



**1st International Congress for the Education of Exceptional Children:
Brazil in the land of Pestalozzi¹**

I Congresso Internacional de Pedagogia dos deficientes:
o Brasil na terra de Pestalozzi

I Congreso Internacional del Niño Deficiente:
Brasil en la tierra de Pestalozzi

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Abstract

In the study of the history of educational assistance directed to children with disabilities, it is possible to identify the existence of a constant dialogue between ideas disseminated in Brazil and foreign scientific production. With attention to the context of academic exchanges, the purposes of this article are: to raise awareness of the 1st International Congress for the Education of Exceptional Children, held in 1939, in Geneva; to analyze the main themes and medical, hygienists, psychologic, pedagogical perspectives of the presented PhD dissertations; to focus the participation of the Brazilian representative Thiago Würth, on the event; and identify scientific arguments present. For the development of this work, it was sought as sources the official proceedings of the Congress and two reports prepared by the Brazilian representative. In the analysis of this material, it was possible to identify arguments around the ideas of abnormality, delinquency, inadequacy, which are related to pedagogical propositions prescribed in that period.

Keywords: Abnormal childhood. Maladjustment. Special education. Thiago Würth.

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Resumo

No estudo da história do atendimento educacional direcionado à criança com deficiência, é possível identificar a existência de interlocução constante entre ideias disseminadas no Brasil e a produção científica estrangeira. Com atenção ao contexto de trocas acadêmicas, os propósitos deste artigo são: dar a conhecer a realização do I Congresso Internacional da Criança Deficiente, realizado em 1939, em Genebra; analisar os principais temas e as principais perspectivas médicas, higienistas, psicológicas, pedagógicas presentes nas comunicações e nas teses apresentadas; focalizar no evento a participação de Thiago Würth, representante brasileiro; e identificar argumentos científicos expostos. Para o desenvolvimento deste trabalho, buscou-se como fontes as atas oficiais do Congresso e dois relatos elaborados pelo representante brasileiro. Na análise do material, foi possível identificar argumentos em torno das ideias de anormalidade, delinquência, inadaptação, que se relacionam a proposições pedagógicas prescritas no período.

Palavras-chave: Infância anormal. Inadaptação. Educação Especial. Thiago Würth.

Resumen

En el estudio de la historia de la asistencia educativa dirigida a niños con discapacidad, es posible identificar la existencia de un diálogo constante entre las ideas difundidas en Brasil y la producción científica extranjera. Con atención al contexto de los intercambios académicos, los propósitos de este artículo son: dar a conocer el I Congreso Internacional del Niño Deficiente, realizado en 1939, en Ginebra; enfocar la participación del representante brasileño Thiago Würth, en el evento; identificar y analizar los argumentos científicos presentes, los temas abordados y las perspectivas médicas, higienistas, psicológicas y pedagógicas que contenían las tesis en las actas del evento. Para el desarrollo de este trabajo, buscamos como fuentes las actas oficiales del Congreso y dos informes elaborados por el representante brasileño. En el análisis de este material, fue posible identificar argumentos en torno a las ideas de anormalidad, delincuencia, inadecuación, que se relacionan con proposiciones pedagógicas prescritas en ese período.

Palabras-clave: Niños anormales. Inadaptación. Educación especial. Thiago Würth.

Approaches to the topic

The principles of educational care for disabled children² can be identified in the 17th century³, when people with some organic alterations (deaf and blind) or considered, at that time, as “abnormal” became the focus of educational activities. As an example, there are different cases: in the 17th century, the elaboration of the book, in 1620, *Reduction of the Letters of the Alphabet and Method of Teaching Deaf-Mutes to Speak*, written by the Spanish priest Juan Pablo Bonet, considered the first manual on the education of the deaf (ROCHA, 2008; GODOI, 2011). The dedication of Jacob Rodrigues Pereira, considered by Salgueiro (2010) the first educator of the deaf, with the registration of his actions in 1745 at the *Académie de La Rochelle*, France; the work of the abbot Charles-Michel de l’Épée for the creation of the Institute for the Deaf-Mutes in Paris (1760); Jean Marc Gaspard Itard’s efforts to teach a child (named Victor) found in the French woods in 1798; and the formation of the first French school for the blind (1785) with Valentin Haüy. In the 19th century, we have the expansion of initiatives in different countries: in the Netherlands, the first institutions for “abnormal” children date back to 1835; in Switzerland from 1841 and, in Germany, from 1863. In Sweden, the first special classes date from 1866 (CARLOS, 1948). We draw attention to the difference between the first registered attempts at *educational attention* or *instruction*, such as those mentioned here, and the existence of a “welcome place” for this population, which is earlier.

As for the education of these children in Brazil, authors such as Jannuzzi (1985, 2004), Bueno (2004), Rafante and Lopes (2013) show that this occurred in the development of schooling in the country, even if largely separated from the regular school, especially for children considered most affected by disability.

It is known that public education was restricted in Brazil until the mid-twentieth century, as a large portion of the population lived in rural regions and the organization of the economy did not require a schooled workforce (RIBEIRO, 1979; JANNUZZI, 1985, 2004). The growth in the number of public schools occurred with the enrollment of the Brazilian population living in urban centers or in close proximity. School care for children with disabilities in the country took place in this context, amidst the perception of the school as an essential instrument to guarantee “national reconstruction”, in the formation of republican Brazil (MANIFESTO..., 1932) and the dissemination of the eugenics/hygienist vision with the school medical services (MONARCHA, 2007), fostered, among others, by the Brazilian Archives of Mental Hygiene and the mental hygiene leagues from different regions of the country, such as the *Liga Paulista de Higiene Mental* [League of Mental Hygiene from São Paulo] (SERRA; SCHUCMAN, 2012) and the *Liga de Higiene Mental de Pernambuco* [League of Mental Hygiene from Pernambuco] (PROF. ULYSSES PERNAMBUCANO, 1944).

Most European countries universalized compulsory education in the previous period (between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th) and students who did not present the expected performance became the focus of research, such as those of Alfred Binet (1857-1911) and Theodore Simon (1872-1961), who began their work with the French government to measure the intelligence of children enrolled in their schools (ROTA JUNIOR, 2016) and published in 1905 a metric scale to measure intelligence, according to age (mental age). The purpose was to select candidates for special classes (MICHELET; WOODILL, 1993).

² Usually, we adopt the names “children with disabilities” or “people with disabilities”, following the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), approved in 2006. However, in this paper, we use the terminologies originally used in their respective contexts and historical moments.

³ There are references to the beginning of education for the deaf in the 16th century, with the experience of the Spanish Benedictine monk Pedro Ponce de León (LACERDA, 1998; GODOI, 2011).

To Binet and Simon, the test set was adjusted to include the range of intellectual manifestations, from the lowest and most elementary (BINET; SIMON, 1905 *apud* ROTA JÚNIOR, 2016).

In Brazil, Clemente Quaglio (1872-1948) conducted the application of the scale in the capital of São Paulo and later published *A solução do problema pedagógico social da educação da infância anormal de inteligência no Brasil* [The solution of the social pedagogical problem of the education of abnormal childhood intelligence in Brazil], in 1913 (MONARCHA, 2007), also with the objective of separating students considered able to attend school in regular classrooms from those “not able”, who should be sent to special classes. This work merited observation by Claparède (1924, p. 84): *Au Brésil la pédologie est peu représentée; à S. Paulo, Quaglio, auteur d'un Compendio de pedologia (1911) travaille à son développement*⁴. Claparède (1924) also adds that, in 1897, Medeiros and Albuquerque created a laboratory for experimental psychology in Rio de Janeiro, but it did not survive the harsh criticism.

The classification of people, in this case – students –, is configured within the perspective of construction of scientific knowledge. Michelet and Woodill (1993) register several actions, since the 18th century, from a nosological perspective.

With the advancement of Scientific Pedagogy, the look of identification/diagnosis for rationalization and adequacy of the organization of classrooms takes shape and for this the involvement of doctors and psychologists was essential, as in the implementation of the laboratory of Experimental Pedagogy in São Paulo, by the Italian doctor Ugo Pizzoli (1863-1934). Pizzoli, says Centofanti (2002) citing Ortensi (1901) as a source, was one of the references in the constitution of Italian Scientific Pedagogy in the 19th century, along with Antonio Marro and Costantino Melzi.

Marro would have focused on the laws of human development, Melzi would move towards the institutionalization of the first laboratory of scientific anthropology in that country, in Arona, in 1897. Ugo Pizzoli, in Crevalcore, created the first laboratory of Experimental Pedagogy, in 1899 (CENTOFANTI, 2002, p. 73, our translation).

Pizzoli arrived in Brazil in 1914 and his guidelines were published in a São Paulo education magazine at the time, circulated among teachers. Below, the excerpt guides teachers on the identification of “abnormal” students:

The external aspect (general attitude, physiognomy, clothing, spontaneous posture) characterizes and reveals the child's psychological condition [...]. The teacher's first care will be to distinguish the average normal intelligent type from the weak-minded type (imbecility, deficiencies due to developmental arrests, delays, etc.) (PIZZOLI, 1914, p. 2, our translation).

Passages through the history of Brazilian education such as these give the indication of constant dialogue between ideas disseminated in Brazil and foreign scientific production, in order to think *if* and *how* such ideas are related to Brazilian actions of educational assistance to children with disabilities; that child considered at the time as “abnormal”.

Interlocution, especially with Europe, for decision-making in Brazil, was identified in evident situations in the Brazilian Imperial Period. Reily *et al.* (2018) narrate:

⁴ In Brazil, pedology is poorly represented; in São Paulo, Quaglio, author of a Compendium of pedology (1911), works towards its development (our translation).

In its modernizing process, the Brazilian government turned its gaze to Paris, where there was the model of the Salpêtrière Hospital (for women) and the Bicêtre Hospital for men. In the texts of Brazilian doctors, these spaces are referred to as inspiration for the treatment of the insane in Brazil. Even the French Law for the insane (12/18/1839) is used in the choice of place and in the organization of institutional services, not only for the insane, but also in the case of the *Asilo dos Inválidos da Pátria* [Asylum for the Invalids of the Fatherland] (REILY *et al.*, 2018, p. 81, our translation).

Other passages register visits by Brazilian professionals to foreign institutions and/or the influence of discussions in Europe and the United States for pedagogical organization in Brazil, as in the case of deaf education (LACERDA, 1998).

Among the *loci* of dialogue regarding the education of children with disabilities, we identified the realization in 1939 of the *1st International Congress for the Education of Exceptional Children*, an event in which a Brazilian representative participated, with the indication of the Brazilian education minister at the time, Gustavo Capanema.

With attention to the context of academic dialogue, the purposes of this paper are to make the realization of this event known, to focus on the participation of Thiago Würth, Brazilian representative, in the Congress, and to identify the presence of scientific arguments.

Restoration of a traveled path

This study composes an investigation that intends to understand and analyze the relationships between foreign sources and the constitution of educational actions and legislation for “abnormal” children in Brazil and Portugal. For the development of this text, we focus our attention on the reports of the *1st International Congress for the Education of Exceptional Children*. We located the official proceedings of the Congress and two reports prepared in Portuguese by the Brazilian representative. That first document is in the library of the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam⁵ and the ones prepared in Portuguese in the private library of Helena Antipoff (1892-1974)⁶, at Fazenda do Rosário, in Ibirité – Minas Gerais, Brazil.

The materials found helped us to delimit the investigated period, since, quite often, the periods defined for a historical investigation are working hypotheses, which may or may not remain, in the face of the data to be known (SAVIANI, 2007). In this way, the time frame was formed around the period when the Congress was held – the period immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War. The official proceedings date from 1940 on the event that took place in 1939 and, regarding the dates of publication of the reports in Portuguese, in the first one this record was not located and the second dates from 1944. They are different texts about the same time and place.

For the analysis of documentary sources, we conceive the “discourse” as “the language in its concrete and living integrity” (BAKHTIN, 1988, p. 157). The different texts register discourses and these, in turn, are like transmission currents from the history of society to the history of language (BAKHTIN, 1992). From this perspective, we understand that when a text, such as that by Ugo Pizzoli, is translated and published in 1914, in a magazine circulated among public education teachers in the state of São Paulo (Brazil), at the same time

⁵ We would like to express our gratitude to the library of the *Vrije Universiteit* in Amsterdam, which kindly sent us the material to carry out the research work in Lisbon. We would also like to thank Mr. Gaspar Matos, an employee of the library of the Institute of Education and of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Lisbon, who made access to this material possible.

⁶ On Helena Antipoff’s path in Brazil, see Campos (2003).

it brings the *gaze* of a time about a certain population (in this case – the “abnormal” child) and disseminates this *gaze*, induces and justifies a pedagogical action to that same population.

The sources

The first document located is a concise report, authored by Würth, without indication of the printing date, with the title “In the land of Pestalozzi - 1st International Congress of Pedagogy of the Disabled in Geneva” (WÜRTH, n.d.), which, as mentioned, is in Helena Antipoff’s personal library.

The second document, dating from 1940, is the complete set of texts (reports) presented at the *1st International Congress for the Education of Exceptional Children (curative education)*. The proceedings, with texts in German, French or English, bring records of the participating researchers in the event mentioned in the Würth’s (n.d.) print, which took place in Switzerland in 1939, under the organization of Heinrich Hanselmann and Therese Simon.

The third is called *A organização da assistência aos deficientes em vários países* [The organization of assistance to the disabled in several countries], also located in Helena Antipoff’s personal library, in Ibitité, Minas Gerais, Brazil. This is yet another report prepared by Würth, with a summary of reports from other participants, which would be the second and third parts of the proceedings. It dates from 1944 and was printed by *Livraria do Globo* (Porto Alegre and Santa Maria).



Figure 1: First document

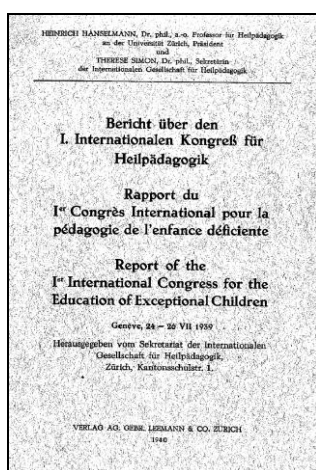


Figure 2: Second document

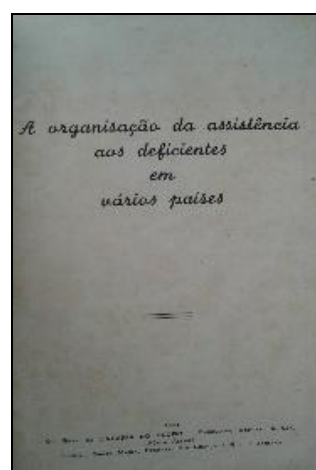


Figure 3: Third document

Woven threads from a trip: an association, a Congress

Between the middle of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, an education proposal was constituted as a field of study. This is the *Therapeutic Pedagogy* or *Curative Pedagogy*. In 1861, Jan-Daniel Georgens (1823-1886) and Heinrich Marianus Deinhardt (1821-1880) published a work, in two volumes, called *Die Heilpädagogik. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Idiotie und der Idiotenanstalten*⁷ (GEORGENS; DEINHARDT, 1861a; 1861b), which marked the beginning of the German therapeutic/curative pedagogy and the consolidation of the term *Heilpädagogik* – Therapeutic Pedagogy or Curative Pedagogy (MOREU, 2009).

⁷ “The curative/therapeutic education. With special attention to idiocy and institutions for idiots” (our translation).

Inspired by Georgens and Deinhardt's work, Theodor Heller⁸ built his work and published, in 1904, *Grundriss der Heilpädagogik*⁹, in which he offers the foundations of Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy and places it between Education and Psychiatry. The process of consolidating this new area of knowledge took place with the holding of Congresses in Germany between 1922 and 1930 (MOREU, 2009).

In 1937, Heller's work and commitment were fundamental for the formation of an association called, as Würth (n.d.) translated from French, International Association for the Education of Exceptional Children¹⁰. Theodor Heller, who died in 1938, was named honorary president of the association and remembered in the opening speech of the Congress by Hanselmann (HANSELMANN; SIMON, 1940). The association was formed by researchers from the field of study that was being constructed as "therapeutic/curative pedagogy" and Heller became recognized as the "father of modern therapeutic pedagogy" (HANSELMANN; SIMON, 1940).

The organization of an international association indicates that works from the perspective of Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy were not limited to Germany, but went beyond the limits of that country. In the translations into Spanish of the 1929 manuscript "*Los problemaes fundamentales de la defectología contemporânea*" [The fundamental problems of contemporary defectology] by Vygotsky (VYGOTSKY, 1995, 1997), there are references to works presented at the first German Congress, indicating the dialogue between scholars at the beginning of the 20th century.

Moreu (2009) registers the university institutionalization of the field when Hanselmann arrived at the first Chair of Therapeutic Pedagogy at the University of Zurich, in 1931.

Würth (n.d.) informs that the society organized in 1937 maintained specialization courses, research institutes, published and/or sponsored the publication of bulletins and studies and began to organize international Congresses. The first took place in 1939, in Geneva, and the second would take place in the Netherlands, in 1941. With the outbreak of World War II, the second meeting was only held from July 18 to 22, 1949, in Amsterdam (2^e CONGRÈS...). It is noticed that the War interrupted transversalization trajectories, around the notion of Special Education, as a challenge to interdisciplinarity.

The focus of this paper is precisely the first event and the participation of the Brazilian representative Thiago Würth.

The Congress – Of Maladjustment

The 1st International Congress for the Education of Exceptional Children (HANSELMANN; SIMON, 1940) took place in Geneva, from 24 to 26 July 1939. Its proceedings document the participation of around 300 participants from 32 countries: Germany, with 13 participants; Belgium with 8; Brazil with 1; Canada: 1; China: 1; Cuba: 2; Denmark: 3; Egypt: 2; Spain: 1; United States: 7, Finland: 2; France: 2; Netherlands: 26; Hungary: 12; Iran: 2; Iceland: 1; Italy: 1; Yugoslavia: 1; Latvia: 1; Lithuania: 3; Luxembourg: 5; Norway: 1; Palestine: 1; Poland: 1; Portugal: 2; United Kingdom: 2; Romania: 2; Santo Domingo: 1; Sweden: 19; Switzerland: 179; Turkey: 1 and Uruguay: 1.

⁸ Westphal *et al.* (2013) clarify that Theodor Heller first described a severe regression of adaptive function in children with normal development in the publication *Über Dementia Infantilis*, in 1907.

⁹ "Draft of a Therapeutic/Curative Pedagogy" (our translation)

¹⁰ Our translation for *Internationalen Gesellschaft für Heilpädagogik/International/Société Internationale pour la pédagogie de l'enfance déficiente* (HANSELMANN; SIMON, 1940).

Among the participants, the presence of highly regarded researchers such as Édouard Claparède stands out. Würth especially registers the presences of Jean Piaget, Bovet, Descoerdres, Simon (Switzerland), Bailey Creak (England), Victor Fontes and Oliveira Guimarães from Portugal, E. Verdesio (Uruguay).

The main purpose of the Congress would be “the articulation of the International Society for the Pedagogy of the Disabled with representatives of Therapeutic Pedagogy” and the institutes of “Assistance to the Exceptional Child” for a joint study of the problems and exchange of observations (WÜRTH, n.d., p. 1).

Through the records of the proceedings, some participants were invited to present their work, so it is possible to find descriptions about specialized education in different countries and, also, academic texts with research reports, such as the work of Jean Piaget *L'importance de la psychologie expérimentale pour la détermination des enfants déficients* [The importance of experimental psychology for the determination of disabled children].

At the opening conference, Edouard Claparède gave a brief summary of the evolution of therapeutic/curative pedagogy. Since the last quarter of the 19th century, the psychopedagogy of the “abnormal” had become a science based on anatomopathology, taking the first steps in electroencephalography, combining neurology, biology and psychology. From the notion that heredity was fatal, it had evolved to take heredity as conditional and be able to solve problems. To solve specific cases, it became necessary to know general psychology; in turn, knowledge of cases makes general psychology and knowledge of mental pathology advance. In his words:

La tâche qui nous incombe est donc double: d'une part, nous devons tirer parti, pour l'étude des cas qui nous sont confiés, des données acquises de la psychologie; d'autre part, l'étude de ces cas devra à son tour nous servir à perfectionner – il vaudrait mieux dire à bâtir – la science psychologique et la pathologie mentale (CLAPARÈDE, 1940, p. 16)¹¹.

In this domain of knowledge, Claparède understood that it was inevitable to probe, building pedagogical science and mental pathology, using psychopathology in the examination of disability using tests. Examination of “abnormal” students through tests depends on general psychology. In this sense, the tests proved to be fundamental, because by identifying and providing the scores, they allowed the organization of the intervention, as an experience and experimentation.

Even with the notion of hereditary fatality being relativized, as can be seen in the work of Professor Szondi, from the University of Budapest, a participant in the 1939 Congress, which raises questions about the “scientific certainty” of the role of heredity in the definition of human inferiority, it is possible to identify evident marks of hygienist ideas, with the concern for mental hygiene (TRAMER, 1940) or in the prophylaxis of “nervous and mental illnesses” by specialized pedagogy (WENRSTEDT, 1940), references to “children in moral and social danger” and to “juvenile criminality” (SIEVERTS, 1940).

Vasconcelos, in an article written in 1922 about the hygienist Congresses of 1921 and 1922, clarifies that Eugenics was conceived by Galton and, from England, the movement spread to different countries. “In France, a ‘French Eugenics Society’ was founded in 1912, in

¹¹ “The task incumbent on us is therefore twofold: on the one hand, we must take advantage, for the study of the cases entrusted to us, of the data acquired from psychology; on the other hand, the study of these cases should, in turn, serve to improve – it would be better to say to build – psychological science and mental pathology” (our translation).

1913 an ‘Italian Committee for Eugenics Studies’, in Denmark in 1913 a ‘Eugenics Section’ in the Danish Anthropological Committee, in Argentina in 1916, and, in Brazil, in 1918, the ‘Societies of Eugenics’” (VASCONCELOS, 2006, p. 112).

According to Vasconcelos (2006, p. 112, our translation), “Galton defined Eugenics as the study of influences accessible to social action that can correct or improve the racial qualities of future generations”.

Eugenics is based on basic principles that: a) heredity plays a much more considerable role than was suspected in the development of the individual and in the evolution of a race, being superior to the influence exerted by the environment; b) the human race has not improved since historical times; c) it is possible to monitor and direct human evolution and facilitate its improvement through intelligent selection and elimination methods and processes, preventing the reproduction of the perverts and favoring that of the best. (VASCONCELOS, 2006, p. 113, our translation).

This perspective is evident in the approach adopted by participants in the 1939 Congress, such as Professor Wernstedt from Sweden, as we have already mentioned, when, in a work on the prophylaxis of nervous and mental diseases by specialized pedagogy for the disabled, he presents as main resources: sterilization, the propagation of mental hygiene, the change of environment for individuals in danger and the fight against social ills (WURTH, n.d.).

Other concepts of Biology are merged with the ideas of genetic improvement, such as the notion of adaptation – maladjustment. The notion of unadapted, frequent since the end of the 18th century, presupposes a normality that corresponds to the balance between the natural and the psychological parts of individuals. Maladjustment also corresponds to disharmony between individuals and the environment. For modern society, maladjustment has been taken as what prevents an individual from integrating and being recognized as valid (DURKHEIM, 2004). Non-integration prevents the individuals from participating in the evolution of society with obvious conditioning for themselves and alienation on the part of others. As in all living beings, in humans, the primary relationship of the functional, vital circle is between the environment that acts by the receptor system and the organism that reacts. In humans, reception and action arise mediated by intention and language. Intelligence and personality participate and reflect this interaction. Mental development coordinates interaction. In a simplified sense, personality is defined by the “set of relationships that unite the environment, and the environment itself is constituted by these relationships” (MAISTRE, 1978, p. 261).

Growth is seen as a complex process of imbalance and harmonization that “met l’organisme dans un état d’équilibre instable”¹² (CLAPARÈDE, 1951, p. 114), in which organic disturbances, more or less serious, can arise. Indeed, “les divers organes sont solidaires; l’évolution de l’un détermine ou régularise l’évolution d’un autre”¹³ (CLAPARÈDE, 1951, p. 114) so that an organ anomaly influences development in an abnormal way. Anomalies are often accompanied by balance-disintegrating lesions in evolution. Growth disorders may concern motor skills and the receptor system, intelligence, or character. Once the disturbance has been characterized, at the qualitative level, it becomes necessary from a scientific point of view and with the aim of improvement, to determine the degree of dysfunction “la question se pose de savoir de combien d’années l’enfant est arriéré,

¹² “puts the organism in an unstable state of equilibrium” (our translation).

¹³ “the various organs are united; the evolution of one determines or regularizes the evolution of another” (our translation).

C' est pour établir ce diagnostic que Sanctis, Binet et d'autres ont édifié des tests d'intelligence par niveaux d'âge"¹⁴ (CLAPARÈDE, 1924, p. 230).

Another perspective directed at the “abnormal” – also present in the 1939 Congress – is the belief in educational work, in the action of the environment on the individual, which lays on the origins of special education. In the preface to *Mémoire sur les premiers développements de Victor de l'Aveyron* [Memory on the first developments of Victor de l'Aveyron], which he welcomed and followed between 1801 and 1806, Jean Itard made it clear that the human does not emerge directly from nature:

Jeté sur ce globe sans forces physiques et sans idées innées, hors d'état d'obéir par lui-même aux lois constitutionnelles de son organisation, qui l'appellent au premier rang du système des êtres, l'homme ne peut trouver qu'au sein de la société la place éminente qui lui fut marquée dans la nature, et serait, sans la civilisation, un des plus faibles et des moins intelligents des animaux [...] Dans la horde sauvage la plus vagabonde comme dans la nation d'Europe la plus civilisée, l'homme n'est que ce qu'on le fait être; nécessairement élevé par ses semblables, il en a contracté les habitudes et les besoins; ses idées ne sont plus à lui; il a joui de la plus belle prérogative de son espèce, la susceptibilité de développer son entendement par la force de l'imitation et l'influence de la société.¹⁵ (ITARD, 2002, p. 8).

Doctor Jean Itard thus emphasized the role of social interaction in human development through education. Without social stimulation, Victor d'Aveyron remained in a primal state of survival, unable to recognize objects that were not part of the habitat in which he grew up.

Edouard Séguin, also a doctor and who lived with Jean Itard, structured a system of education for mental maladjustment, stimulating the development of intelligence and personality within the scope of exchanges between the organism and the physical and social environment, between the self and the world that surrounds him (MAISTRE, 1978). In 1840 he founded a school in Paris for individuals with mental disorders, and in 1848 he took up residence in the United States of America. Séguin distinguished between the central nervous system and the peripheral nervous system; he conceived an exercise and training program designed to make the senses work – sensory education.

These perspectives – maladjustment, hygienism, education – coexist with and are related to the measurement instrument created by Alfred Binet, which combines the level of education with the level of cognition, through the association of ideas and abstraction, and which allowed us to establish the Metric Scale of Intelligence. This Scale underwent successive formulations, having become generalized as Intellectual Quotient. Its application “allowed the discovery and identification of mentally handicapped children and the creation, in 1909, of the Improvement Classes” (MAISTRE, 1978, p. 269, our translation). In the following decades, the Intellectual Quotient was a way widely used throughout Europe and

¹⁴ “the question arises of how many years the child is late; to establish this diagnosis that Sanctis, Binet and others constructed intelligence tests by age group” (our translation).

¹⁵ “Thrown onto this globe without physical strength and without innate ideas, incapable of obeying by himself the constitutional laws of his organization, which call him to the first rank of the system of beings, man can only find within society the eminent place which was assigned to him in nature, and would, without civilization, be one of the weakest and least intelligent of animals [...]. In the most wandering savage horde as in the nation of Europe the most civilized, man is only what he is made to be; necessarily brought up by his fellows, he has contracted their habits and needs; his ideas are no longer his; he has enjoyed the finest prerogative of his species, the susceptibility of developing his understanding by the force of imitation and the influence of society” (our translation).

also in the United States of America. It was based on the grading of cognition factors. One of the critical aspects that often became evident was the discrepancy between the mental level and the level of school acquisitions. Not only were there children whose school achievements were not matched in specific reading, writing or other acquisitions, but the Mental Quotient level did not always correspond to a homogeneous group of acquisitions.

The 1939 Congress focused primarily on maladjustment, measurement, education, and therapy. A generalized movement, starting in the 1930s, was the institutionalization of the *maladjusted*.

Brazil's participation

The brochure "In the land of Pestalozzi - 1st International Congress of Pedagogy for the Disabled in Geneva" (WÜRTH, n.d.), includes, right in the introduction, a copy of a correspondence dated December 21st, 1939 from Professor Hanselmann, president of the Congress, addressed to Gustavo Capanema, Minister of Education of Brazil at the time, thanking the Brazilian participation in the event.

Je vous prie de vouloir bien excuser qu'à la suite des évènements en Europe ma réponse à votre aimable lettre du juillet 1939 vous parvienne si tardivement. Permettez-moi de vous exprimer aujourd'hui toute ma gratitude d'avoir désigné comme délégué à notre Congrès Monsieur le Professeur Thiago M. Wurth, directeur de l'Institut Pestalozzi à Canôas. Le Congrès fut un grand succès; nous permettons de vous envoyer par le même courrier comme imprimé les résultats et un mémoire.

Monsieur le Professeur Wurth a porté un intérêt tout spécial à nos travaux, et nous vous félicitons de ce délégué. Les participants au Congrès ont appris avec admiration les efforts que fait votre gouvernement, suivant vos conseils, pour améliorer le sort des enfants anormaux. Nous sommes heureux de constater que vous avez à votre disposition une personnalité du rang de Professeur Wurth qui joint à une connaissance approfondie de la matière autant d'élan que d'amour pour les enfants.

Nous espérons que nos documents peuvent vous convaincre de la nécessité de nos efforts. C'est pourquoi nous nous permettons de vous prier de nous garder votre intérêt bienveillant aussi dans l'avenir.

Veillez agréer, Monsieur le Ministre, l'expression de ma haute considération.

Le Président:

H. Hanselmann, Dr. Phil.

Professeur à l'Université de Zurich¹⁶.

¹⁶ "I apologize for the fact that, due to events in Europe, my reply to your kind letter of July 1939 has reached you so late. Allow me to express my gratitude for having appointed as delegate to our Congress Professor Thiago M. Wurth, Director of the Pestalozzi Institute in Canôas. The Congress was a great success; permit us to send you by the same correspondence the results and a memorandum. Professor Wurth took a special interest in our work, and we congratulate you for [having] this delegate. The Congress participants accompanied with admiration of the efforts your government is making, following your advice, to improve the life of abnormal children. We are happy to note that you have at your disposal a personality of the quality of Professor Wurth who combines in-depth knowledge of the subject with love for children. We hope that our documents can convince you of the necessity of our efforts. This is why we take the liberty of asking you to keep your

Würth (n.d.) registers the beginning of his work with the foundation, in 1927, of a day school in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul (RS), Brazil, that was transferred to Canoas (RS) in 1929 – the Pestalozzi Institute of Canoas, in Rio Grande do Sul, identified by Lemos (1981), Jannuzzi (1985) and Mazzota (1996) as one of the first private institutions dedicated to the education of children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities in Brazil. Sousa (2018, p. 24, our translation) informs that an educational work for children with “moral disabilities or [...] conduct problems” was started there; in the words of Würth (1944, p. 21, our translation) “the cases treated were the physically, mentally and psychically deficient, with character deficiencies predominating in the manifestations”.

Würth (n.d.) reports that in May 1939 he had received a letter from the International Society for the Pedagogy of Disabled Children, based in Zurich, inviting him to participate in the 1st Congress of Specialized Pedagogy, at the Wilson Palace (former Palace of the League of Nations, currently the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), in Geneva. He had previously received an official invitation from the Brazilian Ministry of Education and had also been granted subsidies by the Foreign Minister for the trip:

As this invitation had been preceded by an official invitation to the Ministry of Education, Mr. Minister Capanema, and honored with the representation of Brazil, since I had dedicated my life as an educator precisely to disabled minors, for whom I founded, in 1927, the Pestalozzi Institute (WÜRTH, n.d., p. 1, our translation).

From the participation of Professor Würth, there was the expectation of a report on the situation of “assistance to disabled children” in Brazil, as reports from different countries were expected: “Mr. President of the Congress, Professor Dr. Henrique Hanselmann, has appointed my doctoral thesis, a report on Assistance to Disabled Children in Brazil and especially in the institution I created” (WÜRTH, n.d., p. 1, our translation).

Würth (n.d.) narrates that he prepared the report during his trip in three languages: Portuguese, German and French, since the official languages of the Congress would be French, German and English. He further informs that he read his thesis two hours after his arrival in Geneva.

It should be clarified that not all the works presented were published, although registered in the indexes of the annals. Some of them carry the warning that, despite the title in the list of contents, the manuscripts were not received. Among those which are in this condition, the report of the Brazilian representative Thiago Würth is identified. In the list of works, there is only the title of his presentation: *Therapeutic/Curative Education in South America (Heilpädagogik in Südamerika)*. This absence seemed peculiar, since we had located his brief report of the trip carried out in 1939, “*Na terra de Pestalozzi*” [In the land of Pestalozzi], with summaries of several presentations and with a copy of Hanselmann’s correspondence to Capanema, referring to the report of his Brazilian colleague.

A correspondence, dated December 20, 1943, from Würth addressed to Helena Antipoff may provide us with clues to the absence of the Brazilian report in the annals. In the letter, Würth refers that, on his return to Brazil from his trip to the Congress, he was stricken

benevolent interest in us also in the future. Please accept, Minister, the expression of my highest consideration. President: H. Hanselmann, Dr. Phil. Professor at the University of Zurich.” (our translation).

with strong “pain and [...] despair”, due to the fact that he had relatives living in Europe at war and, in his brief visit to Switzerland for the event, seen horrors that made him relive situations witnessed during World War I, when he was in Europe, in 1914, to study Philology. This personal situation, and even the war situation, may have prevented the subsequent submission of Würth’s report for publication.

Still regarding Brazilian participation, what we have been able to verify so far is that Würth’s theme registered in the official annals – “Curative/therapeutic education in South America” – is different from the one presented in his version of the Congress, which is in the brochure organized by him in 1944. In this one, the title is “Assistance to the disabled”, in which he focuses on the Brazilian situation and the experience of his school in Canoas, RS.

In the records of Würth (n.d.), it is also stated that Hanselmann authorized the translation of his fundamental works, such as his “*Compêndio de Pedagogia Terapêutica*” [Compendium of Therapeutic Pedagogy] into Portuguese, with a copyright waiver.

Würth’s report was intended to be a summary of the theses of the participating countries presented and debated at the event. He reports that after the presentation of the countries, there was the presentation of assistance organizations and specialized institutes, noting that they were in large numbers in Switzerland where, according to the author, “assistance to children is truly a model”. From the trip, Würth (n.d.) returned with one certainty:

From the unforgettable days of the Congress I keep, for the continuation of my work in Canoas, the precious memory of the confirmation of my theories by the greatest figures of pedagogy today – and that of the grim picture of the beginning of the universal war, a memory that more and more will lead me to dedicate all my love and all my dreams for the future to our Brazil, in which the hope of better times is not a utopia (WÜRTH, n.d., p. 2, our translation).

In search of pieces of a puzzle

Themes present at the Congress or their arguments seem to be similar to those contained in the literature found in Brazil, as in the excerpts registered at the beginning of this work, and in Portugal, especially in magazines such as *A Criança Portuguesa* [The Portuguese Child] and in the bulletins of the *Conferences of the Portuguese League for Social Prophylaxis*.

Specifically in Brazil, the installation of the Republic brought with it the prospect of adopting public instruction as a civilizational mark, form and means of building a modern country, as Anísio Teixeira pointed out in an elaborate appreciation of one of Carneiro Leão’s piece of work¹⁷ about the possibility of implementation of a “singular school” for the entire country. Despite the criticism of some arguments of the work, in this small note, published in 1924 in *Revista do Ensino*, Anísio Teixeira highlights the expectation that existed in the beginning of the 20th century about the school. This would be

¹⁷ The author probably refers to the work “*Problemas de Educação*” [Problems of Education], by Antonio Carneiro Leão, published in 1919.

the magical device destined to give all men the full development of their faculties. [...]. The perfect unity of culture and its perfect development would create perfect national unity and greatness. Such a big and simple premise of instruction would open for that privileged country the greatest path ever to the republic, to democracy and to national happiness. (TEIXEIRA, 1924, n.p., our translation).

The modernizing expectation, in turn, carried some marks such as the valorization of hygiene, as a way of preventing and treating diseases and strengthening the bodies, and the criticism of education disconnected from its practicality. Maciel (1999) clarifies that the “valuation of hygiene” was confused with the ideas of sanitation, hygiene and eugenics, so that, in Congresses or publications, in the health guidelines for the population, it is possible to find in the same discourse “proposals in the sense to introduce physical education in schools with the prohibition of marriages” (MACIEL, 1999, p. 134, our translation), from a eugenics perspective. This concern is also evident in publications and guidelines in Portugal, such as the 1901 Primary Education Reform – Decree n. 8, December 24th:

All civilized countries recognize today the need to organize a thorough and complete hygienic inspection of school establishments, employing the most commendable efforts, in a constant and universal concern for the interests of children, and some of them already have this inspection clearly defined, founded on bases that they almost achieve perfection, leaving it to specialized education employees. (PORTUGAL, 1901, n.p., our translation).

These ideas were also related to the education of children with disabilities. Works registered in this paper indicate the existence of a rich exchange between researchers, at the beginning of the 20th century, and the attempt to form a way of understanding disability and thinking about it in the standards of modernity of the time, especially in the possibility of organizing educational procedures (public instruction). The material found has strengthened the idea that the education of “abnormal” children was constituted as a field of attention of school education (public instruction) with the Republic (both in Brazil, in 1889, and in Portugal, in 1910). Hobsbawn (1989) states that the period from 1870 to 1914 was the primary school era, when some European countries made compulsory education universal. To Magalhães (2010, p. 61), the schooling process at that time took place “under the paradox of regenerating individuals and transforming societies, safeguarding tradition and building normality”. This paradox becomes imprinted in the proposition of an education aimed at children considered abnormal.

Education is at the base of Modernity, at the base of society organized by the social contract. The school institution is, therefore, a social *locus* in which the characteristics of the society that comprises it are present. Thoughts such as hygienist or social modernization (represented in the *Escola Nova* [Progressive Education] movement) found shelter in the school institution. As part of the social movement, the school suffers/refracts/formats different views on the child it receives. The look at the child who is “educated”, the focus of school education, or at those who were the impertinent ones for school – the “abnormal” – is marked by these different thoughts. From the synchresis of “abnormal” or “delinquent” children, to the gradation of “maladjusted” children, based on IQ, to scientific differentiation, institutionalization and specialization, a medical-psychological-pedagogical process took place,

triggered by the 1939 Congress. This Congress took place within a framework of balance and search for new methods. The movement between these perspectives brings together the idea of poverty, weakness and disability in scientific explanations of human behavior in the literature of the time, as well as in the actions undertaken in different countries. In Brazil, Lopes, in 1930, presented in his article *Menores Incuráveis* [Incurable Children] three measures of “prophylaxis” to delinquency: “fighting alcoholism and syphilis in procreators, avoiding the union of perverted individuals and segregation and sterilization of the degenerates according to the opinion of technical commissions” (LOPES, 1930 *apud* COSTA, 1976, p. 45, our translation). Such procedures are also found in the reports of Wenrstedt (1940) and Szondi (1940), both participants in the 1939 Congress. Among the “degenerates” the population with mental/intellectual disabilities was included. Similar articles are found in conferences given at the Portuguese League for Social Prophylaxis.

The persistence in the organization of differentiated spaces, from the identification of the “abnormal” - “delinquent” - “maladjusted” student, is a constant in the different propositions. As previously analyzed (KASSAR, 2013), special classes and schools were proposed following principles of rational homogenization and technical-scientific specialization, principles that are present in the establishment of the school as an institution of universal instruction (MAGALHÃES, 2010). In this sense,

the students were homogenized in classes and graduated by classes, according to their performance; the materials, means, didactic processes were selected and adapted; the school timetable was ordered and regulated according to the nature of the subjects and the organizational functioning of the school. (MAGALHÃES, 2010, p. 442, our translation).

Within certain organizational rules, including the separation of students, the educational process would bring more benefits to all, following the precepts of medical-pedagogical science in several countries. This position is clearly exposed in the proposal of procedures for the formation of special classes, in the proposition of a specialized pedagogy (WAWRZYNOWSKI, 1940) and in the characteristics of the formation of specialist teachers (MOOR, 1940). It is also materialized in figures presented by Victor Fontes in the post-war period. These show that in 1948, there were 13,000 “mentally abnormal” children in Denmark, assisted in different establishments; in the Netherlands there would be 150 schools and 10 boarding schools for the “mentally retarded”. In Sweden, there would be 2,500 children with an IQ between 40 and 70, who were assisted in specialized schools and 6,000 others attended 500 special classes, with an IQ between 70 and 80. There would still be around 5,000 children considered uneducable in adapted establishments. In Switzerland, there would be 5,000 children in special classes (FONTES, 1948, p. 83).

We recall that this perspective was disseminated well before the period of the 1939 Congress. As an example, in Portugal, Faria de Vasconcelos (1880-1939), in a lecture given at the 1st National Cooperative Congress promoted by the National Federation of Cooperatives, in 1921, on the organization and functioning of a *school type*, describes, within the activities of the medical-school inspection service as one of the doctor’s attributions, “the elimination of abnormal children” and “indication of the regime of life for weak children” (VASCONCELOS, 2006, p. 24, our translation).

These positions must be understood within the perspective of modernization referred to by Magalhães (2010). Faria de Vasconcelos himself clarifies the foundations

of his proposals when speaking about the Lisbon Professional Guidance Institute, in a circle of conferences organized by the Portuguese League for Social Prophylaxis. In 1929¹⁸, Vasconcelos (1933, p. 37, our translation) states: “In all educated countries, the problems of orientation and selection of professionals, of the scientific organization of work are in the foreground, in the day order of the most immediate concerns and achievements of national life”

The legislation of a country can be seen as a way of registering norms and beliefs of a given time; as Bakhtin (1992) states, wheels of transmission from life to discourse. The perspectives present and disseminated in scientific publications end up being present in education policy. The precarious conditions of a large part of the Brazilian population and their social disparities became evident in public schools¹⁹ and the legislation of the beginning of the 20th century indicates the assistance to these students also in the form of specialized education, as Decree n. 5,884, of April 21, 1933, shows:

Art. 826

Schools for the physically weak are intended for malnourished children or stunted children, to whom a special schoolwork regime is appropriate, with the aim of reintegrating them into physical normality (SÃO PAULO, 1933, n.p., our translation).

For the identification of these children, the tests and propositions of psychology entered as a promising possibility. Lourenço Filho, in an article published in 1961, registers this movement:

The concern to adapt teaching to modern psychology began to have its first reflexes after 1910. In 1914, a work by A. Sampaio Dória makes a first reference to tests; in the same year, a publication by the Psychology Laboratory of the Escola Normal [Teacher Training School], in São Paulo, appears, organized by the Italian specialist, hired by that institution, Ugo Pizzoli. There is also a pioneering study on the education of the mentally handicapped, written by Basílio de Magalhães (LOURENÇO FILHO, 1961, p. 62, our translation).

The new school organization, supported by evaluation procedures, marked Brazilian Special Education with the projects of Helena Antipoff, from the 1930s onwards (CAMPOS, 2003).

A few more words

The Pestalozzi Institute founded by Thiago Würth in Canoas operated as a boarding school and students' grouping into classes, where punishments were not applied. The teaching adopted was individualized “providing a large part of the free time for physical education, sport, scouting, outdoor life and manual work” (WÜRTH, 1944, p. 22, our translation), in line with the proposals of scientific and modern pedagogy also in use in different countries.

¹⁸ Date of the conference provided by Faria de Vasconcelos.

¹⁹ Veiga (2008) analyzes the frequency of the poor population since the beginning of Brazilian public education.

Academic and scientific dialogue, one of the points of attention of this paper, can be perceived both in the proximity of arguments found in the 1939 Congress and in the writings of thinkers active in Brazil and Portugal, as in the location of similar materials (books and bulletins) in different countries²⁰. But the challenges around a scientific pedagogy, based on a diagnosis and a classification, which make guided action possible came from the end of the 19th century. Medical, hygienist and pedagogical concerns found in the Binet-Simon Scale an instrument of mediation and organization by age and degree of knowledge. Indeed, the complexity and diversity of the universe of school-age children forced the implementation of institutions and pedagogical means that broke with the absolute opposition between normal and abnormal, because under the gaze of metrics, there was now a line of contact between these categories.

Still, in relation to this aspect, it is worth noting the central importance of the Binet-Simon Laboratory and the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute as institutions “deeply involved in the educational renewal movement that crossed Europe” (CAMPOS, 2003, p. 211, our translation), training *loci*²¹ and disseminators of knowledge and thoughts that also marked the 1939 Congress.

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²⁰ It is also interesting to note the existence of editions of the bulletin of the Instituto Antônio Aurélio da Costa Ferreira “*A criança portuguesa*” [The Portuguese child], directed by Victor Fontes, in Ibirité, in Helena Antipoff’s private library.

²¹ Antipoff was supervised by Claparède (1873-1940) at the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute in Geneva, where she graduated (CAMPOS, 2003). It should be noted that Faria de Vasconcelos also attended the Institute during this period (MEIRELES-COELHO, 2015).

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