



Representations of the classroom in photographs published in *Brasília magazine* (1957-1967)¹

Representações da sala de aula em fotografias
publicadas na revista *Brasília* (1957-1967)

Representaciones de aula en fotografías
publicadas en la revista *Brasília* (1957-1967)

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Abstract

The article aims to investigate what representations of classrooms designed for the new capital were published in the pages of Revista *Brasília* between 1957 and 1967. On the one hand, the conclusions indicate that the photographs were intended to convey the representation of a modern and exemplary education, planned to meet the needs of the city in the process of consolidation and of the country itself. On the other hand, when these images were subjected to the scrutiny of historiographical interpretation, a series of more traditional and even contradictory elements emerged in these representations, thus revealing limitations of the proposed teaching model, such as the hierarchical teacher-student relationship, the whiteness of the students served by a school-class, as well as the idea of school as a space for the child's future, ignoring its potential as a place for experiences already in the childhood present, as advocated by some currents of so-called modern pedagogy.

Keywords: History of Education; Photographs; Revista Brasília.

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Resumo

O artigo tem por objetivo investigar que representações das salas de aula pensadas para a nova capital foram veiculadas nas páginas da Revista *Brasília* entre os anos de 1957 e 1967. Por um lado, as conclusões apontam que as fotografias queriam veicular a representação de uma educação moderna e modelar, planejada para atender às necessidades da cidade em fase de consolidação e do próprio país. Por outro lado, ao submeter essas imagens ao crivo da interpretação historiográfica, emergiram uma série de elementos mais tradicionais e até mesmo contraditórios nessas representações, que revelam, assim, limitações do modelo de ensino proposto, como a relação hierárquica professor-alunos, o padrão de branquitude dos alunos atendidos por uma escola-classe bem como a ideia da escola como um espaço do vir-a-ser da criança, ignorando sua potencialidade como lugar de experiências já no presente infantil como advogavam algumas correntes da pedagogia dita moderna.

Palavras-chave: História da Educação; Fotografias; Revista Brasília.

Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo investigar qué representaciones de aulas diseñadas para la nueva capital fueron publicadas en las páginas de la Revista *Brasília* entre los años 1957 y 1967. Por un lado, las conclusiones indican que las fotografías querían transmitir la representación de una educación moderna y modelo, planificado para satisfacer las necesidades de la ciudad en fase de consolidación y del propio país. Por otro lado, al someter estas imágenes al tamiz de la interpretación historiográfica, surgieron en estas representaciones una serie de elementos más tradicionales e incluso contradictorios, que revelan limitaciones del modelo de enseñanza propuesto, como la relación jerárquica profesor-alumno, la estándar de blancura de los estudiantes atendidos por una escuela de clase así como la idea de la escuela como un espacio para el devenir del niño, ignorando su potencial como lugar de experiencias ya en el presente del niño como lo propugnan algunas corrientes de la llamada pedagogía moderna.

Palabras clave: Historia de la Educación; Fotografías; Revista Brasilia.

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Introduction

Between 1957 and 1967, Brasília magazine was published in Brazil and abroad, monthly during its first phase, and sporadically during its second phase. It was the official publication of the Companhia Urbanizadora da Nova Capital (NOVACAP). Its goal was to inform the public about the construction process of the new center of Brazilian power. The magazine had articles and photographs. At first, it supported the idea of moving the capital to the Central Plateau. Later, after the city was created in 1960, it wrote about how the city was growing.

In addition to being an architectural record of what traditional history would later call the epic construction of Brasília (VASCONCELOS, 1992), the magazine provides evidence of the daily lives of its first residents as well as various aspects of life in those early years of the city's planning, construction, and implementation. Historians have already studied it. They have studied topics such as architecture and urbanism (CAPELLO, 2010); the idea of Brasília as the "capital of hope" (MEDEIROS, 2012); the sertão and modernity (ANDRADE, 2020); the discourse of whiteness (LOPES, 2021); and childhood during the construction of the new capital (MOURA and ANJOS, 2023). An important part of the history of education that we're interested in is how classrooms in Brasília were shown in pictures in the magazine. These pictures are what we're studying in this article.

The school network in Brasília was carefully planned by the National Institute for Educational Studies (INEP), which was led by educator Anísio Teixeira. He was responsible for outlining the general plan for the public education system, aiming for Integral Education, from kindergarten to university (TEIXEIRA, 1961; ANJOS, 2022). But even before the city was officially created, schools had to be built. These were built by the government and by people who were moving to Brasília to work on the construction project. They wanted their children to have an education (PEREIRA and HENRIQUES, 2011; ANJOS and BARBOSA, 2020). After the new capital was officially opened on April 21, 1960, the plans for education were slowly put into action. These plans were discussed in several issues of the Brasília magazine. One topic that came up in some issues was the classrooms of the new capital.

According to Inés Dussel and Marcelo Caruso (2003, p. 24), "the classroom is a Western invention dating back to 1500, and [...] in this process, pedagogy used many different arguments to give shape and form to this space." According to these historians, over the last five centuries, the classroom has reflected the impact of religion on education, the disciplining of bodies, and the logic of industrial societies. Most importantly, the classroom has been a place of government of the other (DUSSEL and CARUSO, 2003). It combines what Vincent, Lahire, and Thin (2001) call the school form and what Júlia Varela and Fernando Alvarez-Uria (1992) have already seen, which is an important part of school culture (ESCOLANO BENITO, 2010). This culture can change over time, depending on how it's used and by whom (CHARTIER, 2002). In each historical period, it has a degree of permanence and a degree of change in its physical layout, the people involved, and the teaching methods. This statement suggests an idea for a study. It asks, "What images of classrooms designed for the new capital were shown in the pages of Brasília magazine?" This article aims to answer that question².

² This study is based on research conducted as part of the project "History of school cultures in Brasília (1960-1971)." The research received financial support from the Dean of Research and Innovation and the Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of Brasília through Notice 04/2024.

In theory, we use Roger Chartier's idea of representation. According to this idea, representation can be understood as "physical ideas that create images through which the present can gain meaning, the other can become understandable, and space can be understood" (CHARTIER, 2002, p. 17). Additionally,

such representations are not simple images, true or misleading, of a reality that is external to them. They have their own energy that makes us believe the world, or the past, is really what they say it is. Societies are divided by distance, and representations are created and reproduced as a result (Chartier, 2010, p. 26).

In methodological terms, all issues of the magazine published between 1957 and 1967 were read, and three photographs of classrooms in educational institutions in the capital published during this period were cataloged and selected for this study. Photography is used as a historical source, being

a form of representation of the world, produced in a particular era (it is always a testimony to the past), imbued with values, expectations, and imaginaries that, together, provide the broad meaning of the reality it seeks to represent. In research on the history of photography, we understand the reality shown in a photograph and its meanings and importance only when we consider the actions of the people who constructed, suggested, and explained it (ANJOS, 2015, p. 270–271).

The editors of Brasília magazine assigned captions to the photographs. These captions will also be considered, as they were intended to direct the viewer's gaze and understanding toward certain meanings. These meanings were constructed around the images. These captions can be read against the grain and questioned. This will help us produce other interpretations, including historiographical ones.

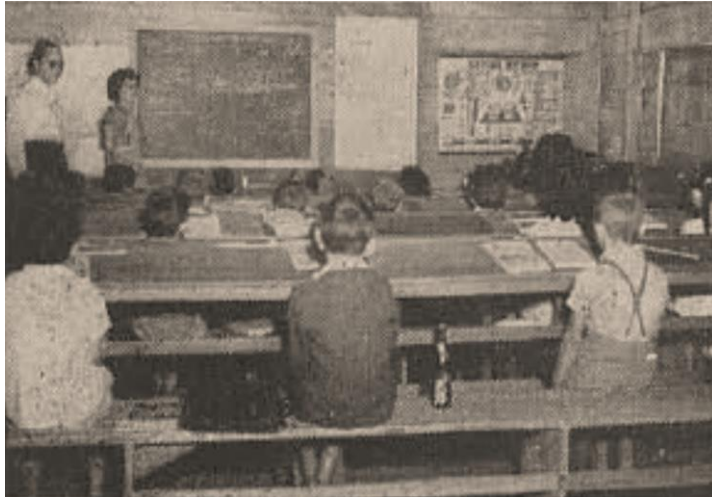
In the following pages, we will look at and study some photographs of classrooms published in Brasília magazine.

A temporary classroom

The first image of a classroom was published in 1957, in issue number 4 of Brasília magazine. It included news about the city's first airport, the so-called "construction march," the projects ranked second and third in the competition to define the Pilot Plan for Brasília, and the Administrative Acts of NOVACAP, which were the main reason for the magazine's existence. On pages 1 and 2, the issue started with short notes about what was happening at the Brasília construction site. The first of three columns had a small picture of the inside of a classroom in a temporary school that was built in the city by a private group. The picture had a text that served as a caption: (Figure 1)

Figure 1 – Interior of a temporary classroom

The photograph below shows a primary school in Brasília. It was installed in a wooden shed through a private initiative. But this is not the only school operating in the new capital. In other parts of this magazine, we provide more detailed information about primary education there, including the establishment of larger facilities already provided for by the management of the Urban Development Company of the New Capital of Brazil."



Source: *Brasília magazine*, issue 4 (1957)

In April 1957, two private schools were in operation at the construction site of the new capital, as stated in the article "The march of the construction of Brasília." At the same time, the first public school—called the official school—was being built. It would later be named Grupo Escolar Número 1 (School Group Number 1) (later, Escola-Classe Júlia Kubsticheck). The photograph on screen, therefore, is of the interior of one of these private establishments that, in that context, were meeting the urgent need for schooling for the children of the workers who were building the city planned by Lúcio Costa.

The schools in operation in the area known as Núcleo Bandeirante were the "Instituto Batista de Brasília," which had primary and secondary levels and 33 students. Professor Anahir Pereira da Costa was in charge of the school. Another school was the "Escola Bandeirante," which was owned by Professor Ana Vitória Cardoso Spotto. Professor Dirani Arruda Campos helped Professor Spotto run the school. There are 25 students at this school" (A MARCHA..., 1957, pp. 5-6). I think this is the school in the photograph because there are two professors, who might be the principal and the professor mentioned in the article. Which classroom is shown in the photograph?

The students seem to be the same height, so this is probably not a multi-grade classroom but rather a graded one. It's not clear from the sources if it was the only classroom in the school. If it was, with two teachers, it would need to be divided into two classrooms and two shifts. The image shows that, even though the space was set up quickly, it had some basic things needed for teaching at the time. There was a blackboard and posters. The photograph, on the other hand, suggests that it was a poorly ventilated space, since no doors or windows are visible in the frame chosen by the photographer, unless they were outside the photograph. P. Dubois (1993) says that three things are important to take into account when taking a photograph: the area where the picture is taken, the area that is in the picture, and the area outside the picture.

The photographer cropped the image to focus on an everyday moment in the classroom. In the past, professors would teach a "lesson" and students would "learn." In other words, even though the school was old and in bad shape, it still met the educational needs of the builders' children. The way the students' heads are positioned in the photograph makes it seem like they were focused. This could be because of the pose they were asked to assume for the photo or because it was a special moment in their school day.

Since this is a temporary school, the students do not wear uniforms. Each one wears different clothes. Look at the three boys in the bottom picture. These children came to school with a desire to learn and a series of objects that they placed on the long school bench where they sat. This suggested that they were ready to be in that space.

The long school benches in the exhibit might have been made at the Companhia Urbanizadora da Nova Capital construction site. Since the late 19th century, individual desks have become the best type of furniture for students. This is because they are both comfortable and help students behave well (see ALCÂNTARA, 2014; ANJOS, 2022). The Bandeirante School chose to use benches instead of desks, probably for the same reasons that they did almost 100 years ago: there wasn't enough space for all the desks. Be that as it may, it is somewhat contradictory that the first photographic record of a classroom in Brasília is quite traditional, mixing poses and furniture that were already outdated for what one might imagine as modern education, which was, after all, what one wanted to offer in the new city.

This contradiction did not go unnoticed by the editors of Brasília magazine, who, in the caption describing the image, sought to preempt any criticism by announcing that this was not the only school operating in the capital and that a larger establishment—and therefore more suited to modern educational needs—was under construction.

A kindergarten classroom

The second photograph of the inside of a classroom in Brasília magazine was published in the special April 1960 edition, which marked the start of the New Capital. It showed a report called "Education in Brasília." It was a picture of the inside of a kindergarten classroom, as the caption said (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Interior of a kindergarten classroom



Source: Brasília magazine, issue 40 (1960)

Anísio Teixeira believed that kindergartens would be the first step for children into the educational system of Brasília. They were supposed to be part of elementary education centers. These centers included kindergartens, elementary schools, and park schools. Park schools were for primary school students during the opposite shift. The plan is to have a kindergarten in each superblock so that all families have access to this educational institution. It was a new idea at a time when preschool in Brazil was seen more as a form of social assistance than education (Pinto; Müller; Anjos, 2020). This explains why the editors of Brasília magazine wanted to take a photograph to show that a kindergarten in the newly inaugurated capital was open and running well. They wanted to show that even young children were receiving an education there. If we think that people wanted Brasília to be an example for the rest of the country (TEIXEIRA, 1961), then we can see that the idea was to use the photographs through the circulation of Brasília magazine to show what was being done in the new capital and to encourage other places to do the same.

The kindergarten classroom is very different from the temporary school three years earlier. It is intended for a specific type of schooling—preschool—and it is already operating in a building designed for that purpose. Before Brasília was inaugurated, there were three kindergartens in the city: the Jardim de Infância das Casas Populares, the kindergarten attached to the Ernesto Silva school, and the Jardim de Infância 21 de Abril (PINTO; MÜLLER; ANJOS, 2018). The 21 de Abril was the first building in the city built specifically for this purpose, and it is very likely that the photograph is of its interior³. It had a very detailed design for the building and for teaching. In addition to the modernist building, it had a playground, swimming pool, and gardens in front of each of the classrooms (BALDEZ, 2021a). It was the start of an educational project for the city's young children. It is the main subject of the photograph published in Brasília magazine.

The photographer captured children sitting on the floor in a more relaxed pose than that advocated by the school system (VINCENT, LAHIRE, THIN, 2001). They appear to be listening attentively to the professor narrating the contents of a book. However, the stiffness of the first boy's body, in an almost uncomfortable posture, and the fact that none of the children are looking at the camera suggest that this pose was created especially for a photograph. This is a valid way to understand a photograph. After all, viewers add their own ideas to what they see in a photograph (AUMONT, 1993), which makes the meaning of a photograph always open to interpretation. At any rate, the connotation of the image is clear: both the teacher and the students show how serious and effective early childhood education is in the newly inaugurated city. The teacher teaches, and the students learn, achieving the ultimate goal of any educational process.

Looking back at the children, they appear to be uniformed—even in their shoes—thus expressing, through their clothing, the homogenizing identity of public school students in the new capital. In the background of the image, we see a mural with many sheets of paper, which may suggest the use of the felt board technique in kindergarten classes, whereby certain knowledge is conveyed to young students through images and discussion about them. The white chairs complete the scene, giving the viewer the impression of a light and harmonious environment, designed for the education of young children.

However, the photograph shows a contradiction. The professor plays a central role in the classroom depicted. A lot of modern teaching methods, especially since the New School Movement, which included Anísio Teixeira as one of its most important members, put children at the heart of the educational process (CARVALHO, 2002). In the 1920s, educators associated with the movement compared the traditional school, centered on the

³A photograph of its exterior, occupying almost an entire page of the magazine, was published in the same article, reinforcing this interpretation.

professor, with the new school, centered on the student (VIDAL; FARIA FILHO, 2005). The image in question appears to capture a very traditional teaching moment⁴. The children just watch what the teacher does. The teacher, who knows a lot about teaching, teaches the lesson. This is an example of a common feature of school culture that has been captured in a photograph. The new, represented by the modern, planned space, combines with the old, traditional ways of sharing knowledge. The mix of different things creates what may have been the rules and activities (JULIA, 2001) that guided schooling in a modern kindergarten in Brasília at the exact moment that was photographed.

A classroom at an Escola-Classe in Brasília

Figure 3 – Interior of an Escola-Classe classroom

"Happy and smiling, the children of Brasília prepare themselves to be useful to their country tomorrow. They are focused on the mission that has been their parents' concern: to build a capital that, in addition to being the most beautiful in the world, could be the starting point for solving so many Brazilian problems, which, to be resolved, await only the determination and goodwill of the citizens of this country."



Source: *Brasília magazine*, issues 50-52 (1961)

The inside of an Escola-Classe is shown in the third picture chosen for this study. In Brasília, this was the name chosen for primary schools, clearly inspired by the American schooling model that Anísio Teixeira had encountered in the United States in 1927, which he had implemented in Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s and at the Carneiro Ribeiro Educational Center in Salvador between the late 1940s and early 1950s (TEIXEIRA, 1928; TEIXEIRA, 1935; DÓREA, 2000; EBOLI, 2000). While in the rest of the country, primary education took place in school groups or isolated schools (SOUZA, 2009), in Brasília, the name chosen was meant to show that the teaching model was going to be changed. Did the photograph manage to capture this spirit of change?

As defined by Roland Barthes (1984), three elements make up a photograph: the operator (the photographer); the spectator (those who observe the image); and the spectrum (that which is photographed). In the case of the photograph on display, the photographer wanted to capture the people in the school, not the school itself. The image shows a group of children

⁴ I use the word "moment" because, as the history of education in Brasília shows, in other episodes that occurred between 1962 and 1965, the city's kindergartens were places where modern and advanced teaching methods were used. For more information, see Baldez (2021b).

sitting at their desks in rows. It is a full classroom, but not too crowded, which makes it seem like the school has enough space for learning.

The school building is in the background, but it's there: a classroom with white walls and a wooden board at the back where posters and students' work could be pinned. Unlike the first photograph of a schoolroom published in the magazine, the students occupy individual wooden and iron desks with straight, modern lines, manufactured for clear school use and purpose.

On the other hand, we see 18 children, boys and girls, represented either fully or partially. Two to four of them—it's hard to say exactly—were black, while the rest were white. This is important because, as historians have shown, the Republican primary school, unlike the imperial school, had a policy of whitening the student body. This caused the percentage of black children attending school to decrease significantly. This image shows a problem that was common in Brazilian primary schools in the mid-1960s. It shows that the idea that Brazil is a racially democratic country is not true. This was not, therefore, an aspect of improving education in the new capital.

But none of this is seen as a problem. The caption tried to tell readers that the children, who were all smiling (although only one girl was actually smiling at the camera!), were being prepared to be useful to their country. The editors emphasize that, in Brasília, they were in tune with their parents' goal of building the new capital. They use the well-known rhetoric that children are the future (ANJOS, 2016). School taught them important life skills. But it was not yet life. This was different from what educators like Anísio Teixeira thought. Teixeira believed that "school should be the place where children come to live fully and completely." This idea came from philosophers like John Dewey. Furthermore, "children need to live to learn the moral and social skills they need to be happy and fit into today's world" (TEIXEIRA, 2000, p. 40). While school was a place for children to gain experience in the present for educators, for the editors of the magazine—in which we can see the voice of Brasília administrators through NOVACAP—it should prepare them for the future, a future that depended on children's participation. This was a practical view, not an educational one. The school was a tool, not a place for learning. This was different from the modern approach to education, especially the New School's. Once again, the old and the new come together to show a classroom in a school in the young capital of the Republic.

Final considerations

The goal of this article was to examine how classrooms designed for the new capital were depicted in the pages of Brasília magazine.

Initially, it can be said that, apart from the first image of a temporary school, the other photographs sought to convey the model of a modern education, designed to meet the needs of the city in its consolidation phase and of the country itself. The magazine's photographers deliberately chose to convey this message through the magazine's photos and the way the school space was designed.

However, when these images were examined through the lens of history, more traditional and even contradictory elements emerged. This showed the teaching model's limitations, like the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students (as seen in the first and second images), the idea of whiteness among students in the *escola-classe*, and the view of school as a place for future development, ignoring its role as a place where children can gain experiences in the present, as some modern teaching methods advocate (as seen in the third image).

In conclusion, we must remember that photographs can't always capture the full complexity of reality. They are, in effect, a fragment of that reality. Thus, it is worth asking whether these representations of the classroom identified here are a more or less accurate

sample of the reality experienced in schools in Brasília. The interpretations created here are meant to encourage more research. They show the expectations envisioned by the editors of a magazine dedicated to promoting the process of building a city where everything, including education, was planned.

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