



Establishment of Special Education in Brazil – through time, places and people¹

A constituição do campo da Educação Especial no Brasil: entre tempos, lugares e pessoas

La constitución del campo de la Educación Especial en Brasil: entre tiempos, lugares y personas

Organized by

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Introduction

The first actions of what will be known later as "Special Education" occur as isolated initiatives executed by medical doctors, beginning in the 18th Century. Special Education historians usually consider Jean-Luc Gaspard Itard, a French psychiatrist, as the pioneer in the field, after he accepted the challenge to try to educate Victor, a wild boy found in the forest of Aveyron, France. The notes about the intervention were preserved, and it demonstrates the attempts to educate the child. In Brazil, it is customary to consider that the segment of Special Education started its journey during the Brazilian Empire days, with the creation of Instituto Nacional dos Surdos Mudos (National Institute for the Deaf-Mute), nowadays Instituto Nacional de Educação dos Surdos-INES (National Institute for the Education of the Deaf) and Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos (Imperial Institute for Blind Boys), denominated since

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the beginning of the Republic as Instituto Benjamim Constant, responsible for educating blind individuals. However, the history of Special Education in Brazil needs to be better explored.

The idea for this dossier emerged due to the creation of a network of researchers organized with the goal of mapping people, initiatives, institutions and actions related to Special Education, as established in different regions of Brazil. The constitution of the 'Portal Pioneiros da Educação Especial no Brasil' is in its final stages, financed by CNPQ.

Thus, this dossier aims to contribute so that researchers and any person interested in Special Education can have access to the path taken in the construction of this little known area in the history of Brazilian education, which can help to clarify theoretical positions and contemporary practices.

Helena Antipoff's period in Russia during the 1917 Revolution is the background for Natalia Masolikova and Marina Sorokina arguments – both are researchers for the Alexander Solzenitcyn Centre for Studies of Russia Abroad – in the dossier's first paper. The authors explore Antipoff's 6 years stay in Russia (1917-1924), when she dedicated herself to the psychological issues of the time in that country – including the study of children in conditions of devastation, hunger and orphanhood; the testing of enhancement/reduction of child intelligence in conditions of social cataclysm and war; and comparison of intellectual abilities of children of different social groups.

Although she practiced psychology during this period, the authors found evidence in Helena Antipoff's letters that it was a period of great frustration for her in the Soviet social and professional realms. Nevertheless, it was a period to learn methods and techniques, a knowledge that she applied in Brazil, later on.

The second paper presents contributions from a French child psychiatrist whose work – although mainly unknown – is fundamental to understand the abnormality concept that prevailed during the first half of the 20th Century. Théodore Simon is remembered for the development of intelligence tests together with Alfred Binet, but he also devised other important works. Carolina Bandeira de Melo e Laurent Gutierrez remember that Simon was considered one of the best French specialists in education of children considered "delayed" during the 1920's. In 1929, Simon came to Brazil, invited by Minas Gerais' government. Even though the education of "normal children" was the main subject addressed by Théodore Simon in his classes and lectures in Belo Horizonte, he also presented tools originally conceived to establish a mental deficiency diagnostic (the term that was used at the time). The connection between psychometrics and Special Education, established at that time, is still in use today, as intelligence tests were and continue to be used to diagnostic this disability. In Belo Horizonte, Simon worked with Helena Antipoff, that he had first met in Paris in 1911. Therefore, the paper discusses one of the basis on which the segment of Special Education is being constituted in Brazil: the definition of its target audience, diagnostic-related.

Authored by Fernando Gouvêa and Adriana A. P. Borges, the third paper of this dossier is about the relationship between two important Brazilian intellectuals: Anísio Teixeira and Helena Antipoff. Both fought for equal access to school, not only for enrolment but for a truly democratic school that would welcome individual differences. As mind and action intellectuals, the duo acted in the political and institutional areas, while developing numerous researches. A number of their papers on common themes were collated, in addition to researches using sources as correspondence between the intellectuals and correspondence mediated by Helena Dias Carneiro, a contributor do Antipoff. The analysis undertaken in this paper allowed to recognize

the importance of these intellectuals to the educational segment, with emphasis in Rural Education and Special Education.

The next paper discusses the interaction of ideas on Special Education disseminated in Brazil with the foreign scientific production. Mônica C. M. Kassar and Justino Magalhães use as reference Thiago Würth's participation in the I Congresso Internacional da Criança Deficiente (1st International Congress for Infant Disability), that occurred in 1939 in the city of Geneva, Switzerland. The authors explore the Congress official records and two accounts produced by the Brazilian representative, being the first one found in the Vrije Universiteit's library, in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and the others in Helena Antipoff's private library, in the city of Ibirité, Minas Gerais, Brazil. It is interesting to note how, at the beginning of the 20th Century, researchers of different nationalities carried out an exchange of ideas about disabilities, based on the standard of that time. According to the authors, the abnormal children education constituted a field of attention in the segment of public education.

Special Education, in a more modern perspective, is discussed based on an absolutely fundamental moment: the creation of CENESP (Centro Nacional de Educação Especial), which centralized all federal action regarding Special Education. The goal of this paper was to present and discuss Sarah Couto Cesar's role, CENESP first general director, and that of Olívia da Silva Pereira, an assistant to the agency, in the establishment of Special Education in Brazil. For that, the authors used a Oral History methodology, based on interviews with Sarah Couto César herself (deceased in 2021, due to COVID-19), Rosana Glat and Ilza Maria Ferreira Pinto. According to the authors, Márcia Denise Pletsch, Getsemane de Freitas Batista e Leila Lopes de Avila, the pioneer role of these two figures of Special Education in Brazil included creation of human resources, participation in research projects, elaboration of papers, public governance related to Special Education, institutional projects and development of political guidelines.

The education of blind individuals in Brazil is the subject of the dossier's 6th paper. Dorina de Gouvêa Nowill activism is recognized in this paper written by Fernanda Luísa de Miranda Cardoso and Silvia Alicia Martínez. After losing her sight at 17 years old, Dorina dedicated herself to educate blind people, and not only in the classroom. In the United States, Dorina learned about the social integration of a blind person, which, according to the authors, influenced her thought process and her professional practice orientation. The importance of her name in the history of Special Education in Brazil is irrefutable. The paper sheds light on the reason for her central role. She acted in different work fronts, based on her lived experience as a blind woman.

The last paper, by Celi Corrêa Neres, Janaina de Jesus Fernandes Belato and Nesdete Mesquita Corrêa, discusses the establishment of Special Education care and services in Mato Grosso do Sul (MS). Created in 1977, the state shows a recent history that makes us wonder about how its institutions were organized for that purpose. Based on the statements of two pioneer Special Education teachers from the state's Educational Department (1980-1987), the authors pointed out that Special Education care in that state was channeled through specialized institutions, some of it established even before the separation from the state of Mato Grosso (MT) and creation of Mato Grosso do Sul, welfarist in its nature and pending strongly to prepare individuals for the workforce. The services were constituted under the influence of medical doctors and psychologists, as well as educators who defended the agenda of people with disabilities.

We highlight in this dossier the role of the dissemination of Special Education knowledge, which allowed the establishment of such a segment in Brazil. But, at the same time that they were influenced by theoretical conceptions originated in the North Hemisphere, the characters herein presented built unique ways to apply that knowledge. This way, the appropriation converted itself in transformation, not limited to big urban centers, but also to suburbs, creating a network in this continental country that transcended time and places.

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