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O processo de organização de escolas étnicas polonesas no Rio Grande do Sul (1875 – 1939)

Adriano Malikoski*
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Resumo: No presente artigo, o objetivo é analisar como foi estruturado o processo de escolarização da imigração polonesa no Rio Grande do Sul entre 1875 e 1939, no qual foram priorizados o ensino elementar e a manutenção de especificidades étnicas, como língua, religiosidade e valores culturais poloneses. Pretende-se mostrar que a cultura étnica foi um elemento importante na estruturação de processos associativos e comunitários da imigração polonesa, que promoveu a estruturação de escolas na maior parte dos seus núcleos coloniais. Para a construção desta narrativa, foram analisadas diferentes fontes empíricas, como atas de associações, relatórios e documentos escolares.

Palavras-chave: escolas étnicas, imigração polonesa, processo escolar.

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The process of organization of the Polish ethnic schools in State of Rio Grande do Sul (1875 – 1939)

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Abstract: This article aims to present the structuring process of education of Polish immigration in the State of Rio Grande do Sul between 1875 and 1939. The prerogatives of this school process included prioritizing elementary school and also maintaining ethnic characteristics, as language, religion and Polish cultural values. It is intended to show that ethnic culture was an important element in structuring associative and community processes of the Polish immigration, which encouraged and promoted the structuring of schools in most of its colonial nuclei. For the construction of this narrative, we analyzed different empirical sources, such as, records of associations, reports and school documents.

Keywords: ethnic schools, polish immigration, school process.

El proceso de organización de las escuelas étnicas polacas en Rio Grande do Sul (1875 – 1939)

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Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar la forma en que se estructuró el proceso de escolarización de la inmigración polaca en Rio Grande do Sul-Brasil, entre 1875 y 1939. Entre las prerrogativas de este proceso escolar estaba la priorización de la enseñanza primaria y también el mantenimiento de las especificidades étnicas, como el idioma, la religión y los valores culturales polacos. Se pretende mostrar que la cultura étnica fue un elemento importante en la estructuración de los procesos asociativos y comunitarios de la inmigración polaca, que fomentó y promovió la estructuración de las escuelas en la mayor parte de sus núcleos coloniales. Para la construcción de esta narración, se analizaron diferentes fuentes empíricas, tales como las actas de las asociaciones, informes y documentos escolares.

Palabras clave: escuelas étnicas, inmigración polaca, proceso escolar.

Introduction

In large part of the narrative-historical constructions on the immigration of the diverse groups, the schools play a secondary role or are simply forgotten. To think about schooling in Polish communities in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, we must relate it to the formation of nuclei with a significant number of these immigrants. Land settlement and the formation of communities, especially those located in rural areas, as well as occupation in urban areas, such as the cities of Porto Alegre and Rio Grande, configure the circumstances of this process. In this way, there is no way to construct representations and senses devoid of this logic, especially the family agrarian.

Based on all these aspects, we sought to analyze and construct a narrative about schools in Polish communities in the Province of São Pedro do Rio Grande do Sul in 1875, when the first group of Polish immigrants arrived in the state, until 1939, when the main nationalizing decrees of education came into force, with emphasis on the process of survival in those media. These communities have formed in all the colonial regions of the state, especially in the northern region and in the Missions, where the main municipalities are currently located and where the largest number of descendants of Polish immigrants are found.

The ethnic community becomes the configuration of being and doing in the negotiated identity processes, as well as in the process of schooling or teaching and learning, whether through the use of language and religiosity or through other cultural manifestations. Based on Kreutz (2001) and Baumann (2003), we can base some senses given to the ethnic community in its historical constructions, whose relations were intermediated and elaborated by associative, cultural and transitory processes.

According to Malikoski (2014), in the schools of the Polish ethnic communities, at different times, the sense in evidence is that schooling was restricted to teaching basic math operations, the first contact with reading and reproduction of writing in the mother language. The mother language here is that of the ethnic group to which the family belongs. This is not a place of birth, but the identification of the family with the ethnic group to which it belongs, in this case, the Polish.

We understand, however, that the meaning of the schools was beyond this apparent meaning and often disseminated by bibliography or historiographical writings. From our perspective, the schools also

collaborated in the reconstruction and maintenance of the ethnic identity values of these immigrants in the places where they were organized. This issue deserves the attention of historians of education, since it contributes to the understanding of the plurality of educational processes experienced in Brazil by different human groups.

In this article on the relations established between education and formation of ethnic communities, we seek to understand the process of school organization of Polish immigration in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Our perspective is the construction and reconstruction of an ethnic cultural process through narratives, since we understand that the world is also told and transmitted through narratives, adjusted with the critical awareness and the subjective appropriations of the researchers. It is not excessive to remember what Veyne makes us think when says:

[...] the history is a narrative of events. Like romance, history selects, simplifies, organizes, makes a century fit on a page, and this narrative synthesis is as spontaneous as that of our memory, as we recall the last ten years we lived. History is, in essence, knowledge through documents (Veyne, 1998, p. 18).

To produce this knowledge through documents, we consider the methodological procedures of historical documentary analysis. It is not, therefore, a literary narrative, but a narrative guided by theoretical assumptions that constitute a possible, plausible version of the historical process.

The first nucleus of Polish immigrants in the State of Rio Grande do Sul was formed in 1875 by 26 families who came from Silesia under the domination of Prussia and settled down among the municipalities that currently correspond to Carlos Barbosa and Garibaldi. They would have arrived together with the Franco-Swiss and Italian immigrants who settled down in the Conde D'Eu colony. Some authors, such as Kozowski (2003), defend the idea that the arrival of Polish immigrants would have occurred in previous years, together with the German immigration of 1854. According to Gardolinski (1958) and Gluchowski (2005), the largest contingents of Polish immigrants arrived in Rio Grande do Sul between 1886 and 1894 and between 1908 and 1912. The creation of the Conde d'Eu colony occurred in 1870, in an area ceded by the imperial government on the slopes of the Serra Gaúcha, according to Act of May

24 of the president of the southern rio grandense Province of João Sertório, giving birth to the first nucleus of Polish immigrants settled in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in 1875. After that, several nuclei formed in different regions of the state. This process helps us to describe how schools have been structured in the communities of this ethnic group.

Regarding the number of these immigrants, most of them brought documents from the countries that occupied Polish territories in Europe, that is, sent by Russia, Prussia or Austria. Although in Brazil the definition of nationality was linked to the geographic political condition of the country of origin, these immigrants were commonly related as Russians, Germans or Austrians in statistics or official documentation of the Company of Lands and Colonization, the organ responsible for the colonization process in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. In this sense, based on the studies of Barth (1998) and his concept of ethnicity, we sought to find the denomination of Polish immigrants and their location in communities in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. In fact, we propose ethnicity as a contribution of the culture and the transformations of the identity processes that formed a mutual conjunction of solidarity, propitiating the formation of communities and their cultural manifestations, among them, the schools. The ethnic-identity process is important to explain the influences and transformations of cultural flows and human productions. In this perspective, using the ethnicity category, we sought to describe the process of formation of the colonial nuclei, from the arrival of immigrants to the formation of their communities.

For the construction of this narrative, we consider the understanding of ethnic community as a process of social construction based on values built throughout history and that are accepted by individuals to form their groups. As Castells (1999) would say, the interests of members are the formation of communities. According to Hall (2006), the formation of communities is the inspiration of dynamic and complex identity processes.

The ethnic-community dimension is built on a relational process and on the appropriation of values. The organization of social life depends on the representations and affirmations that each individual makes of his/her culture. Thus, we believe that the ethnic community is formed according to the decisions of individuals who share the same cultural environment, such as language, religiosity and customs.

In this article, we first analyze the formation of Polish ethnic communities, relating them to the school process. Next, we weave the

narrative thematizing Polish ethnic schools in the State of Rio Grande do Sul and considering its expansion and characterization.

Communities and societies: a necessary condition for organizing school education among Polish immigrants.

The representation of the self of a particular group corresponds to a set of values ranging from its way of thinking to its cultural attributes, among which language, festivals and religiosity. These cultural values and attributes are among the symbolic representations which bring individuals into their membership of a given culture and make them belonging to that group. For Bonnemaïson (2000), ethnicity and culture correspond to a certain territoriality, since in this, there are structures that, according to the contexts involved, make possible the development and configuration of these elements.

Ethnic content develops in a given space. In this sense, we analyze the peculiarities of Polish immigration to Rio Grande do Sul and the appropriation of this territory by the bias of culture and ethnic constructions. We consider that it is in this space of ethnic construction that the process of schooling of the Polish children is formed. For Baumann (2003), when the historical community affiliations no longer make sense for a social group, the reformulation of the values by which the groups constitute their communities take place.

As the old certainties and loyalties are swept away, people seek new affiliations. The problem with new identity histories, in stark contrast to the old histories of 'natural affiliation' daily confirmed by the seemingly invulnerable strength of deeply established institutions, is that trust and commitment have to be worked out in relationships whose duration no one guarantees, unless individuals decide to make them enduring (Baumann, 2003, p. 90, emphasis added).

During the process of formation of settlements and flows of Polish immigrants, several nuclei were formed throughout the State of Rio Grande do Sul. If we analyze the regions where they were installed, we can see that, for the most part, these regions were also inhabited by other groups of immigrants. However, according to Malikoski (2014), many of the nuclei formed were in isolated locations, that is, they were not part of a large group of communities or a region with a prevalence of the same

ethnic group, as was the German colonization in the valley of Caí or the Italian colonization in the region of Altos de Cima da Serra, in the northeast of the state.

To develop this article, we highlight the nuclei that, due to the expressive number of immigrants, formed communities and whose significant manifestation of cultural traits is still present today. The number of immigrants and the location of Polish immigration centers were established according to statistics presented by authors such as Gardolinski (1958), Gluchowski (2005), Stawinski (1999), D'Apremont and Gillonnay (1976) and Klobukowski (1898).

The first region of Polish immigration was located between the coast and the southeastern mountain range and comprised the cities of Rio Grande, Pelotas, Dom Feliciano, Mariana Pimentel, Camaquã, Barão do Triunfo, Santo Antônio da Patrulha and Porto Alegre.

The second group was located in the Serra Gaúcha, encompassing the municipalities of São Marcos, Antônio Prado, Veranópolis, Santa Tereza, Santa Barbara, Bento Gonçalves, Guaporé, Casca, Nova Prata, Nova Roma do Sul, Vista Alegre do Prata and surroundings.

The third region, called new colonies, was also constituted by individuals who migrated from the region of the mountain range. This group was located to the north of the state, comprising the Plateau and the Uruguay Valley, with the cities of Erechim, Getúlio Vargas, Gaurama, Carlos Gomes (Nova Polônia), Dourado, Balisa, Marcelino Ramos, Áurea, Lajeado Valeriano, Barão Cotegipe, Aratiba and Capoceré, among other smaller localities.

The fourth region in which Polish immigrant formed nuclei corresponded to the Missions, also called new colonies, comprising the cities of Santo Ângelo, Ijuí, Santa Rosa, Guarani das Missões, Três de Maio, Tucunduva and the surrounding area.

Such nuclei and communities, although isolated, were the necessary condition for the formation of a process of ethnic education in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. The context of formation of settlements favored the formation of an educational process with ethnic characteristics, resulting from the community relationship and the appropriation of values that organized the social life of these immigrants. As Kreutz (2001) states,

[...] the cultural dimension of the various human groups does not occur in the abstract, as it were, in a social void. On the contrary, it is relational, it

manifests itself in the symbols, representations and valuations of groups, competing in the organization of groups and social life (Kreutz, 2001, p. 122).

The structuring of nuclei of families with same ethnic affiliation and their organization in communities later allowed the school organization. The first communities of Polish immigration resulted from the installation of families of that ethnic group in the same set of lots. These included 20 to 120 families, according to the structural organization of the colonies and the availability of land. As the report of the Ministry of Agriculture and Public Works of 1876 (Brasil, 1876) attests, the land commissions demarcated the lots and their distribution in rows and sections, according to the topography of the lands. Following this dynamic of division of the lots, the Polish immigrants founded their first communities, which could be several kilometers away from the center of the colony's headquarters, as were the communities located in the Serra Gaúcha. An important boost to the formation of these communities was the use of the Polish language by the families to delimit an 'ethnic border'.

Besides territorial and linguistic proximity, another important boost to the composition of the first communities was religiosity. The Capuchin Friars D'Apremont and Gillonnay (1976), in a report referring to the years 1896 and 1915, point out that Polish immigrants, at that time, "[...] remain grouped and very faithful to their mother language and mother country, while continuing to fulfill their duties in reference to the adoptive country" (D'apremont & Gillonnay, 1976, p. 44). This relationship between language and religiosity was, in a way, the first impulse for the formation of communities, especially in the early days of the formation of the colonies.

In the early days of immigration to Brazil, in most colonies with Polish immigrants, the main symbol of community organization was the chapel or small church, like the Germans and Italians. There, social spaces were formed which, over time, also served as a space for teaching and catechizing children. In conjunction with religious activities, formal education was subsequently organized. Thus, the constitution of the communities was a necessary condition for the foundation of the first schools.

The formation and founding of societies¹ also played an important role in the organization of social and school life. According to Klobukowski (1898), the first ethnic Polish society was founded on May 13, 1896 in Jaguari, in the center of the state. Under the name of Bartosz Glowacki, such a society had 41 founding members. On May 17, 1896, in Ijuí, in a colony that congregated approximately 500 Polish and 25 Lithuanian families, was founded the Society Tadeusz Kosciuszko, whose president was the Fr. Antoni Cuber. In Porto Alegre, on June 1, 1896, Zgoda (Concórdia) was founded, whose leader, Feliks Zdanowski, later became a professor and editor of periodicals. It is important to consider that, despite the time span between the arrival of the first immigrants and the founding of the first society in Rio Grande do Sul, which only occurred in 1896, the communities were organized with a sense of solidarity and religiosity, shaped by the need for survival in the colonies.

According to the statutes, the foundation of societies, for the most part, aimed to organize schools. Thus began a process of education among Polish ethnic communities, both in the State of Rio Grande do Sul and in other states of the country. In agreement with Gluchowski (2005), such societies also addressed the need to concentrate and defend ethnic interests in relation to education and community. The initiatives for the founding of societies generally came from leaders of the nuclei. However, as the consul pointed out, they were “[...] scattered efforts without coordination. Each colony founded an association on its own, maintaining little or no contact with other organizations” (Gluchowski, 2005, p. 141). Initially there was no great support from settlers as societies often faced situations involving particular ambitions and ideological conflicts between people bound by the sense of religiosity and individuals who advocated a more progressive and secular education, a process usually conducted by some more enlightened leadership.

The education and formation of the first Polish ethnic schools in Rio Grande do Sul

Although, according to Law 771 of May 4, 1871 (PROVÍNCIA..., 1871), the compulsory primary education in the province of Rio Grande

¹ According to Silva Jr. (2004, p. 515), the Polish founded, between the years 1854 and 1940, six societies of mutual ethnic relief and an ethnic-classist society in Rio Grande do Sul. Moreover, according to this author “[...] among the Polish, whose entities were rarely mutual, there came to exist in 1930 a state federation” .

do Sul was established for male children aged 7 and 15 years of age and female children between 6 and 12 years of age. Most of the colonies did not have public schools maintained by the Brazilian government. In that case, if the settlers wanted some sort of education, they should rely on their own initiatives.

According to Nikodem (1970), this situation was reproduced in the five years after the beginning of the republican government in Brazil. For the author, the sympathy of the immigrants for the federalist revolutionary movement, in which Julio de Castilhos emerged victorious, contributed to the fact that public schools were not founded in the colonies of Rio Grande do Sul, leaving to the charge of immigrants the initiative of conducting the education processes.

In the early days, most of the Polish immigrants had a minimum of education, and there were even a certain number of illiterates. This situation was due to the political conditions of the emigrated territories, since many Polish came mainly from the regions occupied by Russia and Austria. In these territories, there were restrictions or few incentives for the organization of schools. However, establishing themselves in the colonies, mainly through leaderships, these immigrants sought to construct educational spaces for their children. The settlers felt the need for school to provide the least education for their children.

At first, the schools functioned in improvised spaces, like the house of some settler or small chapels. In these spaces, especially in the case of rural colonies, the Polish language was used exclusively. In this perspective, Gluchowski (2005) reports that the first teachers were “[...] often a simple settler, sometimes with less than elementary instruction” (Gluchowski, 2005, p. 168).

In Rio Grande do Sul, the first educational initiatives for Polish children, both in organized and improvised spaces in homes and chapels, were restricted to the first foundations of writing, calculations and reading in the Polish language. They would have been concomitant to the formation of the first colonial nuclei of these immigrants. According to reports of his passage by São Marcos, Caxias colony, in 1895, the traveler Klobuskowski (1898) claims to have found a space built in order to promote teaching among children, but there was no teacher in the professional sense. Older children taught younger ones. The author then states that in visiting the Polish nuclei of the Alfredo Chaves colony, he found in Ernesto Alves a professor named Lewinski who taught among the

Polish immigrants in the Guaporé colony. He was considered the first professional teacher who worked among the Polish immigrants in Rio Grande do Sul.

Klobukowski (1898) further reports that in 1896, when he had been in the Ijuí colony, he found two schools: a public school run by a German immigrant and a private school. By encouragement from Klobukowski (1898), on May 17, 1896, the society Tadeusz Kosciuszko was founded, in whose statutes the first paragraph refers to the organization and maintenance of a school among Polish immigrants.

In relation to the same colony of Ijuí, in a text published in the *Kalendarz Polski* almanac of 1898 (Zdanowski, 1898), the Polish priest Antoni Cuber² reports that Polish immigrants, after clearing the land of a square that was part of the urban center destinations, would have received the promise of building a church and a school. At the time, Polish immigrants were majority in the plots of this colony, but the professor was appointed by German immigrants with the consent of the authorities, and this displeased the Polish, who wanted a teacher who taught in Polish language. At that time, they built another wooden building to be used as a school, but this one would have worked only for a year, being closed due to lack of teacher.

According to Cuber (1898), in the same period, in another part of the colony, another school would have been built, often with 10 to 20 children, but there were about 200 school-age children in the region, many of whom were deprived of education. Noting that when the nuclei were being formed, there were settlers who cared little for their children's education, the Polish priest insists on the need for parents to send their children to school:

[...] the school situation dependent on the settlers presented very sad symptoms and, therefore, the education of the children often became impracticable. Here in Brazil, no family father can be forgiven if he does not send his children to school, wherever it exists. The father who is not interested in the education of his children commits a grave sin: the son, in turn, who did not at least learn to read, write and count because of the irrational greed for profit of the progenitors who had him plant corn or herding cattle, and with this procedure

² Living in the area until 1915, he was the first Polish priest to provide religious assistance in the Polish ethnic communities in Ijuí and later in Guarani das Missões.

he will have prevented possibly great prospects for the future - certainly must remember - his parents, later, with resentment and bitterness (Cuber, 1898, p. 52).

Cuber (1898) also refers to education as a possible obstacle to the exploitation of other immigrants, a way for men to conduct themselves more rationally in business and to honor Polish patriotic initiatives, which, in the author's view, would be inaccessible to illiterate people. Nevertheless, according to him, there were in some settlers the following thoughts: "[...] my grandfather, my father and I do not know to read, so this will also be superfluous for my son" (Cuber, 1898, p. 52). In short, the settlers needed better clarification as to the importance of school instruction.

Thus, starting in 1896, in the Polish ethnic community, the first schools began to emerge properly, with a better organized space to receive the children. This initiative was related to the founding of the first societies, whose organization was due to the Polish traveler Klobukowski, who was in the colonies and encouraged their formation. According to Gluchowski (2005), in 1900, there were already three schools in operation: one in Porto Alegre, one in Rio Grande and another in Santa Tereza, Bento Gonçalves district. After this period, we verified the formation of several societies with the objective of founding schools, not only in Rio Grande do Sul, but also in states such as Santa Catarina and Paraná.

However, this process of school organization developed in isolation in the first two decades of the twentieth century. For Malikoski (2014), the schools were maintained exclusively by the settlers, by means of fees paid in accordance with previously agreed conditions with the partners. According to the cash books of some school societies (Livros caixa..., [s.n.]), tuition fees ranged from 1\$000 to 3\$000 réis, the total of this money being used mainly for hiring the teacher. Generally, the amount collected with the monthly payments was barely enough for the support of the teacher, who sometimes performed other activities to supplement his/her income. In some cases, in the absence of the conditions to pay tuition fees, the settlers paid the teacher with food, such as meat, lard, some chicken, or groceries such as rice and beans.

As we have already mentioned, at the beginning of the foundation of the schools, the children studied exclusively in the Polish language. Nevertheless, over time, to receive government subsidies, mainly for the

payment of teachers, some schools began to adopt the Portuguese language. According to the protocol records of some societies (*Atas de Protocolos...*, 1918-1938), classes were usually held in the morning shift in Portuguese and in the afternoon shift in the Polish language, with some exceptions where classes in Polish were taught in the morning and afternoon in Portuguese language. Most of the children attended the two shifts.

Gluchowski (2005) states that in the 1920s, when he visited the Polish colonial nuclei in Rio Grande do Sul, he observed some problems in relation to the ethnic school process. For the author, there was little commitment from some settlers to maintain or develop the school process, and it was very difficult to persuade them to spend more resources on their children's education. In some schools, textbooks and teachers were missing. Often, children spent long periods without classes waiting for a teacher to be hired by society. There was also the issue of attendance time: many children only attended the first two years of elementary school. Many parents, when children learned to read, write, and count at all, took their children out of school. For reasons of survival, children left school to work with their parents on the farm.

In the School Report, *Sprawozdanie Szkolne* (Przegląd, 1937), from the Polish consulate in Curitiba, referring to the schools in the northern part of the state, current city of Áurea, in the list of children enrolled in 1937, we can observe that, in several schools, there was a higher frequency of students in the first two years of primary education, whereas in the third and fourth years, this frequency decreased considerably.

Among the problems, there were also, in some centers of Polish immigration, ideological disputes between liberal and progressive currents of thought, which sought to suppress religious teaching in schools, and currents linked to the clergy that motivated and encouraged religious teaching. From this perspective, in the 1920s, two teachers' associations were formed to organize and conduct the educational process among children of the Polish ethnic group. The first, *Kultura*, sought to conduct a more lay education, independent of religious precepts. To this association, according to Wachowicz (2002) and the Report of the Polish Consulate in Curitiba, in Rio Grande do Sul, in 1937, 121 schools were affiliated, including those temporarily closed or in organization. The second, *Oswiata*, sought to conduct an education more directed to religious precepts and had only seven affiliated schools in the state. However, in the

update courses for teachers, organized by some of these associations, it was common the presence of teachers of both affiliations.

In the early days, Polish ethnic schools were practically driven by leaders, but from 1920 onwards, when Poland recovered as an independent political state, the education of Polish ethnic children in Brazil also began to be motivated and organized by the Polish government, which sent textbooks, teachers and educators qualified for the organization of the school process. Until 1938, educational activity had an important development, with the opening of new primary schools and schools for teacher training - one in Mallet, State of Paraná, and another in Guarani das Missões, in Rio Grande do Sul - and with the edition of textbooks and offer of qualification courses for teachers (Malikoski, 2014). These measures introduced a considerable improvement in teaching processes in Polish schools in Rio Grande do Sul. By the end of 1937, according to the report of the Polish consulate in Curitiba, there were 106 schools in operation in Rio Grande do Sul, with approximately 4,560 children enrolled. Some schools, 128 in the state, were temporarily closed for lack of teachers and other organizations.

Nonetheless, in 1938, Decree Law 406 of Getúlio Vargas made impossible the functioning of ethnic schools in the whole country (Brasil, 1938). Among other measures, it was determined in article 85 of that law that the teaching of any subject should be taught in Portuguese language, and the teaching of foreign languages to children under the age of fourteen was prohibited. The textbooks should be written exclusively in Portuguese, with the teaching of Brazilian history and geography being compulsory for the children.

Despite protests and criticism by school organizations of some groups of immigrants in 1939, a new law was created that further limited the use of foreign language in schools, decreeing the end of ethnic schools throughout the country. Some Polish ethnic schools that were more organized were able to adjust and continue to work for some time. Part of the schools was taken over by the municipality and the teachers themselves, after public tender, were used and continued in the conduct of the teaching process, but they could not use the Polish language. Many beginner children could not speak any word in Portuguese. Parents directed these children to always respond affirmatively with nods or simply use the word 'yes'. This situation was very embarrassing, and it was not uncommon for children to drop out because they did not

understand anything of what the teacher spoke in the vernacular language. As a consequence, after the nationalization decrees, illiteracy rates have increased in many communities of Polish immigration. In several cases, the parents were literate or had some basic education because they had the opportunity to attend schools before the decrees; in turn, their children were illiterate because of lack of schools or because they could not keep up with classes in the vernacular language.

Finally, since the promulgation of the Decrees of Nationalization of Education by Getúlio Vargas in 1938 and 1939, the teaching process was unviable in the Polish ethnic schools in Rio Grande do Sul. The result of this process was that many schools were not adequately replaced with public schools or simply closed their doors, leaving a very expressive contingent of uneducated children and further increasing the numbers of illiterates in rural communities.

The nationalization of education in Polish schools is still an open topic in the history of this group, since specific studies have not yet been carried out. This article is the result of a larger research on the formation of the school process among Polish immigrants in the State of Rio Grande Sul (Malikoski, 2014), in which we tried to establish some meanings about the subject in the period from 1875 to 1939. However, many other meanings can be established through the advancement and deepening of research.

Final considerations

As we have seen, ethnic culture was important in structuring communities and societies. It was a form of identity production, a dynamic process through which individuals preserved values and peculiarities, such as language and religiosity. These factors were important for the process of building schools and structuring education. The first schools of Polish immigration were founded by the private initiative, that is, the immigrants themselves were the directors of the process. We also emphasize the organization of societies that have worked and contributed to the formation of an education system in the various colonies of Polish immigration. Thus, society has become the incentive and promoter of the school process. It has become part of efforts to maintain ethnic values mainly through the teaching of the language and values of the culture brought with the immigrants.

Ethnicity is a source of meanings and representations of the world for the social imaginary, being an important element in the formation of

communities, always in constant process. This approximation between ethnic process, identity process and formation of communities helps to understand the cultural constructions in their meanings, in view of the formation of collectivities, as is the case of the Polish immigrants.

The ethnic community intended to maintain some values, which had become synonymous of resistance to institutionalized processes. Allied to the feeling of belonging, these values contributed to the teaching was formulated and formed in a certain way. In this way, we cannot understand the Polish immigration schools in the State of Rio Grande do Sul without considering the process of formation of the ethnic communities.

The reasons for the attraction and coming of immigrants to Brazil were part of the political and economic changes that took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe and South America. In this way, we analyzed the Polish immigration to Rio Grande do Sul South in correlation with these transformations in the world and with the transformation in the ethnic and cultural processes.

Initially, the formation of the communities was related to the number of families that were settled in each colony. However, we cannot restrict community understanding only to the construction or delimitation of public spaces. From our perspective, the ethnic community is formed by the meanings and senses of the individual representations established in the collective. A chapel, a society or a school are symbolic elements that represent that, in that particular context, a community was formed.

In analyzing the teaching process among Polish immigrants and their descendants, we note that the sources always refer to the existence, mainly in rural communities, of this group: chapel, society and school. The Polish ethnic education system was being formed together with the formation of communities and societies.

There was, in Polish ethnic communities, a growing interest in organizational life that surpassed the strictly religious relationship. Until 1937, a significant number of societies were formed, with the main goals the schooling in the colonies and urban centers and the promotion of culture and education among ethnic Polish communities. In Rio Grande do Sul, 128 schools and several societies were organized for the purpose of cultural promotion.

From the earliest periods of Polish immigration to Rio Grande do Sul, there was concern for the education of children in colonial settlements. Even if precariously, we observe the initiative of some

leadership in developing or encouraging the formation of educational spaces.

As societies were formed, the teaching process was building up and reaching a larger number of children and Polish immigration nuclei. Over time, children were also being taught in a bilingual system, in order to integrate the Polish ethnic communities into the Brazilian national culture and also to receive government subsidies for the payment of teachers.

Polish ethnic schools suffered from some difficulties, despite the efforts of the leaders who were at the forefront of the educational process. In some cases, the children spent very long periods without classes, with the school closed, because the teacher found some more profitable activity, or simply because he/she moved to other locations without warning. In many schools, there were not enough textbooks or major investments for the education of children. There was also a lack of interest on the part of the parents of some children, who simply were not sent to school because they needed to work at home to help with the family's livelihood.

The schooling process in the Polish ethnic communities was a reworking of the exteriorization of meaning in human relations in the fight against the situation of governmental abandonment, in which the immigrants were in relation to the education in the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Therefore, its configuration occurred in the process of forming communities, an important element of identity and ethnic aggregation and maintenance of values and elements of the Polish culture.

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