

(Non) Successes of the Escola Normal da Corte: From the official reports to the student articles (1880-1881)

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ABSTRACT:

This article¹ aims to unveil the history of the first teacher training school in the city of Rio de Janeiro: the Escola Normal da Corte (1880-1889). It focuses on the moment the school was created and the start of its activities (1880-1881), by means of the news published in the student newspaper *Pharol*. Given that most research in this area has concentrated chiefly on official sources, this work intends to shift the focus of analysis to the receptor of these initiatives, trying to understand how the strategies of action of the instituted power were appropriated by the individuals they were aimed at — the training teachers. By cross-referencing the sources one learns that there was resistance from the student teachers to the school culture imposed as a strategy of the State to bring about the instruction of the people and overcome the backwardness of the country.

KEYWORDS:

Teaching profession, Teacher training, Escola Normal da Corte [Teacher Training School of the Court], *Pharol* newspaper.

The modernisation process that characterised Brazil in the last quarter of the 19th century called for effort to be made to construct a civilized nation, a condition that would only be achieved if priority investment was made to educate the people. In the quest to pursue this ideal as quickly as possible, the concern to train the body of teachers became paramount. It is in this backdrop that an institution emerged that was devoted to training teachers for Rio de Janeiro's primary schools: the Escola Normal da Corte (Teacher Training School of the Court), solemnly opened in April 1880.

In the belief that the training facet is an integral part of the teaching profession, one of the theoretical presuppositions adopted was the interpretive framework constructed by António Nóvoa (1987), in whose opinion the social demand for education ended up imposing, in the 19th century, a school model for this training. According to this author, the process to professionalize the teaching body involves the mastery of a body of knowledge acquired through specific, specialised and long training that should be supplied within an academic and institutionalised framework. The teacher training schools become spaces of production and reproduction of knowledge and systems of norms specific to the teaching production and will end up aiding the development of the professional teaching field, which is increasingly controlled by the State, a stimulator of the civilising drive.

For a long time pushed into the background by the academic production, the history of teacher

training in Brazil has aroused the interest of researchers who have decided to investigate teacher training institutions. However, in most of the work on the history of the teaching profession in Rio de Janeiro, this first school model is almost always portrayed in a general overview, serving as the preamble for analysis of more prestigious periods, especially the moment of the transformation of the Escola Normal into an Education Institute, through the action of the educators linked to the New Education movement (Accácio, 1993; Castro, 1986).

On the other hand, the recent research on the Escola Normal da Corte (Mancini, 2005; Uekane, 2004) has concentrated its analysis chiefly on official documentation: decrees, regulations, reports and teaching programmes.

My proposal, within the constraints of this article, is to focus on the initial moment of the activities of this school, chronologically demarcated in the two years spanning 1880-1881, in an attempt to discuss a question raised in previous work (Lopes, 2008; Lopes & Martínez, 2007). Why did a school, acknowledged as being necessary, propagated repeatedly in parliamentary speeches and which was finally established in the capital of the country, present such disheartening initial results? If we take into account the impact caused by its inauguration, which attracted almost three hundred candidates for enrolment, the following question has to be asked: Why did so few students sit exams and complete the course? In perusing the list of pupils who passed in at least three modules of the first series, up

until the academic year of 1883, we find the names of only 43 students of which 42 were girls and there was just one boy².

To achieve the intended goal, I decided to work with two kinds of sources: the first, of an official nature, is the “report of the notable successes of the Escola Normal in the year 1880” written by the teacher Carlos Pimenta de Laet, who was charged with this task by the Congregação da Escola Normal [Escola Normal Board]. I then shift the focus of analysis to the receptors of the initiative, striving to understand how the strategies of action of the instituted power were appropriated (Chartier, 1990) by the individuals they were aimed at — the training teachers.

Several editions of the *Pharol* newspaper published by the students of the Escola Normal were selected. Based on these texts the editor, Militino Pinto, gives his opinion and registers, almost always with fierce criticism, his impressions about the institution. Obviously the students’ outlook of the school contrasted with the optimistic tone of the official reports channelled to the Ministry of Empire Affairs, which attempted to highlight the “successes” of the School, albeit while acknowledging the initial difficulties of the enterprise. The cross-referencing of these sources enables one to detect resistance by the students to the school culture (Julià, 2001) which was imposed as the strategy of the State to encourage the education of the people and overcome the backwardness of the country.

The theoretical references of this study incorporate the categories of *strategy* and *tactics*, in line with the vision of Michel de Certeau (1994). He states that the *strategy* are the result of the relationships of strength that are structured from the moment an individual or group detains the power and occupies its own space. The *tactics* on the other hand, describe the action of those who cannot count on this space, but which insinuates through breaches, “playing with the events to transform them into opportunities” (pp. 46-47).

The micro-analysis perspective proposed by Jacques Revel (1998) also helps us to understand the complexity and contradictions of the social reality examined, by trying to understand the behaviour of individuals in the relationships with their peers, their experiences and the cultural practices they undertake as situations able to explain the choices

taken within the field of possibilities of a given social configuration.

We therefore take as our object of analysis the discursive production of a teacher, legitimately authorised by the School Board, as well as a student who passed through this institution and whose critical views through a newspaper describes his relations and leads to the circulation of information which confers particular meaning and logic.

Examination of this document enables questions to be raised concerning the teaching profession at the end of the 19th century. One of them refers to the process of feminising the teaching body, which was already a growing trend; another is related to the impact caused by the implantation of a school model that aims to supplant the usual method of recruiting teachers for the public school network. The emergence and enhancement of the teacher training schools at this moment had the effect of enriching its curriculum, especially as regards the increase in science subjects, as well as more systematic and demanding assessment practices. In line with this reality, which entailed numerous instructions from the legally instituted power, the students positioned themselves by constructing a contra-discourse which was materialised through the articles published in *Pharol*.

FROM THE OFFICIAL REPORTS

It is worth noting that the consultation of the official sources, especially the reports produced by the school authorities, was not always sufficient to respond to the questions raised. After examining the legislation and most of the consecrated work on the matter, I selected the report by the teacher Carlos de Laet, who relates the “notable successes” of the Escola Normal in its first year of functioning (1880-1881)³.

In this document the author’s concerns are made apparent about the fact that up until that date the capital of the country did not have a school in which “primary school teachers were conveniently qualified”, which was responsible for supplying a solid basis on which “popular instruction could be consolidated” (p. 1). Above all else, he advocated that it was the government’s responsibility to train

good teachers as the only solution to raise the level of primary instruction in the country.

Owing to the hitherto unsatisfied demand for a school of this nature in the capital, there was a huge influx of candidates to enrol on the course. A total of 282 students enrolled for the 1880 academic year, of which 105 were boys and 177 were girls. Of these around 200 were directly accepted without having to sit the entrance exam; some because they were already teachers in the city's primary schools, others because they possessed certificates with the minimum schooling required⁴.

According to the report writer, the exams were undemanding and the school achieved its objective of barring entrance to "the less cultivated intelligences" (p. 4). Therefore, 281 students were registered⁵ in the first year and owing to the big demand it was impossible to place them all in the classrooms that the Externato Pedro II had yielded to the Escola Normal. In under a month the new institution was transferred to the building of the Escola Politécnica, at the Largo de São Francisco⁶.

In Laet's opinion there were several reasons behind such a big demand. Firstly, the "praiseworthy desire to learn" by aspiring teachers, as well as the suitable night-time lesson timetable that made it easier for student workers. Furthermore, the renowned teacher attributed the high popularity to the fact that such an enterprise was a novelty and aroused interest among the young as it was the first mixed school in the capital, as well as the curiosity of the public to "see how the provisional teachers recently nominated by the government performed their role"⁷. In the author's opinion:

(...) the Escola Normal came out of this test with flying colours, as almost all the students and assistants showed perfect education; the teachers showed themselves to be up to their mission and the Head sensibly allied, in certain emergencies, the greatest of prudence and energy (...) An extremely strict discipline was hence installed and the experience showed that it was possible to run a mixed teacher training night school that was highly attended (p. 6).

But faced with the poor results of the students in the end-of-year exams of the year and the feeling of deflation once the initial "novelty" had worn

off, Laet pointed out the need to make changes to the curriculum, such as, for example, curtailing the course from six to four series, dropping some subjects and transforming others into optional material, as well as giving greater emphasis to the scientific content⁸. He states:

a course that is too long will little by little depopulate the School, as it becomes apparent that there is a discrepancy between the sacrifices that have to be made to obtain the qualification and the advantages, few and far between (...) of a profession that is so modest and poorly paid as that of a primary teacher (p. 9).

To get an idea of the poor results of the tests, one can point to the 25 who sat the Portuguese exam, of whom only three obtained success and of the 19 who sat the arithmetic exam, only five passed. However, in the official vision "teachers and masters performed their roles with a maximum of dedication and assiduity" (p. 11) suggesting that the lack of commitment of the students and the fragility of the public instruction supplied in the capital were the main reasons explaining this lack of success.

The Escola Normal, like other secondary instruction establishments, was governed by the statutes of the Leôncio de Carvalho reform (1879), which advocated the free attendance to lessons. The report writer believed this was one of the probable causes of the lack of success of its pupils. In addition to this fact was the poor intellectual preparation of the students, who were trained to memorise lessons from an early age by the primary schools they attended. Hence, in the name of the School Board, which was charged with reporting on the "notable successes of the year 1880", Laet exonerates the institution from any responsibility and reaffirmed the professionalism of the teaching body, who were tenacious "workers" who had collaborated to "raise the level, by training good teachers, of primary instruction in the municipality of the Court and perhaps in the whole Empire" (p. 13).

One can perceive in this discourse the rhetoric of the institutional discourse, in other words, the authorised word to solemnly express the situation and which is endowed with the legitimacy conferred by the institution itself. According to Bourdieu (1996), the spokesperson accepts his relevance in relation

to the other agents and acts with words “insofar as his speaking concentrates the symbolic capital accumulated by the group that conferred his mandate and for which he is, one can say, its attorney” (p. 89). The discourse of authority does not need to be clear and understandable, requiring only the recognition of its receptors to become legitimate. In contrast, any other discourse will be condemned to failure if uttered by somebody who does not possess the power to pronounce it.

THE STUDENTS’ THINKING

In opposition to this discourse is another, of a different nature, produced by the students⁹. It comes from the student newspaper *Pharol*, a small four-page tabloid which was edited by the young training teacher Militino Pinto, with the collaboration of two colleagues¹⁰. In the middle of a literary production of dubious quality one comes across a regular column, whose aim is to report on news from the recently created Escola Normal (*Pharol*, n.º 1, p. 4).

The comments about the institution aroused concerns among the School Board members. In a document to the Ministry and Secretary of State, the head Benjamin Constant acknowledges the improper conduct of the student in circulating the newspaper within the school and raises the possibility of applying a disciplinary punishment¹¹.

The irreverent columns written by Militino and criticism was especially directed at female colleagues who he said, despite being the most assiduous in the lessons, entertained themselves in “absolutely futile” conversations, in contrast to the boys who circulated in groups and dedicated themselves to debating matters that were “clearly useful” (*Pharol*, n.º 2, p. 1).

It is worth pointing out that the moment of the creation of the Escola Normal coincided with the onset of the process of feminisation of the teaching profession, a phenomenon attributed to the broadening of the industrial sector and consequent urbanization, which, by increasing job opportunities for men, would leave the less profitable functions for the women. Many voices also made themselves heard as regards the woman’s identification with the teaching activity, advocating the idea that they “innately”

possess an inclination towards the profession, given their greater sensibility in dealing with children and the viewpoint that the teaching profession is an “extension of maternity.” Furthermore, the need for feminine education was tied in with the modernisation of the society and the hygienisation of the family. In this sense, the positivist set of ideas called for the education of girls so that they incorporated the contributions of science into the functions of the mother, wife and housewife (Louro, 1997).

The debate around the question did not go unnoticed by the students. The September edition (1880) reproduces a declaration made by the Minister of the Empire, Barão Homem de Mello, that the Escola Normal was providing “good service to many female pupils” (*Pharol*, n.º 7, p. 2). Commenting on the low attendance of the pupils to the lessons, because of the low number of weekly lessons or even because of the high number of students who dropped out, the cutting pen of the editor again targeted the female students: “the class that is best attended is the 1st class, merely because it is made up only of the female sex”. Later on, commenting on the high number of female enrolments for the first exams he comes back for more: “one can see that our female colleagues want to become the majority among the pupils (...) they should change their attitude, otherwise the teachers will say what they really think, offending people left, right and centre” (*Pharol*, n.º 9, p. 2).

The bad feeling grew and the boys, visibly pushed aside in the school space, began to complain that the teachers “turned their backs on them”. Taking into account the context and the era of the events we are talking about, what other voices, apart from masculine ones, were able to stand up and criticise the instituted order? In a time of tight control by the State of the teaching activity, a fact that in itself would justify the resistance of the pupils in relation to the interventions of the new training model, we put forward the suggestion that it would be difficult for female voices to make themselves heard. Even if they were in the majority, they respected the limits that were imposed on them. Perhaps for this reason the young girls, despite being “futile and chatterboxes”, were a threat to the boys as they were willing to act within the school regulations, thus corresponding to the investment made in them by the

State. As such, one can understand the appeal to feminine education and “good service” provided to girls in that establishment, while the boys, even given their greater mobilisation ability, were no more than “agitators of the order”.

In May 1880 instructions were published regarding the regulations of the exams. The document outlined the organisation of the examining boards, timetables, type of exams (written, oral and practical), as well as the stipulations to be taken into account for the registration and to justify absentees. Moreover, assessment criteria were drawn up, which would comprise of “excellent, good, satisfactory or poor”¹².

After correcting the work, the three members of the board would announce the final result, considering the pupils to have simply passed if they obtained at least a pass from two examiners, and a failure in the opposite case. When a pass was unanimous and the pupil had obtained a high number of good marks, the pupil was considered to have fully passed. Finally, they would pass with distinction when as well as unanimity they received the maximum mark from all the examiners.

In truth, this meticulous system seemed to be justified by the prerogatives that the studies of the Escola Normal conferred to the future teachers, many of which were already assistants in the primary schools of the Court, given that since the Couto Ferraz Reform (17/2/1854) the assistant teachers had been guaranteed their nomination without selection¹³.

Meanwhile, the month of August arrived and many questions related to the exams had not yet been decided, such as the topics of the programme or the bibliography to be read. This fact led to a series of criticisms in *Pharol*, of which we provide some samples:

The books are not on the whole the content of the teaching programme, as admitted by the teachers themselves. However, there is no other measure to be taken apart from that restricted obligation of the pupil taking down notes of everything the teacher says in order to follow his intention. The pupils therefore have to be ready to be examined on what the teacher knows and wants to ask questions about (...) Is this freedom in education? (*Pharol*, n° 5, p. 1).

As time passed the editor became bolder, denouncing the disorganisation of the school and the lack of selection processes to fill teacher vacancies. Also in relation to the teachers, accusations were levelled both at those who “give few lessons and miss as many as they give”, leaving the pupils completely to their own devices, while others forced pupils to follow the lessons using exclusively books they had written themselves, even giving out the name and address of the shop where they could be purchased (*Pharol*, n° 14, p. 2).

The irregularities pointed out, naturally, were not confirmed by the official data found in the report analysed. The procession between the two documents may suggest that the strategy outlined by the government to impose a school model for training future teachers would be met with resistance by the students, as captured by the criticism in the *Pharol*. If we also take into account the failed students, which outnumber those who passed, we are led to suppose that the teaching and assessment methods had, indeed, left a lot to be desired, which would justify another observation that did not escape the perspicacious eye of the column writer:

We cannot understand the attitude of the teachers in formulating programmes of this nature, when to enrol for the 1st series they demand only the four practical operations of arithmetic, reading, writing and a testament of morality (poor vicar!), so that, at the end of the year, the pupil can answer the question about where Judas lost his boots! (*Pharol*, n° 14, p. 3).

In spite of being labelled vagabonds by some teachers, the individuals who ran *Pharol* did not let up in their denouncement of “the institution that had a poor result and in contrast to the aspirations of the government, so much so that it already requires a reform”. In one of the last editions, Militino Pinto offers “condolences to the teaching body of the school and to the government represented in the person of the Minister of the Empire” and closes the matter by using the celebrated proverb: “He who sows winds, reaps storms” (*Pharol*, n° 14, p.1).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Without dismissing the contribution of the Escola Normal in its mission to transmit knowledge and prescribe a set of norms that comprise the distinctive know-how of the category, this paper aimed to surpass this perspective, in trying to demonstrate the forces at play in the battles waged between the actions carried out by the instituted power and the forms of resistance drawn up by the our protagonists.

It is known that the recently created Escola Normal still had many challenges to overcome. One need only examine the official report on the academic year of 1880, in which the reporter, despite recognising that there was no reason for “seductive hopes”, saw reasons for “disheartening sadness” and attributed the poor performance of the students to the crisis the school was going through, justifying its difficult “moment of transition”.

In comparing the data of this first report to the documents relative to the 1882-83 period, one concludes that many initial difficulties remained unsolved and that the school, from its very beginning, had structural problems such as, for example, the lack of a selection process for teachers and the maintenance of a night-time timetable that hindered the practical lessons¹⁴. The evidence that most comes to the fore is the performance of the pupils, albeit one can point out the unsuitability of the assessment criteria or the exaggerated quantity of topics to be studied.

Some years later, the highest circulation newspaper in the Court — *O Paiz* — printed a criticism of the Escola Normal on its front page. In the middle of the denouncements, one especially catches

the attention: Owing to the frequent absences of a certain teacher — who in truth was himself a substitute — a group of boys tried to attend a female class, which was given by contracted teachers, according to the pupils. It is easy to imagine what happened, but as put by the writer of the article:

Thrown out by the school guards, (...) one of the pupils was called to the secretary, and as his colleague feared that the authorities wanted to place full responsibility on him individually for their actions, (...) they went to the secretary to explain what had happened. The pupils, however, were not at all well received by the Secretary of the school, who severely reprimanded them. We ask the illustrious and prudent head of the Escola Normal and the Imperial Government to take the measures that the facts call for (*O Paiz*, 22/05/1886, p. 1).

It appears the agitation caused by the editor of the *Pharol* transformed into waves that had a bigger impact. It has proved impossible to find out the subsequent career of Militino Pinto, either as a teacher or a journalist. The only concrete information about him is his name in the enrolment registers of the Escola Normal in 1880, 1881 and 1882, always in the first series¹⁵. Meanwhile, the vestiges of this experience, recovered by means of looking at the “dust provoked by the events” (Revel, 1998, p. 31), remain as indications of the resistance of the students in the battle waged with the State to ensure they complied with the norms destined to instruct and civilize the people of the capital of the Empire.

ENDNOTES

1. The article results from research about the history of the teaching profession in the city of Rio de Janeiro (1880-1920) which I carried out as part of the Education and Society Studies and Documentation Programme (PROEDES/ UFRJ). The study integrates the *History of the Teaching Profession in Portugal and Brazil: similarities and divergences*.

2. Report by José M. Garcia to the Ministry of Empire Affairs, Advisor Pedro Leão Velloso, on 17/03/1883 (National Archive, Folder IE5 30).

3. Document written by the teacher Carlos de Laet to the Ministry of Empire Affairs, Barão Homem de Mello (National Archive, Folder IE5 29).

4. In line with article 6 of Decree no. 7.684 of 6/3/1880 which created the *Escola Normal da Corte. Coleção de Leis do Império Brasileiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Nacional, 1874.

5. As well as the registered pupils around 700 non-enrolled students, and 150 people who were granted clear entrance (responsible for the female students) attended the school. *Report of the most notable successes of the Escola Normal in 1880*, p. 6.

6. Document from the Head of the *Escola Normal* to the Ministry of Empire Affairs, on 30/04/1880. National Archive, folder IE5 28. In 1888, there was a transfer to the *Escola Rivadávia Correia* and from there to the *Escola Estácio de Sá*, were it remained until 1930, when the building constructed specifically to accommodate the school on Rua Mariz e Barros was opened.

7. The first problem faced by the new institution was the lack of specialised teachers. Therefore, teachers were nominated on a temporary basis, who were available owing to the termination of the various subjects in the *Imperial Colégio de Pedro II* and the *Instituto Comercial*. *Report on the most notable successes of the Escola Normal in 1880*, p. 2.

8. French and Religious Education became optional subjects, through Decree no. 7 247 of 19/04/1879 (Leôncio de Carvalho reform), which stipulated that this material was not compulsory for “non Catholics”. On a more scientific curriculum, as proposed by the 1881 Regulation, see Uekane (2004).

9. In the National Archive there are only three editions of the cited newspaper. The complete set

was located in the section of Rare Periodicals of the National Library.

10. *Pharol*, year I, no. 1, p.2. The newspaper was published every fortnight and subscriptions cost 500 reis a month, or 1\$000 (one thousand reis) per quarter. Its headquarters were at Rua General Camara, no. 361 and the printing services were carried out in the *Brazil Catholico* Print shop, at Rua Sete de Setembro, 65.

11. Through the stipulations of article no. 34 of the Regulations annexed to decree no. 7 684, pupils who behaved badly in lessons or in the grounds of the establishment would be given a warning by the respective teacher or by the head. If they re-offended, they would be subject to public reprimand (National Archive, folder IE5 28).

12. Article 17 of the Instructions for the *Escola Normal* of 12 May 1880 (National Archive, folder IE5 28).

13. In terms of access to a teaching career, article 86 of the decree that creates the *Escola Normal* guaranteed that the individuals who pass all the subjects of the course would be attributed qualification certificates that would give them preference to occupy the vacancies in primary education. Those who, having obtained full passes in all the series, and who were deemed by the Assembly as “distinctive due to their qualifications and moral standing” would have the right to be nominated as assistant teachers, in order of classification, regardless of any selection process (art. 87 of decree no. 7 684/1880).

14. Report presented to the Instruction Congress by Dr. Antonio Herculano de Souza Bandeira, Inspector-General of the Public Instruction of the Empire Capital, in 1883 (General Archive of the City of Rio de Janeiro — General Inspectorate of Instruction (1874-1893). Codex: 11— 4-22).

15. Document located in the Memory Centre of the Higher Education Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ISERJ). Registry Book no. 55.

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