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**État, démocratie et éducation au Brésil : la trajectoire d'Anísio**  
**Teixeira**

**Introducción de los editores invitados a la sección temática**  
**Estado, democracia y educación en Brasil: La trayectoria de Anísio**  
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# State, Democracy, and Education in Brazil: The Trajectory of Anísio Teixeira

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## **Introduction to The Thematic Section**

In the present moment, when democracies are at risk around the world, the proposition of a dossier that intertwines state, democracy, and education can be considered as auspicious. It is especially key when we are referring to Brazil, which in the past four years has witnessed attempts against the state of democratic rights and has seen an astonishing disregard by the right-wing federal government for the educational system. Recounting the work of a Brazilian educator, who dedicated his life to the organization of public education and was deeply committed to democracy, gains importance since it sheds light on the disputes that embedded the history of education in Brazil.

That is the purpose of this special issue of *Encounters*, which introduces the life and work of Anísio Teixeira, a leading thinker and educator who marked the Brazilian political scenario in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It is the result of *120 years of Anísio Teixeira*, an international colloquium held on December 17-18, 2020 by the Alfredo Bosi Chair of Basic Education at the Institute of Advanced Studies of the University of São Paulo (USP), in collaboration with the Institute of Brazilian Studies of the same university, with the support of the Itaú Foundation for Education and Culture. A reflection on Teixeira's life and work, the colloquium was organized to discuss topics such as science, education,

the university, democracy, and quality-equity of public instruction. The papers gathered here in this special issue of *Encounters* deal with these themes by bringing a novel approach and provoking new interpretations about this polymath, whose presence in recent Brazilian history includes facing the many challenges key to the consolidation of a national educational system.

Anísio Teixeira's career begins in the 1920s, so his trajectory pre-dates the creation of the Ministry of Education and Health in Brazil—which occurred only in 1930—and extends until 1971, when the military dictatorship drafted the *General Law for Education*, replacing the first law, *Bases and Guidelines of National Education*, approved in 1961. In addition to his profuse intellectual production and effective performance as institutional builder of various organs of the state and federal administration, Teixeira was a professor of philosophy who first translated John Dewey's thought in Brazil. His interests included elementary and higher education, history of the university, school architecture, pedagogical practice, and educational research. These topics are the focus of the articles included herewith, emphasizing Teixeira's importance to the history of Brazilian education.

The dossier contains five articles. In the first, Clarice Nunes, admittedly the greatest contemporary national authority on Teixeira's work, presents a biographical approach that sets the tone of this volume. Mining the existing documentation in the Anísio Teixeira Archive of the Center for Research and Documentation on Contemporary Brazil (CPDOC), Nunes discusses his Jesuit education, the trips he made to the United States of America and Europe in the 1920s, the networks established with educators from various parts of the world, the readings he gave and the posts he accepted in the administration of public education. The paper highlights the reform undertaken in Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of the republic, between 1931 and 1935, the creation of the *Escola Parque* in Bahia in the decades of 1940 to 1960, and the elaboration of the book *Education Is Not a Privilege*. Nunes focuses particularly on the conceptions of democracy and popular education in Anísio Teixeira, while seeking to situate his work in a relationship of proximity and difference with Dewey's writings.

The second article, authored by Diana Gonçalves Vidal, is an attempt to assess the teaching practice of Anísio Teixeira as a professor of philosophy at the Institute of Education of Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s, using as sources school exercises, class notes, discourses, and the bibliographic production of our educator, as well as interviews with former students of the institution. Vidal has two main objectives. The first consists of elaborating a methodology that allows dealing with historical teaching practices through hints left in written documents and oral narratives. The second seeks an understanding of the relationships between teachers taken as role-models and the construction of teaching identities. To this end, she uses oral history to understand the ways in which former students brought meaning to this relationship throughout their lives and the interview situation itself. The classroom performance of Anísio Teixeira works, thus, as a vehicle for a study on training for teaching.

Samira Chahin is the author of the third article that, from an interdisciplinary point of view integrates education, architecture, and urban planning, aims to analyze the Anisian proposals of the park and class schools in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador. From a transnational perspective, the study interweaves the administrative work done by Teixeira in Brazilian territory to his international circulation as an educator, refusing the paradigm of unidirectional assimilation of ideas and betting on an interpretation based on appropriations and hybridizations. Sources were archive collections in Brazil, France, and the United States of America. This includes the various roles assumed by the educator in the temporal arc from 1930 to 1960, revealing how, in Chahin's words, Brazil responded to the "challenge of providing a spatial infrastructure consistent with a modern school program."

The following article in this dossier is authored by Libania Xavier. She uses the notion of a "rebel university" in the analysis of the creation of two universities led by Anísio Teixeira—The University of the Federal District (UDF) in 1935 and the University of Brasília (UnB) in 1962. She designates as rebel or rebellious the university focused on social needs, which has become, in parallel, a center of documentation and research for the building of national culture, knowledge, and science. Xavier proposes that both UDF and UnB, due to their utopian, democratic dimension, were the target of repression by the authoritarian governments of Getúlio Vargas (the Estado Novo dictatorship, 1937-1945) and the military dictatorship (1964-1985). Among the main features of this project to create two universities was the defense of financial, administrative, and pedagogical autonomy.

The text that closes this collection was written by Naomar Almeida-Filho and Rosa Bruno-Jofré. The history of Anisian universities reappears in this paper, but the purpose, then, is to answer the intriguing question: why is the legacy of Anísio Teixeira ignored today? With this aim, the two authors draw thoroughly and deeper on the intellectual connections between the Brazilian educator and John Dewey's work, evidencing proximity and circumscribing Anisian thought in the framework of the liberal conceptions of the 1930s to the 1950s. Next, they focus on the qualification of what they call the "long-sixties," and the epistemological ruptures that it brought in the sense of recognizing in the subjects the dimension of political action. Paulo Freire's work emerges as the counterpoint that in some way would have overshadowed Teixeira's performance.

These articles share many common references that are not limited to documentary sources. Key themes are recurrent, such as the reform of public education carried out by Anísio Teixeira in the capital of the republic between 1931 and 1935, the creation of universities, the program of *Escolas-Parque* and *Escolas-Classe*, as well as the relevance of John Dewey for the intellectual construction of the Brazilian educator. If themes are repeated, approaches change. While Bruno-Jofré and Almeida-Filho focus on Teixeira's debt to Dewey, Nunes insists on the differences between them. The transnational treatment given by Chahin to school architecture contrasts with the inner, more national analysis found in Almeida and Bruno-Jofré or in Nunes' paper. The

reform of 1931 is seen from the administrative perspective by Nunes and becomes the backdrop for Vidal to discuss teaching practices. By searching the proposals of UDF and UNB, Xavier and Almeida-Filho and Bruno-Jofré outline different interpretations. In the first case, the interpretive devices are intended to bring a reflection to the current situation of universities in Brazil. In the second, the inflection with Paulo Freire is what stands out.

The overall panorama provided by these papers encourages us to go through the multiple facets of a Brazilian politician, educator, and intellectual whose trajectory of life and profession was all dedicated to public education. Nevertheless, they also entice the reader to know more about the mishaps of the Brazilian educational system in its early days and, even, invite us to dig into the tensions and struggles that punctuated the national and international scenario between the end of World War I and the long sixties.

We do hope that this merging of the history of Brazilian education stimulates a transnational academic debate.