

**DOSSIER**

*Innovation and Tradition in the Transnational History of Educational Knowledge and Practices*

**Tradition and innovation: transnational transactions in the history of education*****Tradição e inovação: transações transnacionais na História da Educação*****Bruno Bontempi Jr.<sup>a</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

This dossier proposes a transnational approach, highlighting border crossings that generate hybridization between educational knowledge and school practices. The polarity between tradition and innovation is central, being historically tensioned since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the modern school began to reconcile cultural preservation with preparation for the future. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, evolutionism influenced educational theories and justified the graded school, while the New School movement criticized tradition and advocated for innovative methods. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, historical events destabilized linear notions of time and progress, prompting conceptual revisions in both pedagogy and historiography. Tradition, associated with the preservation of knowledge, and innovation, linked to progress and creativity, became strategic categories to qualify educational practices and discourses. The articles in this dossier analyze various events and sources to investigate, from a transnational perspective, how tradition and innovation confronted and intertwined within educational discourses and practices.

*Keywords:* Transnational history. Tradition. Innovation. School Culture.

**RESUMO**

O dossiê propõe uma abordagem transnacional, destacando os cruzamentos de fronteiras que geram hibridações entre saberes e práticas escolares. A polaridade entre tradição e inovação é central, sendo historicamente tensionada desde o século XVIII, quando a escola moderna passou a conciliar a preservação cultural com a preparação para o futuro. No século XIX, o evolucionismo influenciou teorias educacionais e justificou a escola graduada, enquanto a Escola Nova criticou a tradição e propôs métodos renovadores. Ao longo do século XX, eventos históricos desestabilizaram as noções lineares de tempo e progresso, provocando revisões conceituais na pedagogia e na produção historiográfica. A tradição, associada à conservação de saberes, e a inovação, vinculada ao progresso e à criatividade, tornaram-se categorias estratégicas para qualificar práticas e discursos educacionais. Os artigos deste dossiê analisam eventos e fontes diversas para

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investigar, em perspectiva transnacional, como tradição e inovação se afrontaram e se combinaram nos discursos e nas práticas educacionais.

*Palavras-chave:* História transnacional. Tradição. Inovação. Cultura Escolar.

Research and writing in the history of education have become more diverse in recent years, both in terms of themes and problems and in relation to theoretical-methodological approaches. While in the 1970s and 1980s the prevalence of “historical-dialectical materialism” was absolute within the Brazilian community of researchers in the history of education, the rise of the “new cultural history” shaped much of the production in this field between the 1990s and 2000s. The pluralism evident in tables of contents of collections and specialized journals, as well as in presentations at scholarly meetings, stems from factors that still warrant investigation. However, it is plausible to assume that the intensification of international circulation was a decisive factor for the proliferation of themes and references. In fact, the 1990s witnessed a significant number of travels, exchanges, meetings, and networks involving both experienced researchers and students abroad. With these encounters, knowledge, practices, tools, inquiries, and references were able to cross borders and, as a result, reconfigure both national historiographies and their fields of specialists.

This hypothesis, which illustrates how the transnational approach shapes the diverse landscape of contemporary research and writing in the history of education, also constitutes the core issue of this dossier<sup>1</sup>. In both cases, the aim is to historically investigate agencies and agents, relationships, and effects of border crossings in which knowledge and practices transcended nation-states, giving rise both to the dissemination of broad-ranging patterns and to appropriations and hybridizations marked by strong local features. Within such transactions, the polarity between “tradition” and “innovation” — a persistent theme in the context of schooling — is the challenge we put forth to the contributions of the dossier.

Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the school has been established as a modern institution, operating according to principles of rationality and efficiency applied both to the teaching of cultural content and to norms of civility. As it served to disseminate a cultural heritage, schooling assumed a commitment to tradition; yet, in seeking to prepare the future by educating new generations, it could not remain impermeable to innovation. In educational discourses, tradition is commonly associated with cultural productions and established knowledge regarded as useful, relevant, and universal. From a critical perspective, however, it is also linked to the conservatism of rigid and outdated ideas and customs. The idea of innovation, often associated with modernity, progress, and creativity, has at times become an object of distrust and fear, as it was seen to threaten civilization and established values. The terms “tradition” and “innovation” are categories employed in educational discourses to compare, qualify, or disqualify knowledge, practices, institutions, and individuals, and are therefore strategic to identify points of tension and conflict in the field. Therefore, it is essential to attend to

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their presence in language, the transformations of their meanings over time, and the variations observed across different contexts, since what was perceived as innovative in one region might have been regarded as retrograde in another.

Especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the urgent need to configure or reconfigure national education systems triggered disagreements over domestic ways of being and acting and gave rise to contrasts between local cultural and identity elements and globally expanding school models, this polarity took on dramatic contours. Concurrently, the scientific field vibrated with insurgencies and paradigm shifts that also affected education. The theme of evolution became central in the natural and social sciences, and the development of individuals, as well as social progress, came to be understood from an evolutionary perspective, which framed the problem of differences among human groups and individuals in terms of greater or lesser degrees of civilization and progress. In the field of educational theories, it came to be accepted that there was a direct relationship between the natural laws of human development and the history of societies (Gould, 2003; Gouvêa; Gerken, 2010). In practice, the idea of the evolutionary genesis of human intellect was applied to the division and ideal sequencing of school grades in the graded school model (Monarcha, 1999). Subsequently, it was argued that the main goal of the school was no longer to transmit knowledge, but to promote student development. This statement was central to the discourse of the New School, as a criticism of the contents and methods of the traditional school — condemned as obstacles to student development and to the progress of knowledge. Opposing this pedagogical tradition, the movement defended the renewal of teaching methods, based on scientific knowledge about child development, seeking to modernizing society.

Swedish writer Ellen Key designated the 20<sup>th</sup> century as The Century of the Child, title of her 1909 book, in a proposition that spread throughout the educational field. It came to be argued that the efforts of the state and families in the education and health of children were investments for the future. However, contradictions of scientific and social thought persisted: if the child was regarded as the future of humanity, the hope for better days, under the thesis of homology between ontogenesis and phylogenesis, the child also appeared associated with the primitive man, the uncivilized savage of evolutionary psychology. Teachers, as representatives of cultural and civil values to be transmitted, were valued as responsible for educating new generations; but as adults in positions of authority, they were also criticized for clinging to the past of knowledge and social interactions, and even for resisting change.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the themes of continuity, evolution, and progress were constantly challenged by historical events such as world wars and economic crises, which left their mark on the arts and human sciences, including pedagogy and historiography. This ideological dissemination, radiating from Western nations in dominant positions, had implications for theories and social policies of states, but also affected subjectivities less aligned with them. The perception of time, the meanings attributed to its “passage,” and the notions of accumulation, discard, progress, or backwardness — especially when and where they could be “recognized” in observable phenomena — destabilized the understanding of what was designated as tradition and renewal (or innovation).

Locally, the perception of time as a unidirectional arrow of progress confronted the value of the “local” or “national” in relation to the “modern” and “universal.”

If such a dichotomous way of thinking and feeling time was not widely subverted — except perhaps in the arts of Picasso and Stravinsky — today’s historiography can marshal diverse conceptual tools to problematize its single direction and, in the case of the history of education and schooling, to inquire into temporalities in other ways. Borrowing a musical terminology, the relations between tradition and innovation may be thought of as expressions of the melodic and rhythmic movements of counterpoint and fugue. In brief, counterpoint is the combination of two or more melodic lines, in which the subsequent ones, in relation to the first, create harmonic results horizontally. With poetic license (and the forgiveness of musicians), we might take tradition as the first melodic line, from which each innovation would position itself and create a combination, simultaneously and at each moment, through more or less dissonant intervals. In turn, fugue opens with one voice, answered by a second that intones the same motif, although transposed. The first then continues in accompaniment, while other voices are gradually added, generating harmonic colors with the overlapping of melodic responses. Broadly speaking, just like the counterpoints of a fugue, innovation and tradition coexist, are polyphonic, and unfold in compressed or extended temporalities. In this sense, the musical metaphor helps us recognize the reticulated character of temporalities, as well as the complex, non-univocal meanings of the discourses and practices in which they are entangled.

Historians have abandoned the assumption of linear time that accommodates events within a continuous, evolutionary narrative. Temporalities multiplied according to themes, objects, sources, and theoretical perspectives; logical or deterministic explanations of causes and consequences in historical processes were challenged, and efforts were made to identify and describe moments of rupture that produced unforeseen transformations in the course of events. Concurrently, the human sciences began to question classifications based on grand universal narratives, in which Western Europe and the United States appeared as advanced centers, radiating civilization, innovation, and progress, while peripheral, primitive, and backward poles were expected to reproduce the most advanced models in order to move forward.

In the field of education, historiography has shown that in countries from other regions of the globe, knowledge and pedagogical practices of nations considered developed were not simply imported but appropriated, reinterpreted, and transformed in light of the cultures and needs of local populations, as perceived by educators and policymakers. Moreover, in these countries and regions, ideas and practices were also formulated and, with international circulation and dissemination in exhibitions, conferences, and publications, were made known abroad, demonstrating that their agents actively participated in the global movement of educational and school modernization (Vidal; Silva; Lima; Bontempi, 2024; Silva, 2018). Such studies have shown that the relations between tradition and innovation, in addition to not being linear or unidirectional regarding time, cannot be understood within the confines of a rigid geographical division based on the center-periphery division.

Therefore, historical time is not exhausted by the past-present-future axis, but encompasses different durations, continuities, and accelerations. School culture is a good example of the coexistence of long-term practices, such as monitoring student attendance and assigning grades to their work, alongside much more recent ones, such as the incorporation of new technologies into the curriculum. One must also consider the different stories that can be written about unequal schooling processes of boys and girls, of children from more privileged social groups, and of those whose access to schooling was only admitted much later (Nóvoa, 2001, p. 48). Thus, one can speak of stories that intersect, as well as others that continued to run in parallel for a long time.

The perspective of this dossier also converges with theories derived from the linguistic turn, which highlighted the productive dimension of discourse — no longer considered a mere representation of reality, but rather a constitutive of objects, subjects, and events (Foucault, 2004). As António Nóvoa (2001, p. 51) observed, the concept of discourse became central to the shift in perspective within the history of education, which for a long time was dominated by pedagogical ideas — that is, by the “endless search for origins, influences, and causes, in an attempt to interpret the ideas of the great educators of the past” (our translation). For him (Nóvoa, 2001, p. 51),

The “new” cultural history of education, in contrast, is interested in the production, diffusion, and reception of educational discourses across time and space. Thus, the focus of research has shifted to discursive practices that regulate schooling, especially where rupture or conflict occurs (our translation).

In this dossier, it was suggested that tensions between tradition and innovation in the dialogical universe of knowledge and school practices should be situated within historical contexts of transactions between the global, the national, and the local — that is, in the various modalities in which the crossing of borders can be observed. The choice for this perspective lies in its potential to reveal problematizing and challenging aspects of the self-sufficiency of national histories, particularly because these narratives encompass the sometimes antagonistic meanings of “national” and “international,” of the “autochthonous” and the “foreign.” For Saunier (2013), even the “nation” becomes a category used by agents to generate situations, roles, values, institutions, and behaviors that shape processes of internationalization. In these complex and intricate relations, changes in the substance of the “national” will always impact the dynamics of the “international” (Caruso, 2014, p. 11).

However, this does not mean the dissolution of the nation-state, nor the discrediting of its role in the geometry of international relations. While directing its focus toward agents and their actions in specific temporal and geographical contexts, transnational history navigates across different conceptions of spatiality by attending to mobilities and border crossings. Therefore, what becomes significant are the interconnections and interdependencies between the national and the rest of the world, as well as the foreign presence within domestic history.

According to Droux and Hofstetter (2014, p. 5), relational analyses have the power to reveal the “ability of national actors, whether civil servants or members of local civil society, to go

beyond their borders to initiate new policies inspired by foreign experiences (or, at times, designed against their influences).” The purpose of this dossier was thus to encourage the description and interpretation of the ways in which individual and collective agents engaged in transnational relations, whether to preserve traditional knowledge and practices acquired in their training and valued in their experiences, or to criticize tradition and support initiatives for the renewal of curricula and teaching methods, as well as to formulate expectations associated with pedagogical innovations. The articles gathered here scrutinize the ways in which, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, criteria of innovation and tradition, advancement or backwardness were historically and transnationally formed and disseminated, enabling the comparison and hierarchization of school systems, institutions, knowledge, practices, and subjects. The main sources examined include schoolbooks and manuals used in basic education and teacher training, as well as didactic materials such as workbooks, historical maps, psychometric instruments, and autobiographical texts.

The article “The Waldensian Educational Process in Uruguay (1858–1880),” by Gerardo Garay Montaner, opens the dossier. Drawing on a rich repertoire of sources — including personal letters, diaries, and official documents — the author analyzes the construction of the cultural identity of Waldensian settlers, “a religious minority with medieval roots,” during their settlement in Uruguay. The article underscores the centrality of education and written culture in ensuring community cohesion and in confronting economic and social hardships. The author defies the traditional narrative that describes this process as a simple cultural transplant, arguing instead that it was a story involving both adaptation and innovation in response to challenges posed by the new context.

The following two articles focus on the transnational circulation of ideas and its local effects based on Brazilian cases. In “‘Schoolmasters to his Race’: Political Metaphor of the Transnational Circulation of Ideas of Racial Inclusion in the Early Twentieth Century”, Jonas Roque Ribeiro draws on the biography of educator José Eutrópio (1886-1929) and his dialogue with other Black intellectuals of the West, focusing on how Eutrópio’s studies were mobilized in the defense of guiding principles for formal education in Brazil. His analysis emphasizes discourses on schooling, which, as he argues, “has become a central metaphor in debates on civil and political rights of transnational Black movements.” In “Herbert Spencer: Science and Evolution in History of Education Manuals in Circulation in Brazil (1914-1999),” Leonardo Batista dos Santos and Décio Gatti Jr. examine how the ideas of the British thinker were translated, appropriated, and disseminated in History of Education textbooks circulating in Brazil between 1914 and 1999. The empirical basis includes foreign manuals translated into Portuguese (1939-1999) and Brazilian publications (1914-1989). By comparing this material with reviews of commentaries and with Spencer’s own works, the authors reveal how concepts and categories related to themes such as evolutionism, the hierarchy of knowledge, and scientific education were presented diversely. Amid classifications, divergences, selections, and accommodations, Santos and Gatti Jr. confirm Spencer’s presence in the canon of modern pedagogy, while also cataloguing the “translations” of his thought that reached teachers in training.

Three articles focus specifically on teacher training with the analysis of books intended for educators. “The ‘Biblioteca de Cultura Pedagógica’ Manuals and the Advice on Education Renovation

from its Founder Clotilde Rezzano (1946-1951)” presents the results of the research conducted by Roberlayne de Oliveira Borges Roballo on the manuals of this collection, directed by educator Clotilde Guillén de Rezzano — a precursor of the New School movement in Argentina. The author reconstructs Clotilde’s trajectory and analyzes elements related to the production and circulation of the works in the collection, which form part of the pedagogical literature aimed at teacher training. Grounded in robust empirical research, the article explores both materiality and narratives, problematizing representations and analyzing editorial strategies. It concludes that the manuals of the “Library of Pedagogical Culture,” written by authors from various countries, promoted the dissemination of guidance for teaching practices considering renewal principles, crossing national borders and, thanks to the strength of the Kapelusz publishing house, influencing teacher training in other Latin American nations. In “‘Adorned with modern concepts’: circulation of foreign references in *Apostillas de Pedagogia*, by Balthazar Góes (1905)”, Rony Rei do Nascimento Silva undertakes a detailed examination of a didactic material for teacher training, produced by a teacher at the Ruy Barbosa Normal School in Aracaju in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The analysis characterizes the ways in which foreign references were appropriated with a view to modernize education in Sergipe State. Drawing on the concept of “cultural repertoire,” the author shows how the educator from Sergipe mobilized references to the publications of Pestalozzi and Norman Calkins in his manuals, aiming to disseminate and defend the intuitive method of teaching. The article “Didactics and its Manuals in a Transnational Perspective: Disciplinary Boundaries and Circulation Spaces (Brazil-Portugal-Spain, 1930 to 1970)” presents a comparative analysis of 32 didactic manuals — a discipline that became central to teacher training — published in the three countries, seeking to characterize their similarities. In this study, Carolina Ribeiro Cardoso and Vivian Batista da Silva adopt a transnational perspective in analyzing sources to highlight the importance of translations and the international circulation of authors, factors that decisively contributed to didactic manuals crossing national borders and being read by teachers from different countries. As the authors state, “By reading the manuals, teachers came into contact with other ideas and experiences, which constituted a body of knowledge shared beyond national borders.”

In a similar approach, in “Educational Practice in the Public Schools of Piauí (1927-1961) in the Light of the Transnational History of Educational Knowledge and Practices”, Maria do Socorro Pereira de Sousa Andrade analyzes the constitution of school culture in primary schools of Piauí State between 1927 and 1961. The author focuses on graded primary schools, emphasizing the training of teachers and teaching practices, especially by examining curricular and methodological prescriptions for the teaching of Geography. Drawing on documentary analysis of normative sources, memorials, reports, and teaching programs, the author highlights the mediation of agents in the local translations of pedagogical knowledge circulating globally. Framed within the transnational approach, the study explores local modes of appropriation and uses of modern pedagogy, revealing practices that express a school culture built of memory and experience, in which tradition and innovation coexisted in an integrated manner.

Also aiming to characterize the transnational circulation of ideas and resources that crossed borders, Rogério Monteiro Siqueira and Luciana Dadico investigate the local appropriation of international knowledge and instruments of psychometrics, specifically from Germany, in the article “On the Presence and Absence of the Person in Psychometrics: The Circulation of Psychometric Instruments in 1920s São Paulo.” Their contribution is valuable as it recalls the material dimension of the appropriation of discourses and the production of knowledge, which, whether in scientific knowledge or in schooling processes, requires access to and handling of materials such as books, journals, and objects, including school supplies, laboratory instruments, and machinery. Based on the analysis of a study presented by engineer and polytechnic professor José Octávio Monteiro de Camargo at a hygiene congress and focusing on a specific instrument — the tremometer — used in professional selection processes, the authors discuss the intricate process of scientific production, circulation, appropriation, and dissemination.

Carolina Carvalho Ramos de Lima, in “Chronological Charts and Maps for History Teaching in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century” positions her work within studies on the history of History education, particularly with the examination of materiality and school culture. The author analyzes chronological charts and maps used at Colégio Abílio in Rio de Janeiro in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, placing them in the international circulation of teaching artifacts and methods. The study emphasizes the role of the school’s director-owner, Abílio Cezar Borges, as a mediator in the circulation of teaching methods, pedagogical ideas, and artifacts produced in other nations. Lima observes, after a thorough analysis of the materials, that the circulation provided by the convergence of the expansion of the public education system with the increase of the international school market involved transnational connections that broadened the repertoire of pedagogical innovations, which, however, carried cultural and ideological values that impacted education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

“Values and Proposals on the Radio as an Educational Medium in Brazil and Spain in the 1930s. A Comparative Study”, co-authored by Kelly Alves, from the Federal University of Bahia, and Víctor Guijarro Mora, from Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, in Madrid, focuses on pedagogical proposals involving the use of radio as a technology in a period of great development of broadcasting in both countries. Drawing on articles from the Spanish publications *Ondas* (1925–1936) and *Catalunya Ràdio* (1931–1934), which featured professionals across various fields, as well as the Brazilian pedagogical manual *Rádio e Educação* (1934) by Ariosto Espinheira, the authors employ a comparative method to characterize discourses circulating in both countries regarding the potential of radio to universalize culture and advance civilization, provided it was integrated into pedagogical practices and modern curricula.

The article “An Interpretation of the History of Brazilian Education: The Bibliographic Manual of Brazilian Studies (1949)”, by Roni Menezes, presents an interesting counterpoint to analyses of the local appropriation of transnational knowledge and practices. Focusing on a work organized by the Brazilian Rubens Borba de Moraes, who served as deputy director of library services at the United Nations, and William Berrien, an American educator and professor at Harvard University, as an “initiative of the Institute of Latin American Studies, based in the United States,” the article

contributes to understanding how efforts were made to synthesize Brazilian culture for both domestic and international audiences.

In “CIEP: a (Trans)national Institution for the Training of Secondary School Educators (1945-1952)”, Norberto Dallabrida and Laurent Gutierrez examine two original pedagogical dimensions of the *Centre International d’Études Pédagogiques* (CIEP), based in the city of Sèvres. The first dimension addressed is the center’s role in preparing teachers for voluntary work in the *classes nouvelles*, newly implemented by Gustave Monod in secondary education. Drawing on the center’s published bulletin, French educational legislation, and testimonies from former trainees and educators, the authors highlight that teacher training included pedagogical lectures, planning and assessment internships, and visits to the Lycée de Sèvres, where innovative practices — such as full-day schedules, supervised exercises, and educational guidance — were implemented in practice. Regarding the second dimension, they reveal that from 1949 onwards, with the creation of the *Association des Amis de Sèvres*, the *Bulletin d’Information Les Amis de Sèvres*, and support from UNESCO, the CIEP established itself as an international hub attracting educators and authorities interested in learning about the functioning of the *classes nouvelles* and the ideas and proposals for the renewal of secondary education.

The collection of works gathered here provides a comprehensive view of the richness of contemporary academic production in the history of education, particularly regarding the ways in which relationships between actors, practices, and knowledge from different geographical regions were established from a transnational perspective. When these studies also consider tensions generated in the educational field around temporal categories of tradition and innovation, we can apprehend a variety of ways of thinking and doing were (dis)qualified depending on whether their place of origin was considered advanced or backward. As the articles in this dossier demonstrate, just as efforts were made to import and incorporate what was produced in countries recognized as *loci* of progress, there were also attempts to showcase abroad the most innovative practices occurring in schools of countries considered less advanced, which were also visited by researchers from the most developed centers in search of expanding their knowledge and references. We consider that we have achieved our goal in proposing this call for papers and we thank the authors who contributed to this dossier. Finally, we thank the editorial team of *Educar em Revista* for providing the necessary conditions for this work to be completed.

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