

# THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND IN BRAZIL DURING THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: REVISITING HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

## A EDUCAÇÃO DE CEGOS NO BRASIL DO SÉCULO XIX: REVISITANDO A HISTÓRIA

Gabriel Bertozzi de Oliveira e Sousa LEÃO<sup>2</sup>

Cássia Geciauskas SOFIATO<sup>3</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** The *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* was the first school organization founded in Brazil specifically for the education of people with visual impairment, providing primary, musical, vocational and some areas of secondary education. The objective of this research is to present and analyze the organizational structure of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, an institution founded in 1854 that used the simultaneous teaching method and was under the direct protection of the Emperor until the collapse of the monarchy. For this, this work consists of a documental research (Gil, 2002) carried out based on primary sources located at the *Arquivo Nacional* (National Archive), *Biblioteca Nacional* (National Library), *Almanak Laemmert*, and from bibliographic sources, such as: Aranha (2006), Araújo (1993), Jannuzzi (2004), Mazzotta (2001), Penna (2008), Veiga (2007) and Zeni (1997, 2005). The geographic and temporal cutoff of the research is Rio de Janeiro, during the second half of the 19th century, when the first educational institution for the visually impaired was born in the capital of the Empire. The primary sources analyzed consisted mainly of reports from the Institute's managers and the Ministers and Secretaries of Business of the Empire, responsible for monitoring the education. The *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* established the basis for the education of the blind in Brazil, which, despite giving some autonomy and providing the intellectual development of its students, has been criticized for its asylum characteristics, present in its practices throughout its history.

**KEYWORDS:** Blind's Education. Visual impairment. Special Education.

**RESUMO:** O Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos foi a primeira instituição escolar fundada no Brasil, no Rio de Janeiro, voltada à educação de pessoas com deficiência visual, provendo o ensino primário, musical, profissional e alguns ramos do ensino secundário. O objetivo desta pesquisa é apresentar e analisar a estrutura organizacional do Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos, fundado em 1854, que utilizava o método simultâneo de ensino e esteve sob a proteção direta do Imperador até a queda da monarquia. Para tal, este trabalho consiste em uma pesquisa documental (Gil, 2002), realizada com base em fontes primárias localizadas no Arquivo Nacional, na Biblioteca Nacional, no *Almanak Laemmert* e em fontes bibliográficas, tais como: Aranha (2006), Araújo (1993), Jannuzzi (2004), Mazzotta (2001), Penna (2008), Veiga (2007) e Zeni (1997, 2005). O recorte geográfico e temporal da pesquisa dá-se no Rio de Janeiro, durante a segunda metade do século XIX, momento que nasceu a primeira instituição de ensino para a pessoa com deficiência visual na capital do Império. As fontes primárias analisadas constituíram-se, principalmente, por relatórios dos gestores do Instituto e dos Ministros e dos Secretários dos Negócios do Império, responsáveis pelo acompanhamento da educação. O Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos instituiu as bases para a educação dos cegos no Brasil e, apesar de dar certa autonomia e proporcionar o desenvolvimento intelectual de seus alunos, fora criticada pelo seu caráter asilar, assumido por meio de suas práticas ao longo da história.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação dos cegos. Deficiências da visão. Educação Especial.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The education of the blind in Brazil in the 19th century was already a topic of research in light of its importance for the establishment of foundations for the Special Education area in the country with regard to such target population. Authors such as Mazzotta (2001), Jannuzzi

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<sup>2</sup> Master's in Education from the University of São Paulo. São Paulo/SP – Brazil. gabriel.bertozzi@gmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0267-731X>.

<sup>3</sup> PhD in Arts from the University of São Paulo. São Paulo/SP – Brazil. cassiasofiato@usp.br. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5291-9658>.



(2004), Zeni (1997, 2005), among others, brought contributions to the field, but based on careful analysis of documentary sources not yet explored. Thus, we can say that the discussions on these issues are not yet consolidated and are open to new contributions, hence the relevance of the study presented here.

The first attempt to systematize the education of the blind in Brazil occurred through a project presented to the Legislative General Assembly at the session of August 29, 1835, by the representative Cornélio Ferreira França. According to Zeni (2005), such a project provided for a teacher of primary education for the deaf, mute and blind in each province of the nation, granting the right to primary education to all citizens, according to Law of October 15, 1827. The project, however, was not approved, and the education of the blind was only consolidated in 1854, thanks to the performance of José Álvares de Azevedo and José Francisco Xavier Sigaud.

According to Zeni (1997), José Francisco Xavier Sigaud was French, born on December 2, 1796, in Marseille, France. He went to Rio de Janeiro in the 1820s for having worked as a surgeon at the Lyon Hospital. As secretary of the Royal Society of Medicine of Marseilles, he had created a medical journal called *Ascrepiades*, that circulated in France from 1823 to 1825. Sigaud was naturalized as Brazilian in 1854. José Álvares de Azevedo was Brazilian, born in Rio de Janeiro, on April 8, 1834; he lost his sight at the age of three, due to a “purulent newborn ophthalmia” and moved to Paris on August 1, 1844. Álvares de Azevedo was educated at the *Institut National des Jeunes Aveugles* where he learned the Braille System. Upon returning to Brazil in 1850, he sought subsidies to create, in the Court, an institute similar to the French. Zeni (1997) states that while in Brazil, Álvares de Azevedo taught the Braille System to one of Dr. Sigaud’s daughters, Adelia, who was also blind. Adélia Sigaud’s progress made her father, who was a doctor of the Imperial Chamber, introduce José Álvares de Azevedo to the Emperor. According to the author, the monarch’s interest in the Institute’s project allowed his first form of organization to be structured.

The replies of the Minister of the Empire, to whom the public instruction was subordinated, were nevertheless delayed. Zeni (2005) argues that the Government took the initiative to install an institute for the blind in the Court, on the arrival of the new minister, Luiz Pedreira de Couto Ferraz, on September 6, 1853. The author states that the delay of the Senate in granting authorization to the Government to create an institute for the blind made it function in an “unofficial” character, from March to September of 1854. Finally, by Decree no. 1,428, of September 12, 1854, the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* (Imperial Institute of the Blind Boys) was officially founded in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and was solemnly inaugurated on September 17 of the same year, in the presence of the Emperor, the Empress, and the entire Ministry, without, however, the presence of José Álvares de Azevedo, who had died six months earlier, on March 17.

Although the official history of the Institute reaffirms its existence through José Álvares de Azevedo’s actions, in accordance with the interests of Sigaud and the Emperor, it is possible to infer that there was already a project or an intention on the part of the Imperial Government to create an institute like that. In 1856, two years after the founding of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, the *Imperial Instituto dos Surdos Mudos* (Imperial Institute of the Mute and Deaf) was also established in Rio de Janeiro. It is probable that the constitution of

these two spaces, having as reference French institutions, was part of a project of modernization of the society, of its institutions and of the Court itself, which had as its model the reference capital of that period: Paris. The founding of the educational institutes and shelters for people with disabilities could be one of the steps in this direction, with the aim of bringing the whole dynamics of Rio de Janeiro closer to French standards, even if this approach was impregnated by the characteristics and specificities of teaching and society in the tropics.

In view of the preliminary scenario, the objective of this study is to present and analyze the organizational structure of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, an institution founded in 1854 and under the direct protection of the Emperor until the fall of the monarchy. For that, a documentary research was conducted, based on a qualitative approach. To Gil (2002, p. 45), the documentary research “uses materials that have not received an analytical treatment yet, or that can still be re-elaborated according to the objects of the research”.

In addition to books and papers that deal with the history of Special Education in Brazil, a set of primary<sup>4</sup> documents were used, according to Gil (2002), such as: the reports and letters of the directors of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* and Ministers and Secretaries of Business of the Empire from 1854 to 1889, present in the National Archives and the National Library (Rio de Janeiro - RJ), and documents extracted from the *Almanak Laemmert*. In addition, the *Collections of Laws of the Empire*, considered a secondary<sup>5</sup> document, were also analyzed based on the same time frame, according to the same author.

All the documents were photographed, read and paleographically transcribed, for later analysis, use and citation. Given the originality of most of the sources, data processing followed the premises of the content analysis, in order to extract the “emerging core”, in line with the research objectives and, consequently, the coding process was carried out, interpretation and inferences from the information expressed in the documentary findings, “revealing their manifest and latent content”, according to Pimentel (2001), and emphasizing their institutionalized discourse. The textual construction was based on a large category, from which we could extract five other subcategories, in order to give the text a more didactic character.

## **2 IMPERIAL INSTITUTO DOS MENINOS CEGOS: ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK**

The first premises of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, in Rio de Janeiro, was a house at the *Morro da Saúde* until the year 1864. It had as first director and medical doctor José Francisco Xavier Sigaud, who died in 1856 and was replaced by Cláudio Luís da Costa, nominated by Imperial Decree; he also served as the Institute’s doctor. During his administration, in 1866, the educational institute was transferred to an address at *Praça da Aclamação*, currently *Praça da República*. With Cláudio Luís da Costa’s death in 1869, he was replaced by Benjamin Constant Botelho de Magalhães, Professor of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the Institute since 1862 (invited by Cláudio Luís, who was his personal doctor), and married to Maria Joaquina da Costa, Cláudio Luís’s daughter since April 1863. Also acting as professor of Mathematics and Sciences and as treasurer, his management as director only ended with the Proclamation of the Republic, on November 15, 1889, when

<sup>4</sup> Sources that have not had, apparently, an analytical treatment yet, according to Gil (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Documents that have already undergone an analytical treatment (Gil, 2002).

Benjamin Constant started to be part of the administration of the Provisional Government as Minister of War and later as Minister of Public Instruction. During the Imperial period, the Institute counted on these three directors.

According to Zeni (2005), after Sigaud's short administration (1854-1856), during Cláudio Luís's management, the discipline became more rigid, both for the students and the employees, "the controls of expenses were tighter, with evident effort of economy, also with regard to the hiring of personnel; an effective search for the Institute's financial autonomy, mainly through the creation of its own patrimony" (Zeni, 2005, p. 178). Regarding the relation of the Director with the education of the blind, the author states:

I did not find any approach between Claudius Luís and the education of the blind before assuming the direction of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*. No reference was made in his writings on the blind and the Institute during his passage through the Institute of Paris when he was there in 1855 visiting his son-in-law, the poet Antonio Gonçalves Dias, with whom he continued to correspond even after the separation of his daughter (Zeni, 2005, p. 171).

Benjamin Constant, the Institute's third director, had always worked in the field of education; this is one of the reasons he did not live in the Institute (as had been done by his predecessors in view of what was stated in the Provisional Regulation<sup>6</sup> of 1854). During his tenure at the Institute, he also worked as a teacher at the Military School and at the Court's Normal School<sup>7</sup>, which gives us clues about the poor remuneration of education professionals, already recurring in that period. The directors before Benjamin Constant, Xavier Sigaud and Cláudio Luís da Costa, both retired doctors, were, however, "omnipresent" directors, as they lived in the Institute (Zeni, 2005).

Zeni (2005) points out that both Cláudio Luís and Benjamin Constant attempted during their administrations to make a series of changes in the Institute, especially with regard to the reform of their Provisional Regulation. Benjamin Constant had always been remembered in the Institute, due to the attempts of expansion and improvements of the educational institution along with the Government. Later, the Institute would receive, in his honor, the name of Benjamin Constant. Much was denounced and asked by the last director to improve the education of the blind and for the Government to watch over these actions.

Another position that was part of the administration of the Institute was the Government Commissioner. Although it was also subordinated to the Ministry of the Empire, as well as the other schools of the Court, the Institute was not supervised by the General Inspector of Instruction, but, as proposed in Article 2 of the Provisional Regulation (Decree no. 1,428, September 12, 1854), by the Minister himself or by a commissioner determined by him. This representative of the State, who also supervised the *Imperial Instituto dos Surdos-Mudos*, had the role of:

<sup>6</sup> The Provisional Regulation of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* was inserted in the legislation of creation of the school (Decree no. 1,428, September 12, 1854). Composed of five chapters that dealt with: the aims of the institute and its organization; the functions of employees; the number and form of admission of students; teaching content, exams and awards; and some general provisions on the institute. This regulation was in force until May 17, 1890.

<sup>7</sup> Name given to a secondary school course to qualify teachers to teach in Elementary Education.

- §1<sup>st</sup> Inspecting the moral and religious education, the teaching of primary education and arts and the discipline and economy of the Institute;
- §2<sup>nd</sup> - Attending the examinations of the students and reporting to the Government in an annual report, of the judgment to be made regarding their performance, of the merit of the masters and of the administration of the Institute;
- §3<sup>rd</sup> Proposing, at any time, the measures that he deemed appropriate for repression of abuses or correction of regulatory dispositions according to the best advisable experience (Notice of December 18, 1854, p. 270).

Zeni (2005) states that the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* had three permanent commissioners during the imperial period:

The Marquis of Abrantes (Miguel Calmon du Pin and Almeida), the Baron and then Viscount of Bom Retiro (Luiz Pedreira do Couto Ferraz) and Antonio Candido da Cunha Leitão, who assumed several times in the temporary impediments of the Viscount of Bom Retiro before assuming the position effectively in 1887 due to the death of the latter. Their prestige and their non-coveted position as Government Commissioner at the Institute enabled that the rotation of ministers of the Empire did not affect their permanence even when they took over liberal ministries, since these were commissioners of the Conservative Party. The Marquis of Abrantes was commissioner of the Imperial Government at the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* from the beginning, signing the first volume of the Book of Enrollments, remaining there until his death in the city of Rio de Janeiro on October 5, 1865 (Zeni, 2005, p. 128).

In addition to the Director and the Government Commissioner, the Institute had a staff that, according to its Provisional Regulation, was composed of:

A teacher of primary education; one of vocal and instrumental music; And the one of the mechanical arts, which were preferred with attention to the age, and aptitude of the students; A doctor; A chaplain; An inspector of pupils per class of ten boys, and according to this number, the employees and servants who are indispensable (Decree no. 1,428, of September 12, 1854, p. 296).

In the 4th Article of the Regulation (Decree no. 1,428, dated September 12, 1854), it was pointed out that teachers would still be designated as necessary in accordance with the Institute's curriculum development, which gave rise to newly hired staff. According to Article 15 of its Internal Regiment<sup>8</sup>, it was the responsibility of teachers:

- §1 To teach the students the content of the respective classes, explaining them properly;
- §2 To remind them, at any opportune time, their duties as citizens, and give them useful advice whenever they needed;
- §3 To treat all students with equal care, praising those who give good accounts of themselves, admonishing those who are negligent and encouraging them not to despise the benefit they want to provide (Notice of December 18, 1854, p. 273).

In order to teach in public schools in the municipality of the Court, it was necessary to prove legal age (21 years old) (Decree no. 630, dated September 17, 1851; Decree no.

<sup>8</sup> The Internal Regiment of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* was established by the Notice of December 18, 1854. Organized in 106 articles, there was a greater detail on some dispositions of the Institute, such as the roles of its employees; classification, instruction, exams and routine of students; discipline and clothing; awards and penalties applied to students; administration and accounting of the Institute; as well as issues related to opening hours, meals and visits to the boarding students.

1,331-A, February 17, 1854), morality and professional skills. In order to be nominated by Imperial Decree, the teachers carried out an oral and written examination that would deal “not only with the content of the teaching area, but also with the practical and methodical system of this respective area, according to instructions issued by the General Inspector, once approved by the Government, and having preceded the hearing of the Directing Council” (Decree no. 1,331-A, of February 17, 1854). However, there is no data to prove that this procedure was realized at the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*.

In the absence of teachers of the Institute of the Blind, these were replaced by one another or by the “repeaters” (a class probably inspired by the monitors of mutual teaching also present in other schools, such as *Colégio Pedro II* and the *Imperial Instituto dos Surdos-Mudos*) and, in lack of these, by whom the director appointed, with approval of the Minister of the Empire.

Article 18 of the Provisional Regulation (Decree no. 1,428, of September 12, 1854) stipulated that there would be a number of up to four repeaters in the institution, “which may also be student inspectors, residing and living in the school, and with gratification indicated by the Government” (p. 297). It was the role of the repeaters to explain the lessons to the children in their study hours, to assist the chaplain in teaching religious practices and roles, “to direct students in the preparatory studies of their lessons, explaining to them what was of most difficult intelligence, reminding them what they had forgotten and conducting them through reasoning to understand the content being taught” (Notice of December 18, 1854, p. 274). In addition, they should “comply with the students during the preparatory study the same duties prescribed for teachers” (Notice of December 18, 1854, p. 274). When necessary, they were replaced by their fellow repeaters or by whom the director wished.

According to *Almanak Laemmert* (Laemmert, 1855), the Institute had, in its first year of operation, in addition to the director, who served as doctor, seven other employees, among them a teacher of Primary Education for boys, a blind teacher for the girls (Adélia, Sigaud’s daughter), one of music, also blind, and one of religion (the chaplain). There was also a blind repeater (student of the Institute) and a student inspector. This number of professionals is linked to the small number of students who, according to Zeni (2005), on the official date of its installation (September 17, 1854), were in all 10: eight boys and two girls, and that number, later on, reached 19, 13 boys and six girls (*Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* [IIMC], 1859, p. 29-33).

In 1889, the last year of the Imperial Government, *Almanak Laemmert* (Sauer, 1889) reveals a number of 29 employees in the Institute, also considering that the occupation of treasurer was filled by the director, that of professor of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, also a role of the director, was, at the time, being occupied by a substitute; and that of chaplain and teacher of religion was available. Among the seats counted, there were 13 for teachers, being five of music, four for professional workshops and the rest for other scientific disciplines. At that time, there were seven repeaters. In addition to these, *Almanak* revealed the existence of a three-member estate commission (director, secretary and treasurer).

As stated in the Provisional Regulation of the Institute of 1854, there was no exact number of teachers to be hired to teach, varying according to the need of the educational

institution. In addition, considering that throughout the imperial period the Institute possessed only one regulation and regiment, it is interesting to note how the norms contained therein were made more flexible, accepting in the 1880s, for example, a number of more than four repeaters and 30 students, as stated in the regulation. The increase in the number of attended students may be the cause of the increase of the number of employees in 1889, since there were only 10 students in 1854, 30 in 1862 and 60 students in 1884.

### 3 CURRICULAR PROPOSAL

Prior to the establishment of the Provisional Regulation (1854), there were also three proposals for regulation of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, sent to the Ministry of the Empire and probably not accepted. The first proposal, dated December 26, 1853 (IIMC, 1853, p. 6), and the second, dated January 20, 1854 (IIMC, 1854, p. 10), are signed by José Álvares de Azevedo and José Francisco Xavier Sigaud. In them, it is said that the Institute is a national establishment placed under the immediate protection of the Emperor. The course would last eight years, and the student could still study for another two years if he/she had not finished his/her studies. Students aged 8 to 12 would be admitted. There would be intellectual, musical and technological instruction divided into elementary (1st to 4th grade) and higher (5th to 8th grade). The 7th and 8th grades would be used for students to improve in the studies of musical instruments and in the profession that they had learned.

The last proposal, without date reference (IIMC, 1854, p. 40), is only signed by José Álvares de Azevedo and claims to be the institution destined for “Brazilians deprived of sight”, who would receive education that would put them in the “shelter of misery” and give them “means of improving their existence”. This could be, as Zeni (2005) says, from 1854 because it is when it was grouped in the documentation folder of the National Archive. According to the author, “in the latter, where reasonable differences are found between the other two, it is where the name that would come to be given to the Institute appears; in others, *Instituto dos Jovens Cegos do Brasil*<sup>9</sup> appears” (Zeni, 2005, p. 113), as the French institute was called. The proposal offered a course of six years without being able to exceed seven years.

The curriculum of the Imperial Institute was based on three axes: intellectual education, present in other elementary educational establishments; the teaching of instrumental music and technological teaching, through the intended workshops for the school (such as piano tuning). It was planned for the Imperial Institute to be taught: “primary education; moral and religious education; the teaching of music, some areas of the secondary education, and factory crafts” (Decree no. 1,331-A, of February 17, 1854, p. 295). In an internship regime and using the Braille System, created by Louis Braille at the Institute for Blind Youth in Paris, an eight-year course is defined, with a possibility of a two-year extension, for students who were not considered sufficiently qualified (different from the usual elementary schools where course lasted between three and five years). According to Zeni:

Literacy in another system of writing and reading different from the one usually used conferred on the education of the blind as a differential character, sufficient enough to receive the label of “special” today. The uncertainties of the success of this endeavor, marked by the notion of

<sup>9</sup> Institute for the Blind Youth of Brazil.

devaluation, not disease, conferred on blindness, almost inevitably associated with begging, a supposed fate for those who, without family resources, did not achieve a reasonable level of instruction that would enable them to receive the teaching in the Institute. This justifies the inclusion of the teaching of music and art crafts in the teaching of the blind, unlike the provision for primary education in the Municipality of the Court, which implied a longer duration of the course (Zeni, 2005, p. 139).

In the *Exposição do Estado do Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos no ano de 1858* (Costa, 1858), a report of the director Cláudio Luís da Costa on the conditions of the Institute, the importance of the teaching of vocal and instrumental music for the blind is emphasized. According to the director, “in favor of such a study the students’ natural propensity and the consideration of being the one who provides them with the most secure means of subsistence for the future militate” (Costa, 1858, p. 14). According to Zeni (1997), the investment in music teaching “was the conviction, still today shared, even with less intensity, that the blind were naturally gifted to music, because of the greater and better use they made of hearing as compensation for visual loss” (Zeni, 1997, p. 87).

Regarding professional education, Zeni (1997, p. 107) points out that “on August 21, 1857, the Director Cláudio Luís da Costa informed the Minister of the Empire of the opening of the Institute’s typographical workshop with the engagement of five students [...]. To begin with, a brief history of the Institute would be printed”. Throughout the 19th century, there were also binding workshops for boys and needle, fringe, crochet and beadwork for girls, considered “special gifts to their gender”. Zeni (2005, p. 181) points out that “workshop masters were not civil servants, not receiving directly from the Treasury, but on a separate sheet, a much less secure situation”. This can be justified by the general devaluation of manual work in this historical context. The same author also says that, “throughout the imperial period, the Institute had only two workshops, the one of binding and the typography, which only met the internal needs of the Institute” (Zeni, 2005, p. 182) and that the work of the students did not even cover the needs of the Institute itself. According to the Report of March 31, 1884 (IIMC, 1884), written by Benjamin Constant to the Minister and Secretary of State for the Business of the Empire, at the end of the 19th century, the professional course consisted of: theory of music for students; woodwind, string and percussion instrument, piano tuning, typographic arts and bookbinding for boys; and several needle jobs for girls.

In the first three years, for scientific education, the disciplines were: “reading, writing, calculus of decimal fractions, music and mechanical arts adapted to the age and strength of the boys. Regarding reading it is understood the teaching of the catechism” (Decree no. 1,428, of September 12, 1854, p. 298); these were the first class disciplines. In other years, there was the teaching of “national grammar; French language; arithmetic; flat and rectilinear geometry; geography; history; gospel reading; in addition to the continuation of music and mechanical crafts” (Decree no. 1,428, of September 12, 1854, p. 298) (improved in the last year of the course), which comprised the second class. It is interesting to note that, during his administration, Benjamin Constant asked to implant the gymnastics chair for the teaching of the blind, but it was denied due to the visual condition of his students (Zeni, 2005), a factor that reveals the perception we had about the blind and their mobility and that makes us reflect even today on the vision we have in relation to this potential mobility that characterizes



this subject as one who is unable to perceive and move his/her own body with dexterity and autonomy.

In the municipality of the Court, the school was divided into first and second class, according to the years of study as occurred in the legislation of the 1850s (Decree no. 630, of September 17, 1851; Decree no. 1,331-A, February 17, 1854). Schools were divided between the first grade (elementary education) and the second grade (higher primary education). According to the Educational Reform made by Couto Ferraz (Decree no. 1,331-A, February 17, 1854), elementary education comprised: “moral and religious education; reading and writing; essential notions of grammar; elementary principles of arithmetic; system of weights and measures of the municipality” (p. 55). Regarding higher primary education, it was composed of:

Development of arithmetic in its practical applications; explained reading of the Gospels and news of Sacred History; elements of History and Geography, mainly from Brazil; principles of the Physical Sciences and Natural History applicable to the uses of life; elementary Geometry, surveying, linear design, notions of music and singing exercises, gymnastics, and a more developed study of the system of weights and measures, not only of the municipality of the Court, but also of the provinces of the Empire, and of the Nations with which Brazil had more commercial relations (Decree no. 1,331-A, February 17, 1854, p. 55).

In schools for girls, additionally, embroidery and some needlework were also taught. In 1879 (Decree no. 7,247, April 19, 1879), there was a reform in primary and secondary education of the Municipality of the Court, idealized by Leôncio de Carvalho, that included primary and secondary schools. With compulsory attendance for boys and girls aged between 7 and 14 years, there was voluntary religious education and the possibility of boys being enrolled in women’s schools. The primary schools would have a six-year course with the following disciplines:

Moral education, Religious education, Reading, Writing, Generic notions, Basic notions of grammar, Elementary principles of arithmetic, Legal system of weights and measures, Notions of History and Geography of Brazil, Elements of linear design, Rudiments of music, with solfege and singing exercise, Gymnastics and simple Sewing (for girls) (Decree no. 7,247, April 19, 1879, p. 198).

For the secondary schools, there was a two-year course that continued the contents of the first grade, added to the disciplines:

Elementary principles of Algebra and Geometry, notions of Physics, Chemistry and Natural History, with explanation of its main applications to the industry and the uses of life, General notions of the duties of man and citizen, with brief explanation of the political organization of the Empire, Notions of farming and horticulture, Notions of social economy (for the boys), Notions of home economics (for the girls), Manual practice of crafts (for the boys) and Needlework (for the girls) (Decree no. 7,247, April 19, 1879, p. 198).

In the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, the Report of March 31, 1884, written by Benjamin Constant to the Minister and Secretary of the State of Business of the Empire, reveals that the course of Sciences and Letters, part concerning the intellectual or scientific education of the School, was also divided between primary and secondary, in a probable attempt of assimilation with the regular education destined to sighted students. In its composition, there was:

Primary Course: Reading, writing, notions of Portuguese grammar, religion: Sacred History, dogma, moral and cult; practical arithmetic: spoken and written numbering, multiplication tables, four operations, on numbers, integers, fractions, ordinals and decimals, and notions of the metric system. These contents are given in the first three grades.

Secondary Course: Portuguese Grammar, French Language, Ancient, Middle, Modern and especially Brazilian History, Physical and Political Geography, Cosmography, Religion: Explained Gospel; theoretical and practical Arithmetic, complete course; Algebra: up to the equations of the second degree; Geometry: flat and in space, notions of Physics, Chemistry and Natural History. This course starts from the fourth and continues throughout the eighth grade (IIMC, 1884).

According to the documents there were daily, monthly and quarterly assessments. At the end of the year, public examinations were held on a date appointed by the Minister and State Secretary of Business of the Empire, in his presence or by the Commissioner appointed by him (Decree no. 1,428, September 12, 1854). Finally, the lessons and behavior were judged by teachers as: *great, good, poor, bad* or *terrible* (Costa, 1858). Based on the explicit curricular matrices, it is possible to see that the education of the blind tried to follow the general trend of the education of the country, but considering the specificity of the target population in question, there was a process of professionalization specially outlined.

#### 4 INTERNAL ORGANIZATION

The Institute's Provisional Regulation (Decree no. 1,428, September 12, 1854) determined that classes should begin on January 7 and end on November 15, and be open from 5:00 in the morning to 9:00 at night. At the time, the second director of the Institute, Cláudio Luís, reported that "students have all their time taken up by study or by some occupation, except for the recess" (Costa, 1858, p. 33). Working as a boarding school, students got up at 5:00 am and slept at 10:00 pm, going out for a walk accompanied by those responsible for them, only on some Sundays and holidays. They could receive visits from parents or guardians, with the principal's permission, on Thursdays and Sundays. Justifying the time spent by the students in their student activities, the director stated: "It seems, perhaps, excessive work; and in fact it would be for others, not for the blind, who in study and in work find their most pleasant recreation" (Costa, 1858, p. 33). The stigmatized and mythical view of visually impaired people, as if they could not enjoy the same pleasures and did not have the desires of the sighted people, considered "normal", is an idea present in the very medical discourse of Cláudio Luis and that justified an exhausting routine and strongly controlled by the institution, including in the personal and individual sphere.

In Article 75 of the Internal Regiment (Notice of December 18, 1854), it was informed that the income of the Institute was composed of "subsidy of the Public Treasury, which is annually voted on by the Legislative Body<sup>10</sup>; of the paying student allowance; of the donations made" (p. 284). In 1874, a plan of lotteries was devised by Benjamin Constant in order to relieve the State of the growing expenses that attendance to the blind required, through the creation of the Protective Society of the Devalued Blind. However, this project was not consolidated. On September 29, 1877, Decree no. 2,771, dated on September 29, 1877, created for the *Instituto*

<sup>10</sup> Subsidy of 15:000\$ réis according to *Almanak Laemmert*

*dos Meninos Cegos* and for the Deaf-Mute, an equity of 2.000:000\$000 of réis<sup>11</sup> constituted in public debt policies. Property formed by several different funds of the society.

## 5 COURSEWARE

Of the materials needed for the teaching of blind boys, many were imported mainly from the Paris Institute. As Zeni (2005) explains:

For writing in the Braille System, a special device and a pointer, known as puncture, that could be made here (in Brazil), were necessary. The paper, which only had the grammage as its special factor, should come from abroad, which attests the incipience of our industry (Zeni, 2005, p. 110).

In addition to the paper, as explained in the Letter to the Minister of the Empire, on objects coming from Paris, written by Sigaud on October 2, 1854 (IIMC, 1854, p. 35), zinc boards were imported for calculation, “alphabets in points” (Braille) and in Roman characters, Braille books and booklets, relief maps, typewriters, among others. In a report dated on March 31, 1884 (IIMC, 1884), Benjamin Constant reveals the variety of resources available for use in the Institute; such as: guide, pencil, *noetigraph*, *Remington machine*, *Foucault machine* (which allowed the blind to write in ordinary system, in ink or in pencil) and *Diplograph* (proper for writing in both common and special systems to the blind).

Regarding the textbooks used, during the first grades of the school, it was recurring the import order of *Espositor Portugues*, *Grammatica Portuguesa de Coruja*, *Catechismo de Montpellier* (in portuguese), *Tratados de Aritmética e Elementos de Música de Francisco M. da Silva*, all on “salient points” (i.e. Braille), as stated in the Letter sent to the Minister of the Empire on December 8, 1853, signed by Sigaud and Azevedo (IIMC, 1853, p. 12). Another document from 1856 (IIMC, 1856, p. 36) shows the receipt of a box with 50 copies of *Catecismo resumido de Montpellier*, also referring to the need for the other books cited. In general, it was stated that in every year it was necessary to have material purchased abroad towards the progress of pupils’ education at the Institute (IIMC, 1863, p. 214).

Zeni (2005, p. 159) states that “the library of the Institute was slowly being formed with books sent from Europe and the United States, in addition to those copied by the students themselves. This library began with the donations made by José Álvares de Azevedo’s father”. According to the Letter dated May 31, 1854, sent to the Minister Luiz Pedreira de Couto Ferraz and written by Manoel Álvares de Azevedo (IIMC, 1854, p. 19-20), 64 volumes of different relief written works were donated to the Institute, after Azevedo’s death, and 62 volumes on the History of the Institution of the Blind of Paris, translated by José Álvares de Azevedo, as well as a series of other useful materials for teaching students with visual impairment. As time passed, several other copies became part of this library, as result of donations or purchases from Paris.

<sup>11</sup> The first official currency of Brazil.

## 6 STUDENT BODY

As for the number of students in the Institute, it had always been reduced, not only by the few vacancies that were offered, but also by the social, geographical and bureaucratic barriers that were imposed. According to the *Report of statistical data provided so far to this Institute, of the existing blind children in need of education*, of 1857 (IIMC, 1857, p. 40), there was a total of 299 blind people counted and sent to the Institute by the provinces of Pará, Pernambuco, Bahia, Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná and in the neutral municipality of Rio de Janeiro. According to the report, the last statistic provided, reported a total number of 7,677,800 inhabitants in Brazil and it was considered that there would be one blind person per thousand inhabitants. The Empire, then, would have 7,678 blind people throughout its territory. In the report, Cláudio Luís da Costa therefore states: “Assuming that half will be slaves, there will be 3,839, 1/3 of those over the age of 14 and another 1/3 of those under six years of age (considering that for the older ones this amount is much larger), results to a number of 1,279 blind boys free and in need of education” (IIMC, 1857, p. 40).

In spite of efforts to abstract such data, these figures presented by Cláudio Luís must, however, be relativized due to the lack of census methodologies of that time. In addition to these data, Zeni (1997) reveals that during the management of Xavier Sigaud (1854-1856), the director received statistics confirming the existence of 148 blind adults living in Rio de Janeiro; of these, there would still be 19 blind since birth. However, the author reflects that “even for those days, the number of 148 blind people was low, especially when considering the precarious hygienic and sanitary conditions of Rio de Janeiro at the time, compared with what we have today, that still falls short of expectations” (Zeni, 1997, p. 76). In general, these data turned out to be arbitrary, as there were still no well-structured mechanisms to account for this population; the provincial administration itself did not have precise estimates of the condition of its inhabitants. It was only in 1872, with the national census, that there was a greater organization in the collection of these data, where an estimated 13,344 free blind people and 2,504 blind slaves were counted (*Recenseamento do Brazil de 1872 – Brazil’s Census of 1872*).

In order for the visually impaired to benefit from education at the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, there was a number of conditions for enrollment. As stated in the Provisional Regulation of 1854 (Decree no. 1,428, September 12, 1854), the number of students could not exceed 30 in the first three grades. Of these, there could be 10 admittedly poor and free of charge, and those who were not recognized poor should pay an annual pension decided by the Government, which could not exceed 400\$000 réis. In addition, they should pay an entry fee of up to 200\$000 réis. It would be up to the Government to provide sustenance, clothing and dressing for students.

Only free boys and girls, aged between six and 14, were admitted. Admission to the Institute depended on the authorization of the Minister and State Secretary of Business of the Empire, requiring the presentation of a baptismal certificate, or justification of age; medical report of the establishment, which attested that the blindness was total; and, if it were free of charge, a certificate from the parish priest and two authorities of the place of the pupil’s residence, proving his/her indigence. In addition, it was necessary that the doctor of the establishment verified that the student had been vaccinated and that he/she was not suffering from a *contagious disease*.

As for the permanence of girls in the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, a peculiar case for the schools of the time, in which education was separated by gender, was determined by the Internal Regiment (Notice of December 18, 1854) that they should be completely disassociated with boys, taking classes apart, work house, recreation and promenade, dining room and dormitory. Classes, of a different gender, should be separated from each other, with each one having, as a rule, a separate dormitory and dining room.

In general, the girls were educated by masters in elementary disciplines, languages and workshops considered “proper to their gender”, related to sewing, needlework and wool, in accordance with what would happen in the municipality of the Court where they were taught “embroidery and needlework” (Decree no. 1,331-A, February 17, 1854). The boys followed the usual curriculum, these being taught by the masters, occurring a physical separation of the genders in scientific education and hand crafts.

The students of the Institute were also classified according to their Internal Regiment (Notice of December 18, 1854), regarding their status: payers and free of charge; in relation to age and in relation to teaching, in two classes: the first, those who attended classes in the first three years; the second, those who had successfully completed this three-year period. At the time of its official installation, the *Imperial Instituto* had 10 students (eight boys and two girls), three of whom were considered to have financial resources and seven were poor (Zeni, 2005). Initially, Dr. Sigaud presented some of the causes of the reduced number of pupils, referring to distances, refusal of the poor, difficulties with time, and the opposition of wealthy parents (Zeni, 1997), who regarded the vocational education with disdain. That number, however, grew over the years.

After retreats and deaths, only on August 22, 1862, did the Institute have 30 internally enrolled students, 26 in the free class and 4 in the paying class (Zeni, 2005). In the Report of January 1, 1863 (IIMC, 1863, p. 11-17), of the 21 boys and nine girls, the majority, ten, came from the Court, five from Rio de Janeiro, three from Minas Gerais, three from Bahia, three from Santa Catarina, two from Ceará, one from São Paulo, one from Espírito Santo, one from Montevideo and one from Prussia. The 1864 Report (IIMC, 1864, p. 300-311) reveals a number of 29 students; of these, 28 were internal and one external. In this report, it is further affirmed that “many students are ready in what is called in the schools of the sighted as primary school”.

After the moving of the building in 1866, “Cláudio Luís began a practice that was widely used by Benjamin Constant, to admit candidates waiting to be enrolled, already residing in the Institute, which, by law, did not violate the Regulation and the budget law because they were not students” (Zeni, 2005, p. 201). This resulted in a pressure for increasing enrollment. In the management of Benjamin Constant, the number of students rose to 57 (15 girls and 42 boys) (IIMC, 1884). The Director constantly fought for a greater expansion of these enrollments (to 150), action justified by the census data of 1872.

In the project *Reorganization of the Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* (1873), developed by Benjamin Constant, approved by the House Chamber in 1875 and rejected by the Senate, in 1877, for budgetary reasons, the following was planned: the change of the building of the educational institution, the increase in the number of students, the creation of

new technical workshops, the dissemination of the Institute throughout the Empire, and the creation of homes for work and asylums for the elderly and “invalids”.

The project of creation of the Protective Society of the Devaluated Blind, proposed by Benjamin Constant in 1874, was also linked to the idea of expanding the Institution. However, this proposal was not fulfilled. The fact is that the number of paying students had always been reduced and the administration had not created a distinction among the students, which was an expense for the Institution. According to Zeni (1997), unlike Sigaud, Cláudio Luís da Costa acknowledged that most of the blind were from the poorer classes, which made the Government open seven more vacancies for the poor beyond the expected, only three were paying students.

It was also stated in the Provisional Regulation (Decree no. 1,428, September 12, 1854) that poor students, after completing their studies, if they were not employed as repeaters, they would have the destiny that the Government considered appropriate. However, the few unsuccessful attempts to work outside the Institute showed its “totalitarian and caring” tendency (Zeni, 2005). In a Bill for the Chamber House, Benjamin Constant said that the fate of the students upon leaving the Institute was a real problem to be solved and that the educational institution was a house of education and instruction, not a home for the blind. According to him, “it is not enough to educate and instruct the blind. The solicitude of the public power must not leave him/her unprotected, to the perilous eventualities of life” (*Reorganization of the Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, 1873, p. 7). That is why it was his resourcefulness to create a society that protected the blind based on the French model, which would act on the individuals educated in the Institute.

The Regulation also provided the access of former students to the magisterium of the establishment, which ended up making them “permanently” linked to it. It was already very common for “advanced students to assist for free, teachers as repeaters, which brings the teaching of the Institute closer to the *Lancasterian Method* by putting them in the position of monitors” (Zeni, 2005, p. 144). In addition, “despite the ‘specialty’ of the education of the blind, the Institute’s teachers did not receive any special training, even when they were not blind, because there was no apparatus encouraging them to learn the Braille System” (Zeni, 2005, p. 143).

When creating the Institute, it was the intention, on the part of José Álvares de Azevedo and José Francisco Xavier Sigaud, to bring blind masters from France to educate the students. However, Cláudio Luís da Costa did not agree with the idea that the blind should be taught by the blind, because, for the Director, those who saw would teach better (Zeni, 1997). This generalized position on the incapacity generated by blindness resulted in a difficulty for blind repeaters to become teachers, “it was only with Benjamin Constant as early as in the 1880s that the blind were in fact preferred to be teachers, even suggesting the resignation of some sighted ones” (Zeni, 2005, p. 144).

## 7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research, when bringing up unpublished documents and reflections, on the first educational institution for people with disabilities in Brazil, with its level of detail about the pedagogical proposal and the broad configuration of education of the blind in the 1800s,

gives the field an innovative perspective, since a mosaic of possibilities for the understanding on how education and training issues were established for blind students of the period was explained. This mosaic built the pedagogical and organizational foundations for later Brazilian special education institutions founded during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Moreover, although this proposal of analysis and historical-documentary reflection considers the importance of agents such as José Álvares de Azevedo, Xavier Sigaud and D. Pedro II in the constitution of the Institute, brings new perspectives to think about the creation of the educational institution for the blind, since it distances itself from a published personalist history, today, by the institution itself and adds to the debate the public intentions with a modernizing bias that affected the institutions of Rio de Janeiro during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, based on conceptions of what was modern and innovative in European countries of the time, especially in France.

Through the studies, we glimpsed the efforts of the three directors for the establishment and maintenance of the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* in the defined temporal cutoff. In addition to literary education, vocational referral was also planned, despite the difficulties presented, in order to make the blind subject less “onerous” to the society of the time.

In general, as Araújo (1993) affirms, there was the opportunity to educate the blind in order to obtain a degree socially recognized and offered by the institution, but that would only serve within the limits of the school walls, corroborating with a passive condition that was reinforced for many decades. Unlike the secondary teaching, which was “fundamentally aimed at the children of the elite, whether to hold political-administrative posts or to enter higher education” (Veiga, 2007, p. 188), the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos*, besides presenting a curriculum that followed the model of the time, had more of a characteristic of charity than of a school space for the education of citizens. The Institute ended up keeping its boarding students longer than the *Asilo dos Meninos Desvalidos* (Asylum of the devaluated boys), which, also being an education institution, would give primary and vocational education, and would keep its boarding students up to the age of 18.

The teachers of the *Imperial Instituto* were poorly paid and, as Costa said (1858, p. 13), “the exiguity of their wages is such, that for some it is not enough to cover the expenses of their transportation to the institute”, a delicate situation if their wages were compared with those of the teachers of the public schools of the sighted, whose teaching was considered by the director as “unquestionably much less laborious”. It was, therefore, an arduous task for the managers to convince the enlightened sectors, the Government itself and the society that the Institute was an educational institution and not a charity.

According to Zeni (2005), this connotation of asylum was expressed not only by the marginalization as a result of the disability, but also by the majority of the students coming from subaltern classes, which marked them with some degree of inferiority and refusal of the most affluent parents in enrolling their blind children into the institution. In general, the education of the poor should prepare them for an honest profession and not to be wise (utilitarian curriculum), “this distinction would be taken as a rule and the transgression would generate an iniquitous mixture or a monstrous amalgam (poor and rich receiving the same instruction)” (Penna, 2008, p. 130).

The imposition of this education on the blind and the impossibility of pursuing a career in another institution characterized the asylum aspect of the Institute. However, even if living, studying and working in the Institute was a reflection of the submission of these groups to the roles of the person with disability imposed by society, being a teacher of the Institute of the Blind, according to the possibilities available, could be one of the ways to resist and face a context of strong social discrimination.

In a society in which the enslaved population had no access to formal education and the poor population dealt with the offer of a few schools, whose activity was restricted to elementary education (reading, writing and counting); in which the data of the time show that only 10% of the school-age population were enrolled in primary schools in the year 1867 (Aranha, 2006); the divergence between the *Imperial Instituto dos Meninos Cegos* and the schools whose pupils came from the elite, such as the Pedro II School (of expensive tuition and designated to the few privileged, and with a curriculum of a humanistic and scientific nature); we have a clear example of the historical social inequality based on the relations of school institutions.

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