



**Notes about the testimony of children in the historiography of Education
(Brazil, 19th and 20th centuries)**

Apontamentos sobre o testemunho infantil na historiografia da educação
(Brasil, Séculos 19 e 20)

Apuntes sobre el testimonio infantil en la historiografía de la Educación
(Brasil, Séculos 19 y 20)

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Abstract

Regarding attempts to listen to the voice of children of the past, what types of testimonies by children have the historians of the Brazilian education been investigating? This paper aims at offering some notes regarding this theme. Chronologically, it focuses on the 19th and 20th centuries. In methodological terms, it approaches three historiographical fields presenting intersection of interests in relation to children of the past: historiography of childhood, historiography of culture about Brazil, and historiography of education. The conclusions pointed out that the available sources vary according to the studied period. For the 20th century, writings and documents produced by children have been used (school notebooks or correspondences). In turn, for the 19th century, egodocuments are the sources that, despite being indirect, allow access to the experiences of Brazilian children of that time.

Key words: Sources. Childhood. History of Education. Historiography.

Resumo

Em se tratando de tentar ouvir a voz da criança do passado, a que tipos de testemunhos infantis têm recorrido os historiadores e historiadoras da educação brasileira? Oferecer alguns apontamentos em torno dessa questão é o objetivo deste artigo. O recorte cronológico adotado transita entre os séculos 20 e 19. Em termos metodológicos, visita três campos historiográficos, entre os quais há intersecção e cruzamento de interesses em torno da criança no passado: o da historiografia da infância, o da historiografia da cultura sobre o Brasil e o da historiografia da educação propriamente dita. As conclusões apontam que, a depender do período estudado, variam as fontes disponíveis. Para o século 20 têm sido utilizadas, recentemente, escritas infantis, documentos produzidos pela própria criança (cadernos escolares ou correspondências). Já para o século 19, os egodocumentos são as fontes que, mesmo indiretas, permitem acessar as experiências da criança brasileira daquela época.

Palavras-chave: Fontes. Infância. História da Educação. Historiografia.

Resumen

En cuanto a tratar de oír la voz del niño del pasado, ¿a qué tipos de testimonios infantiles han recurrido a los historiadores e historiadoras de la educación brasileña? Ofrecer algunos apuntes en torno a esta cuestión es el objetivo de este artículo. El recorte cronológico adoptado transita entre los siglos 20 y 19. En términos metodológicos, visita tres campos historiográficos, entre los cuales hay intersección y cruce de intereses en torno al niño en el pasado: el de la historiografía de la infancia, el de la historiografía de la cultura sobre el Brasil y el de la historiografía de la educación propiamente dicha. Las conclusiones apuntan que, dependiendo del período estudiado, varían las fuentes disponibles. Para el siglo XX se han utilizado recientemente escrituras infantiles, documentos producidos por el propio niño (cuadernos escolares o correspondencia). Ya para el siglo 19, los egodocumentos son las fuentes que, incluso indirectas, permiten acceder a las experiencias del niño brasileño de aquella época.

Palabras clave: Fuentes. Infancia. Historia de la Educación. Historiografía.

1.

When reflecting on the historiographic operation, Michel de Certeau stated that “In history everything begins with the gesture of setting aside, of putting together, of transforming certain classified objects into ‘documents.’” (CERTEAU, 2002, p. 72). The epistemological exercise of writing history requires that the historian seeks to approach the human beings of the past by means of vestiges, sometimes direct, sometimes indirect, that have bequeathed us from their existence. It is through this mediation, clarifies Robert Darnton, that the researcher manages “...to talk with the dead. By putting questions to documents and listening for replies, he can sound dead souls and take the measure of the societies they inhabited”. (DARNTON, p. v)

But when it comes to trying to hear the voice of the child from the past, particularly as a student in primary schools, but also in other aspects of children's life, what types of child testimonies have historians of Brazilian education used? Offering some notes on this issue is the objective of this article.

I understand child testimony as those documents produced by the children themselves, during childhood; or produced by adults recalling their childhood experiences, in which it is possible, albeit indirectly, through a rhetoric of childhood (BECCHI, 1994), letting the child of the past speak at the hands of an “other”, that is, the adult he has become. The chronological approach adopted in this article transitions, diachronically, albeit in a punctual and vertical way, between researches that spanned the 20th century (traditionally most visited by historiography) and the 19th century, particularly the imperial period, that has increasingly attracted the interest of scholars from our educational past.

In methodological terms and for a more nuanced analysis of the problem of this article - which is not an exclusive concern of historians of education - the visit to at least three historiographical fields, among which there is an intersection and crossing of interests around children and infants in the past, it has become unavoidable: that of the historiography of childhood, that of the historiography of culture about Brazil and that of the historiography of education itself.

In the case of childhood historiography, although the interest of this article is to apprehend child testimonies at the level of Brazil, it was necessary to dialogue, at certain times, also with international historiography, above all to better highlight some choices that, given the nature of archives and the empirics available in our country, clarify the specifics of the way here, on this side of the ocean and below the Equator, historians have faced the challenge of producing sources from which the child's voice from the past can be apprehended.

The historiography of culture, though represented only by one work, by Gilberto Freyre, concerns the production of an author whose explanations about childhood had a notable influence in the field of the history of culture and the history of childhood in Brazil, as shown by, among others, the analyzes of Peter Burke (2002) and Amurabi Oliveira (2015).

The selected historiography of education, in turn, refers to recent works, produced in the last 15 years and which, without the intention of exhaustive revising or analysis of the production, seems to constitute, nevertheless, a revealing and punctual sample of how the issue of child testimony have appeared in historical educational research both in the 20th century and, in particular, the 19th century, with an emphasis on the imperial period.

2.

When, in 1960, Philippe Ariès published *L'enfant e la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Regime*, he inaugurated, today we know, a new site of historical research, the history of childhood.¹ Since then, historians have become increasingly interested in understanding what it was like to be a child in other times. About this, writes Angela Giallongo:

Childhood history is no longer neglected by the intellectual community of our time. It confirms its diffusion in international literature and the proliferation of studies in American and South American universities, in the countries of the West, of the Middle East and Europe (...) In these last decades it has developed in such a way that it begins to assert itself as a conscious and particular aspect in the study of the human past (GIALLONGO, 2002, p. 8, *free translation*).

In Brazil, since the publication of the collective works organized by Mary Del Priore (1991; 1999), a historiography of childhood began to become more evident, in the interface with the history of child care and protection (MARCÍLIO, 1998; RIZZINI, 2000) and, more recently, with the history of education (SOUZA, 2010; FARIA FILHO e ARAÚJO, 2011). In the rest of Latin America, similarly, historical studies on childhood have seen widespread development in practically all countries (JÍMENEZ; MANARELLI, 2007; SOSENSKI; ALBARRÁN, 2012). At the European and North American level, works such as those organized by Egle Becchi and Dominique Julia (1998) and Paula Fass (2003) or historiographically synthesized, such as those written by Hugh Cunningham (1997), Colin Heywood (2004) and Peter Stearns (2006) also confirm the vigor and diversity of historiographical production on the subject.

If historians' interest in the field has become widespread, the approaches are quite varied. This is explained, in part, by the theoretical diversity of production - whereas in Italy, for example, there is a permanent theoretical-conceptual concern with the writing of childhood history (cf. BECCHI, 2010; BECCHI and JULIA, 1998), in Brazil these aspects are only sporadically discussed (cf. WARDE, 2007; GOUVÊA 2009) – but, above all, due to the nature of the available empiricism.

In the whole of what we call “Childhood History”, there are two dimensions that, in terms of historical experience, are inseparable: the history of childhood (that is, the history of the social time of human life built on the relationship between the generations and which changes in each historical and social context) and the child's story (which would be the story of the social subjects of that time in human life and the way they related to adults and/or to each other and helped to produce their own childhoods). Ideally, these two dimensions should always be studied articulated in the historiography of childhood; however, for empirical reasons, it is generally in one direction or another that the research has been consolidated, when we analyze historiography in a transnational scope.

In countries like the United States, England and Holland, where sources produced by children are available, such as children's diaries (POLLOCK 2004; DEKKER, 1999; LEJEUNE, 1995); or like Italy, where Renaissance archives house letters and correspondence from children of elite ducal families (FERRARI *et al*, 2010); or school museums guard notebooks with children's writings (MEDA, MONTINO, SANI, 2010), historiography tended to benefit, often being able to hear the child's voice from the past, thus writing a story, many times, in the first person, a story of child. In countries like

¹ In Brazil, published in a reduced version, under the title: “História social da criança e da família” (ARIÈS, 1978).

Brazil, where records written by children are quite scarce and, even when they exist, difficult to access, historians have used, mainly, adult records about children, such as family correspondence, travelers' reports, criminal cases, reports from teachers, etc., thus resulting in eminently historical writings on childhood.

In recent years, however, this approach has slowly changed in Brazil, mainly due to the contributions coming from the work of some female historians and their inventiveness in the search and localization of new sources, even though, frequently, the immediate interest is not that of a history of the child or of the childhood, but, rather, education or other aspects related to the little ones and their socialization processes in the 20th century. The works that use this empirical basis are still rare. In these, two types of sources stand out: school notebooks and children's correspondence.

In the first direction, Eliane Peres (2017), in a study recently published, proposes to investigate the writings of students of what we now call initial years of basic education, related to family trips and school trips, recorded in school notebooks in the collection of HISALES, at the Federal University of Pelotas (Universidade Federal de Pelotas). In the conclusions, proposing two questions in particular – “from what perspective do children, pupils and students in the initial phase of schooling, register their family experiences of trips and outings? [...] what do the children's texts allow to learn about trips and outings in the school space?” (PERES, 2017, p. 306, *free translation*) – highlights that:

Regarding the first question, it can be concluded that, in the universe researched, the children's texts indicated aspects such as: the cultural and geographic limits of their outings and trips; the relationship with family and friends, apparently reinforced during vacation periods, in many cases in rural areas; the coexistence of a time to collaborate with parents in small domestic chores, to study and play, and also some traditional children's games, with signs of gender separation with respect to these games and toys. There is, notably, a difference in the texts produced by male and female students when they write about their vacations, outings and family trips and when they do so in reference to those activities carried out at school. In the first case, there is “freer” writing, apparently less controlled and less corrected, different from that which records school trips and trips. Thus, in relation to the second question, it can be emphasized that there are few school trips or outings recorded in the notebooks that reveal a more playful dimension or “rest-tour”, as Sampaio (1994, p. 81) called it, in reference to the class tour of the Freinet pedagogy. What the data indicated is the existence, at school, of “training-tours” (SAMPAIO, 1994, p. 181), that is, those made specifically to learn or reinforce school content (vegetables, animals, environment, currency system, historical periods and facts, as in the examples shown). In addition, through the texts, it is possible to see that school trips and outings are made, in most cases, to places associated with a “legitimate culture”: museums, libraries, cinema, historic mansions. In this sense, they also reveal a perspective of history, memory and culture that the school preserves and even contributes to its construction (PERES, 2017, p. 306-307, *free translation*).

In the second empirical direction, the inquiry into children's productions contained in correspondence, the study also recently published by Luciana Santos and Maria Teresa Santos Cunha (2017) is quite significant. In it, the historians investigate letters sent by children who read the Sunday children's supplement to the newspaper *O Estado (The State)*, which circulated in the Santa Catarina state between 1972 and 1987, concluding that:

The letter section, which has existed since the first years of the supplement, allowed us to understand how the relationship between the supplement and its readers has been strengthening, especially since 1984. *Estadinho (Little State)*, the title of the supplement) started to encourage the participation of its readers in various sections of the supplement, creating more and more spaces for the publication of drawings, reports, poetry and even recipes.

The letters exchanged in the “letters” column showed such participation, because through them, girls, boys, even if encouraged by adults, exposed their desires and intentions in that act of writing. The letters contained words of affection and for the most part requested the publication of some text, drawing, or even a cooking recipe. Answered and published, they responded to the friendly tone and the promise of publication, which sometimes told the reader that there was a need to wait (SANTOS; CUNHA, 2017, p. 251, *free translation*).

In a similar historiographic operation, it is worth highlighting the work of Patrícia Tavares Raffaini (2015), who focused on letters sent by child readers, in the 30s and 40s, to the writers Monteiro Lobato, in Brazil and Laura Ingalls Wilder, in the United States. In a comparative analysis between the reading experiences of these children, manifested to their favorite authors through letters, the historian points out that:

In the letters analyzed here, the children show themselves as complete beings, they play the role of correspondent, as they already know how to use written language and epistological models, but at the same time they allow themselves some “freedoms”, because they apologize for the letter, blots or pencil writing. By using personal forms of treatment, they are not being naive, but using a resource to become close to those they admire. The documentation also tells us that reading practices were similar in both countries, many children report reading intensively, not because they do not have access to other books, but because of the pleasure of rereading a beloved work. So also the practice of collective reading, in the family, is reported by the children in both countries. During the period analyzed here, access to books was difficult for most Brazilian reading children, mainly due to the high cost of children's books and the lack of public libraries with collections aimed at children. In spite of this, the letters show us that by having access to these books, Brazilian children read in a similar way to the American public, which had a consolidated network of libraries. Reading, for readers in both countries who corresponded with their favorite writers, was a source of pleasure, fun and delight. From what the letters reveal, both Lobato and

Laura seem to have achieved what they intended with their literary production (RAFFAINI, 2015, p. 157, *free translation*).

It seems plausible to suppose that, in the coming years, if historiographic investments like these continue to be made, other studies focusing on the direct testimony of the child may come to light, thus contributing to the advancement of the historiography of childhood and of education as a boys' and girls' story in the 20th century. Indeed, judging by the current state of the archives, one can imagine that it is even possible to find evidence and sources of child authorship provided that the custodians are sensitized on the importance of this heritage of productions of the children as priceless social documents for understanding the world we live in, both yesterday and today. Likewise, make adults aware - starting with ourselves! - so that, in their relations with children, they value the records produced by children and preserve them in order to guarantee their survival for future research and investigations.

However, for the 19th century Brazilian, except for some great archival discovery that may yet be made (which, in the case of historical research, is imponderable), the existence of child testimonies is much more unusual and scarce. Of course, as Lucien Febvre (1989) points out, each historian learns to make his honey from the sources at his disposal or to make arrows with any wood, in the provocative expression of Dominique Julia (2001). A documentary corpus from which some of this honey can be extracted or some good wood obtained, in the case of our 1800s in the Tropics, seems to be that constituted by the egodocumentary records of people who were born in the 19th century and who offer testimonies about their childhood and their experiences as children.

3.

Egodocuments we can be defined, with Antonio Viñao, as “those texts in which the subject speaks or refers to himself, in which the self finds refuge and becomes a reference element” (VIÑAO, 2000, p. 11, *free translation*). This type of documents, however, covers a variety of textual genres, such as diaries, memories, reminiscences, autobiographies, etc. Oftentimes, for the Brazilian case and with regard to their potential as testimonies of childhood, they are usually memorialistic reports in which an adult remembers his childhood, thus allowing information to be obtained, even if indirect and mediated by tangles. threads of memory, about the child he once was.

A pioneer in trying to hear the voice of the child of the past through the adult that he became, among us, was, without a doubt, Gilberto Freyre. Truly known, recognized and criticized for his masterpiece *Casa Grande & Senzala* (published in English as *The Masters and the Slaves (Casa-Grande & Senzala): A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*), there has been little space among his reviewers and critics for the discussion of the book that closes the trilogy that his *opus magna* inaugurated. In reality, Freyre planned to write a quadrilogy on the formation of Brazilian society. Of the four works planned, he wrote three. Following *Casa Grande & Senzala* (published in 1933), he published *Sobrados e Mucambos* (1936) and *Ordem e Progresso* (1957)². In my view, the latter is the most inventive of all. In it, Freyre adopted a very innovative method for the 1950s, however imagined and put into practice some twenty years earlier and that consisted of the:

² The fourth book would be “Jazigos e Covas Rasas”, which was never written, although his plan was exposed by Freyre himself in the Preface to the 1st edition of *Ordem e Progresso*.

study of a considerable number of autobiographies of individuals born in our country between 1850 and 1900: individuals of both sexes, three races and their various nuances of miscegenations; different professions, different social and intellectual conditions; different creeds or faith. These autobiographies, very difficult to collect, were provoked. More than that: they were addressed. Directed because each autobiography was requested that, while being able to expand freely in those reminiscences that were more of your taste and pleasure or that came spontaneously to your memory, answer certain questions. Such questions were asked of more than a thousand Brazilians born at that time in order to obtain reactions from them to the same stimuli, information on the same subjects, possible revelations of different traumas or euphoria caused by the same events with different repercussions on individuals of the same time and from the same country. We did not obtain a thousand written responses to the questionnaire organized with the intention of provoking these directed autobiographies (...) Even so, there were almost three hundred responses written and obtained during years of patient harvest (...) (FREYRE, 2010, p. 18, *free translation*).

As innovative as the proposal to obtain provoked autobiographies is the questionnaire that each interviewee was asked to take as a guide for evoking their reminiscences. Some of the questions asked by the sociologist, even today are found in the inquiries of most historians of childhood and education. But before us, Freyre made them:

1. Name.
2. Place where you were born (with description of the same place in childhood).
3. School or college you attended (methods, teachers, classmates, punishments, toys, games, prank calls, school books, study of grammar, calligraphy, math, civic parties, etc.).
4. Toys, camaraderie, games and reading for children outside of school.
5. who were your heroes from boyhood? Who did you want to be when you got big? What more ardently did you want to be?
6. Why did you focus on the profession that you came to exercise? Where did you do professional studies? Teachers, schools and readings from that period?
7. What is your impression of the Republic during childhood and adolescence?
8. What was your impression of Santos Dumont at the time of your youth and at the height of his glory?
9. What is your attitude as a boy, as a young man, as a man towards a) Paris? b) Europe; c) Catholic Church; d) Positivism; e) Darwin; f) the so-called Women's Rights? g) Divorce; h) the clergy; i) education in Brazil (primary, professional, etc.); k) Rui Barbosa in The Hague; l) Rio Branco (The Baron); m) Nietzsche; n) Karl Marx; o) A. Comte; p) Spencer.
10. What dances or modinhas do you prefer when you were a boy (or girl)?
11. Did you go to a cafe or bakery? Restaurant or Hotel? Club?

12. Your tailors or dressmakers? Your fashion preferences (English, French, American)? Your preferences in hats, shoes, underwear, umbrellas, walking sticks, jewelry?
13. Which Brazilian and foreign newspapers and magazines do you prefer, from your youth?
- 14 Which trips did you take as a boy, in Brazil or abroad?
15. Your ideas as boy, of social reform in general, of social and political reform in Brazil, in particular?
- 16 a – Your attitude towards blacks, mulattos and people of color?
- 16 b – How would you receive the marriage of a son or daughter, brother or sister, with people of color? Darker in color than yours?
17. Other reminiscences (FREYRE, 2010, p. 27, *free translation*).

As can be seen from this questionnaire, the objective was to understand how the transition from the Empire to the Republic took place by analyzing the changes that would have occurred in the social, material, intellectual and cultural life of the country, based on the perceptions of their interviewees, especially in childhood. It stands out, for example, the fascination that soldiers and war officers that took part in the Paraguay War exercised over boys during their childlike age, populating their imagination and games, boys who, in 1889, already young men, watched the republican coup led by military sectors with mixed feelings: admiration for what their childhood heroes did and fear for the changes that this sometimes caused, even in the lives of their families.

Freyre also observed how the changes in the transition from imperial to republican education were slow and customary practices, such as physical punishment, remained for a long time in the schooling of the younger generations. About education, by the way, are the most interesting pages of *Ordem e Progresso*. Through the testimonies of its interviewees, it follows the birth of American influence in education, with Protestant colleges; the emergence of recreation time in schools, the prescribed and the taught curriculum, the methods adopted in the teaching of reading and writing; the reading books that most marked the childhood of children both at school and outside. Themes still dear to the historiography of contemporary education.

However, if Gilberto Freyre's study went from the Empire to the Republic, it is, above all, among historians of the second period that we will find, today, most of the researches that, although on independent paths, pursue part of the clues launched by the Brazilian sociologist even before the birth of Childhood History (which is why Peter Burke (2002) already considered him, in a way, one of its precursors).

In this sense, there are relatively well known studies on the egodocumental writing of the young Helena Morley (pseudonym of Ana Caldeira Brandt) in *fin de siècle* Diamantina (FREITAS; CUNHA 2001; Aguiar, 2004;), by the little Cora Coralina (pseudonym of Anna Lins dos Guimarães Peixoto Bretas) at the school of mistress Silvina and in her experiences through the alleys and streets of Goiás of the first republican decade (VALDEZ, 2011; PERES; BORGES 2015) or José Lins do Rego and other Paraíba memorialists, so well interrogated and analyzed by Ana Maria de Oliveira Galvão (1998).

As far as the imperial period is concerned, investigations that have privileged the main source of documents and the evidence of childhood and schooling they contain are rare. Searching for jobs that set out to interpret the history of imperial education from this empiricism – although without the intention of exhaustive survey, but contemplating the main event in the area; the five journals in History of Education in circulation in Brazil today; the set of journals available in one of the most important consultation bases (SCIELO); the annals

and the magazine of the Sociedade Brasileira de Pesquisa (Auto) Biográfica (*Brazilian Society for (Auto) Biographical Research*)³ – I found only three surveys that fit this criterion.

In the first of them, Ana Cristina Pereira Lage (2006), through the memorialistic record of Francisco de Paula Ferreira Rezende, born in 1832 in the town of Campanha, Minas Gerais state, discusses some aspects of the history of Spanish education, taking the schooling experiences lived by him in childhood as the guiding thread of historical narrative and interpretation, crossing it, when necessary, with official sources. Thus equipped, she analyzes the type of primary public school he attended, governed by the mutual method; the practice of physical punishment adopted by the master (thus contradicting one of the assumptions of the Lancaster method, which was the adoption of moral punishment instead of corporal punishment); the interpersonal relationships of the memorialist with the teacher, which seem to have made schooling less painful (being punished only twice and being allowed to play with a colleague in the backyard of the master's house in addition to being able to taste some delicacies made by the teacher's wife); the organization of the school in classes (in which, according to the egoautor's perception, the teacher tended to despise the lower ones) and also material aspects, such as the adoption of the wooden box with sand for teaching writing, considered by the memorialist to be a new to that context.

The second study found is by Névio Campos (2011). In it, the historian proposes to analyze the school trajectory, from the perspective of intellectual history, of Victor Ferreira do Amaral e Silva, born in Lapa, Paraná state, in 1862, using, primarily, his autobiography entitled "*Minha infância escolar*" ("*My childhood school*"). Due to the information present in the interrogated memorial record, which emphasizes secondary education, started in Curitiba and concluded in Rio de Janeiro, than primary education, held in Paraná, there are few interpretations that can be built on the elementary schooling experience of the memorialist. However, he points out that he started his education in his hometown, continuing it in a private school, thus showing the multiple spaces in which school education took place at the very moment of the institutionalization of the school among us, at the time of the Brazil Empire. In the conclusions, he observes that this school pilgrimage, in the case of Victor Ferreira do Amaral, had very clear objectives for the local elites, of which he was a member:

through the trajectory of Victor Ferreira do Amaral, it was possible to understand the movement of the political and economic elite of the Province of Paraná throughout the second half of the 19th century that aimed to put their children in prestigious schools, preparing them to enter higher education and guarantee their presence in the most important public and private spaces in the Paraná scenario (CAMPOS, 2011, p. 84, *free translation*).

Finally, the third research found is that developed by Nayana Rodrigues Cordeiro Mariano (2017). The objective of the work was to “from the memories of Coriolano de Medeiros [...] discuss public and private instruction in the last decades of the 19th century,

³ I refer to the Brazilian Congresses on the History of Education (2000-2017), Revista História da Educação - ASPHE (1997-2017); Hisdtebr-online magazine (2009-2017); Brazilian Journal of History of Education (2001-2017); Education History Notebooks (2002-2017) and Education History and Historiography Magazine (2017); Journals available on the Scielo database (1997-2017); Annals of International (Auto) Biographical Research Congresses (2004-2016) and the Brazilian Journal of (Auto) Biographical Research (2016-2017). For the clarification of the reader, the dates in parentheses refer to the chronology consulted in each of the bases, according to what I could find available online. For the CBHE editions, the full annals were consulted; from CIPA the annals or abstracts (when available) whereas in journals the research was done, in free mode, with the keywords in the singular and plural: autobiography (s), memory (s).

in the, at the time, Paraíba do Norte Province” (MARIANO, 2017, p. 1, *free translation*). The privileged source was the memorial text *O Tambiá de minha infância* (*The Tambiá of my childhood*), in which Coriolano de Medeiros, born in 1875 in Paraíba Province, reports his school reminiscences in the provincial capital, the current João Pessoa and, at the time, Paraíba do Norte. With regard to primary education, the historian, crossing autobiography with other sources, such as newspapers, points out the different schooling experiences lived by the boy Coriolano in the 1880s: the mixed school of teacher Cecília Cordeiro, where he learned the first letters and carried out reading the first book by Barão de Macaúbas; the second school, where he met the rigor and discomfort of the school day, since the class lasted “from 9 am to 4:30 pm, with the odor of garbage always prowling the environment, tiredness due to study hours and the constant presence of paddles” (MARIANO, 2017, p. 4, *free translation*) and the third and final school of first letters, also functioning in an unhealthy space, inappropriate for children's health.

4.

To conclude, it can be said that, depending on the historical period studied - the 20th century, the end of the 19th century or the imperial period - the available sources vary and, with this, also vary the child testimonies that historians of education have used in the Brazil in the search to listen to the child's voice in the past and to give it greater centrality in the construction of historical explanations about the period of human life that we call childhood.

We have identified that, for the 20th century, children's writings have been used recently, documents produced by the child himself (although we cannot lose sight of the eternal influence that adults will always have on this type of material, whether guiding their production or selecting what has been preserved), materialized in school notebooks or correspondence. As for the 19th century, egodocuments – although they cannot be categorically stated as the only documents available, but certainly those that have been effectively used to circumvent the absence of contemporary sources of child authorship – seem to be the empiricism that, even indirectly, allows to get very close to the daily life and the historical experiences of the Brazilian child of that time, above all, evidencing the perspective from which they participated in the processes related to their education and socialization.

In addition to the notes that this article sought to offer on the issue, it is also worth noting the need for both investments in the location of new children's documents for the 20th century, while they can be identified and preserved, as well as in the survey and systematization of egodocuments relating to childhoods experienced in the 19th century in Brazil, as a basis for new research that seeks to privilege the child as a historical actor, even when his voice can only be captured indirectly by the writings of the adult he has become. In fact, it is also the historian's role to help the society of which he is a part to develop historical awareness about the importance of the child in collective life, both in the past he studies and in the present he lives. The diligence with children's records and the investment in research that give prominence to these voices – especially in periods less studied or where this presence is more difficult to be evidenced – is one of the forms of exercise of listening, respect and attention that can be given to the child participating in history.

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