder to prevent *Little Utopia* from being fulfilled than to make it happen. However, its fulfillment is the indispensable requirement for the flourishing of the free and solidary civilization that we must be (idem, p. 8).

He referred to two experiences of popular education, which he considered positive and that could serve as an example for overcoming our educational debate: first, the work of Martin Luther, in Germany, which elevated reading to the prayer sphere (reading is the supreme way of praying), and the second initiative comes from Napoleon, in France. Napoleonic education is based on the important role of the primary teacher<sup>7</sup>, who must be prepared to "[...] disrupt the French and enable them to exercise citizenship" (idem p. 38).

The sociologist points to the unbridled growth of the population as one of the main causes to produce these disastrous results. At the time, the Brazilian population was around 150 million inhabitants and with such growth, according to him, it is impossible to reach the minimum quality desired in the services<sup>7</sup> provided by the government. The school network is unable to meet all the demand. The most disturbing data revealed that,<sup>5</sup> according to the 1970

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<sup>5</sup> Darcy Ribeiro considers education a social issue, and this has always been a major problem as, in the mid-20th century, Brazil ceased to be an agrarian society and evolved into an industrial society.

Census, about 42% of young people who could neither read nor write lived in rural areas, and 10% in cities (RIBEIRO, 1984, p. 13).

The politician was even more amazed at the seriousness of the educational problem by comparing Brazil's statistical data with the indexes of nearby countries such as Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile, but especially Cuba. In one of his surveys, he found that many Brazilians had never even attended school, and among the students who attended it, the average passing rate was extremely low. According to him, “[...] only 30% of the children reach fourth grade, which corresponds to the minimal amount of writing and reading someone can efficiently function, in a literate society” (1984, p.16).

He also warned that primary school<sup>6</sup> was selective and elitist, because even though most of the children the school received were from popular classes, they were educated in the same way as children in the privileged sectors. There was exclusion, not due to the lack of schools alone, nor to the possibility of attending it, but because of the problem of inequality and social exclusion that still occurs at large proportion. Even in the richest areas of the country, such as the city of Rio de Janeiro, which had received a “dense school network and a multitude professorate”, our researcher realized that the exclusionary picture (school dropout) was growing and the educational performance was “less than mediocre” (RIBEIRO, 1984, p.16). He noted in this case that “in 1975 for a thousand children enrolled in first grade, 486 reached second grade in 1976; 464 the third grade in 1977, and 417 the fourth grade in 1978”(IBIDEM). From this reality, Darcy Ribeiro is concerned about the difficulties teachers face when dealing with children and teenagers from lower classes, when they enter school.

This approach requires special attention. The child from the abandoned classes who has at home someone who studies with her, some extra hours, politely faces this scholarly regimen in which almost no classes are taught. It only penalizes, in fact, the poor child coming from precarious situations, because he or she counts only on the school to learn something. Here's the crux of the matter: our school fails for its cruelly elitist character (RIBEIRO, 2018, p. 21).

The aim of educational concern relates, in Ribeiro's work, as a school matter of value for poor children and the reasons for its deficiency. By analyzing Brazilian historical and societal landscape, he seeks to highlight how the idea of school deficiency cannot put the blame on the poor student, or even simply declare that such “deficiencies” come from home (RIBEIRO, 1984, p.19). Darcy Ribeiro understood the school was not able to welcome and to recognize children from poor classes, and this fact explained to some extent the negative results. The selective and elitist character causes the poor child to be rejected and, on the other hand, the one with the best financial conditions is seen as having a promising future and learning conditions. “Based on this false expectation, the school is hostile to its true clientele because, being a public school, its task is to educate Brazilian children on the social condition they found themselves” (RIBEIRO, 2018, p. 23). In the author's own words:

Our public school is unpopular because it is organized to benefit the minority of students from the most fortunate sectors. It is an unfair school because it harms the students who need it the most, who come from lower classes (RIBEIRO, 1984, p. 93).

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<sup>6</sup> Primary school, in most school jurisdictions, has become a reference that involves the basis of an official school education, or the elementary level of schooling. Even though the nomenclature is no longer in the Brazilian law (since 1971), it is still recursive mention to identify the process of initial formation.

Darcy Ribeiro also pointed out that as urbanization and industrialization grew, so did the shortage of schools. He realized that, at the time, the country had little value for education. As a result, financial resources to be applied were lacking, while on the other hand, significant funds were allocated to other public spheres, such as buildings, roads and national electrical work<sup>7</sup>. For this reason, he denounced the decrease in the percentage of federal budget on education: 11.2% in 1962 and only 5.3% in 1980, relating the decrease in education expenses and the increase in other expenses (idem, p. 29).

As the Minister of Education during João Goulart's government (1961-1964) and at the early age of 29, Ribeiro could closely check how resources were earmarked for education in both federal and state education, expressing his non-conformity regarding the performance and the disrespect of the responsible ones regarding the unequal distribution of public resources.

The situation of the educators was also worrying. According to Ribeiro, due to the lack of professional career structuring, educators had overtime work, low pay and felt discouraged and not sufficiently qualified to perform their duties. His most blunt criticism and outbursts concern the obstacle of democratizing public education, the lack of incentive for teachers, the misapplication of financial resources and the wrong of money on didactic and audiovisual materials in an attempt to modernize the education system. Regarding the role of the teacher, Darcy Ribeiro debates:

It must be clearly stated that there is nothing simpler, more economical, more effective and accessible than education with a good primary teacher. It was this teacher alone, with a blackboard and some chalk boxes that educated the world. Of course, the teacher can be helped by means gathered outside the school, but he is still the only and irreplaceable educational force which one can counts on (1984, p. 33).

In his work, Ribeiro clearly and critically points out the wounds in the educational landscape and, similarly, registers and expresses his dissatisfaction with the way in which Brazilian educational issues are faced.

Darcy Ribeiro asserts that much of the educational calamity comes from both historical and current reasons. For instance, the truly authoritarian and centralizing character of Brazilian society, in which the ruling class decides on the rights of the working class and does not take into account collective needs. This scenario has come from the colonization period, through the Empire and to the present days of the Republic, and it has never been given the proper attention. "This means that we have a vast education system that doesn't educate, as well as a marvelous welfare state that is a big lie. In a nutshell, regarding all that is meant to serve the people, we are champions of ineffectiveness" (RIBEIRO, 2018, p. 25).

This thesis very clearly illustrates his feeling and conception of the Brazilian society and education. Our educational drama is about "an intrinsic deficiency within the Brazilian society" (RIBEIRO, 2018, p. 24). The causes of our educational failure, although manifested today with the indifference of public administrators, have their roots in our Colonial and Imperial past, when there was no interest to literate anyone or even to educate the people. In this respect, it should be acknowledged that in the recent sphere of *Brasil República* this task is yet to be done. As Ribeiro endorses, however, a deep examination shall be performed - recognizing the calamity - which does not create a false margin for our indifference or empty

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pessimism, nor for our voluntarism or naive optimism. Rather, it is a cynical optimism recognizing the social and historical dimension of the educational problem in Brazil. The ability of the people to face it within the conditions of a bureau that effectively puts the Republic, or the Brazilian State, at the people's service.

In a pessimistic tone, Darcy Ribeiro recognizes that "the Brazilian education system failure — our inability to create a public school that can be generalized to everyone, operating with the minimum of effectiveness - is parallel to our inability to organize the economy for everyone to be able to work and eat" (1984, p. 47). This pessimistic tone in the diagnosis drives an optimistic agency in action, manifested through the testimony given in the effort to think and design the Law No. 9,394 / 96, sanctioned when Ribeiro was a senator in Brazil, in the period from 1991 to 1997.

### **Darcy Ribeiro and the National Education Guidelines and Bases Act**

The anthropologist writes about the problems of education not as a pessimistic man, but as a person who had a radical optimism: he goes to the root of the problem, seeks to change the situation, and faces it until it is resolved. One can see his deep concern about the situation of Brazilian education by writing that "education is one of the causes of my life. That is why I always talk emotionally about it, wearing my heart on my sleeve" (1984, p. 7).

Observing the precariousness of the school of his time, especially in the public system, he felt compelled to revert this situation. In this respect, he emphasizes that:

Any serious assessment of the Brazilian educational structure leads to the realization that, besides being so huge and precarious, it has been seriously deteriorating in recent years. People of my generation state that the schools in which they studied were much better than today's (RIBEIRO, 1984, p. 23).

Darcy Ribeiro heads then the Social Studies Division of the Brazilian Center for Educational Research and, with the support of UNESCO, organizes a postgraduate course to train social researchers. Next, he became deputy director of the *Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Educacionais* (*National Institute for Educational Research*, INEP).

In addition to his career as a teacher, researcher and writer, Darcy Ribeiro devoted his efforts, either in Brazil or in exile, to build new universities that generally aimed to produce change, breaking with the old *status quo*. [...] It was like that in Brazil, with the University of Brasilia and the North Fluminense State University (UENF) and, in exile, with the National University of Costa Rica and the University of Algiers. (GOMES, 2005, p. 65-66).

Along with Anísio Teixeira, he collaborated in the execution of the first National Education Plan, whose purpose was to offer universities with a common basic education program to its students, such as the *Centros Integrados de Educação Pública* (*Integrated Public Education Centers*, also known as CIEPs). Darcy Ribeiro intended to contemplate a new humanism compatible with the technological society and based on applied research, in which the student, by learning to learn, could acquire competence for a professional career.

Elected as a senator in 1990, Ribeiro was prominent in approving the proposal for the National Education Guidelines and Basics Act that has been in the senate since 1988. At a time when his health was weakened due to a cancer, he dedicated himself to organize the open university in Brazil, with distance education courses aiming the democratization of education.

The current law in Brazil – the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education No. 9,394 / 96 - ,which regulates the organization and the functioning of education at all levels, takes the name “Darcy Ribeiro Law”, as a homage to its mentor and organizer. The law was sanctioned by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso on December 20, 1996.

The Law No. 9,394 / 96 brought some innovations in relation to previous laws; for instance, the unification of the three stages of education and a number of changes, such as the inclusion of early childhood education (kindergartens and preschools) as the first stage of basic education. The result of long debates in the congress, in the senate and several entities, generated much controversy, because to some people, the current legislation is absent on a few issues. It also includes some outdated aspects and it is not as democratic as it should.

### **Brazilian education in the early 21st century**

Darcy Ribeiro's analysis and observation in *Our school is a calamity* (1984) about the reality of Brazilian education, with emphasis on primary education in the last two decades of the 20th century, proves once again that the “state of crisis in the education”, which we face until this day, seems to be the rule rather than the exception. The major problems are being repeated and perpetuated. Solutions are late and dreams are always postponed.

By drawing a comparative line, we can say that we have improved and even surpassed some of the crucial points pointed out by Darcy Ribeiro, but we might have added some new and more serious ones. There is no way to refer to educational democratization and to republican education, which were the main flags of Ribeiro, when we observe the reality of the Brazilian educational system at all levels and the educational networks. The educational democratization and the Brazilian school can be analyzed based on three dimensions and criteria: *a) from the point of view of school management and organization; b) from the point of view of access, permanence and career in school and c) from the point of view of cognitive democracy.*

The school management and organization process, especially in public, state and municipal schools, as of the enactment of Law No. 9,394 / 06, has now been exercised by elected principals. The school, however, is still split by the management of higher agencies with little administrative autonomy.

The reality of Brazil in recent years, from the point of view of access, permanence and constancy in school, reveals an inverted pyramid. Access is not yet guaranteed for everyone, especially for those who live in remoter places, such as rural areas. Similarly, the social quality of education is not yet equally guaranteed for all social classes.

According to the 2018 Brazilian Yearbook of Basic Education, it is possible to verify, from enrollment information in 2016, that out of 48.8 million children enrolled in Brazil, 5.2 million lived in agricultural areas, 232, 7 thousand were in indigenous areas and 218, 4 were at schools in *quilombola* areas. The number of children out of school rose from five million in 2005 to 2.5 million in 2015. Therefore, there was a reduction in the scenery of deficit and exclusion in the last period (2005-2015), which is highly positive, although there is still a significant number of children and young people out of school.

The 2019 Brazilian Yearbook of Basic Education, in turn, raises the question that although on 2019 June 25<sup>th</sup> five years are completed from the approval of the *Plano Nacional*

*de Educação* (PNE, the abbreviation in Portuguese for *National Education Plan*) there is some stagnation and slowness, when compared to the period of 2005-2015. It shows that the pace of change in the educational reality is far below desired<sup>8</sup>. Yet, that education was not taken too serious from a strategic point of view in the last period, or as a nation project, as Darcy Ribeiro wished.

Although the universalization of elementary school is evolving, almost a quarter of students complete elementary school at the age of 16. This has some impact on high school, which has included younger people (91, 5% of 15-17 year-olds are in school), but only 68, 7% attend this type of education.<sup>9</sup> This aspect makes explicit the great difficulties of promoting educational equality in a country with such social inequality.

The right to quality in education is still far from assured and it is the most urgent challenge. Less than half of the students attained levels of proficiency deemed adequate by the end of the 3rd year of Elementary School in Reading and in Math. In Writing, proficiency levels are also far from reasonable: 33.8% of students are at insufficient levels (ANUÁRIO BRASILEIRO DA EDUCAÇÃO BÁSICA, 2019, p.14).

This is a concerning fact alone, but it becomes more terrifying from the point of view of inequality whenever income, social class and location emerge in this analysis. Regarding literacy in reading, 29.8% of children from the rural area reach a sufficient level, while the same level is reached by 47.7% of children studying in urban areas. In rural areas illiteracy still reaches about 17.5% of the population “being twice as high for blacks and mixed races” (idem, p. 83). From the Socioeconomic Level (NSE, from the abbreviation in Portuguese) standpoint, while only 14.1% of very low NSE children have sufficient reading literacy, “this number reaches 83.5% of children in the very high NSE group” (ibid.). This analysis becomes more problematic in 2018, if we consider that full time education, which could be a way to reverse this situation, had its number of enrollments reduced by almost 35% when comparing 2017-2018 (ibid.).

The access to basic education is guaranteed for around 95% of the population, but the average education level of Brazilian people is 6.8 years. Regarding the population between 18 and 29, this average reaches 11.3 years, and 9.6 in the rural population. If we consider the level of childhood education (3 to 4 years), the average access does not reach 80% (AGÊNCIA BRASIL, 2017). Almost 30% of Brazilian adolescents and young people

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to say that from the total of 27.2 million children who attended elementary school in 2018, about 80% attended public school. The net enrollment rate in 2018 reaches 98%, being higher than in 2012, when it reached 96, 6%. However, there are regional, class and income inequalities, meaning that due to their reality, some are more able to succeed in education than others. The Brazilian Yearbook of Basic Education (2019) exemplifies this by stating that: “68.1% of adolescents in the Northern region complete elementary school at the age of 16, compared to 81.9% in the Southeast” (2019, p. 34). This information is also shown when it comes to literacy, reading, writing and math between 2014-2016. While in Brazil, the percentage that reached the sufficient level was 45.5% in math literacy, this figure reaches 57.3 in the southeastern region and only 29.3 in the northern region. In Minas Gerais 62, 2% of children achieved sufficient level of math literacy, while only 19.5 of children in Amapá. This table contrasts and shows regional inequalities and the difficulty of educating in the poorest regions.

<sup>9</sup> Inequality at this stage of education should be highlighted. According to the Brazilian Yearbook of Basic Education (2019, p. 38), “43.3% of young people to complete high school at the age of 19 in Bahia. This proportion is 78.3% in São Paulo”. There is a larger presence of white youth in middle school, up to 11% more than black youth enrollment. This numerical expression highlights the background of the Brazilian reality in its constitution as a country and as people. The four centuries of slavery, and the unequal realities of the subjects and the regions, shape the panorama shown in education. There are results to celebrate in the midst of obstacles, but there is still much left to be done. In 2012, only 51, 7% graduated in high school. Today this number reaches around 63, 6% (IDEM, p. 40).

do not attend high school in the proper school range. The schools therefore remain exclusionary and elitist.

Only around 15% to 18% of Brazilian students, aged 25-34 years old, are enrolled in higher education.<sup>10</sup> Regarding inequality in the access to higher education in Brazil, the disparity between states is one of the most drastic. While 35% of 25-34 year olds in the Federal District attend university, in the state of Maranhão the rate is five times lower (7%) (AGÊNCIA BRASIL 2017).

The class groups may even start complete, but they finish with less than half of students. This is what the Superior Education Census reveals (MEC; INEP, 2016): 49% of students dropped out of college. One of the main causes, to cause a vicious circle is the deficiency of previous formation. Since 2005, the year in which the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) was created, the Brazilian high school average grade has never been above 3.8 on a scale of 1 to 10. The inadequate performance in reading and comprehension texts and in math tests mattered most. The dropout in higher education reached, in 2016, 30.18% in private schools and 18.5% in public schools. Even in distance learning education (EaD) dropout is around 30%, and the growth of this form of learning, which increased significantly, is due to the economic crisis, the convenience to get a diploma and the advancement of new technologies.

In addition, there is a surplus of places in higher education: in 2015, out of the 8.5 million places available, only 42.1% were filled. According to MEC/INEP Census, 2016, there are more than 140,000 unfilled places in the federal school system and an even larger total in the confessional or corporate private system. The federal system rarely offers nocturnal places. Regarding the situation of professors, the dropout of professor training courses also stands out. In 2014, the number of dropouts in the Pedagogy course reached 39%, and in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics was even higher: 57.2%, 52.3% and 52.6% of dropouts, respectively.

Data show that half of elementary education teachers teach math classes without specific training. In the areas of physics, philosophy, sociology and arts, the numbers are even lower. The percentage of places occupied by teachers without graduation in these areas is 32.7%, 31%, 18.6% and 17.2%, respectively (MEC/2017). Many teachers are considered to be assigned, not to say obligated, to teach subjects that they are not qualified to. Teacher remuneration remains low compared to professionals with the same level of education.

The private school system accounts for 75.3% of higher education students, compared to 24.7% of state institutions. This means that in 2016 there were 6,058,623 students enrolled in private colleges and universities and another 1,990,078 in public institutions. When analyzing data from 2006 to 2016, enrollment growth was 66.8% in the private sector and 59% in the municipal, state and federal higher education systems. [...] There are 2,407 higher education institutions in Brazil. Of these, 2,100 are privately owned, while 298 are public. For each student enrolled in the state network, there are 2.5 studying in private institutions, when it comes to in-person courses (AGÊNCIA BRASIL, 2017).

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<sup>10</sup> These data, back in 2018 when an age group of 18 to 24 was analyzed, reached 21, 8% compared to 2012 (16, 6%); that is, in this age group, there has been an increase in youth access to higher education, although only 7% come from lower classes and 48% from upper-class. "In 2018, gross and net enrollment rates in Superior Education started to grow again after a decrease in 2017, although the PNE target is still far from being met. In the last year of the series, Brazil had a higher gross enrollment rate of 44.2%, an increase of 3.9% over 2017 and of 11.4% over 2012. The net rate enrollment reached 21.8% in 2018, representing advances of 1.9 and 5.2 percent over 2017 and 2012, respectively. It is worth noting that this latest growth has reinforced inequality. While three out of ten whites come to universities, 1.5 black Brazilians out of ten reach the top level" (BRAZILIAN EDUCATION ANNUAL, 2019, p. 98).

Nowadays, about 75% of Brazilian students attending superior education are in private institutions, and this means that many young people cannot attend this level due to the lack of economic conditions. In 2017 there were 8,286,663 enrollments in superior education in Brazil, 6,241,307 being in the private system and 2,045,356 being in the public system (ANUÁRIO BRASILEIRO DA EDUCAÇÃO BÁSICA, 2019, p.100).

The dimension from the point of view of cognitive democracy was not deeply analyzed by Darcy Ribeiro. This dimension is, arguably, even more serious and important than the others. Current assessment rates, both internal and external, are showing poor school performance. Although the student attends school, the indicators show that he does not have significant learning, and this is explained by several different factors. The student is somehow excluded by the school itself. Reasons to cause student exclusion include: aseptic content, inadequate methodologies, unmotivated teachers and run-down schools. How this situation can be overcome is, in our view and also in the opinion of many intellectuals, philosophers and educators, the most serious of all: the need of a profound paradigmatic reform on education and not just pragmatic and / or operational? There is no use in equipping the school, expanding the compulsory school, providing health care and food, and even other compensatory measures, if we cannot achieve adequate democratization of knowledge and a reform in the way of thinking<sup>11</sup>.

Another category of analysis, not present in Darcy Ribeiro's texts, is the issue of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (TDCIs). There are hypotheses analyzing the issue of *edukommunication* and even cyber-auto-citizenship. The democratization of technologies is viewed as one way to awaken and to promote other levels of citizenship.

In a recent past, technologies were instruments used for reading and distributing media content; though today they are used for the sake of research, production, creation and socialization of content, social practices and subjectivation processes, in other words, it enables another articulation of languages (MARQUES, 2006). This revolution is comparable to the great inventions of human history. This new reality is demanding more care and investment, as many pedagogues and educators point out. Antonio Nóvoa (2017), to name only one person, is emphatic when referring to the importance of digital revolution, knowledge and connectivity in the 21st century. When asked what the biggest challenge of today's education is, he does not hesitate to say: it is the digital revolution. We live in a techno-computer-based society, a mix of technology, computers and electronics.

We have too much information, which does not translate into knowledge. One has to be able to access and process such information. The facts, the data, the news, are made available in the form of physical or online publications. In the past the information was precarious: today, there is an excess of it and you need to know how to select and how to process it. In the meantime, we have to be precautious about it and always question whether a fact is *fake news* or even about the veracity of photographs, which may be false. To be aware, one must know how to process this information. According to Valente (2005, p. 24), "what is known, is that the information comes from this knowledge, but never from knowledge itself". Hijacking information and transforming it into knowledge, using different methodologies, is one of the current challenges of education.

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<sup>11</sup> The theme of "reform on the way of thinking" is recurrent in many of Edgar Morin's works, because, according to him, the reform of minds is a prerequisite for complex thinking and, therefore, a *sine qua non* for change. Complex thinking constitutes the theoretical basis for a reform of thought or mentality, which is indispensable for the reform of knowledge, the reform of the educational system, and the reform of institutions. The reforms are interdependent; they cannot walk apart and therefore they feed once and again on each other in a recursive motion (MORIN, 2000). The importance and necessity of reforms for the metamorphosis of man and humanity is also a central theme of *The Way to the Future of Humanity* (MORIN, 2013)

Sensitive to this new scenario, Edgar Morin narrates in the book *Um ano Sísifo (A Sisyphean Year)*, 2012, p. 311), a dialogue over Hindu wisdom he found in a magazine, and which refers to dietary fasting and mind fasting. He writes about contemporary times: “we feed on an excess of information, impressions, a thousand useless things, hence the need for mental fasting through meditation.” We need to undergo a detoxification process. Today, one of the ways to know is to protect yourself from so much information, as it can also produce blindness and ignorance.

TDCI mediation<sup>12</sup> is something that deserves a large debate at the present stage of education. It turns out that the use and availability of TDCIs shows another form of exclusion which is being produced: digital exclusion. The creation of official government programs such as the National Educational Technology Program (PROINFO) in 1997 and the Broadband in Schools Program in 2008 is one of the concerns of national curriculum guidelines. They reach a small number of students and become available to schools as a tool for learning purposes for the labor market, rather than for promoting meaningful learning.

One of the virtualities of the Distance Education modality should be the democratization of teaching, that is: distance learning is an increasingly accessible and viable form of education for those interested in professional qualification, as it allows a flexible schedule, place and rhythms of learning. It gives more people access to education at different levels. It is also the State's responsibility to propose public policies in order to democratize the access to TDCIs on equal terms. This democratization, however, also gives rise to major challenges, for the exclusion and the digital barrier they generate by producing thousands of digital illiterates.

## Final considerations

To understand the recent History of Education in Brazil, the life and work of the educator Darcy Ribeiro becomes imperative. We conclude that, as a writer and an anthropologist, Ribeiro published significant works for the perception and analysis of Brazil's civilizing process. As an educator, he had a prominent role as manager and creator of innovative projects and Universities, both in Brazil and abroad; and, in political engagement, he had the opportunity to influence the elaboration and the approval of the last and most complete Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9.394 / 96).

Clearly, in the first two decades of the 21st century, we have a more complex reality with new challenges, such as TDCI and the distance learning modality of education. The question of democratization of education is still undoubtedly a goal to be met regarding the successful access, permanence and success at all levels of education, as well as the issue of school exclusion, among other factors, by social barriers and by those that the own school institutes. It is still appropriate to note what Darcy Ribeiro wrote about the need for both elementary and superior education: “Only one another, properly combined, enable the people to become part of modern civilization” (1984, p. 77).

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<sup>14</sup>In his last phase as an educator and education manager, although the presence of the virtual and digital world was not so relevant, insightfully, Darcy Ribeiro was concerned about the presence of new technologies in education. It is also his the open university project in Brazil, in partnership with Pedro Demo, in which “[...] intended to make full use of new information and communication technologies to open the doors of superior education” (GOMES, 2005, p. 89).

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