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# The management of the pandemic crisis (2020-2021): the Unified Health System and the National Education System

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## Abstract

This article aims to compare measures taken in the health and education sectors during the pandemic crisis in Brazil from March 2020 to December 2021, problematizing the dimensions of inter-federative conflicts in a system considered structured, such as the Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS) [Unified Health System], and in a system considered unstructured, such as the Sistema Nacional de Educação. As a theoretical-methodological framework, we mobilized the history of the present time, based on François Dosse and other authors, to support the analysis of official sources of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and journalistic sources. The final considerations point out that the existence of a consolidated system, such as the Unified Health System, was unable to mitigate the pandemic crisis caused by Bolsonaroist management. Therefore, the establishment of an National Education System would not be enough either, given the subjection of the federated entities to the central government.

Keywords: Educational federalism. Health. Pandemic. Public policies.

## A gestão da crise da pandemia (2020-2021): o Sistema Único de Saúde e o Sistema Nacional de Educação

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## Resumo

Este artigo objetiva comparar as medidas tomadas na área de saúde e na área da educação no decorrer da crise pandêmica no Brasil no período de março de 2020 até dezembro de 2021, problematizando as dimensões dos conflitos interfederativos num sistema considerado estruturado, como é o caso do Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS), e num sistema considerado não estruturado, como é o caso do Sistema Nacional de Educação (SNE). Como arcabouço teórico-metodológico, foram mobilizadas a história do tempo presente, com base em François Dosse e outros autores, para subsidiar as análises de fontes oficiais do Ministério da Educação, do Ministério da Saúde e de fontes jornalísticas. As considerações finais apontam que a existência de um sistema consolidado, como o SUS, não foi capaz de atenuar a crise pandêmica em decorrência da gestão bolsonarista. Logo, a instituição de um SNE também não seria suficiente, dada a sujeição dos entes federados ao governo central.

Palavras-chave: Federalismo educacional. Saúde. Pandemia. Políticas públicas.

## La gestión de la crisis de la pandemia (2020-2021): el Sistema Único de Salud y el Sistema Nacional de Educación

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### Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo comparar medidas adoptadas en los ámbitos de salud y educación durante la crisis pandémica en Brasil de marzo de 2020 a diciembre de 2021, problematizando las dimensiones de los conflictos interfederativos en un sistema considerado estructurado, como el Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS), y en un sistema considerado no no estructurado, como el Sistema Nacional de Educação (SNE). Como marco teórico-metodológico, se movilizó la historia del tiempo presente, a partir de François Dosse y otros autores, para apoyar los análisis de fuentes oficiales del Ministerio de Educación, del Ministerio de Salud y de fuentes periodísticas. Las consideraciones finales apuntan que la existencia de un sistema consolidado, como el SUS, no ha sido capaz de mitigar la crisis pandémica como consecuencia de la administración Bolsonaro. Por lo tanto, la creación de un SNE tampoco sería suficiente, dada la sujeción de los entes federados al gobierno central.

Palabras clave: Federalismo educativo. Salud. Pandemia. Políticas públicas.

### Introduction

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A criação do Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS) adveio de pressões das conferThe creation of the Unified Health System came about as a result of pressure from national health conferences, federal universities, health professionals, society and city halls with progressive agendas to improve the functioning of the health field in Brazil in the 1980s. This articulation was called the Health Reform Movement and managed to take shape as what was known as Integrated Health Actions (Santos, 2018; Carvalho, 2013). These actions sought to combine social security with subnational health care and were renamed, in 1987, Unified and Decentralized Health Systems until they were replaced by the Unified Health System, via the Federal Constitution, in 1988, that was institutionalized by Laws 8.080/1990 and 8.142/1990 (Brasil, 1990a; Brasil 1990b).

In the case of education, despite the demand for a system since the 1930s – which culminated in the approval of the National Education System – the debate on the discussion would only gain materiality from the constituent process. Although the expression was not included in the Constitution, the Sole Paragraph of Article 23 states that education and culture, among other

policies, must have rules of cooperation between the federated entities and that all of them would be obliged to take responsibility for providing them, in accordance with the model of cooperative federalism adopted (Brasil, 1988).

Article 211, in turn, deals with the collaboration regime between the Union, states, municipalities and the federal district. Both the cooperation rules and the collaboration regime are pillars of the National Education System and are constitutional demands met by the new wording of Article 214 of Constitutional Amendment No. 59/09 and Law No. 13,005/2014 (Brasil, 2014). During the pandemic, the recurring argument was that the delays in terms of supply and learning would have been smaller if the National Education System had been approved and was up and running. For example, in 2021, the NGO Todos Pela Educação (All for Education) released a technical note on the National Education System in which it stated that there was a consensus on the efficiency of solving the educational problems arising from the pandemic if the National Education System existed (Todos Pela Educação, 2021).

This argument continued to be corroborated in the media: “The existence of a National Education System can help overcome the challenges generated by the pandemic [...]” (Altenfelder, 2022). Other actors from education business organizations strengthened this discourse and went further, bringing the discussion of establishing the National Education System closer to a format similar to that of the Unified Health System. One example is the interview that Movimento Colabora Educação (Collaborative Education Movement – a joint venture formed by the Inter-American Development Bank [IDB] and several private foundations in Brazil) did with Dr. Gabriela Lotta, a researcher at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, in which she stressed that the Unified Health System should be the example for structuring the National Education System (Lotta, 2020).

Given this relationship between the two areas most affected by Covid-19, this article aims to compare the measures taken in the health and education areas during the pandemic crisis in Brazil, from March 2020 to December 2021, analyzing the dimensions of inter-federative conflicts in a system considered structured, the Unified Health System, and in a system considered unstructured, the National Education System. The problem we are trying to answer is: Would crisis management as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in the field of education have been successful if there had been a structured

system, the National Education System, like the Unified Health System in the field of health?

The comparison looked for similarities in the dismantling that took place in both areas in the period leading up to and during the health crisis, with a view to creating a near history, an immediate history, and a history in process. However, it was not just a question of analyzing and comparing documents, more than that, we looked for relationships between the phenomena and the problem we set out to analyze. To this end, the use of journalistic sources, documents from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, in the 2020-2021 timeframe, were organized in a synchronic and interconnected way, generating three tables for the purpose of synthesis in the pandemic between March 2020 and December 2021<sup>1</sup>. The first table presents the background to the pandemic crisis in health and education, the second, the situation of coping with the pandemic in the field of health and the third, in the field of education.

4 The theoretical framework that guided the analysis in this article is the history of the present time (Delgado, Ferreira, 2013; Ferreira, 2018; Fiorucci, 2011), whose particularity is the valorization of the events of the present time, given that they are potentially richer in changes. The history of the present also has another peculiarity, which is temporality, since the research can be carried out in parallel with events relating to the near past, that is:

[...] due to the method used at the time the work was produced, it is not possible to deny that these works are a history of the present time, but temporally, due to the shifting boundaries of this type of history, the objects and sources covered are part of the history of the past, albeit recent (Fiorucci, 2011, p. 114).

The historiographical methodology was conceived in such a way as to assume the impossibility of pointing out the regularities, continuities, and risks of the factual, because the present is “[...] placed under the aegis of the concept of initiative, of a doing, or even of a connection” (Dosse, 2012, p. 18).

From these introductory questions, the article is divided into four parts. The first discusses aspects that preceded the health crisis in health and education; the second discusses crisis management within the Ministry of Health and its repercussions on the Unified Health System; the third deals with an

assessment of the crisis resulting from the pandemic in the area of education, which does not have a structured system. The final considerations indicate that the existence of a structured National Education System in the Bolsonaro administration would not be a mitigating factor in guaranteeing effective measures in terms of educational provision in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## The background to the crisis in health and education

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil has aggravated the entire Brazilian federative structure, especially under the aegis of what Abrucio, Grin, Franzese, Segatto and Couto (2020) called Bolsonaro federalism – a model that is constituted by the apex of the lack of federative coordination in a crisis scenario, disregard for the principles of collaboration between the three branches of government and between the federated entities, as well as opposition to subnational governments. With the advance of the pandemic and the consequences of this management model, added to the president's unrepugnant profile (already evident before he was elected), the health crisis scenario became the backdrop for the culmination of a political project of democratic retraction and political fragmentation.

This is because in Brazil, public policies and democracy have been going through a period of retraction since the legal-media-parliamentary coup in 2016 that ousted President Dilma Rousseff from office. In fact, the dismantling of health and education policies did not begin with the advent of the pandemic. Table 1 shows some of the events that characterize the scenario of dismantling democracy and public health and education policies until the beginning of 2020, before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Table 1 - Setbacks prior to the Covid-19 pandemic in the areas of education and health**

Year	Occurrence
Dec./2016	Constitutional Amendment 95 – spending cap for twenty years.
Dec./2017	Resolution CNE/CP N° 2 – regulation of the Common National Curriculum Base without dialog with education professionals and academia.
Feb./2017	Law 13.415/17 – High School reform that reconfigured and fragmented the curriculum.
May/June	Portaria N° 577, de 27 de abril de 2017 – dissolução do Fórum Nacional de Educação que recompôs a participação das entidades representativas.
2017	Ordinance No. 577, April 27, 2017 - dissolution of the National Education Forum that recomposed the participation of representative entities.
Nov./2018	Termination of the partnership with Cuba of the More Doctors Program, which had approximately eleven thousand Cuban doctors, given Bolsonaro's public attacks on the country.
Dec./2018	Resolution CNE/CP N° 04 - instituted the Common National Base at the High School stage, accentuating the precariousness of public education.
Mar./2019	Decree 9.741 – cut 29,582 billion from the federal budget, including cuts in the areas of education, health and citizenship.
Apr./2019	Removal of the concept of harm reduction from the National Drug Policy, which provided for the distribution of syringes to drug users with HIV infection.
May/2019	Postponement of the Indigenous Health Conference gradually from May to August, December and July 2020 (during the pandemic).
May/2019	Merger of the Department of Sexually Transmitted Infections, AIDS and Viral Hepatitis into the Department of Chronic Conditions and Sexually Transmitted Infections.
Sept./2019	Decree 10.004 - instituted the National Civic-Military Schools Program.
Nov./2019	Ordinance 2.979 – changed the financing of Primary Health Care. It replaced per capita funding with funding according to the demand of the previously registered population, violating the principle of universality.
Nov./2019	Ordinance 2.015 – regulated the implementation of National Civic-Military Schools Program for 2020 and provided for the establishment of 54 civic-military schools.
Dec./2019	Creation of the Doctors for Brazil Program as a kind of replacement for the More Doctors Program, but with a privatizing bias.
Dec./2019	Approval of Law 13.931 with compulsory notification, within 24 hours, in cases of violence against women, treated in private or public networks. The law goes against the precept of secrecy to protect victims from their aggressors.
Jan./2020	Technical Note 3 – made the constituent elements of the Expanded Family Health and Primary Care Center more flexible, de-characterizing the purpose of its creation and operation. As a result, municipalities can determine which types of professionals will make up the Expanded Family Health and Primary Care Center, as well as their workload.

Sources: Newspapers, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health websites (elaborated by the authors).

It is not difficult to see that the areas of education and health areas have already been going through a process of dismantling what is set out in Article 6 of the 1988 Federal Constitution. This is a scenario in which neo-liberalism is undermining both education and health policies. Starting with Constitutional Amendment 95/2016, which caused health area to lose R\$20 billion and education R\$32.6 billion in 2019 (Saúde..., 2020; Pellanda, 2020), making it impossible the adequate funding for the Unified Health System, which was already underfunded, and the goals of the National Education Plan, especially those relating to the implementation of the initial student-quality cost and the student-quality cost.

The High School Reform, via Law No. 13,415/17 (Brasil, 2017a), and the Common National Curriculum Base brought changes that restrained curricular arrangements. The reform altered the stage of education in a way that made the curriculum more flexible, both from the point of view of disciplines and to hire teachers, as well as accentuating the precariousness of teachers through the possibility of hiring professionals with notorious knowledge. In parallel, there were discussions about the Common National Curriculum Base, which was later regulated by Resolution CNE/CP No. 2 of December 22, 2017 (Brasil, 2017b). The document, in its final version, ignored the contributions of education professionals and materialized as a booklet based on the development of competencies.

On the other hand, the construction of the National Education Forum, came about as a result of the demands of the 2010 National Education Conference, with the aim of giving broad representation to the movements and entities involved in the area of education in order to organize the Conferences, as well as accompany, monitor and evaluate the National Education Plan (Shaw, 2017). In April 2017, the Ministry of Education, in a unilateral act, published Ordinance No. 577/2017 (Brasil, 2017c), which changed the composition and functioning of the National Education Forum, triggering protests from the entities that were excluded, such as the National Confederation of Education Workers, the Center for Education and Society Studies and the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education, As well as others who withdrew in solidarity. This movement led to the creation of the National People's Education Forum and the National People's Education Conferences, as a space for resistance, struggle and proposals in the field of democratizing education policies.

In the wake of the backward movements in education, the victory of Jair Messias Bolsonaro in the 2018 presidential elections represented the rise of a moral agenda defended by religious sectors. Frequent attacks on schools and teachers also gained prominence with proposals from ultra-right-wingers for students to film classes, the "school without a party" model, home-schooling and the militarization of schools, which was put into practice with the National Civic-Military Schools Program, starting in 2019.

In the case of health area, the breaking of the partnership with Cuba in the More Doctors Program in 2018 was controversial, since the president made offensive statements to the Cuban people, as well as wanting to subject them to tests to prove their medical capacity<sup>2</sup>. It is important to note that a large part of the indigenous population was served by the More Doctors Program, which was one of the agendas of the Indigenous Health Conference, which was postponed several times. This lack of commitment to indigenous peoples and other vulnerable populations reveals a disregard for specific health needs, which are part of the fundamental human right to life<sup>3</sup>. To fill the gap left by the break with the More Doctors Program, the Doctors for Brazil Program was created. However, the program was a failure, since it provided for an extremely fragile structure, with the privatization of the primary health care stage<sup>4</sup> and the replacement of medical residency by distance learning.

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From the point of view of financing, Ordinance No. 2.979/2019 (Brasil, 2019a) undermined the principle of universality in relation to health, since the logic of the primary health care budget was changed. Previously, it worked in such a way as to make resources available on a per capita basis, since everyone had to be served. With the approval of the Ordinance, funds were made available according to the number of people who had registered, which weakened the first contact with primary health care, popularly known as the "gateway" to the Unified Health System.

Among the actions that have also weakened the system and Unified Health System users was the approval of Law No. 13,931/2019 (Brasil, 2019 b), which notifies cases of violence against women in public or private networks, violating the right to confidentiality that protects the victim, as well as the flexibilization of the Expanded Family Health and Primary Care Center<sup>5</sup>, which has meant that people served by these policies, often in areas where access is more difficult, have had their right to health undermined.



It is notice that, since Constitutional Amendment 95/2016 (Brazil, 2016), both the education and health areas had already been undergoing a process of dismantling, regardless of whether there was a structured system or not. The pandemic crisis boosted this dismantling and made even more vulnerable that part of the population that needed the guarantee of the right to health, the right to education and the right to a dignified life, as we will see in the following section.

## **Coping with Covid-19: a balance between the existence of the Unified Health System and the performance of the Ministry of Health**

With the arrival of the virus, the scenario of fragility in the health area made the forecast of collapse very worrying, with a particular risk for populations in situations of social vulnerability. While the media reported a significant increase in the number of deaths from Covid-19 in other countries in early 2020, there was no federal guidance or deliberations by the Ministry of Health to mitigate its arrival. In a short time, according to Carvalho, Carvalho and Santos (2020), the country became the pandemic epicenter in Latin America as a result of crisis management with: a) demobilization of social distancing, lockdowns and the use of masks; b) political dispute between the central government and subnational governments; c) ideological polarization over Covid-19 as a lesser evil in the face of economic losses for the country; d) the absence of any instance of epidemiology specialists to manage the crisis with the Ministry of Health.

In order to elucidate the events in the health area, table 2 was drawn up in the time frame from January 2020 to July 2021 – since cases of Covid-19 decreased dramatically from the second half of 2021 as a result of the expansion of vaccination of the population.

Table 2 - Pandemic in the health field

Year	Occurrence
Jan./2020	The World Health Organization has declared a state of public health emergency of international concern one month after the first cases of Covid-19 were reported in China.
Feb./2020	First confirmed case of Covid-19 in Brazil.
Mar./2020	The World Health Organization has declared a pandemic.
Mar./2020	Jair Bolsonaro starts denying the pandemic in public statements and participates in gatherings/demonstrations.
Mar./2020	Start of import, production, and distribution of Hydroxychloroquine and Ivermectin (drugs contraindicated in academic research for the treatment of Covid-19).
Apr./2020	First Covid-19 tests.
Apr./2020	Resignation of Health Minister Luiz Henrique Mandetta.
Apr./2020	Admission of Health Minister Nelson Teich.
May/2020	Resignation of Health Minister Nelson Teich.
July/2020	The National Health Surveillance Agency has come out against the use of Ivermectin.
Sept./2020	Admission of Health Minister General Eduardo Pazuello.
Oct./2020	Bolsonaro and Paulo Guedes signed a Decree allowing the privatization of the Unified Health System and revoked it the next day.
Nov./2020	Creation of the Covid crisis cabinet.
Dec./2020	First mass vaccination campaign in Europe.
Jan./2021	Collapse of the Unified Health System in the capital of Amazonas, shortage of oxygen equipment.
Mar./2021	Resignation of Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello.
Mar./2021	Admission of Health Minister Marcelo Queiroga.
Mar./2021	First vaccine purchase in Brazil.
July/2021	Diversion of funds from the Unified Health System to military expenditures.

Sources: Newspapers (elaborated by the authors).

It is possible to note the federal government's late action in creating a Covid-19 crisis office in November 2020, nine months after the first case in Brazil and in the month that Brazil reached the number of 13,263 deaths (Pinheiro, 2020). Health financing planning indicates that the Unified Health System has been in a budgetary recession since Constitutional Amendment

95/2016 (Brazil, 2016), which denotes the strengthening of the neoliberal agenda of fiscal austerity (Servo; Santos; Vieira; Benevides, 2020). However, the authors point out that revenues for health increased with the admission of the former Minister of Health, General Eduardo Pazuello (from R\$ 18.9 billion to R\$34.5 billion), but it is worth noting that, during his tenure at the Ministry of Health, there was a delay and the imposition of difficulties for the disclosure of official data on contagion and deaths by Covid-19, hurting the basic right to information as a constituent element of democracy. For this reason, a media consortium was set up independently to publish the number of hospitalizations and deaths on a daily basis, based on information from the state health departments (Veículos de comunicação..., 2020).

Another very serious point of the crisis was instability in the Ministry of Health, with a high turnover of ministers, due to resignations that involved scandals about divergent positions contrary to those of the president of the Republic on the use of ineffective drugs for the treatment of Covid-19, such as Ivermectin and Hydroxychloroquine and others that made up the "Covid kit" defended by the government, in addition to measures and speeches opposed to social distancing and the use of masks.

Pazuello's longer tenure at the Ministry of Health may be directly related to the militarization of ministries to the detriment of the participation of technicians and specialists. In particular, with regard to Covid-19, it was important that the Minister of Health was someone who agreed with Bolsonaro in terms of anti-governability, i.e. that he was submissive to implementing the president's resolutions. For Inácio (2021), the inclusion of military personnel in politics is linked to the idea of loyalty, even if the choice compromises their ability to make technical decisions.

In the federative dimension, the autonomy of the sub-national entities was strengthened, as the state governments took a leading role in the purchase of inputs, as well as in decisions to instruct social distancing, given that "[...] the Federal Executive adopted a strategy of confrontation with the sub-national entities and renounced its role of creating incentives for cooperation and coordination [...]" (Souza; Fontanelli, 2021, p. 136). According to the authors, the federal government's intention was to blame the subnational entities for the social, economic and political fallout, since the discourse of the then president of the republic and his trusted team was to deny the pandemic. In other words, the actions taken during the pandemic indicate a kind of politics of

chaos. Corroborating this perspective, Santos and Guimarães (2020) point out that the federal government sabotaged the actions of sub-national entities by blocking financial transfers, inconsistent indications of social distancing and disarticulation with the Ministry of Health.

The most emblematic example of this confrontational policy was the case of the state of São Paulo. With the advance of vaccine production, the governor of São Paulo, João Agripino da Costa Doria Junior (PSDB), stood out in the media for acquiring inputs for vaccine production at the Butantan Institute and highlighted his rivalry with Jair Bolsonaro (Veja a cronologia..., 2020). However, sub-national protagonism in tackling the pandemic has not been homogeneous, since the absence of national guidelines has meant that, for example, lockdown measures have been advanced or set back due to political tensions.

Finally, looking back at the pandemic in Brazil, we can come up with some indications: 1) The instability of the Ministry of Health and the lack of crisis management<sup>6</sup>; 2) The federal government's actions in the face of Covid-19 were marked by strong denialism, contempt for Brazilian lives, the lack of federative cooperation and the rules of the political game – a project of destruction that had already been announced. In the health area, the pillar supporting the fight against Covid-19 has been the Unified Health System, which has been consolidated for many years, and which, at the same time, has been under many attacks of dismantling. As an aggravating factor, the instability of the Ministry of Health, using denialism as a political measure (related to the existence and containment capacity of the virus, which implied the choices of people to manage the crisis and the prevention mechanisms), meant that the health area, even with the Unified Health System, was weakened.

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## Education and Covid-19: the politics of omission

The Ministry of Education, like other ministries, also failed to determine any prior measures to combat the Covid-19 virus in Brazilian schools and took weak actions to contain the crisis in terms of education. Table 3 shows the history at federal level in the field of education during the pandemic.

**Table 3 - The pandemic in the education area**

Year	Occurrence
Feb./2020	First confirmed case of Covid-19 in Brazil.
Mar./2020	The World Health Organization declared the pandemic.
Mar./2020	Ordinance 343/Ministry of Education – suspended in-person classes.
Mar./2020	Creation of the Ministry of Education’s Emergency Committee.
Apr./2020	Provisional Measure 934 (converted into Law 14.040 in August 2020) – established exceptional rules for basic education.
Apr./2020	The Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub, posted racist statements and blamed the Chinese for Covid-19. The Federal Supreme Court opened an inquiry to investigate the case, which was closed in February 2021.
Apr./2020	Opinion 5/CNE (re-examined by Opinion 9/2020) – dealt with the reorganization of school calendar and the calculation of non-in-person activities to comply with the minimum workload, as well as suggestions on the stages, levels and modalities of education.
May/2020	The Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub, attacked the Federal Supreme Court and declared that its members should be imprisoned.
May/2020	Ordinance No. 503 – institutes the governance policy of the Ministry of Education, changes the organization, and abolishes strategic departments.
June/2020	Presentation of Bill 3076/2020, signed by the Minister of Education, Abraham Weintraub, providing for public-private partnerships for universities generated several protests in 2019.
June/2020	Resignation of Education Minister Abraham Weintraub.
June/2020	Appointment of Education Minister Carlos Decotelli and cancellation of his appointment the same week due to a scandal on his CV, which included a doctorate degree not recognized by the educational institution in question.
July/2020	The external committee of the Chamber of Deputies, created to analyze the actions of the Ministry of Education, pointed out in its report flaws such as the absence of a national plan to deal with the pandemic, federal collaboration and the absence of the National Education System.
July/2020	Pastor Milton Ribeiro appointed Minister of Education.
July/2020	First in-person resumption of classes in Brazil, held in the city of Manaus.
Dec./2020	Opinion 22/CNE guidelines/suggestions for holding in-person and non-in-person classes in the context of the pandemic.
Dec./2020	Approval of Law 14.113 regulating the new Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of Education Professionals.
Dec./2020	Resolution 2/CNE – National Guidelines of Law 14.040 – dealing with the return of in-person classes in agreement with local health authorities.

Table 3 - The pandemic in the education area (continuação)

Dec./2020	Ordinance No. 1. 071/2020 which provided for the implementation of 54 civic-military schools in 2021.
Dec./2020	Ordinance No. 1.096/2020, which provided for the return to in-person classes, the early completion of courses and the exceptional use of digital educational resources to complete the workload of teaching activities in technical-professional education courses.
Jan./2021	Carry out of in-person Scholastic Achievement Test 2020.
May/2021	Start of public hearings on the National Education System, Bill Project 25/2019.
June/2021	Ordinance 177 – Creation of the Brazil at School Program, which provides technical and financial support to schools.
Aug./2021	Resolution CNE/CP nº 2/2021 – instituted the National Guidelines for the implementation of measures to return to in-person classes.
Aug./2021	Resolution CNE/CEB nº 2/2021 – established the operational guidelines for the implementation of the Education Development Arrangement as a public management tool for improving the social quality of education.
Oct./2021	Ordinance 852 – regulated the certification of civic-military schools and the quantitative methodology for evaluating school performance.
Nov./2021	Report on Bill 235/19, which envisaged establishing the National Education System, authored by Senator Flávio Arns (REDE/PR), is referred to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee.
Nov./2021	Ordinance 925 – regulated the National Civic-Military Schools Program for 2022 and provided for the creation of 89 civic-military schools.
Dec./2021	Report 1/2021 of the Chamber of Deputies' External Committee set up to analyze the actions of the Ministry of Education made severe and pertinent criticisms to the management.

Sources: Ministry of Education website and newspapers (elaborated by the authors).

Based on the elements set out in table 3, the facts were systematized into four categories: a) inertia on the part of the Ministry of Education; b) ministerial instability; c) advances in the hybridization and militarization of schools; and d) educational federalism.

Abrucio (2021) points to the actions of the Ministry of Education (even before the pandemic, but already in the Bolsonaro administration) as a moment of tension and alignment between moral and ideological agendas and educational policy practices, given the number of attempts at proposed ideological practices such as: Programa Future-se (Future Program from Ministry of Education), homeschooling, "School Without a Party" Project and others,

concomitant with the Ministry of Education's inertia in the pandemic<sup>7</sup>. The result of this departure from the dialog that bases democratic practice and crisis management, coupled with the precariousness of the ministry, falls into the first category, *the Ministry of Education's inertia*, which has resulted in a series of normative instruments<sup>8</sup>. These instruments provided incipient coordination, since they did not include measures to contain the damage caused by students being absent from school or to prepare teachers for remote work, nor did they agree on actions for collaboration between the federated entities.

The lack of commitment of the Bolsonaro administration to the fight against the pandemic can also be observed in the second category, *ministerial instability*. In one year (2020-2021), an economist and a pastor (exonerated in 2022 due to a corruption scandal)<sup>9</sup> were appointed Minister of Education. In addition to their backgrounds, which are not in line with the competence of the position, they have been involved in various controversies, such as attacks on the Federal Supreme Court, racist and xenophobic statements, as shown in table 3. This profile, which is incompatible with democratic values and the guarantee of the right to education, was the driving force behind the third category of analysis, *the advances in the hybridization and militarization of schools*.

As a declared government program to weaken public education, there has been an advance in the hybridization and militarization of schools, as we call the third analytical category. In 2020, the National Association for Hybrid Basic Education was created, presented by the business community as a solution to activities non in-person via internet for public education. For them, human education is a resource that can be adjusted to the transformations of capital, configuring a select, unnatural scale of control over content, which justifies the flexibilization of models based on the idea of "learning to learn". These proposals have been endorsed, such as Bill No. 2497/21 (Brasil, 2021a), which deals with regulating the provision of hybrid education, authored by Congresswoman Luíza Canziani (PTB/Paraná)<sup>10</sup>.

Such initiatives have gained prominence under the aegis of Bolsonarism, which is unfolding in an institutional crisis and a project of democratic retraction, intensified against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. With the omission of the Ministry of Education, private actors were able to structure themselves more strongly in the field of educational policies. A similar movement occurred with the militarization of schools, which was already being

paved before the arrival of the virus and was accentuated with the progressive creation of civic-military schools<sup>11</sup>. In this scenario, the pandemic served as a kind of smokescreen to hinder attempts to resist the military advance in the field of education.

In addition, even with recommendations not to return to in-person classes – coming from Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, for example – which showed concern about how the schools would return in-person, as well as the impact of such a measure, since it was a serious scenario (Castro, Périssé, 2020), the crisis management in the field of education determined the first in-person return in a hurried manner. It was a moment of pressure, given the lack of commitment to preventive measures, at the same time as there were movements such as Open Schools<sup>12</sup> that led the agenda for the in-person return as a counterpoint to Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, the National Campaign for the Right to Education and others. In July 2020, the in-person classes return in Manaus resulted in a massive expansion of contamination by the virus. The Report 1/2021 (Brazil, 2021 b) of the external committee of the Chamber of Deputies, which dealt with the actions of the Ministry of Education in the pandemic, indicated a lack of priority for the educational field, budget reductions, delays in the implementation of measures and structural inadequacy of schools.

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With the indifference of the Ministry of Education, the NGO Todos Pela Educação (All for Education), together with other actors, acted ostensibly by producing content for the most diverse audiences in the education area – parliamentarians, managers, party leaders (Todos pela Educação, 2020) – especially with regard to the incisive presentation of the agenda for the institutionalization of the National Education System, which we will deal with in the last category: *educational federalism*. In this sense, it's not just about curriculum control, but about the dispute over the implementation of the National Education System, which could alter federal structures, creating territorial cooperation arrangements, making the National Education System an agenda to guarantee the opening up of new markets, ensuring the action of private agents.

Thus, as in the health area, the spectacle of managing the pandemic has been a kind of *laissez faire* with the devastating consequence of 601,000 deaths by October 2021 (Brasil..., 2021) and education has been a piece of the game. The sub-national entities sought alternatives in an uncoordinated manner and suffered the consequences in the event of wrong decisions. As a



stereotype of federalism, subnational autonomy is part of its configuration and this action in the face of the pandemic should not be overlooked. The power of federal coordination should also be present with the definition of minimum standards for in-person return (when and how), with the prior planning of preparatory measures for the arrival of the virus in Brazil, with minimum standards for education via internet, adaptation of schools, adopting financial and technical measures, fostering of federative collaboration, among other initiatives.

It is notice that there is a kind of de-characterization of federalism in the Bolsonaro government, actions that cannot be called simple inertia, but a project of democratic retraction. As a result, a context was paved for actors such as the NGO Todos Pela Educação (All for Education) to guide the debate around the National Education System, in the midst of a generalized institutional and democratic crisis, as well as the advance of fragile instruments, categorized as a collaboration regime, as was the case with the Education Development Arrangements, via Resolution 2/2021 (Brasil, 2021c).

From the point of view of education funding, despite the new Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and Valorization of Education Professionals having been approved by Law 14.133/2020 (Brazil, 2020c) and the Brazil in School Program by Ordinance 177 (Brazil, 2021d), Alves, Farenzena, Silveira and Pinto (2020) indicate three aggravating points for tackling the pandemic: a) the complexity of intergovernmental relations and the lack of a National Education System as a factor that presupposes difficulties in achieving coordination and federative cooperation; and b) the lack of regulation of the new Fund at the time. According to the authors, in order to deal with the crisis, it would be necessary to inject resources into existing programs, such as the National School Feeding Program and the Money Directly to School Program, as well as a greater financial contribution from the federal government to the maintenance and development of education.

The central figure is not only the Ministry of Education's inoperability in national education policy, but also the capabilities of the Ministry of Education's office in its competencies to subsidize, articulate, promote, coordinate, ensure and propose actions in favor of quality public education, when its functions have been reduced to a suggestive character, with the central argument based on the autonomy of the federated entities.

In short, in the educational sphere, from 2020 to 2021, the actions taken in the face of the pandemic can be summarized as instability, omission and the advance of neoliberal policies. The Ministry of Education experienced constant changes of education ministers, materialized incipient actions to manage the education crisis (which caused each federal entity to take disparate measures) and, as a result of these aggravating factors, policies such as the hybridization of education and the National Civic-Military Schools Program gained strength.

## Final considerations

We are experiencing in the present a field of disputes and interpretations, which requires the researcher to adopt a critical and reflective stance. In the history of the present, it is not a question of revealing what is hidden, as in the history of the past, but of problematizing what seems to be evident, of questioning the meanings and significations attributed to facts and discourses. In this sense, the history of the present seeks to understand its own time, placing it in a historical perspective, making it possible to denaturalize what seems obvious or given. In this article, in addition to the present time, we have also adopted a comparative perspective. In fact, all present-day history is comparative history, as it involves analyzing different contexts and realities that are related in some way, such as nations or regions, as well as cultural, social, political and economic aspects within the same society (Schurster, 2015). It is precisely the approach to social, political and economic aspects that has been prioritized in this article.

The analysis and critical interpretation of the sources, based on the history of the present time and the comparative approach, made it possible to infer that, more important than the consolidation of more or less institutionalized health and education systems, the federative issue is about: a) the centrality of the federal government's coordination; b) the dimensions of underfunding and then de-funding; and c) the denialism, the anti-science discourse and the discredit of public education that affected the health and education areas very seriously in the period studied.

As for the experience of crisis management in the health area, it can be seen that, in general terms, that the crisis management did not culminate in the necessary effectiveness, since there were no preventive measures before

the virus arrived in Brazil, or after the pandemic had already hit the country, since the actions taken by the Ministry of Health did not strengthen the performance of the Unified Health System. On the contrary, the president himself caused a agglomeration among his electorate and trivialized the seriousness of the virus, the efficacy of the vaccine and the critical state of many people who had contracted it. In other words, even with the existence of the Unified Health System, the Ministry of Health's actions were intertwined with the president's ideological project. The combination of the constant change of health ministers, the delay in purchasing inputs for vaccines and the weak campaign to encourage vaccination meant that the reduction in the number of deaths took longer than necessary, as well as failing to strengthen the work of the Unified Health System. Therefore, the existence of a structured system was insufficient to contain the ideological advance of the Bolsonaro administration.

In the case of education, with the Ministry of Education failing to manage the crisis, sub-national governments were faced with the need to take heterogeneous measures according to the levels of contagion in each region, without coordination with the federal government. With students not being able to attend classes, there was no way for the federal government to collaborate or even coordinate in the educational policy arena. In fact, what gained momentum were discussions about homeschooling and the possibilities of National Education System formats, as well as the advancement of the National Civic-Military Schools Program.

In view of this, we return to the problem of this article: Given the scenario of the Covid-19 pandemic, if the National Education System had been in place, as in the health area, with the Unified Health System, would crisis management have been successful? Placed in parallel, both fields have been drastically affected by the pandemic. Even though the Unified Health System has been structured for so long, the existence of the system alone has not been enough to meet the policy needs that should come from the Ministry of Health with regard to the prevention and treatment of Covid-19 cases. What we saw was pre-existing fragility aggravated by the Ministry of Health's inoperativeness, instability in command, denialism, and contempt for biosafety measures on the part of the president of the Republic. In other words, the existence of a structured system has not been able to stop the ideological influence of Bolsonaro and all its ills, which has placed the country at the epicenter of the pandemic.

In this sense, we believe that even if education had a structured system at the time (the National Education System), it would also have been under the coordination of the Ministry of Education – just as the Unified Health System is for the Ministry of Health – which was omitted during the administrations of the different ministers, enforcing other agendas that did nothing to tackle the pandemic and guarantee the right to education. In other words, the scenario would hardly be different if there were a National Education System, since education has also been attacked by the ideological factors of Bolsonaro. Therefore, it seems appropriate to advocate the establishment of a National Education System that, above all, equalizes the conditions of educational provision in the national territory, based on a funding mechanism and that allows for the provision of quality public services. The institutionalization of the National Education System that only protects the instances of the pact between the sub-national entities would not and will not cope with emergency and complex situations such as the management of the pandemic by the Unified Health System, a historically structured system that has been severely shaken.

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### Notas

1. Such a choice is justified from the begin of the Covid-19 pandemic until the period in which Brazil had already expanded vaccination, with a return to in-person classes expected in early 2022.
2. The program had existed since 2013, with the aim of bringing medical care to areas with few health professionals, but its extinction caused 11,000 doctors to stop working in Brazil (Nisz, 2018).
3. This can also be seen with the withdrawal of the concept of harm reduction from the National Drug Policy, which reduced HIV infection. The most vulnerable people found themselves under reforms that trivialized the right to health.
4. The less complex services of the Unified Health System, such as vaccinations, home visits, dengue control and others.
5. Teams with street health clinics to care for riverside populations, which could be extended to other risk groups.
6. The choice of ministers, delays in the purchase of supplies, no measures to prevent the imminent wave of deaths and the lack of federal coordination.
7. In addition to the total isolation of the Ministry in terms of dialogue with other actors, such as universities, forums, and others.
8. Ordinance N° 343/2020, Opinion N° 5/2020, Ordinance N° 503/2020, Opinion N° 22/2020, Resolution N° 2/2020, Ordinance N° 1,096/2020, Resolution CNE/CP N° 2/2021.

9. A minister was also appointed who failed to perform due to inconsistencies in his academic formation.
10. He was president of the Mixed Parliamentary Front for Digital and Citizenship Economy and was part of the coordination of the thematic axis on federative arrangements in education in the Mixed Parliamentary Front for Education, with broad articulation of private interest agents.
11. Ordinance N° 1.071/2020, N° 925/2021 and N° 852/2021.
12. Civil society organization coordinated by fathers, mothers and guardians.

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