



Re-imagining Teaching: Progressive Pedagogies in Experimental Schools

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1) Overview.

Apple and Beane (2007) believe that the pursuit of neoliberal aims of education has cut our connection with progressive schools of the past: they write, “Shall we forget that ‘developmentally responsive’ practices stretch back to the progressive, child-centred schools created more than a century ago?” (p. 8). Indeed, John Dewey and his daughter Evelyn Dewey published *Schools of To-morrow* in 1915, profiling schools in the United States in which new education ideas were put into practice. Our research is inspired by the Deweys’ use of illustrative cases to explore the theory-/practice relationship with a focus on teachers and it responds to Bean and Apple’s plea to pay attention to lessons from the past. The research also reflects the transnational circulation of new education ideas over the first decades of the twentieth century (Passow, 1982; Popkewitz, 2005; Röhrs & Lenhart, 1995) by exploring case- study schools in five countries:

- Jardim de Infância da Escola Caetano Campos in São Paulo (1896-1930);
- The Malting House School in Cambridge (1924-1929) directed by Susan Isaacs;
- The Hietzing School in Vienna co-founded by Anna Freud (1927-1932);
- John Dewey’s laboratory school at the University of Chicago (1894-1904)*;
- The experimental station schools, Moscow, Russia (1917-1925)*

*Whilst research on the latter two schools is an important part of the larger book project - funding for that research was not part of Froebel Trust grant bid and indeed has come from other sources entirely.

Although the São Paulo school continues (in an altered form) today, none of the other institutions lasted more than a decade. However, to borrow a phrase from Dewey scholar Albert Balz (1949), they endure in historical memory as “symbols of the possible” (p. 328)—namely, of the promise of education to be individually and socially transformative. Moreover, insofar as the schools also functioned as stages for practicing the possible, their legacy endures in the later programs that Isaacs, Freud, and others established and inspired.

Our project had two main objectives. The first was to describe and explain the process of educational innovation in transnational perspective, considering the circulation, implementation and adaptation of new education ideas. Following on the work of Maderia (2012), we aimed to determine the “networks of pedagogical discourses” (p. 163) within particular socio-political spaces, including networks of prominent figures along with those who have received little attention, mainly women

teachers. Our second objective was to investigate the intersection of theory with practice in the ways teachers were selected and prepared to work in new ways in the schools. As Reese (2013) noted, “the role of teachers in the history of progressive schools merits more consideration. For example, if progressives hoped to make schools more child-centred, how would that occur?” (p. 323) – and, by extension, how might it occur today? To borrow from sociologist Bernstein (1990), we asked: How did teachers learn to engage in the “invisible pedagogic practice” (p. 68) that was the hallmark of the new education? Through careful archives-based research we were able to compare the different ways in which our case study schools addressed this question, such as at the Malting House School, where as a former teacher recalled, “the aim of the teachers is as far as possible to refrain from teaching” (Lawrence, 1949, p. 4).

Our work throughout was guided by five research questions:

1. What were the social, political and historical pre-conditions for the transfer of ‘new education’ theory?
2. What were the networks of ideas and experts that supported the transfer?
3. What was the culture of teaching in each school, i.e., means of assessment, conceptions of the learner and teacher, the social and material learning/teaching environment and pedagogies?
4. Who were the teachers in the schools, and how were teachers prepared to teach?
5. How did previously trained teachers who worked in the school engage with progressive practices?

Although we anticipated some shifting in emphasis, and even expected to add or drop one or another research question as the project proceeded, in the end all five remained at the heart of our project, and are at the core of our monograph, written by co-authors: Larry Prochner, Helen May, Alessandra Arce Hai, Kristen Nawrotzki, Yordanka Valkanova, and under contract for publication by Palgrave Macmillan in their ISCHE Global Histories of Education in 2020.

2) Conclusions and achievements. Please describe the extent to which objectives were met, the conclusions reached, the degree to which an original contribution to theoretical and/or practical knowledge has been achieved, and an assessment of the significance for other research in the field.

In the Kindergarten in Brazil we were able to identify two different periods for the works produced. The first, was marked by the application of Froebelian methodology inside the kindergarten together with Pestalozzi’ intuitive methodology and

Norma Calkins ‘object lessons’, due to the emphasis in Normal School to prepare teachers according to Pestalozzi’ ideas and ‘object lessons’. The second, was marked by the New School, with ideas circulating in the Normal School having a direct impact in the work of the kindergarten.

The broader outcome of our research has been to trace the long footprint in relation to teaching and learning and teacher education as a consequence of the Malting House experiment - in the combined and separate careers of Nathan and Lawrence.

We were able to find Evelyn Lawrence’s submission to the Plowden committee on behalf to the Froebel Foundation - and submissions from Nathan calling for a reform of higher education and in particular the training of teachers.

Research on the Hietzing School called into question some of the main assumptions of extant research on the school. Evidence from the Freud Archives in Washington DC suggests that these are

highly debatable, and that the roots of some of the school's most interesting pedagogical experiments may indeed have laid not with its most famous educators but instead with Marie Briebl, who also taught at the school and was the most progressively-oriented, professionally-trained educator and who had connections to revisionist Froebelian in New York.

What follows are notes about the threads we are weaving together as we compose the text.

1. What were the social, political and historical pre-conditions for the transfer of 'new education' theory?
 - a. Central to all of our case study schools in this regard were transnational, interpersonal relationships which brought together strands of thought from different societies/cultures/contexts undergoing transformation and melded them to form new visions of the school, the teacher, the child (and/or learner).
 - b. Important to the emergence of these experimental schools (and the desire to implement new visions of school, teacher, and child) were contexts of mass compulsory education, political transformation and an increasing confidence that science (child study, psychoanalysis as science, psychology and social sciences) could hold answers for how to re-shape nations and their citizens, and improve the lives of individuals, too. (This is exemplified in our case studies by the Soviet New Man, Dewey's writings about School and Society and the workings of his lab school, schools without repression as at Hietzing and Malting House, and the development of Kindergarten pedagogies to develop strong citizens in the young Brazilian republic)
2. What were the networks of ideas and experts that supported the transfer?
 - a. The networks arose in part out of earlier and ongoing movements for Froebelian education, but also in conjunction with the emerging transnational entities such as the New Education Fellowship and the International Psychoanalytic Society in particular)
 - b. Individual and institutional wealth also played a role in crucial periods, as individuals' travels (whether for personal or professional reasons, sometimes funded by institutions and governments) extended circles of contact and influence.
 - c. In all of our case study schools there is a sense of the key actors as being outsiders in important ways. This point has been made about e.g. the UK Froebel movement by Kevin Brehony, but it's also true here. The key actors have power in one or another regard but are also outside of traditional hegemony in their respective contexts: due to their social class, gender, sexuality, religion, lack of pedagogical pedigree/training. They see themselves or each other as being 'apart', which in turn appears to feed their 'different' views on schools and (themselves as) teachers within them.
 - d. Here we will draw on the concept of 'transnational educational spaces' as described by Fuchs and Rodàn Vera (2019), in depicting our case studies as occupying intellectual, pedagogical and emotional spaces at the 'crossroads of international trends and local concerns'. We haven't yet finalized our own take on this, but we have been discussing them informally as 'realms of the re-imaginary' which included purposeful, systematic experimentation as well as more free-form exploration of pedagogical approaches and concepts.
3. What was the culture of teaching in each school, i.e., means of assessment, conceptions of the learner and teacher, the social and material learning/teaching environment and pedagogies?
 - a. Here our focus has been on the re-imagined teacher and child in particular, and how those were reflected in the social and material learning environment and pedagogies. The importance of empathy emerges as a central theme in new visions of the teacher in our schools. In some cases, this is part and parcel of the evolving ideological bundle

that was psychoanalytical-pedagogy at that time; in all cases, to some extent, it's connected to ideas about freedom and child-centredness that are (mid-)understood to be very Deweyan, or Froebelian, Montessorian, or associated with still other (indigenous or transplanted) pedagogies.

- b. There is a strong sense in the case study schools of a contrast between 'other' schools and 'ours' – between critiques of existing forms of education and solutions (or at least approaches toward solutions) for those problems as identified. The 'other' schools are often framed in temporal terms, as being 'of the past' and oppressive/repressive as opposed to 'modern' (and therefore liberating). Often this contrast is described in terms of school culture, relationships between teachers and pupils, individuals and the curriculum, or even the pupil and his/her/their own self, conscious or subconscious).
4. Who were the teachers in the schools, and how were teachers prepared to teach?
 - a. The re-imagined teacher at our experimental case study schools was selected for different criteria entirely, including (especially) empathy and amenability.
 - b. The re-imagining of the teacher (as entity, as role, as individual) was ongoing in the schools in question, and was being hashed out over time. We have discussed this under the rubric of 'the teaching self', but also tied it back to the ways in which these re-imagined teachers became – if not ideals to be translated into every local school, then at least 'symbols of the possible', to return to Balz (1949) once more.
 5. How did traditionally-trained teachers who worked in the schools engage with progressive practices?
 - a. This question has received less of our attention than expected, since the teachers at our case study schools were largely selected for their amenability to new approaches, to working in environments different to those which formed the local standard at the time. Many of them were not traditionally trained at all, or had stood out during their training as different in some way. This was apparent, too, in the aforementioned contrast between 'other' schools and 'ours', and in the very sense of a 'we' of the school community of educators and leaders (or benefactors) who collectively determined the school's direction based on observations, experiences, and experiments (rather than on the wholesale subscription to one or another programmatic pedagogy).
 - b. The reimagining of the role of teachers was accompanied by (and/or driven by) a reimagining of the role of adults vis-à-vis children, childhood, education in general – including a reimagining of the role of parents in childrearing and in selecting, providing or advocating for 'appropriate' modes of education for their children. There were, of course, differences between the role of parents vis-à-vis the institutions in the individual case study schools, and social class and 'the nation' as agent and construct played different parts in various schools.

3) Implications. What are the implications for this work? Please include details of any anticipated changes to policy and/or practice as a result of this research.

This work was not designed to have a direct practical impact on policy or practice, but we can tell from the response to our presentations of this work that it contributes to historiographical discourses about the transnational and the history of 'progressive' and child-centred education by expanding the knowledge base about well-known institutions and educators (e.g. Dewey, Freud, Schatsky, Isaacs), and by illuminating their connections to others whose contributions have not been well examined

before. The project's particular transnational perspective problematizes some rapidly evolving ideas about networks and transmission of educational ideas and practices.

It also, we hope, will contribute to conversations about what we are tentatively calling 'the teaching self' – the many possible (and some desirable) roles of the educator in child-centred learning environments. These include, for example, the educator as learner, as therapist, as researcher, as observer. They bring into relief the culturally-situated yet widespread ambivalence about educators having a calling versus practicing a profession -- even under the supposed 'best possible conditions' for change that our case study schools provided. The psychoanalytic and project-based components that were influential to these experiments have threaded their way into discourses of teaching and learning in many countries, and we think this work can prompt a re-examination of these by individual practitioners as well as those who educate them. There may be much to learn from looking at child-centred educational experiments (anywhere, in any time period) as 'symbols of the possible' rather than as scalable models for widespread change.

4) Other funding

This project has been in receipt of an Insight Grant from the Government of Canada Social Science and Humanities Research Council. That grant has funded Prochner's research on the Dewey School - one of our larger project's five case studies, as well as our team meetings in Berlin (Aug 2018) and in Alberta, Canada (July 2019).

Arce Hai has received some funds from FAPESP - São Paulo Research Foundation in support of aspects of her work on the Brazilian case study only.

5) Publications and other outputs

Publications

1. Arce Hai, A., May, H., Nawrotzki, K., Prochner, L. & Valkanova, Y. (2020). Progressive pedagogies in experimental schools, 1894-1932: Transcontinental connections. (London: Palgrave Macmillan). Forthcoming.
2. Arce Hai, A., & Prochner, L. (2018). Aproximando-se da 'caixa preta da escolarização': uma análise da Revista do Jardim de Infância (1896-1897). In A.C. Bortoleto Nery (Ed.), *Pedagógica na Ibero-América: local, nacional e transnacional*. São Paulo, Brazil: Alameda. (This was not a Froebel-Trust-funded part of the project.)

Blog

We have used our individual social media accounts and project blog at <https://re-imaginingteaching.com/blog/> to offer occasional updates on our research team's activities and ideas as the project has progressed.

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