

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JCB-36 Education in Brazil

732 Yale Avenue
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania
July 12, 1965Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Education in Brazil has always been for the few and, based firmly in the European tradition, has offered little in a practical way toward the development of those skills and disciplines needed in a developing society. For this reason the passage, after 13 years of argument, of the Law of Educational Bases and Directives in 1961 gave hope to many educators that Brazilian education would assume new directions and move ahead.

In place of the old and moribund Federal Council of Education a new Federal Council was provided with considerable authority to regulate and determine policy. States were given primary control over education with the right to create educational councils of their own. Universities were given more autonomy. Secondary schools had their curriculum liberalized so that practical courses in industrial or commercial education could be introduced and so that students in all types of secondary schools (academic, commercial, technical, agricultural) would have a better opportunity of going to college. Primary education was made compulsory and businesses with more than 100 employees were required to maintain free primary education for employees and their children.

Education is free from beginning to end; a student may be able to go all the way from the first grade through college without the payment of any tuition. The Federal Government is supposed to spend at least 12% of its revenues on education and the states and municipalities, 20%.

To read Brazilian laws dealing with education is to be impressed with the great move forward they have made. But in Brazil too often there is a tendency to believe that everything has been accomplished when it has been formalized into law. It is enough to mention that at least 45% of all Brazilians are illiterate to know that there has not as yet been any real attempt at compulsory education. There are not yet enough schools, classrooms or teachers for all primary-aged children.

One legislator told me that these laws were not passed insincerely but rather with the expectation that they could and should be met. He explained, "Our country has gone through difficult economic and political times. They are not over yet. But in the degree that these educational laws are not now carried out they serve as goals as to what will be in the near future. You must realize that great differences exist within

Brazil; most of our country is yet undeveloped. For backward or poor areas like the Northeast or the Matto Grosso there is a much greater gulf between what exists and what the law requires than in the more productive areas of the South, the states of São Paulo, Guanabara and Minas Gerais."

How good is the best?

Although the steady migration of families from the North and the interior have increased pressure on school systems there, the states of São Paulo and Guanabara have come the closest to meeting the law's requirements. Prof. Flexo Ribeiro, Secretary of Education for the State of Guanabara, was quite ecstatic about the improvements in education which had taken place since he took office in 1961. (He is now a candidate for Governor on the record of what he has done for education in the state). He told me that Guanabara had arrived at the point where there was more classroom space than there were children in that age group. They were planning to begin the enforcement of compulsory education. "To this purpose we have created for the first time in Brazil the role of Compulsory Education Inspectors...They will take the necessary measures to bring these (unexcused) children to school." He was especially proud that there are now over four times as many students in public secondary schools as there were four years ago. This was largely done by increasing the use of space available (more than one session per day) and granting more state-aid tuition scholarships for students to attend private schools. He noted that Guanabara comes close to appropriating 20% of its revenues for education. It has also been helped by a loan from the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) in the building of new primary classrooms.

Of course, education in Guanabara is not yet near the state of perfection. Increased enrollment has been accomplished by crowded classrooms, two or three school sessions per day and the use of inadequately trained teachers. In spite of increased secondary class space and tuition grants many secondary school age children are kept out of school because there is no place for them in public school. An indication of the unmet demand occurred earlier this year when over 13000 children in Rio de Janeiro took examinations to get into the federally-run public secondary school, Pedro II. (Education is mainly the function of the state but the federal government can create schools in areas where it believes state ones are insufficient. In this case Pedro II was created when Rio was the federal capital and has remained under the control of the Federal Ministry of Education with the shift of the capital to Brasilia.) Of the number tested only 1900 (15%) were approved. And then the school had funds to admit only 700, little more than 5% of those who wanted to attend. Yet against the backdrop of the whole nation's educational development, Guanabara progress shines forth. At least there a full 4 to 6 year primary education is possible.

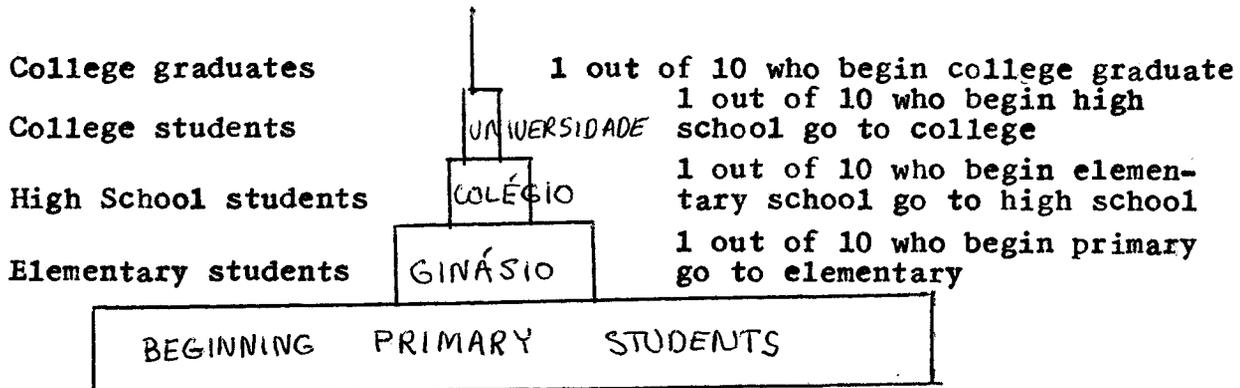
The biggest problems, gretest disappointments

It is a little difficult to know exactly where to lay the blame for Brazil's inability to meet its high educational aims. Perhaps the greatest disappointment has been in the new Federal Council. Established with wide powers to reform and coordinate on a grand scale, to set up constructive criteria for teaching and, in effect, get the whole program moving, they have done little more than arbitrate petty disputes (the appeal of a dismissed teacher or whether or not a certain child should be admitted to some school). Meanwhile states, with more authority over education, do as much or as little as their leadership and money indicate.

On the local level space is the most immediate requisite for all children to go to school. However, once the children get into school the greatest problem is to keep them there and to make sure that they get some education through their attendance. Unfortunately for various reasons (poor health, disinterest, inadequate teaching conditions, poor teachers, the need to work) very few beginning students are around at the end of four years of primary school. Of that number even fewer continue into secondary school. Dr. Carlos Pasquale, Director of the Instituto Nacional de Estudos Pedagógicos, INEP, pointed out that of those in primary school, on a national average, 14% drop out each year. Of the remainder, 37% are not promoted. "At the end of four years of an original 100 who began primary school only 18 are left. And this is a national average. While it is better in some places in others it is much worse."

Another educator swept aside some of the papers on his desk to draw me a pyramidic diagram which roughly showed, as he explained, "the failure of the Brazilian educational system to meet the needs of the people and society."

He pointed out, "Of those who start primary school about 1% get to colégio, the second half of secondary school (high school) and only 1 out of 1000 makes it to a university. We cannot have a democratic or a modern industrial state with such wastage, with so few people getting an education."



A summary of the views of the various officials in the Federal Ministry with whom I talked would sound something like this: "We are aware of our educational shortcomings. In spite of economic difficulties we are doing what we can, not only to broaden the base of education in our country but also to improve its quality. In relation to primary schools, special projects such as the Ford one in Guanabara (JCB-35) has shown the relation of health and social conditions to learning and what can be done to lower drop-outs and improve teaching. But most states are not yet to the point of having the resources to implement fully the programs that such projects suggest. Our first priority is to have sufficient primary classroom space for all our children. The United States AID has helped with loans for building and the Brazilian Government has enacted an educational tax (January, 1965) on all businesses employing more than 10 people, the funds of which will be used exclusively for the further development of primary education. States have also been given the freedom to expand primary schools to 6 years in order to help those not able to go on to secondary school to get a better education than they might in just 4 years."

They all talked about the expansion of the secondary school curriculum but it was apparent that the second major focus of government attention was not there but on the development of higher education.

Help from the top down?

Brazil's Universities have always leaned heavily on the humanities and have sometimes seemed more like clubs than disseminators of practical skills and knowledge. Professor Susan Gonçalves, the new Director of CAPES (Campanha Nacional de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior) told me that without improvement in Brazil's universities, very little progress could be expected on the other educational levels. She said, "In order that secondary and primary schools have good teachers the universities must be better equipped not only to teach them but also the teachers of those teachers. The universities must be better equipped not only to stimulate and guide the scientific studies which a modern school curriculum needs to educate the scientists which our society has an increasing need, but also to educate well the teachers of scientists. In order to do that our universities must make drastic changes. They must become less collections of separate faculties with part time teachers and students and more unified centers of higher learning and research with full time professors.

"The job of CAPES is to lift the priority of education in national planning so that these objectives can be obtained. The solution of our other national problems is tied up with a greater development of our human educational resources, just as it is in your country. A study recently made in the United States showed that 42% of the American income was the result of educational investment. Our government needs to realize how important investment in education is to the nation's future."

With the help of AID and the Bank for Economic Development national post-graduate research and training centers are being created to coordinate and expand various academic fields, particularly the sciences. Some of the changes which the Director of CAPES envisioned are coming about slowly. Very slowly indeed, since faculties are entrenched and more often than not are ready to fight for the status quo.

The "hourglass" approach to education

Improvement of higher education and expansion of primary education are both very much needed in Brazil. The problems in both areas are in themselves quite formidable. But there are educators who believe that the major obstacle in the development of a better Brazilian school system has been deliberately bypassed.

"The major bottleneck in Brazilian education," one told me, "is the secondary school. It is dominated by private schools whose main reason for existence is to make a financial profit. To pass on from the primary level an exam must be taken, which of course weeds out the number going on considerably. Then most of those who pass can't find room in a public school and thus find it impossible to continue unless they have moneyed parents or receive a state tuition scholarship to attend one of the private schools. After seven years of secondary school they are supposedly ready for college and college board exams have to be taken. But their schooling has been so inadequate they usually have to spend another year in preparation, in 'prime courses'. These are also private and run for a profit. University is free and open to all who can get in but the students do have to buy their own books and pay their living costs.

"Thus our educational system is like an hourglass, free at the bottom and top but not in the middle. How can we educate more and better students unless we remove the bottleneck?"

It does appear that the federal government and the states have found it easier to let private schools furnish secondary education than to build and staff more public schools. At present at least 2/3 of Brazil's secondary schools are private. They have, at least in the past, received federal aid. They are also supported by the tuitions the state pays. (In the State of Guanabara, for instance, 1/3 of those indicated as public school students were state-tuition paid students in private schools).

Also most of the secondary schools, public and private, are located in the larger urban areas; 45% of all secondary school students live in state capitals and almost half of the counties have no secondary school of any kind. Thus children in rural areas or in small towns have little chance for secondary education unless they have families wealthy enough to send them to the city for a private education. This explains, along with the inadequacy of most primary schools, why only 14% of those of secondary school age were enrolled in 1963. (Southern

states had 18.3% enrolled, the rest of the country, around 7.5%).

Yet in order to take care of the few students there are, most secondary schools have to hold classes for two sessions a day with perhaps another at night. The attention of the teachers is divided; because of low pay many teach at more than one school. (We met a young lawyer who, besides his law practice, taught at two secondary schools, the University of Guanabara and the Institute Brasil-Estados Unidos). 60% of the teachers in secondary schools do not have a degree from a Faculty of Philosophy or its equivalent, supposedly the minimum requirement for a secondary school teacher.

The schools are laxly supervised by the state. Curriculum is checked to see if the schools list the courses required by the federal government and by the state, but all other matters - additional courses, the kind of teachers hired, class size, discipline, school hours, equipment - are left in the hands of the individual school. Thus private schools have considerable freedom in the way their students are educated.

In a study of secondary schools in Brazil, an American educator recently found that "the vast majority of Brazilian secondary schools lack textbooks, teaching materials and especially science laboratory equipment.....in the majority of cases Brazilian secondary schools give their students a thin varnish of culture and an inadequate education." He believed that 10% of the schools, mostly private, did a good job, 20%, all private, were only diploma factories, and the rest spread out in between.

Dr. Anísio Teixeira, member of the Federal Council and former Director of CAPES and the University of Brasilia (until the golpe of April, 1964) does not believe that the private school domination of secondary education does any good service to the cause of over-all quality in Brazilian education. He sees private school interests as a threat to the development of a public school system. "Brazil without an adequate public school system cannot be any more of a democracy than the United States could be without one. American education has helped to educate and Americanize Americans; Brazilian education has yet to reach the level of development where it can educate and Brazilianize all Brazilians."

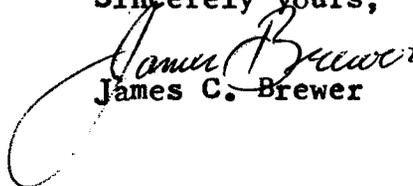
It appears that a fight between private school interests and those of the public schools is the major obstacle to any improvement in the secondary school situation. This same clash helped prolong for 13 years the debate over the much-needed educational reform law introduced in 1948. And now, with the passage of the law, the strong private school lobby still stands firmly in the way of its implementation. Private school interests are amply represented within the Federal Council; several state supervisors or Ministers of Education are private school oriented and are reluctant to change the kind of educational elite they have been a part of. There are those who claim that the whole educational system in Brazil today is deliberately constituted to

block any mass movement of lower class peoples to a higher educational and therefore economic level.

Indeed, students who go through the Brazilian school system without the payment of tuition are exceedingly rare. Public secondary schools are few and far between. State and federal money is often slow in coming and there is little feeling of urgency within the country that education keep pace with even current needs.

This is the real tragedy in Brazilian education. And every year it falls further and further behind because the population keeps growing at a rate of 3% to 3.5% a year.

Sincerely yours,



James C. Brewer

Received in New York July 19, 1965.