

EXHIBITING, DISSEMINATING, PROMOTING, AND CIRCULATING SCHOOL OBJECTS, SYMBOLS, AND ARTEFACTS: INTERFACES BETWEEN UNIVERSAL EXHIBITIONS AND CENTENNIAL EXHIBITIONS IN BRAZIL – REPERTOIRE AND STRATEGIES OF A MATERIALITY

*Exhibición, difusión, promoción y circulación de objetos, símbolos
y artefactos escolares: interacciones entre las exposiciones universales
y las exposiciones del centenario en Brasil:
repertorio y estrategias de materialidad*

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ABSTRACT: This article analyses the role of Universal and National Exhibitions —particularly the Brazilian Centenary commemorations— as arenas for promoting social, industrial, and educational modernities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using primary sources such as official reports, commemorative albums, catalogues, medals, and photographic records, as well as journals including *Revista A Ilustração* and *Revista Nacional*, it explores how these events functioned as showcases of material culture and pedagogical innovation. The discussion is informed by historiographical perspectives from Hobsbawm, Nóvoa, Escolano Benito, and Pesavento, framing the exhibitions as part of broader processes of nation-building and the invention of traditions. Methodologically, the article adopts a historical-cultural approach, intersecting the history of education with the study of materiality. Findings indicate that these exhibitions not only reinforced projects of modernisation but also contributed to the diffusion of schooling practices, educational repertoires, and materials —including Montessori apparatus and school furniture— thereby aligning Brazil with international movements of active and progressive education.

Palabras clave

Exposiciones
universales
Centenarios
Cultura material
escolar

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza el papel de las Exposiciones Universales y Nacionales, en particular las conmemoraciones del Centenario de Brasil, como espacios para la promoción de la modernidad social, industrial y educativa a finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX. Utilizando fuentes primarias como informes oficiales, álbumes conmemorativos, catálogos, medallas y registros fotográficos, así como revistas como *Revista A Ilustração* y *Revista Nacional*, se explora cómo estos eventos funcionaron como escaparates de la cultura material y la innovación pedagógica. El análisis se basa en las perspectivas historiográficas de Hobsbawm, Nóvoa, Escolano Benito y Pesavento, enmarcando las exposiciones como parte de procesos más amplios de construcción nacional e invención de tradiciones. Metodológicamente, el artículo adopta un enfoque histórico-cultural, que entrelaza la historia de la educación con el estudio de la materialidad. Los resultados indican que estas exposiciones no sólo reforzaron proyectos de modernización, sino que también contribuyeron a la difusión de prácticas escolares, repertorios y materiales educativos —incluidos aparatos Montessori y mobiliario escolar—, alineando así a Brasil con los movimientos internacionales de educación activa y progresista.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE ADVENT OF WORLD EXHIBITIONS AND THE “REFERENCE SOCIETIES”

The theme of Universal Exhibitions has already mobilised significant efforts on the part of scholars of history and of historiographical production in education, resonating both in their role as arenas of visibility—functioning as “showcases” of the modernity desired by nations—and in the idea of a national model to be followed or even projected. Sandra J. Pesavento (1997) argues that.

As exposições funcionaram como síntese e exteriorização da modernidade dos ‘novos tempos’ e como vitrina de exibição dos inventos e mercadorias postos à disposição do mundo pelo sistema de fábrica. No papel de arautos da ordem burguesa, tiveram o caráter pedagógico de ‘efeito-demonstração’ das crenças e virtudes do progresso, da produtividade, da disciplina do trabalho, do tempo útil, das possibilidades redentoras da técnica, etc. Por meio das exposições, a burguesia encontrou um veículo adequado para a circulação não só de mercadorias, mas de ideias em escala internacional. Ou seja, as exposições não visavam apenas ao lucro imediato, advindo do incremento das vendas ou do estímulo à produção industrial pela comparação entre os potenciais das diferentes nações. As exposições foram também elementos de difusão/aceitação das imagens, ideais e crenças pertinentes ao ethos burguês. (Pesavento, 1997, p. 14)

At the same time, as Dussel (2011) aptly observes, the Exhibitions played a significant role in the process of hybridisation and meaning-making, in which education assumed a symbolic function in defining national modernity.

In this article, the aim is to discuss the world exhibitions —particularly the Paris Exhibition of 1889— in connection with the National Exhibition (Brazil) of 1908 and the Centenary Exhibition of Brazil in 1922, understood as events that conveyed repertoires and strategies of a certain visual, exhibitiv, formative, and pedagogical materiality.

To achieve this goal, the study draws on sources from newspapers and magazines that had an impact on the Brazilian context of the period, as well as on photographs, documents, and visual collections originating from the aforementioned events.

From a theoretical and methodological standpoint, the text engages with historiographical reflections on the topic of world exhibitions and also draws on the specific literature addressing the material culture of schooling and pedagogical renewal.

Universal Exhibitions established themselves as showcases for the nineteenth century (and, by extension, at the beginning of the twentieth), within a context of acceleration and expansion of the industrialisation process, driven by the strategies of imperialist expansion of capitalism—a hegemonic project centred in Europe. According to the analysis of Heloísa Barbuy (1996), these events introduced the first mass phenomena, the metropolitanisation of cities, and, with it, crowds as well as new experiences and sensations. From 1851 onwards, the first Universal Exhibitions were held, constituting the most condensed material representation of the capitalist world project. They brought together, within a single space, representations of expanding regions (European countries and the emerging United States), of regions under a full colonial regime, and of distant regions (from the imperialist perspective), promising sources of raw materials such as Latin America (Barbuy, 1996, p. 211).

Werner Plum (1979) argues that the World Exhibitions of the nineteenth century were imbued with the character of grand spectacles of socio-cultural transformation, and affirms that they constituted incarnations of the future, projecting attractions of visuality for that very purpose. The author highlights

the symbolic force present in the monuments erected in the spaces of the Exhibitions, such as the Crystal Palace in London in 1851, the Statue of Liberty, exhibited while still unfinished at the Paris Exhibition in 1878, and the Eiffel Tower, emblem of the Paris World Exhibition in 1889. “In order to be recognised by all as the beginning of a new era, it must be endowed with symbols” (Plum, 1979, p. 29).

Image 1. Engraving of the construction works (15 April 1889) at the Champ de Mars and of the Eiffel Tower for the Paris Exhibition



Source: *Revista A Ilustração*, Paris-RJ, 5 de maio de 1889, n. 9, p. 132.

The engraving above, depicting the construction at the Champ de Mars in Paris with the Eiffel Tower in the background, conveys this idea of building symbols of global visibility. The Brazilian press followed the unfolding of these events and the activities of the national delegations, most often publicising the settings and investments of European nations, while establishing goals for Brazil to affiliate itself with such achievements. For example, with regard to the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889, an image was published of the space dedicated to the press itself, intended to highlight both the grandeur of the event and the role assigned to the press.

Image 2. Press exhibition space, Campo de Marte, Paris Exhibition, 1889.



Source: *Revista A Ilustração*, Paris-RJ, 20 de abril 1889, v. 8, p. 121

Mariano Pina, director of *Revista A Ilustração*, in a chronicle on the opening day of the Exhibition in May 1889, states that

tudo isto que para aqui tenho estado a declamar, não é tanto para lhes descrever ou dar uma vaga impressão do *pitoresco* de Paris, vendo-se todas as casas, todas as ruas, todas as avenidas, cobertas de bandeiras de todos os países, de troféus onde a bandeira de França se entreteçava com o estandarte da China, ou do México, onde as bandeiras de Portugal e do Brasil se mesclavam com as bandeiras da Rússia, ou dos Estados-Unidos ou da Turquia, ou do Japão, o que dava a Paris um aspecto, *não de Paris, capital da França*, mas principalmente de – *Paris, capital do mundo!* (*Revista A Ilustração*, Paris-RJ, 20 de maio de 1889, n. 9, p. 146, grifos do original).

European nations, such as Paris at the 1889 Exhibition, regarded as modern, function as reference societies. The researcher Jürgen Schriewer (2000) argues that these nations would serve

[...] como unidades de referência, que podem ser trazidas a lume por vários argumentos políticos. Por outras palavras, elas são transformadas em “sociedades de referência [...] tornam-se, portanto, ‘condutoras’ de uma suposta ‘internacionalidade’, revestidas do caráter de modelos: transformam-se em países que estão à frente da civilização do mundo. (Schriewer, 2000, p. 106)

Brazil not only followed but also took part in these international events, as seen in the publicised installation of the Brazilian pavilion at the Paris Exhibition, which took place on 14 June 1889. The cover of *Revista A Ilustração* presents this representation through the following engraving.

Image 3. Engraving of the installation of the Brazilian Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition, 1889



Source: *Revista A Ilustração*, 5 de julho de 1889, n. 13, p. 185.

The editor of the magazine details that the exhibition of the Empire of Brazil extended over an area of 2,500 square metres and including a main pavilion, a gallery linking and connecting two buildings, and a small annex pavilion (referred to as the testing pavilion). According to the magazine, the main pavilion covered an area of 400 square metres, including three floors, and was constructed of iron, wood, and brick.

Image 4. Brazilian Pavilion at the Paris Universal Exhibition.
View to the left of the fountain and beneath the Eiffel Tower, 1889. Paris, France



Source: Acervo Arquivo Nacional.

Brazil took part in these international events, devised strategies to showcase its national products, sent delegations, and publicised such efforts through images and photographic albums.

Image 5. Paris Universal Exhibition: Brazilian Exhibition [album cover], 1889. Paris, France



Source: Acervo Arquivo Nacional.

According to historian and researcher Claudia Beatriz Heynemann, the album “Exposição Universal de Paris 1889 - Exposição Brasileira”, preserved in the National Archives, “is an event in itself, that of the diffusion of photographic language, establishing the visuality of an era, not only through what it chooses to show, but also by casting upon these settings the aura of modernity with which those societies were imbued.” The album, composed of sixty-one photographs, is dedicated to Brazil’s participation in the event, which celebrated the centenary of the French Revolution and of the Republic and attracted 32 million visitors. The Universal Exhibitions disseminated the advances of industry, commerce, and cosmopolitanism.

There was an ongoing debate regarding the necessity of Brazil’s participation in these universal events, despite internal criticisms circulating in political circles and in the press concerning this involvement, due to the absence of an industrialisation policy and the persistence of a markedly slaveholding society. The rhetoric of modernity fostered this sense of belonging and of sharing the signs of material progress, the transformations stemming from the industrial process, and a model of economic development and civilisation.

Beyond the Brazilian context, the theme of world exhibitions —and more specifically the Paris Exhibition of 1889— became one of the most frequently discussed topics in the French press. Alda Heizer (2009) examined periodicals that circulated in France during the second half of the nineteenth century and found that *Le Figaro* published a special issue devoted to the event, *Le Figaro Exposition*. Other periodicals, memoirs, reports, catalogues, and magazines such as the *Revue de l’Exposition Universelle de 1889* also dedicated special issues to these celebrations, presenting significant information. “There one can see depicted not only the Empire of Brazil within the French imaginary, but also articles that serve as documentary sources on the conceptions of science, progress, and civilisation intertwined with the texts” (p. 2). The press —both in France and at the Court of Rio de Janeiro— played a crucial role in the debates concerning topics such as Brazil’s participation in the Paris Exhibition of 1889 and the abolition of slavery in Brazil.

2. IN THE WAKE OF THE UNIVERSAL EXHIBITIONS, BRAZIL WOVE SCHOOL-RELATED SYMBOLS AND MATERIALITIES INTO THE COMMEMORATIONS OF CENTENARIES

Brazil understood the importance of organising such commemorative events and, in the first decades of the twentieth century, held two major exhibitions: in 1908, the Commemorative Exhibition of the Centenary of the Opening of the Ports, promoted by the Federal Government with the aim of publicising the country’s economic progress of that period; and in 1922, the Exhibition of the Centenary of Independence, in Rio de Janeiro.

At the 1908 Exhibition, the strategy of constructing spaces and palaces for the states (Brazilian regions) had a dual purpose: monumental exhibition areas with stands displaying products from all the states of the Federation, set out on the two floors of the ballrooms and reception halls of the Brazilian political elite.

Image 6. National Exhibition of 1908, Rio de Janeiro, RJ



Source: Augusto Malta. Acervo Museu da República.

In the images above are records made by Augusto Malta (1864-1957), the official photographer of the City of Rio de Janeiro, who produced a collection of photographs of the National Exhibition of 1908—Agricultural, Industrial, Pastoral, and of the Liberal Arts. This exhibition, held to commemorate the Centenary of the Opening of the Ports to Friendly Nations and located at Praia Vermelha in the Urca district, expressed the ideal of celebrating international trade networks and the capitalist and industrial way of life that became consolidated in the twentieth century.

Among the strategies for creating commemorative symbols and preserving the memory of the events was the circulation of a set of objects. Examples include medals and certificates of participation and awards for merchants, who, in possession of these titles, used them as criteria for social distinction and commercial promotion (this also extended to the educational field).

Image 7. Exposição Nacional de 1908, RJ



Source: Augusto Malta. Acervo Museu da República.

Image 8. Obverse and Reverse of the Gold Medal of the National Exhibition of 1908



Source: Museu Paranaense. Medalha de Ouro. N.º de registro: MP.MO.1276

Image 9. National Exhibition Certificate, 1908, RJ

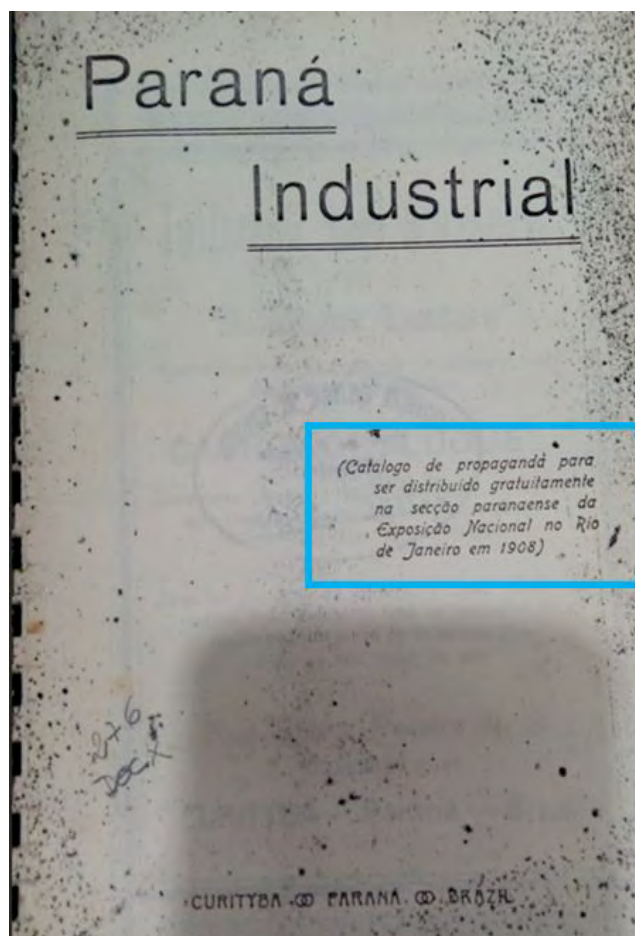


Source: Museu Paranaense.

The states of the Federation organised themselves to present their products at the 1908 Exhibition and to promote their merchants. The state of Paraná, for instance, established a commission and prepared a catalogue of the “Paranaense industry” to circulate among the stands and visitors of the event in Rio de Janeiro.

Gecia Garcia (2024), in her Phd thesis, presents and discusses school furniture merchants present at these events, such as Pedro Rispoli, Carlos Stephan, and Affonso Lubrano.

Image 10. Catálogo das Indústrias Paranaenses



Source: Paraná Industrial. Typ, Romário Martins, 1908
apud GARCIA, 2024, p. 169.

The use of awards for merchants can also be observed in another Exhibition—that of the Centenary of Brazil's Independence (1822-1922). According to Gecia Garcia (2024), at this Exhibition of 7 September 1922,

também gratificou os participantes das mostras com menções honrosas e medalhas. No caso do estado do Paraná, o 'jury internacional de recompensas' laureou com o grande prêmio a indústria Muller e Irmão pelo maquinário em lavoura e com medalha de prata o empreendedor Salvador Maida pela confecção de uma carteira escolar. (Brasil, Exposição Internacional, 1922, p. 7)

The historian Eric Hobsbawm argues that these awards were part of the creation of traditions that hark back to the nineteenth century, since the affirmation of the Nation-State and the rapid transformations of the period required “new devices to ensure or express social identity and cohesion, and to structure social relationships” (Hobsbawm, 1997, p. 271). For this author as well, the invention of public ceremonies guaranteed and continually reinforced the power of the state and the sense of satisfaction among citizens. From this perspective, the ritualisation of local, national, and universal exhibitions would propagate the legitimization of prosperity, of technical progress, and would publicise those States with greater economic strength. Hence the importance of the production of commemorative materialities, since they were imbued

with the “advertising value of anniversaries, as clearly demonstrated by the fact that they frequently provided the occasion for the first issue of historical prints or similar items in postage stamps, the most universal form of public symbolism” (Hobsbawm, 1997, p. 289).

Image 11. Pavilion of the Great Industries, Centenary Exhibition of 1922



Source: Acervo Museu Histórico Nacional, RJ.

The Centenary Exhibition was inaugurated in Rio de Janeiro on 7 September 1922 and concluded on 24 July of the following year (O Paiz, 25 July 1923). It “stood out as the most ambitious of the commemorative activities then planned to demonstrate the degree of progress and civilisation that Brazil, and its capital, had achieved in that century of independent life” (Motta, 2004, p. 31).

Photographic albums, catalogues, and commemorative stamps may be understood as part of the effort of the “invention of traditions,” in the sense articulated by Hobsbawm (1997), that is, a phenomenon that extended across several nations concerned with creating symbols and materialities that would function didactically in fostering and preserving social cohesion.

Agustín Escolano (2018) observes that the theme of Universal Exhibitions —extended here also to national exhibitions— assumes a high testimonial value for historians of the empirical culture of schooling. For the author, the exhibitions provided publicity and social visibility to the earliest representations of the contemporary world.

Image 12. Commemorative Stamp of the Centenary Exhibition, 1922



Source: Acervo Museu Histórico Nacional, RJ.

These events made possible the promotion and dissemination of school-related goods —books, furniture, writing utensils, toys, magazines— a diverse and powerful repertoire for school instruction, serving as showcases of pedagogical modernities.

In order to fulfil the objective of “being the expression of the economic and social life of Brazil in 1922”, the National Exhibition was to consist of 25 sections representing the country’s main activities: education and teaching; instruments and general processes of letters, sciences, and arts; material and general processes of mechanics; electricity; civil engineering and means of transport; agriculture; horticulture and arboriculture; forests and harvests; food industry; extractive industries of mineral origin and metallurgy; decoration and furnishing of public buildings and dwellings; yarns and textiles (Motta, 1992).

The Centenary Exhibition of Brazil’s Independence had an international character, with thirteen countries represented: the United States, Argentina, and Mexico (America); England, France, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, and Norway (Europe); and Japan (Asia). The 1922 Exhibition was the first to be held after the First World War, and for Brazil it was a timely opportunity to present the image of a modern nation.

Sven Schuster (2014) points out that the congresses held in Rio de Janeiro in 1922 not only provide a national perspective on how the political and cultural elite sought to give meaning to Brazil’s history, but

also constituted transnational spaces in which there was a rich exchange among Latin American, European, and North American scholars.

At the Centenary Exhibition of Brazil's Independence in 1922, school materials aimed at educational innovations were disseminated. The Companhia Melhoramentos of São Paulo, a publishing company that played an important role in the production and commercialisation of a range of school objects in the early decades of the twentieth century, on that occasion presented a display promoting books and didactic materials¹. According to Heloísa Helena Pimenta Rocha:

(...) criada em 1890, a Companhia Melhoramentos deslocou os seus investimentos, a partir de 1915, da impressão e encadernação para a edição de livros, a produção e a venda de materiais escolares os mais diversos, com vistas a dar suporte às práticas escolares, ao mesmo tempo em que buscava suscitar novas necessidades de consumo e ampliar os seus negócios, num contexto marcado pela difusão da escola primária em São Paulo. (ROCHA, 2019, p. 95)

According to Rochele Allgayer (2020), *Revista Nacional*, a publication edited by Companhia Melhoramentos of São Paulo, recorded the grand prizes of the International Centenary Exhibition.

Segundo a publicação o Diário Oficial da União do Jury Internacional da Exposição do Centenário no julgamento à parte escolar, compreendendo as 6 classes seguintes: 1.^a Educação da criança, Ensino primário, Ensino de adultos, 2.^a Ensino secundário, 3.^a Ensino Superior, Instituições Científicas, 4.^a Ensino especial artístico, 5.^a Ensino agrônomo e 6.^a Ensino especial, industrial e commercial. Nesse julgamento proferido por uma comissão técnica que fizeram parte delegados especiais representantes de diversas nações, São Paulo salientou-se brilhantemente, obtendo tres Grandes Premios, conferidos um ao Governo do Estado, outro ao Lyceu de Artes e Officios desta Capital e o outro à Secção Editora da Companhia Melhoramentos de São Paulo, que se inscreveu nas 6 classes referidas. (*Revista Nacional*, ano II, abril 1923, número 4, p. 251 apud ALLGAYER, 2020, pp. 48-49)².

By way of exemplification, I present a selection of images from the Exhibition organised by Companhia Melhoramentos for the 1922 Centenary, with the aim of illustrating the presence and circulation of certain school materials at these events.

¹ Companhia Melhoramentos of São Paulo was a publishing company founded in 1890, with a significant role in the production and commercialisation of a vast inventory of school objects intended for primary education in the early decades of the twentieth century. Initially created to focus on printing and bookbinding, from 1915 onwards the company turned its attention to the publication of books and the production and sale of various school materials, with the aim of supporting educational practices while simultaneously seeking to generate new consumer needs and expand its business. This development took place within a context of the growing diffusion of primary schooling in São Paulo, which required specific didactic materials. In 1926, Lourenço Filho entered into an agreement with Melhoramentos and organised the country's first collection of pedagogical texts, entitled *Biblioteca de Educação*, which he directed until his death (Ruy Lourenço Filho, ABE, 1966). Hernâni Donato, in his work *100 Anos da Melhoramentos 1890-1990*, reports that in 1925 Melhoramentos already included "one of the most established figures of the New School movement, Professor Manoel Bergstrom Lourenço Filho." As editorial consultant for the company, Lourenço Filho produced around 30,000 evaluations of children's books and didactic works. According to Donato (1990, p. 82), the *Biblioteca de Educação* aimed to introduce into the country the philosophical and educational currents developed in other centres of debate. Lourenço Filho prepared 35 titles for this collection, signing translations, adaptations, and revisions of texts, while at the same time advancing the New School movement, influenced by American and European philosophical and pedagogical traditions (Allgayer, 2025, p. 220).

² The original spelling from the magazine source has been preserved.

Image 13. Exhibition of Companhia Melhoramentos, at the Centenary of Brazil's Independence, 1922



Source: Companhia Melhoramentos de São Paulo. Source cedida por Rochele Allgayer.

Image 14. Exhibition of Companhia Melhoramentos, at the Centenary of Brazil's Independence, 1922



Source: Companhia Melhoramentos de São Paulo. Source cedida por Rochele Allgayer.

Image 15. Exhibition of Companhia Melhoramentos, at the Centenary of Brazil's Independence, 1922



Source: Companhia Melhoramentos de São Paulo. Fonte cedida por Rochele Allgayer.

The record of the images makes it possible to identify lithographic and typographic material, world maps, a map of the metric decimal system, cartographic material, books, uniforms, games, Montessori materials—items that circulated not only in Brazilian exhibitions but also in European and North American contexts. Part of this material, such as that of Maria Montessori, forms part of the repertoire of proposals and methods considered innovative, through which public instruction and early childhood education could be brought into alignment with the projects of active education.

The debate and contribution to early childhood education from the perspective of the active school can be found in the work of Ferrière³:

Escola Ativa, fundamentada na ciência da infância, evoluiu e continuará a evoluir; seria vão esperar que ela se fixasse em fórmulas definitivas e categóricas: no dia em que isso acontecesse, ela deixaria de existir. Mas esperar? A infância não espera. Ela vive, cresce, lança sobre nós seus olhares inquisitivos. Nós, que abominamos os métodos coercitivos do passado que violam e mutilam a natureza humana, o que faremos? A abstenção também é uma solução, mas muito mais prejudicial do que a escola no

³ Third edition of the book *La Scuola Attiva*, by Adolphe Ferrière, published in Italy in 1929. I am grateful to Rochele Allgayer for providing a copy of this material, made available through her doctoral sandwich research at the University of Turin.

estilo antigo! Resta, portanto, apenas uma saída: estudar, compreender e então agir: transformar a escola; não tolerar mais tudo o que é imposto de fora para dentro, ao corpo e à alma da criança, uma formação que muitas vezes é deformadora! Introduzir na escola o ar, a vida, o amor, para que a criança floresça ali e desenvolva, de dentro para fora (com o processo próprio de tudo o que vive, cresce e prospera), as energias saudáveis que nele dormem e esperam sua hora para se realizar, para amadurecer nele o melhor que tem. (Ferrière, 1929, p. XXIV, tradução minha)

This discussion on the active school leads to the circulation of the New School movement. According to Rosa Fátima de Souza (2013), in Brazil the New School became the guiding ideal for the renewal of primary education from the 1920s onward. By the end of that decade and the early 1930s, several Brazilian states had implemented educational reforms based on modern pedagogy, which proposed not only methodological changes in teaching but also new aims for education—linking the school to broader projects of national modernisation and social reconstruction. The author goes on to argue that two aspects characterised educational renewal under the New School:

“the so-called active school, involving formulations such as the globalisation of teaching, the adoption of centres of interest, active methods, the emphasis on activities such as excursions, subject-specific classrooms, the project method, etc., and the auxiliary school institutions. It is within these innovations that one can understand the new meanings attributed to teaching objects and the material reconfiguration of primary schools.” (p. 109)

In light of this statement, it becomes clear that the display of posters, world maps, and other school objects was grounded in the debate on pedagogical renewal and the material provisioning of schools. This fostered an organic relationship between discussions on pedagogical knowledge, the promotion and dissemination of educational objects and materials by companies and manufacturers, and the State operating at the intersection of pedagogy and the market.

Gecia Garcia (2024) discusses the “culture(s) of provisioning” and advances historiographical studies by defining material provisioning as “a way of investigating the forms of distribution, supply, and the meanings attributed to the school desk. In its process of idealisation, manufacture, and commercialisation, it reveals not only the challenges but also the strategies and actions that the State, mediated by educational agents, mobilised to create and institutionalise the primary school” (p. 49). In this sense, I understand that the promotion and advertisement —by the commercial house Melhoramentos, as shown in Figures 13, 14, and 15— of lithographic and typographic materials, world maps, metric-system charts, cartographic materials, books, uniforms, games, and so forth, constitute this “culture of provisioning” and the pedagogical urgencies that had been framed as renewal since the late nineteenth century and became prominent in the twentieth century.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The Universal and National Exhibitions (such as the Centenary Exhibitions in Brazil) served as stages for the promotion and visibility of a social, industrial, and educational machinery, intended to reiterate and disseminate actions and auspices of modernity, which were not always fully achieved.

Such events contributed to the promotion of instruction and to the constitution of a pedagogical and school repertoire. Institutionalisation, access, and school attendance are processes that emerged amidst lengthy and significant debates and that profoundly altered the lives of families and children. The establishment

of this “social invention”—the school—took place within contexts of disputes and tensions. For António Nóvoa, the school became an

(...) componente essencial do Estado-nação e de um ideal de sociedade produzido e difundido, sistematicamente, por uma série de atores e agências. Ele não é fruto do acaso ou de um processo imprevisível. Ao contrário, é o resultado da conjugação de vários esforços, conduzidos por intelectuais, homens de Estado e educadores. (Nóvoa, 2006, p. 197)

It is important to recognise that the circulation of projects and knowledge concerning the schooling of childhood, which took shape and spread forcefully at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, also relied on Exhibitions (both universal and national) as powerful and strategic spaces of promotion.

Given the purpose established for this text regarding the role of world exhibitions and their connections with national exhibitions —such as those held in Brazil in 1908 and 1922— it can be noted that the strategies of these events, beyond projecting, disseminating, and displaying the achievements regarded as progress in social, economic, and cultural life, also positioned these international exhibition environments as arenas for the promotion of science and of what, at the time, was understood as pedagogical modernities. Researcher María-Gabriela Mayoni (2021), in analysing the devices for teaching nature in Argentine schools at the end of the nineteenth century, argues that these exhibition spaces and “other forms of communication of scientific knowledge of the period—such as books, newspapers, magazines and newsletters, lectures, and scientific displays—gave rise to a material and visual rhetoric defined within the framework of a culture of consumption and a mass market, in which audience attention and the experiences offered were at stake” (p. 187). The author, in dialogue with the historiography on world exhibitions, also emphasises that

las ferias mundiales fueron otra gran manifestación de las prácticas seriadas características de la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Los hombres de las ciencias aprovecharon estos espacios para forjar la idea de universalización, tanto de la ciencia como de la educación. Las exposiciones universales fueron una expresión de culto al progreso y a la industrialización, a las máquinas y a los objetos científicos, por eso llamaron su atención ya que multiplicaban el interés por la ciencia y favorecían un atisbo de diálogo intercultural en el marco de una hegemonía cultural europea. (Mayoni, 2021, p. 188)

Another dimension highlighted by this study concerns the strategies for using the prizes awarded to merchants at these national and international events, which served not only to promote and publicise their products but also contributed to their commercial visibility and acted as instruments of social and market distinction.

Finally, a further central aspect relates to the dimension of material culture and its connection with the school world. In these circuits of national and international exhibitions, the display of books, pedagogical materials, and games was not merely intended to showcase the teaching objects in circulation at the time; rather, through these school objects—understood as social vectors—pedagogical knowledge, commercial rivalries, and representations of childhood, science, and the world were expressed. It is useful here to draw on Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s (2014) reflection and his idea of “connected histories” (p. 27) in examining the relationship between Europe and Asia, since this perspective allows us to move beyond the classical historiographical stance that treats the relations between international and national events as mere instances of influence exerted by the former upon the latter, and that views educational objects merely as replications of auspicious technological progress. I understand that school objects, as well as the circulation of knowledge within these spaces, express the “intense cultural and economic exchanges and

the continuous movement of people and things across political, religious, and linguistic borders” (Marcocci, 2014, p. 9). In this sense, school material culture both reflects and enables scientific, cultural, economic, commercial, and pedagogical circuits. The exhibitions—whether universal or national—thus become stages for these strategies of exhibiting, disseminating, promoting, and circulating school objects, symbols, and artefacts.

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