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*General comments on the state of
educational research in Brazil*

by

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GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE STATE OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
IN BRAZIL

Robert J. Havighurst
September, 1958

If one compares educational research in Brazil with educational research in other Latin-American countries, one is impressed with both the greater volume and the superior quality of work in Brazil. But when one attempts to measure the Brazilian work against the needs of education in Brazil, one sees such serious weakness that one cannot be satisfied with the state of affairs.

Almost all of the educational research in Brazil has been done in a highly individual manner, the work of a single person pursuing a single interest. The result is a quantity of publication, some of it of high quality, but scattered over a wide area and not having much effective bearing on the pressing practical problems of education in Brazil. There are also a number of fact-finding researches of the survey type, which help us to get a true conception of the state of affairs in Brazilian education, but of course do not point the way to solution of problems.

Needs

There is a major need for the planning and conduct of a series of researches on the pressing problems of Brazilian education such as:

1. Length of school day and achievement of pupils. The school day consists of 3 to 4 hours for most children. This may be the major cause of low levels of achievement in the primary school, but nobody has proved it. Meanwhile, the short school day may become so well established for reasons of economy that it will be difficult to change when the financial resources become available to lengthen the school day. There should be a careful study of the relation between length of school day and achievement of children.

2. Tests of learning ability of children, with norms for at least one of the more populous states. Group tests are the most practical, and in spite of the shortcomings of such tests, they are a valuable instrument and should be made available.

3. Studies of the causes and concomitants of Failure and Success in School.

4. An extensive study of the nature of opportunity for education in Brazil, especially at the secondary school level. What are the factors that limit the opportunity of able students? Under what conditions do we find the maximum of educational opportunity?

5. Studies of Teacher-Pupil relations. What kinds of leadership style are most effective in the classroom for Brazilian children?

These may not be the most important problems, but they are among the most important, and they all illustrate the fact that such studies require resources of money and time. They require careful planning, team-work, and a good deal of time. No individual will be able to do much with such problems. There must be some institution that can marshal the time and energy of teams of people for this kind of work.

To meet this need the following steps might be taken:

1. One or more institutions might set up educational research programs which are based on careful planning, on the development of a research team, and on the assurance of support over a period of years. The Centro is obviously such an institution. In addition, it would be desirable to support such a program in one or more of the Universities.

2. It must be said, however, that the personnel for such a program does not now exist either in the Centro or in any University. This is the crucial weakness. There are numbers of young people, trained as educational technicians or as graduate students, who could work on research teams; but there is almost nobody with the maturity and training necessary for leadership in such research projects. A few people might be mentioned, but they are either working in other areas and cannot be brought back into research, or they are not interested in a research career.

What is needed is a half-dozen people between the ages of 30 and 45, training beyond the Ph.D. level, with experience in a variety of research techniques. These people should be given further opportunity for study abroad, if necessary, and then given research or University appointments on a full-time basis, with assurance of stability to their jobs.

Perhaps the chairs in Education in the major Universities should be open to such people, after they have served as research directors, with the expectation that they would continue productive in research and in training people to take their places.

3. The problem of financial support is probably less pressing than the problem of finding and training personnel. But there should be a system of making research grants on an objective basis so that a person would enter on a research career sure that he can find support for his research if it is of good quality.

For this purpose, it seems to me that some sort of Commission on Educational Research should be set up and given money to spend. This procedure has been adopted in all the modern countries which support research. It was first applied to research in the physical and the biological sciences, and then to the social sciences.

The commission should be given gradually increasing money, as it learns its job. It should have an adequate staff. It should establish itself in the minds of people as being thoroughly objective, and having no personal interests in the grants that are made or in the people to whom grants are made.

Such financial support should go to individuals for small projects, to encourage them and allow them to get started, as well as to teams of researchers with major projects.