

ARTICLE

**“THE FAILURE OF NEW SCHOOL REFORM”: ATALIBA DE OLIVEIRA INTERPRETING THE PAULISTA SCHOOL RENOVATION (THE 1930s AND 1940s)<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** Under the perspective guided by Darnton (1986), this article aims to capture the interpretations made by Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira about the new school movement. It is about a teacher from São Paulo who followed and resisted closely and from within the onslaughts and attempts at pedagogical renewal in progress in the São Paulo school system. By writing more than two hundred chronicles, interpreting among other themes the initiatives of the Escolanovistas in São Paulo, Ataliba de Oliveira pointed out the errors that characterized “the failure of new school reform”. After inventorying and analyzing these chronicles, this article intends to answer the question: How did Ataliba de Oliveira interpret the new school movement and the tentatives of inserting this pedagogical doctrine in the Paulista school apparatus between 1930 and 1940? The comparative logical structures the most of the chronicles, and through them, are revealed his most scathing criticism to the reform, the reformers, and the educational consequences of those actions. He also revealed the patterns that he intended to preserve. Taken together, the chronicles of Ataliba de Oliveira made up the interpretation that “the failure of new school reform” occurred because its apologists did not consider the data and situations of the Paulista school reality, nor the conditions faced by teachers and students in the educational task.

**Keywords:** traditional school, new school, active school, correlated teaching, project method.

**“O FRACASSO DA REFORMA ESCOLANOVISTA”: ATALIBA DE OLIVEIRA INTERPRETANDO A RENOVAÇÃO ESCOLAR PAULISTA (DÉCADAS DE 1930 E 1940)**

**RESUMO:** Sob uma perspectiva de análise orientada por Darnton (1986), este artigo objetivou capturar as interpretações de Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira acerca do movimento da escola nova. Trata-se de um professor paulista que acompanhou e resistiu de perto e por dentro às investidas e tentativas da renovação pedagógica em curso do aparelho escolar paulista. Ao escrever mais de duas centenas de crônicas, interpretando, entre outros temas, as iniciativas dos escolanovistas em São Paulo, Ataliba de Oliveira

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apontou os erros que caracterizaram “o fracasso da reforma escolanovista”. Após inventariar e analisar essas crônicas, este artigo buscou responder a seguinte problemática: como Ataliba de Oliveira interpretou o movimento da escola nova e as tentativas de inserção dessa doutrina pedagógica no aparelho escolar paulista, entre as décadas de 1930 e 1940? A lógica comparativa estrutura a maior parte das crônicas e, por meio dela, revelam-se os pontos sobre os quais incidem críticas mais contundentes do autor à reforma, aos reformadores e às consequências educacionais dessas ações, bem como o padrão de trabalho que ele desejava preservar. Tomados em conjunto, os textos de Ataliba de Oliveira construíram a interpretação de que “o fracasso da reforma escolanovista” ocorreu porque os seus apologistas não souberam ler o exemplo do passado.

**Palavras-chave:** escola tradicional, escola nova, escola ativa, ensino globalizado, método de projetos.

### **“EL FRACASO DE LA REFORMA ESCOLANOVISTA”: ATALIBA DE OLIVEIRA INTERPRETANDO LA RENOVACIÓN DE LA ESCUELA PAULISTA (DÉCADAS DE 1930 Y 1940)**

**RESUMEN:** Desde una perspectiva de análisis guiada por Darnton (1986), este artículo tuvo como objetivo capturar las interpretaciones de Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira sobre el movimiento de la escuela nueva. Se trata de un maestro paulista que siguió y resistió de cerca y desde dentro las embestidas e intentos de renovación pedagógica en curso en el sistema escolar paulista. Al escribir más de doscientas crónicas, interpretando entre otros temas las iniciativas de los escolanovistas en São Paulo, Ataliba de Oliveira señaló los errores que caracterizaron “el fracaso de la reforma escolanovista”. Después de inventariar y analizar esas crónicas, este artículo buscó responder al siguiente problema: ¿Cómo interpretó Ataliba de Oliveira el movimiento de la escuela nueva y los intentos de insertar esta doctrina pedagógica en el sistema escolar paulista, entre las décadas de 1930 y 1940? La lógica comparada estructura la mayor parte de las crónicas y, a través de ella, se revelan los puntos sobre los que se desvelan las críticas más contundentes del autor a la reforma, a los reformadores y a las consecuencias educativas de estas acciones, así como el patrón de obra que quiso preservar. En conjunto, los textos de Ataliba de Oliveira construyeron la interpretación de que “el fracaso de la reforma escolanovista” ocurrió porque sus apologistas no supieron leer el ejemplo del pasado.

**Palabras clave:** escuela tradicional, escuela nueva, escuela activa, enseñanza globalizada, método por proyectos.

## INTRODUCTION

I do not have any aversion to the so-called new school, but I formally condemn the exaggerations and inconsistencies of the new schools. If the theorists of the new doctrine decided to descend from Sirius to Earth; if they resolved to leave, for a time, the cold world of folios to approach the objective world of reality; if they exchanged the peaceful environment of libraries, where they converse with philosophers of education, for the noisy environment of schools, in which the dynamic work of child education takes place; if they went up, or down (as they wish) from the abstract to the concrete, exchanging the icy landscape of theory for the tropical landscape of reality, full of sappy greenery, then they would realize, with astonishment, how counterproductive their work as indoctrinators have been and how negative your task of proselytizing! [...]. After all, what do these men want? Do you want to destroy everything and then rebuild everything? Are they friends or enemies? Do they bear the sign of the predestined who apostolate a doctrine, or do they wear the breastplate of the Huns who destroy everything when passing, under the paws of war steeds? (OLIVEIRA, 1936g, p. 30).

As the phrase highlighted with quotation marks in the title of this article, the epigraph above, in the harshness of its incisive and conclusive language, he summarizes the way of thinking of a malsim from the São Paulo school system who denounced what, for him, the education reformers, in the 1930s, they wanted to cover up: the failure of the New School on a national and international level<sup>2</sup>.

Numerous studies have outlined the professional trajectories of great apologists of the new school movement and the strategies for disseminating this pedagogical conception in Brazil, particularly in São Paulo, from 1930 onwards (BRANDÃO, 1992; MONARCHA, 1997, 2009, 2010; CAVALCANTE, 2000; CARVALHO, 2002, 2003; MATE, 2002; VIDAL, 2002, 2013; CAMPOS, 2003; MAGALDI; GONDRA, 2003; XAVIER, 2004; SOUZA, 2009; CARVALHO, 2012; just to name a few references from a long list). These researches mostly focused on New School propositions in their elements of renewal and innovation, overlooking resistance that emerged within the system<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps this explains, in part, the lack of knowledge about the performance of members of the public teaching profession in São Paulo during the first half of the 20th century, which obscures the clash that took place at the time. By going against the grain of those researches, that is, by analyzing the criticisms about the ongoing renovation, this article sought to understand other meanings of the new school movement through the interpretations of one of its most forceful critics: Professor Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira.

An unfamiliar figure to educational historiography in Brazil<sup>4</sup>, Ataliba de Oliveira worked in the São Paulo school system between 1905 and 1935 and knew from the inside the entrails and gears of that school machinery. From schoolmaster to the general director of public education in the state, he went through the professional escalation system and moved from the lowest to the highest administrative, normative, and directive teaching positions. In this transit, he assumed the tasks of teaching, educating, inspecting, guiding, examining, and supervising the teaching given in primary and normal schools in the state of São Paulo, during thirty years of public teaching. Therefore, he is a “school worker” – as it was said at the time – of high culture, who perceived the didactic and pedagogical value of public schools in São Paulo, both in its systemic aspect and in the dynamism of everyday life. Finally, he was a teaching professional who fought for a long time in the field of São Paulo school practice.

Ataliba de Oliveira's professional career in the São Paulo public school system coincided with the different phases of two pedagogical movements: until the final years of 1920, he participated in the institutionalization of modern pedagogy, as its proponents called it (pictured by much of Brazilian historiography for the synoptic expression of method/intuitive teaching); In the 1930s, he experienced

<sup>2</sup> This article brings partial results of two research projects. One of them was a postdoctoral one – “The Arithmetic of the primary course to teach literacy: Historical analysis of the dynamics of production of school knowledge (1870–1930)” –, developed under the supervision of professor Dr. Vera Teresa Valdemarin, with the financial support of FAPESP (Process: 2017/20738-5); and the second: “Conceptions and methods for teaching: circulation of Brazil-United States pedagogical ideas”, funded by CNPq in the Productivity in Research modality (Process 311711/2019-7).

<sup>3</sup> Differences between Catholics and adherents of the New School were focused on in different analyses. See mainly: Russef (2013); Cunha and Costa (2002).

<sup>4</sup> In the survey carried out in the theses and dissertations databases of CAPES, BDTD and FAPESP, only one scientific work was located: master's dissertation by Andréia Cristina Borges Rela Zattoni (2016), which addressed actions by Ataliba de Oliveira as director of the School Group in Itatiba.

renovation initiatives (scientific pedagogy), retired and began to analyze, almost daily, in the newspaper *Correio Paulistano*,<sup>5</sup> the reasons that, in his opinion, resulted in the “failure of the New School reform” (OLIVEIRA, 1939h, p. 5) or, in the peremptory statement that “the new school was born dead” (OLIVEIRA, 1938j, p. 5).

A declared defender of the pedagogical and didactic norms of modern pedagogy, Ataliba did not hide his aversion to the dictates of scientific pedagogy, which, according to him, could be identified by different expressions: new school, active school, renewed school, work school, rotating teaching, globalized teaching, project method, problem method, Dalton plan. It was based on these and other themes that he carried out a critical exercise “faithfully interpreting the thinking of luminaries of the new school, who dealt with these issues” (OLIVEIRA, 1938p, p. 5). In this interpretative exercise, as the epigraph of this introduction shows, his strong objection to the work of disseminating and implementing the intended pedagogical renewal, more specifically, to the actions of reformers (“doctrinators”, he would say) who worked in São Paulo, became clear.

The synthesis of these objections was formulated in two memorial chronicles published in 1941, in which he addresses the mistakes he made at the beginning of his teaching career. In the first of these, he states that New School thought “hovered in the vaporous regions of doctrinal abstractions; despised the pedagogical practice; left aside the individual efforts of the masters; did not submit the principles to the test of experience” (OLIVEIRA, 1941a, p. 5). In another, he confesses his astonishment, and revolt when, under the banner of didactic autonomy, the creation of programs and school schedules was assigned to the new teachers and normalists. According to his understanding, such “nonsense [was] uttered in the name of a poorly spelled and poorly interpreted science” (OLIVEIRA, 1941b, p. 5) and subjected half a million children to unknown effects.

If the criticism made by the author is crystal clear, it is necessary, as proposed by Robert Darnton (1987)<sup>6</sup>, to inquire into this documentation to broaden the understanding of the reform movement. Embracing the experience of resistance, expressed almost daily in a newspaper with wide circulation in the capital, implies considering the divergent interpretation in the construction of meanings of a movement with pretensions of rupture. It is a historiographical exercise that takes the writings of such a peculiar actor on the new school movement, notably on the attempts to operationalize this movement in the São Paulo school apparatus, to understand the interpretations that certain individuals make of the historical events they experienced. and, many times, built by them.

This leads directly to the problematic of this article: how did Ataliba de Oliveira interpret the new school movement and the attempts to insert this pedagogical doctrine in the São Paulo school apparatus, between the 1930s and 1940s? The documentation analyzed is rich enough to characterize the trajectory and professional performance of Ataliba de Oliveira, which made him an authorized interlocutor of the reforms that were being processed at the time, and to inform about the reception, appropriation, and incorporation of the principles and pedagogical practices of the new school in the São Paulo school system.

For this purpose, mapping and analytical inventory of a set of more than two hundred texts written by Ataliba de Oliveira, published in the pages of the newspaper *Correio Paulistano*, between February 1936 and July 1941, in weekly columns called: Páginas de um schoolmaster, Problems of public instruction (both from 1936 to 1941) and School management and inspection (1936). Through this procedure, it was verified that, in the writings of the first column, the form is memorialist and describes facts from childhood to professional life; in the third, the work of school administration is outlined, highlighting the functions, duties, and rights of teachers, directors and school inspectors built around professional and functional values. The texts in the second named column, with the largest volume of

<sup>5</sup> All this research documentation is accessible at: <<http://bndigital.bn.gov.br/hemeroteca-digital/>>. Despite focusing on most of his writings published between 1936 and 1939, when necessary, this article advanced the analysis to a few writings by Ataliba de Oliveira published between 1940 and 1941.

<sup>6</sup> The American historian Robert Darnton (1986) teaches that historical research conducted from an ethnographic perspective requires the researcher to travel to the world of the dead to listen to the informant, which requires taking off from fieldwork to pilgrimage/navigation in physical and/or digital files. In essence, knowing the distant past is in itself a trip to the world of the dead. Instead of vis-à-vis the native informant, the French historian Roger Chartier (2010) also teaches “listening to the dead with the eyes”, and Michel de Certeau (1982) defines the possibilities of this listening in relation to the reader and with historiographical research.

writings, record the author's interpretations of various themes linked to São Paulo's school routine, such as a drop in the level of teaching, school buildings, didactic autonomy, the purpose of primary school, causes of the decay of primary education, new school, and pedagogical guidance, rotating teaching, globalization of teaching, active school, traditional school, new school, preparation of normal students, literacy of the Brazilian people and the people of São Paulo in urban and rural areas, and so on. The comparative logic structures most of the chronicles and, through it, the points on which the author's most forceful criticisms of the reform, the reformers, and the educational consequences of these actions focus, as well as the standard of work that he wanted to preserve.

Exposing to public scrutiny, Ataliba de Oliveira emphasized that the main topic of his texts had his experience in primary teaching:

We have been recording, weekly, in these columns, our opinion on matters of education and we do so based more on experience and general observation of the facts than on erudition, interpreting events with the use of our intelligence, without ever losing the independence of judging the data chosen, without orthodox feelings to mar our reasoning (OLIVEIRA, 1941c, p. 5).

Controversial point of view (as will also be seen further on), since the choice of *Correio Paulistano*<sup>7</sup> as a vehicle for disseminating his writings was not by chance. He saw this newspaper as a “bulwark in defense of São Paulo's tradition and past” (OLIVEIRA, 1938a, p. 5). An incontrovertible fact, however, was that great figures in literature, journalism, and the Brazilian educational field also had their chronicles published in the daily editions of this newspaper: Monteiro Lobato, Lélis Vieira, Carlos da Silveira, Amadeu Mendes, among others.

To characterize the debate initiated by Ataliba de Oliveira, the first analytical movement was based on the articles designated as memorialist to compose the author's biographical traits and outline his professional career within the São Paulo school system. Then, the writings on the problems of education were explored to apprehend the elements that, according to the author, led to the failure of the new school in public education in São Paulo. When necessary, other subsidiary documents were invoked (school legislation, teaching yearbook, pedagogical magazines, newspapers, etc.), seeking to clarify obscured information in Ataliba de Oliveira's texts.

## ATALIBA ANTONIO DE OLIVEIRA TRANSITTING THROUGH THE PAULISTA SCHOOL APPLIANCE

Son of the former slave Lourenço Antonio de Oliveira<sup>8</sup>, Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira was born on July 17, 1884, in the Ponte neighborhood, in the city of Itatiba, in the state of São Paulo, where he lived as a boy. It was also in this neighborhood that, at the age of 5, in 1889, he mourned the death of his mother and started school at Chico Affonso's private school. In 1896, in the bloom of youth, leaving Itatiba, the new student phase began with admission to the *Liceu do Sagrado Coração de Jesus* in São Paulo and, later, to the *Ginásio São Joaquim in Lorena*, both maintained by the Salesian congregation. His student life lasted until 1904 when he graduated as a normalist at the *Escola Normal da praça da República* in the capital of São Paulo<sup>9</sup>, but he remained “an eternal schoolgoer!” (OLIVEIRA, 1936f, p. 14).

<sup>7</sup> The newspaper *Correio Paulistano* began to circulate in 1854 defending liberal and abolitionist ideas; later joined the ideas and members of the Republican Party, in the fight against federal interventions and in support of the oligarchies. It was closed between 1930 and 1934 by order of Getúlio Vargas. See CPDOC, thematic entry and Thalassa, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> In the phase of free life as a white man at the time, he started to support his family with the salary of a woodworker that he became. Afterwards, he went on to build works and then to lead men of works, becoming a craftsman. This free black foreman was known as “Mestre Lourenço” and “Capitão Lourenço”. In memorial chronicles, the author discusses issues related to Brazilian miscegenation and Brazil's debt to blacks (see chronicle of 10/26/1940).

<sup>9</sup> He belonged to the class of students who graduated in 1904 from the *Escola Normal da Praça da República*. In addition to Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira, professors of the stature of Antônio Firmino de Proença, Aprígio de Almeida Gonzaga, Armando Araújo, Benedicto de Paula França, Eugênio Teani, Frederico Bayerlein, Geraldo Alves Corrêa, Hélio Penteadó de Castro, João Baptista de Toledo Leme, Joaquim de Castro Mendonça Furtado, Júlio do Amaral Carvalho, Mário de Oliveira Campos, Saturnino Barbosa Junior, Sebastião Paulo de Toledo Pontes and Zenon Cleanthes de Moura. Between 1901 and 1904, this class of students had professors from São Paulo teaching professions, such as: José Feliciano de Oliveira

Graduated as a normalist, Ataliba de Oliveira returned to his homeland and, on February 23, 1905, was appointed by Jorge Tibiriçá – then president of the state of São Paulo – as a teacher of a rural male school in *Tapera Grande*, municipality of Itatiba. The *Escola Normal* diploma gave him the possibility of starting his career in an urban school, but he preferred to start his professional life in a house that, from 11 am to 4 pm, was transformed into a school, to conduct primary classes. Part of the five hours of daily school work was devoted to teaching reading and writing to his first students through the “Childhood Booklet” (*Cartilha da infância*), by Thomaz Galhardo.

With just over a year into his career, seeking to rise in public teaching, he left the rural school in August 1906 in Itatiba to take over classes at an urban school in the beach town of São Vicente, where he remained for two years, until October 1908. This new position arose through the succession of the position left by Professor Cymbelino de Freitas.<sup>10</sup>

In 1909, Ataliba de Oliveira returned, once again, to his homeland as an assistant professor in the school group “Coronel Júlio Cezar”. A more experienced teacher, he reports that he organized the school timetable and, three years later, in 1912, he opened a preparatory course for higher schools together with his teacher-sister, Maria Joanna de Oliveira. His recognition of his commitment to the exercise of public teaching led the state government to credit Ataliba de Oliveira with new responsibilities during the 1913 school year: first, as interim director of that school group, with permission from Horácio de Faria; then as an effective director.<sup>11</sup> The course created with his sister did not last long. Having already graduated as a normalist, Maria Joanna de Oliveira soon joined the staff of the school group directed by her brother. At the head of the school group, Ataliba de Oliveira taught, guided, and encouraged co-workers and received teaching authorities who inspected the school. One of these authorities was Professor Júlio Pinto Marcondes Pestana when, in 1913, occupying the position of a school inspector, he visited this school group and praised the didactic, pedagogical, and hygienic organization of the establishment. That same year, he met Benedicto Maria Tolosa, who was also a school inspector. He was at the head of the Itatiba school group until the end of the 1920 school year.<sup>12</sup>

On December 15 of that same year, Ataliba de Oliveira was appointed school inspector of the 10th Education Region based in São Carlos, a position he held until 1922. His promotion to public teaching in São Paulo was a source of pride for people from Itatiba, manifested in public appreciation. In this role, he acted as a teaching authority, supervising, guiding and advising primary school teachers in São Paulo in the municipalities on the Estrada de Ferro Douradense, from São Carlos to Itápolis, Ibitinga, and Bariri.

The seriousness of Ataliba de Oliveira's work in public teaching was recognized, and, on April 24, 1923, he was appointed interim Regional Delegate of the 8th Education Region, based in Itapetininga, replacing Professor Júlio de Oliveira Penna. During this period, he got to know and closely followed the professional work of Pedro Voss in the didactic and pedagogical organization of the *Escola Normal de Itapetininga*.

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(mechanics and astronomy); Godofredo Furtado (geometry and trigonometry); Azevedo Soares (arithmetic and algebra); Manuel Cyridião Buarque (language); Remigio Cerqueira Leite (French); José Estácio Correa de Sá e Benevides (universal and Brazilian history); José Machado de Oliveira (Latin); Canuto do Val (natural history); Sá Campello (English); Luís Galvão (geography); Antonio Carlos (music); Manuel Baragiola (gymnastics); Bruno Zwarg (crafts); Thomaz Ribeiro de Lima (drawing); Macedo Soares (physics and chemistry).

<sup>10</sup> According to Ataliba de Oliveira (1941e, p. 5), Cymbelino de Freitas was responsible for the “organization [of the indications that guide the teaching of each subject] of the teaching program for grouped and isolated primary schools of the State, approved and mandated observe by Dr. José Manuel Lobo, then Secretary of State for Interior Affairs, by act of February 19, 1925”. Between 1930 and 1931, Cymbelino de Freitas was one of the founders and first director of the *Centro do Professorado Paulista* – an institution that still exists today: <https://www.cpp.org.br/institucional/presidentes>. Professor Cymbelino de Freitas was also part of the commission responsible for preparing the so-called “minimum program of 1934”.

<sup>11</sup> Created on May 13, 1896, but being installed on July 1 of that year, the school group “Coronel Júlio Cezar” had its didactic and pedagogical organization entrusted to the then teacher of the “Escola Modelo do Carmo” Ramon Roca Dordal. This school group from Itatiba had as directors exponents of the São Paulo teaching profession of the stature of: Ramon Roca Dordal, Salustiano Leite de Oliveira, Luiz Ribeiro de Carvalho, Izaltino de Mello, Horario de Faria and, from 1913, Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira.

<sup>12</sup> As director of the Itatiba school group, Ataliba de Oliveira held another public position. In 1914, he replaced Professor Francisco da Costa Martins in the position of assistant director of the Normal Primary School of Pirassununga (Cf. ANUÁRIO DO ENSINO, 1914).

When, in 1925, Pedro Voss occupied the position of General Director of Education in São Paulo, he promoted the transfer of Ataliba de Oliveira to the position of school inspector in the district of Mogi das Cruzes, informing that: “I could not transfer him to São Paulo, I brought him to Mogi, on the outskirts of the capital” (OLIVEIRA, 1940b, p. 4). Excerpts from an inspection report presented by Ataliba de Oliveira were published in the pages of the magazine *Educação*, June 1929 edition, highlighting the disciplinary means advisable for conducting primary education classes. When these excerpts were released, he had already left the post he had held until May 1929.

On May 12, 1929, Ataliba de Oliveira was promoted to general inspector of *Escolas Normais Livres* in the state – primary teacher training institutions run by municipalities or private individuals. The promotion came from the hands of the then director of education Amadeu Mendes, for which he received homage from primary teachers in the municipality of Mogi das Cruzes. Newspapers at the time reported the balance of the Court of Auditors of the state of São Paulo, referencing, among other things, the good conduct of Professor Ataliba de Oliveira in the use of public money, documented in the rendering of accounts as a school inspector.

A new step in his career took place with the appointment of Eusébio de Paula Marcondes to exercise the position of director of the Secretariat of the General Directorate of Public Instruction, allowing that, on December 5, 1930, Ataliba de Oliveira to occupy the role of district inspector of education in the capital.

Decree 5,335, of January 7, 1932, reorganized public education in São Paulo. Among the 22 education regions into which the state<sup>13</sup>, was divided, the education police station in the capital was entrusted to Professor Ataliba de Oliveira. Upon detecting the difficulty of teachers in teaching a specific subject, he wrote and circulated in the pages of *Educação* magazine, April and May 1932 editions, a set of model lessons entitled “How to teach Roman numerals”. This seems to have been the only article in the form of a “lesson model” that Ataliba de Oliveira published in pedagogical magazines in São Paulo during the entire period of his professional life as a teacher.

His professional climb in the teaching profession in São Paulo continued. On August 24, 1933, the professor of French at the Institute of Education of São Paulo, Professor Francisco Azzi, was sworn in as general director of education in the state. The latter, in turn, invited Professor Ataliba de Oliveira to the post of technical assistant to the Commission for School Buildings and deputy director in his absence (Cf. ANUÁRIO DO ENSINO, 1935–1936, p. 353).

After the dismissal of Francisco Azzi from the position he held, Ataliba de Oliveira became responsible for the highest position in the education system: the General Directorate of Education, remaining there from August 15 to September 14, 1934. He gave his position to Professor Luiz Motta Mercier, then regional delegate of Ribeirão Preto, appointed on September 15th. The inauguration ceremony of the new director of public instruction in São Paulo, held two days after his appointment, was reported in the pages of newspapers in São Paulo as follows: “The new general director entered the premises accompanied by Mr. Aluizio Lopes de Oliveira, representative of the Secretary of Education, and Professor Ataliba de Oliveira, who was up to the moment responsible for the file of the Board of Education, being received by a round of applause” (TOMOU posse..., 1934, p. 3). With the transfer of the position, Ataliba de Oliveira reassumed the leadership of the service and the presidency of the Commission of School Buildings, and his performance was once again publicly recognized by Luiz Motta Mercier.

After thirty years dedicated to public teaching in São Paulo, Ataliba de Oliveira retired in 1935, when he held the position of head of the technical service of the Secretary of the Department of Education, whose director was his colleague and friend from the normal course Armando Araújo. After retirement, he became a regular contributor to the newspaper *Correio Paulistano* on educational topics, between February 1936 and July 1941.

The journey described here reveals that Ataliba de Oliveira was doubly useful to the public teaching profession in the state of São Paulo: as an educator and as a bureaucrat in different sectors of

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<sup>13</sup> Each region had its education police station based in: São Paulo (one in the North Region and another in the South Region), Araraquara, Bauru, Botucatu, Campinas, Casa Branca, Guaratinguetá, Itapetininga, Jaboticabal, Lins, Piracicaba, Pirassununga, Presidente Prudente, Ribeirão Preto, Rio Claro, Rio Preto, Santa Cruz do Rio Pardo, Santos, São Carlos, Sorocaba and Taubaté (Cf. ANUÁRIO DO ENSINO, 1935–1936).

education. Its importance in the educational field of São Paulo was the subject of the program “*Curso de Admissão pela TV*” on TV Cultura, on October 15, 1962. In celebration of Teacher's Day, this broadcaster paid homage to Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira, conducted by Secretary of Education, Euvaldo de Oliveira Mello, who recalled his professional career, from his work as a teacher in the rural area to the high degree of general director of education, including journalistic activities in the educational sector (Cf. DIÁRIO DA NOITE, 1962).

Ataliba de Oliveira saw the writing of newspaper articles on educational matters as “the second way of continuing to exercise the profession, even after we had distanced from it a few months ago when, on February 4, 1936, we set out for the '*Correio Paulistano*', our first chronicle” (OLIVEIRA, 1940a, p. 5). For him, journalistic activity became a way of overcoming the inactivity imputed by retirement, and in this second stage of the profession, professor Ataliba de Oliveira – as he signed his chronicles – registered an original interpretation of the initiatives of the New Schools from São Paulo, above all.

His death, on August 30, 1967, aged 83, left his wife Rafaela de Oliveira a widow and orphaned their children Milton Lourenço de Oliveira, Magino Roberto de Oliveira, Maurício de Oliveira, Marina de Oliveira, Magda de Oliveira, Mirtes de Oliveira, Isaura de Oliveira, and Elisa de Oliveira, in addition to the now deceased Mauro de Oliveira, who was a teacher. Almost three months after his death, his name and educational legacy were immortalized in official documents of instruction in São Paulo and on the walls of Colégio Estadual “Professor Ataliba de Oliveira” – currently located at Rua São Silvestre, n. 400, São João Clímaco, São Paulo (Law n. 9.925, of November 28, 1967).

Despite being a teaching professional who played and held various positions in the public teaching profession in São Paulo, his accomplishments are little remembered both by the history of education and by the history of literacy in Brazil. This article recovers only a small portion of his journalistic writings, to read, through the eyes of this subject, the initiatives of the pioneers of the new school in the São Paulo school system, during the 1930s.

## PROFESSOR ATALIBA DE OLIVEIRA INTERPRETING THE PAULISTA SCHOOL SYSTEM

October 1930. President Washington, in Rio de Janeiro, and President Prestes, in São Paulo, had already been removed from power by the triumphant revolution. The people had already taken to the streets, shouting 'We want!'. The atmosphere, full of apprehensions, which enveloped the city, extended to the headquarters of the General Board of Education.

Inside the main premises of the department, in the presence of professors and employees, from the most modest to the general inspectors – mature men, teaching leaders, graduates, and gray in the work of instruction – in an atmosphere of heavy and apprehensive silence, the sound of the voice of the then Pontiff of Escolanovismo São Paulo, exclaiming emphatically: 'Do you think that the revolution is over? Well, they are wrong! Now it will start!'

And it was like this, with a whiplash of these threatening phrases, that – back in October 1930 – the ‘new school’, in a sudden leap made in the dark, triumphantly ascended to the chair of public officialdom in São Paulo.

In the afflictive solemnity of that day and in the anguish of that hour of uncertainty, the Escolanovismo action program was outlined in our land: Revolution! In the electrified atmosphere, his combat flag was unfurled: Revolution! His system of school reform was revealed, before the awestruck professors: Revolution!

Revolution instead of evolution.

In place of the calm and reasoned labor of the laboratory – the clamor and hustle of tasks engulfed in confusion. Screams. Nicknames. Blunt statements. Anarchic indoctrination. (OLIVEIRA, 1938e, p. 5).

The narration above – made by a witness, Professor Ataliba de Oliveira – reveals facts in the history of public education in São Paulo that only someone who experienced them could narrate them. Facts that occurred at the time of political turmoil in the country – the Revolution of 1930 –, echoed within the highest instance of education in São Paulo: the General Board of Education.

On the one hand, the political tension of October 1930 generated apprehension among the employees of the General Directorate of Education, on the other hand, it created the climate to



substantiate the official ways of institutionalizing the New School action program in the state of São Paulo. From the point of view of the political situation at the time, this institutionalization can be summarized as follows: on October 25, 1930, the provisional government was instituted in São Paulo, composed of José Maria Whitacker (in the finance department), Plínio Barreto (in the interior secretariat), Edmundo Novarro de Andrade (in the agriculture secretariat), who invited Manoel Bergstron Lourenço Filho to the general direction of public education.

It is not possible to state that in the announcement of the pedagogical revolution the expression “the pontiff of the new school of São Paulo” is a reference to Lourenço Filho; however, this enthusiastic new school (MONARCHA, 2010), became the general director of education in the month and year of the events witnessed by Professor Ataliba de Oliveira.

In this atmosphere of tension in October 1930, “taking advantage of the confusion of the moment, in a juggling act of daring leap in the dark, the New School conquered in São Paulo, with the red scarf of the revolution, its 'entrée' in the official world” (OLIVEIRA, 1936d, p. 7). From then on, the São Paulo public school system began to receive new didactic-pedagogical guidelines, which simultaneously discredited the work of the past. According to Ataliba de Oliveira, the New School condemned the educational past of São Paulo as being archaic and inoperative. Both the work of the “luminaries of education in São Paulo [at the end of the 19th century]”<sup>14</sup> and the school of the past were slammed by “the most ridiculous nicknames” (OLIVEIRA, 1936c, p. 7). Of the teachers of the past, “their effort was mocked, the ideal that guided them was mocked. They were late. Laggards. Traditionalists. Candied. Mummified” (OLIVEIRA, 1936c, p. 7). The school of the past was also disdained “and it was, then, a whole barrage of grotesque epithets: old school; old; expires; traditional” (OLIVEIRA, 1936c, p. 7).

From top to bottom, certified by the baptism of an official seal, the New School made these adjectives circulate throughout the four corners of the state of São Paulo. But they had a reference. According to Ataliba de Oliveira (1936a, p. 3), “inside the backpack of the reformers, there was a renewed pedagogy that brings in its core the 'scientific spirit', twin brother of the celebrated 'revolutionary spirit'”. Linked to this scientific pedagogy was a set of concepts from psychology, didactics, history, statistics, biology, and educational sociology: didactic freedom; globalized teaching; active school; centers of interest; project method; objective measurement of children's intelligence through tests and functional education (OLIVEIRA, 1936c). For him, such concepts were constituted in the gospel of the New School, vulgarized with its style: “The New School Gospel was preached with spears...” (OLIVEIRA, 1936c, p. 7). It was “mercilessly hurting the militant teachers with profanity and grotesque curses that signaled the onslaught of the New School offensive in the quiet fields where the São Paulo school developed its dynamism” (OLIVEIRA, 1936g, p. 30).

This relentless advertising of the renovators about the doctrine of the new school was based on the different means of communication available at the time: translations, magazines, books, newspapers, from the chairs of schools and the tribunes of conferences – he argued. Between the lines of each article published and in the speeches of each lecture given, “the reformers undermined the foundations of the São Paulo school and hurled against its walls, in a daring offensive, the projects of the catapult of demolition” (OLIVEIRA, 1938b, p. 5). For Ataliba de Oliveira (1937c), this modus operandi of the New Schools was summed up in the following points: bold in preaching their doctrines, they were indifferent to the past, they instilled disbelief against pedagogical precepts and postulates in use.

With this modus operandi, the New School reform was imposed as a dictatorial regime when, according to the columnist, putting public opinion on the sidelines, “no protest was heard. Not even the press made the slightest comment. It could not do so: the powerful gauntlet of a strong government suffocated, in the grips of muscular fingers, the lungs through which the people breathe, in difficult moments of distress and despair” (OLIVEIRA, 1936b, p. 3).

However, in this heavy atmosphere, São Paulo professors adapted, reacted, and resisted.

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<sup>14</sup> Expression used to refer to the reformers of 1890 and their fellow teachers, who continued the work: Caetano de Campos, Rangel Pestana, Bernardino de Campos, Prudente de Moraes, Gabriel Prestes, Arnaldo Barreto, Oscar Thompson, João Augusto Toledo, Amadeu Mendes, José Ferraz de Campos and others “who belonged to the top of the Bandeirantes teaching staff” (OLIVEIRA, 1936b, p. 4).

In retaliation, São Paulo magisterium, always discreet in its conduct, if it did not frankly raise the gauntlet of challenge, nevertheless knew how to entrench in a secure stronghold of passive resistance, an eastern defense strategy, which Gandhi taught to the followers of his ideas. The professorship did not roar in the public squares, nor the indiscreet columns of the newspapers. He did not act with a sword in hand, nor did he swing with closed and threatening fists. He stilled. He resisted by inertia. He reacted with silence. He let the storm roar in the atmosphere, remaining, down here, under the shelter of a studied muteness that feigned fear but was intelligent, preconceived courage. Although hurt and perplexed, he continued to work inside the schools, while all around the opposing horde howled, menacing, with lively stridency, until the vocal cords relaxed. It was this attitude of inertia that prevented the complete collapse of the ship of instruction from São Paulo (OLIVEIRA, 1938g, p. 6).

Time, being relentless in its course, brought changes. The time has come to exchange silence for protest, muteness for speech, calm for agitation, and stillness for movement. This behavior change “is the change that São Paulo professors offer to their gratuitous detractors” (OLIVEIRA, 1938i, p. 5). Becoming a spokesperson for this group, Ataliba de Oliveira protested and caused noise in the school scene with harsh criticism of the attempts of reformers in São Paulo.

Leaked in their style, such criticism circulated through the pages of *Correio Paulistano*. Criticism, according to the author, is independent and sincere, without ever naming anyone, “avoiding turning the columns of the ‘*Correio [Paulistano]*’ into a decompression valve for hidden idiosyncrasies and our writings into instruments of personal effort, which is always objectionable.” (OLIVEIRA, 1941c, p. 5). Argumentatively, he underlined that it was an “opinion taken from the point of view of the militant teacher that he was then” (OLIVEIRA, 1938e, p. 5).

Despite this justification, when analyzed together, Ataliba de Oliveira's texts reveal another temperament of the author. The sour tone can be felt and measured by the adjectives used – perhaps – to return the ridicule received from the New School. He called them: false gods of renewed pedagogy; corifeus from the new school; intellectual growers; copious education theorists; new creed theorists and evangelists; panegyrists of the new theoretical ideology; neo-ideologists; illustrious preachers of the seductive new school; propagators of indigenous pedagogy; enemies of the São Paulo school tradition; mental upstarts; strange people in our midst, disconnected from the highly respectable influences of tradition; speculation men; improvised lighthouse keepers on sailors; fanatical reformers; new school avant-gardes; local pioneers of new educational concepts; detractors; free enemies of the traditional school; academic educationists; naive futurists teaching creative and poetic imagination; office educationists; and so on.

These adjectives, literally taken from the chronicles, reveal his interpretation of the school he wanted to see preserved. By making an incursion into the history of public education in São Paulo, he demarcated the traditional school – “so pejoratively named, as a sign of mockery and contempt for the reformists who sponsored the advent of the so-called new school” (OLIVEIRA, 1938c, p. 5) – as that school being a result of the education reform carried out in the early years of the Republic. More precisely, he named the school system created by Caetano de Campos, Rangel Pestana, Miss Browne, and their peers from 1891 onwards as traditional. But he made a point of noting that it was a “traditional school; but not traditionalist” (OLIVEIRA, 1938c, p. 5), as it had permanent renewal – he underlined.

With a sense of reality and the adaptive work of Caetano de Campos, he said, “The so-called ‘*Escola Paulista*’ was created, with its own organization norms, methods and processes of school technique, coming from outside, it is true, but accommodated to our climate, fond of the warm temperature of the tropical sun” (OLIVEIRA, 1938b, p. 5). A school, he continued, in which “didactics became from São Paulo”; its pedagogical and administrative structure, copied from abroad, but accommodated to the conditions of São Paulo – “everything acquired, then, the scope of *bandeirismo*” (OLIVEIRA, 1938d, p. 5). That was, he defended, the traditional São Paulo school, progressive school, school of slow and graduated renewal.

Therefore, Ataliba de Oliveira became a professional teacher in this traditional school. Placed in the background, this conception of the São Paulo school guided his criticism of the New School initiatives, after October 27, 1930. From then on, the New School that conquered São Paulo “sought to

mark its 'entrée' in the official world, with the blatant and resounding proclamation of didactic autonomy” (OLIVEIRA, 1936d, p. 7). This was, according to him, the first and main theme brought into focus by the pioneers of the new school, their battle horse, and perplexing teachers, as reported by our informant. Accompanying this autonomy was the voice of command “which gave the schoolmaster the task of organizing – himself – the program of his class or school” (OLIVEIRA, 1936d, p. 7). It was not the didactic autonomy already known by São Paulo professors, but “a new autonomy imbued with a 'scientific spirit', carried to these shores in the company of the 'revolutionary spirit', his big brother” – protested Ataliba de Oliveira (1936e, p. 3). The consequences of all this, he accused, were “schools without programs and a slackening of technical assistance”<sup>15</sup> (OLIVEIRA, 1936d, p. 7). The anarchy in the camps of São Paulo professors was general, he concluded.

In the flow of his interpretations, a question was raised by the writer: “After all, what is a new school?” (OLIVEIRA, 1938g, p. 5). To answer it, the old retired teacher reviewed a set of concepts disseminated by the reformers and arrived at the following answer: “The new school must be 'active' and, within it, 'functional education' takes place” (OLIVEIRA, 1938k, p. 5). From then on, the active school was one of the most explored themes in the weekly chronicles, emphasizing that it was based on the concept of the student's interest, who, on their initiative, should exercise the complex of educational activities: “The interest! This is a wonderful force, which is the magical elixir of the new indoctrinators!” (OLIVEIRA, 1938k, p. 5).

The details on this theme unfold, little by little in the chronicles, in a skillful play on words: within this active school

there are no students who study, but children who live; there are no lessons, but life problems that are solved; it does not have schedules that restrict it, nor programs, but projects to solve; it does not have classrooms with desks, but environments for geography, mathematics, etc.; [finally], according to extreme scholars, the legitimate active school can even dispense with the teacher (OLIVEIRA, 1938k, p. 5).

Claiming that he did not know where this “school of wonder” was or even existed, Ataliba argued that Russia welcomed it in 1918, but abandoned it ten years later, in 1928, to reinstall the traditional school. He continued to list: “They also say that functional education takes place in experimental schools in France, England, and the United States. Officially, no country in the world has adopted it” (OLIVEIRA, 1938l, p. 4). Returning to the caustic tone, he concluded his interpretation of the theme by saying that “the school based on pure interest is possible, however, it exists, far from here, in strange lands and other worlds. On Mars, for example, where civilization has a great advantage over ours...” (OLIVEIRA, 1938l, p. 4).

It is not difficult to see the objections behind the ironic language. As evidence of his statements, he revised the idea of functional education, carried out in the active school regime, against

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<sup>15</sup> Actually, schools have never run out of programs. São Paulo primary school teachers, when they did not create their own programs, found other solutions. The account of Professor Fernando Rios, then regional delegate for teaching in Itapetininga, testifies to this reality of the São Paulo school system. He said: “Here in São Paulo, in 1931, in obedience to the determination of Professor Lourenço Filho, then Director of Teaching, each teacher had to organize his own program. That was in 1931. The following year, the program of 1925 was returned to. Today, the minimum program of 1934 is still being followed here in the region, which, despite its organization along traditional lines, with discrimination of subjects, honors those who organized it” (RIOS, 1936, p. 19). In the São Paulo school system, didactic autonomy went through several teaching reforms, constituting a didactic-pedagogical principle of the teaching profession. It all started with the Sampaio Doria Reform, in 1920 – in its article 13; then, he was present in the reformist propositions of Lourenço Filho, in 1930 – notably his article “About Didactic Autonomy” published in the magazine *Escola Nova*, v. 1, no. 2 and 3, November 1930; and it was reaffirmed in the 1933 Education Code – an extensive document with approximately one thousand articles –, which included in Part III, Chapter IV, Article 239, the following norm: “The teacher is assured didactic autonomy, within the general technical norms indicated by the contemporary pedagogy” (SÃO PAULO, 1933, n.p.). For the record, it is mentioned that “the issue of didactic autonomy” was the main topic widely discussed at the “First Brazilian Congress of Regional Education”, held in Salvador, Bahia, on November 15, 1934, it reads that “no subject stirred up Congress as much as this one. Professor Sud Mennucci came to the podium four or five times to demonstrate that no one was claiming didactic 'license', that is, the teacher's right to do what he wanted, but simply 'didactic autonomy', that is, the right to fulfill the program according to the master's individual process and not the official one imposed by the government” (MENNУCCI, 1934, p. 32).

the suppression of the school program. Argued Ataliba de Oliveira (1938m), in the authentic conception of “new school majors”, the active school has an improvised program in the act of school activities, so that the subjects are generated by the students themselves. This “natural” germination of subjects placed various contents under joint work: globalized teaching, par excellence, and establishing a new way of distributing subjects following the psychological needs of the child. “The doctrinators call this a 'program built in the psychological sense'” (OLIVEIRA, 1938m, p. 5). Adopted by “this active school, school of activities, school of action, better said, of work”, this program, based on globalized teaching, is the dominating principle of the method of projects, the method of problems, and the center of interest, united the materials in a homogeneous block – assured Ataliba de Oliveira (1938m, p. 5).

According to his understanding, implementing the principles of the active school in São Paulo primary school would imply destroying the formalistic sense built since the end of the 19th century – because, wanting to be active, “it would be more like a club than a school. The isolated and systematic teaching of each subject would disappear, to appear in its place, the globalized teaching” (OLIVEIRA, 1938n, p. 4). These changes in school and teaching would also readjust the role of the teacher, which, while not being almost annulled, would be reduced “to the subaltern situation of 'white cane for the blind'” (OLIVEIRA, 1938n, p. 4).

These interpretations led Ataliba de Oliveira to subordinate the effectiveness of the active school in the São Paulo school system to three conditions: I) “a long and malleable schedule, broadly relaxed and flexible, capable of supporting all the varied and multiple activities” (OLIVEIRA, 1938o, p. 4); II) reduced number of students per class to meet the rhythm of each student, because “Learning in the active school has to be done this way, individually and not collectively” (OLIVEIRA, 1938o, p. 4); III) cultural and technical preparation of the teacher who, having to abandon his teaching practice of elaborating models/lesson plans, is “forced to intervene in the school activity impromptu, addressing issues that emerged in the discussion. It is therefore impossible to prepare lessons in advance” (OLIVEIRA, 1938p, p. 4).

Faced with these conditions, and considering the São Paulo school reality, Ataliba de Oliveira (1938n) argued that the active school could not be put into practice because it would not be possible to maintain classrooms with enrollments reduced to 15 to 20 students and, with a higher number of students, it would not be possible to adopt the individual teaching mode; there were no specialist professors prepared encyclopedically to conduct such classrooms. To objectify his argument, he resorted to the cold language of numbers to emphasize that, with a school work schedule reduced to three hours, with 59% of its school-age child population out of school, with a low amount of teacher training and inadequate cultural preparation for the required encyclopedism, “the school of spontaneous interest, commonly called active or work school” could not be integrated into the São Paulo school system under these conditions (OLIVEIRA, 1939b, p. 5).

This led him to state that the active school was a “school conducted until us through compendiums of pedagogical literature by doctrinaires of universal New School” (OLIVEIRA, 1939d, p. 5). This interpretation made him see the active school that landed in São Paulo as a “school of textbooks, only interviewed in the vague atmosphere of theories”, because it did not have results of pedagogical realism accumulated in the field of practice (OLIVEIRA, 1939f, p. 5). To support this argument, he sought to show that the incompatibility of the accommodation of the active school with the São Paulo reality was not an isolated case. For this, he accompanied the marches and marks of penetration of the “active school, nicknamed the new school” in different countries (OLIVEIRA, 1939f, p. 5). When moving from the active school of Cecil Reddie, in England, in 1889, to the active school in communist Russia in 1918, he came to the following conclusion: “The new school has spread throughout the world. [However], until the day, month, and year in which we draw these lines, no nation on the earth's globe - not France, European and learned; nor the United States, American and dynamic – made the new school official” (OLIVEIRA, April 22, 1939i, p. 4). There was, therefore, he also concluded, a “failure of world education” (OLIVEIRA, 1939k, p. 4), juxtaposing, in a neologism, new school, and active school.

Not being able to carry out an active school in São Paulo, declared Ataliba de Oliveira, the New School tried to replace it “with two types of schools that are completely reprehensible: the rotational teaching and the Dalton plan” (OLIVEIRA, 1939f, p. 5). According to their reports, rotational teaching

had already been tried in a school group in São Paulo. He said that “perhaps in 1919, in the group ‘Rodrigues Alves’, from this capital, then directed by Professor Antonio Alencastro de Azevedo, the rotational teaching system was experimented” (OLIVEIRA, 1937a, p. 3). This experiment completely altered the dynamism of this school group, as the main characteristic of rotational teaching was to assign each subject to a teacher, that is, transforming “the class teacher” into a “specialized subject teacher” (OLIVEIRA, 1937a, p. 3). The experiment did not last long, and “the experiment ended in complete failure. ‘He anarchized the group’” (OLIVEIRA, 1937a, p. 3).

After a few years, operating under the control of school officialdom, “under the exotic name of Platoon System, the new school sponsored the adoption of the old and outdated rotational teaching, tried and condemned by the experience verified twenty years ago in São Paulo” (OLIVEIRA, 1938g, p. 6). To substantiate his speech against rotational teaching, he said he was accompanied: “I am not the only one who says it. It is not just the teacher of the old São Paulo school, nicknamed archaic, who says so. It is Claparède, the authoritative advocate of renewed education, who asserts it with all the strength of his authority” (OLIVEIRA, 1937d, p. 3).

The criticisms seemed to have no end. By continuing to express his objections, Ataliba de Oliveira contrasted the main bases that guided the active school and the school of the Dalton plan. After announcing the didactic and pedagogical differences that bound the New School in contradictions and inconsistencies, in an ironic tone, he questioned: “Did the readers notice? Does not it seem unusual to you that the indoctrinators of the activity or work school are those of the Dalton school?”. He then replied: “Well, the Dalton-type school is condemned by highly prestigious authorities, some from the new school” (OLIVEIRA, 1939e, p. 5). To legitimize his interpretations, he resorted to the writings of Lourenço Filho, Onofredo Penteadó, and Claparède. These initiatives constituted a pedagogical mosaic that projected a fluid and shifting image of these concepts onto the São Paulo school system, asserted Ataliba de Oliveira, thus making it difficult to establish the foundations of New School. Finally, the columnist reaffirmed that the attempts to incorporate this school typology were inherited from the pedagogical tourism carried out by the New Schools in São Paulo.

According to the chronicler, traveling through capitals of the old and new world, these pioneers visited France, Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, the United States, Cuba, and Soviet Russia. In each of these countries, he claimed, reformers found a reference. In Belgium, they sought to learn, with Decroly, the method of centers of interest; in France, with Binet and Simon, they tried to understand the metric orientations of intelligence measurement; in Switzerland, they followed Ferrière and Claparède; in Spain, Luzuriaga and Aguayo; in Italy, Montessori; in the United States, with Dewey, they tried to learn reflective thinking, also called the method of problems; still in North America, they checked another way of teaching, with Kilpatrick, based on propositional activity, “dubbed the project method”; before, they had discovered that of the organization of habits of conduct, by William James (OLIVEIRA, 1939f, p. 5). On this pilgrimage, reported the informant, “the reformers went around the world around their room, devouring, with Pantagruelian hunger, appetizing library folios, and pedagogical journals, dug up from the back and bulging holds of transatlantic ships” (OLIVEIRA, 1939f, p. 5).

As they moved through the pedagogical world without traveling too far, the pioneers of the new school were, by Ataliba de Oliveira, named “‘globe-trotters’ of a new species” (OLIVEIRA, 1939f, p. 5). In this internal-local pedagogical tourism – the concept is ours, but the narration belongs to the informant –, the New Schools from São Paulo developed a strategy of persuasion: “to open the easy, wide and beaten path for them, the brand ‘made in U.S.A.’ was enough.” (OLIVEIRA, 1939j, p. 4). Despite this, the pioneers of the new school “groped, in confusion, in the broad terrain of practice. They knew how to indoctrinate, but they did not know how to perform” (OLIVEIRA, 1938b, p. 4), concluded the critic. In this interpretation, the New School in São Paulo (*Escolanovismo*) was, to a large extent, a campaign to spread ideas, not to create them.

Reiterating the focus of his criticisms, Ataliba claims that the reformers did not want to learn from Caetano de Campos the maxim of “adapting and not adopting”, which required knowing and assessing the needs of the environment. Such lack of knowledge would constitute, in his opinion, “the main reason for the failure of the reforming work of the pioneers of the new school” (OLIVEIRA, 1939g, p. 5). Those town criers, he continued, lacked the “art of adaptation”, “the reform of the new

school lacked a Caetano de Campos who would outline its objectives with masterly certainty; and a Miss Browne, who would teach, in the field, the application of the methods capable of reaching them. It was a bankrupt reform – due to lack of conductors” (OLIVEIRA, (1938f, p. 5). The pioneers of New School failed because their whole proposal for school innovation was nothing more than “simple theoretical erudition, easily drawn from the inexhaustible source of textbooks” ( OLIVEIRA, 1939c, p. 5). For acting in this way, interpreted Ataliba de Oliveira, the New School activist (*Escolanovistas*) in São Paulo were nothing more than “doctrinaire preachers”, disseminators of “Catiline uttered from the tribunes of conferences”, whose work consisted of “reading works of pedagogical literature and to interpret them before curious and submissive audiences” (OLIVEIRA, 1939c, p. 5).

Almost eight years passed, from October 1930 to April 1938, until, on that date, in São Paulo, the coming to power of Adhemar Pereira de Barros (as a federal intervenor in the state), Mariano de Oliveira Wendel (as secretary of Education and Health), Antônio D'Ávila (as director of the Pedagogical Guidance Service of the Department of Education) and João Alves Cruz (as director of the Department of Education) was read, understood and celebrated by Ataliba de Oliveira as the end of São Paulo New School and the return to tradition. Through three decrees<sup>16</sup>, this governmental composition of São Paulo established the replacement of the Board of Education by the Department of Education; the creation of an *Escola Normal Modelo* in the Capital; and the extinction of the *Instituto de Educação da praça da República* and other measures. For Ataliba de Oliveira (1938a, p. 5), “these decrees, therefore, represented an authentic victory for the Escola Paulista and the triumph of Tradition. Congratulations to the government! Congratulations on the normalist professorship! Congratulations, also, to ‘Correio Paulistano’”. Perhaps, in order not to lose independence in judging the facts – which he claimed to preserve – he did not congratulate himself. However, the lines above allow us to imagine how much he celebrated this victory, this triumph.

## CONCLUSIONS

After eight years of dead domination; eight years of fruitless work, in which almost everything was confusing and messy; it did not happen, as expected, the proclaimed new school did not follow (OLIVEIRA, 1938h, p. 5).

Today, the new school, not as a doctrine or theoretical conception – but as a school practice or pedagogical art, to be carried out within the four walls of a public school – constitutes an enormous weight that flattens and crushes the vanity and pride of New School members. It is a skittish bird that circles the cage but does not fall, like naive prey, into the trapdoor trap. It is a distant dream, frayed and formless like a cloud, that there is no way of turning into reality. (OLIVEIRA, 1939m, p. 5).

Contrary to what it may seem, Ataliba de Oliveira was also able to recognize that the work of the New School activists left access to various foreign and national works on educational subjects as the main legacy to the São Paulo professors, which were part of the collection of the “Library of Education” organized in 1926 by Lourenço Filho. In the exercise of his position, as director, inspector, or school delegate, he advised teachers to “take the path pointed out by preachers of new doctrines” (OLIVEIRA, 1938e, p. 5), employing some new pedagogical procedures. About this attempt, he assured me, “teachers from more than thirty municipalities in the State entrusted to our guidance can give testimony” (OLIVEIRA, 1938e, p. 5). However, the enthusiasm was short-lived, and the understanding prevailed that the reality of schools in São Paulo did not allow for the effective application of those guidelines.

Knowing from the inside and up close the complex problems of the São Paulo school system, Ataliba de Oliveira pointed out its flaws by analyzing them from the outside. That is, when he retired, his room became his new work site – as he reported in his memoirs.

At the time, Ataliba de Oliveira's interpretations of the New School reform seem not to have

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<sup>16</sup> They were: Decree n. 9.255, of June 22, 1938; Decree n. 9.256, dated June 22, 1938; Decree n. 9268-A, of June 25, 1938. These decrees can be accessed via the Digital Library of the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo.

been refuted, and it has not been possible, so far, to identify any text in this regard. On the other hand, it is known that his criticisms broke the territorial boundaries of São Paulo. After all, the printed word does not respect borders. In April 1939, he received a letter from Isaías Alves, then Bahia's Secretary of Education, requesting his writings: "I would ask my illustrious friend to be kind enough to send me the complete collection of those that have been published, until the moment". Recognizing the prestige and seriousness of the professor's work from São Paulo, Isaías Alves concluded the letter by requesting a technical opinion: "I take this opportunity to send you the clipping together, on the first bases of the reorganization of our normal teaching, asking for this modest work your tolerant appreciation. Always at your complete disposal, here is an admiring colleague and friend – Isaías Alves" (CORREIO PAULISTANO, 1939, p. 3).

A professional of recognized credibility, Ataliba de Oliveira became, therefore, an authorized voice in educational matters through his chronicles. The very writing of the reviews demonstrates care in the rational and well-systematized exposition of her arguments in polite, albeit blunt, language. When interpreting the actions of the New School pioneers, in charge of school officialdom in São Paulo, Ataliba de Oliveira considered that their performance through books, pedagogical magazines, and conferences was characterized by an "unusual campaign of demoralization based on threats and adjectives" (OLIVEIRA, 1938g, p. 6). This was, for the retired professor, another capital error by the reformers, as, wanting to indoctrinate and recruit supporters, they chose to insult and offend, instead of convincing.

Their arguments shed light on two other aspects. The first reports on the successful creation, by the first Republican reformers, of a solid image of São Paulo pedagogy. It does not seem to derive, exclusively, from training at the Normal School (which the writer does not detail), but from the creation of a normative and professional system, which established standards of didactic, programmatic, and evaluative procedures and, through different processes, engaged the professionals who became its defenders in the process of building a symbology coated with teaching practices. This dynamic of action contributed to "apaulistizing the didactics" of the subjects to be taught in primary schools. The second aspect informs about the short, but decisive, hegemony of the renovators in the administrative system. It was after retiring (or being out of reach of reprisals) that Ataliba de Oliveira gave free rein to a hitherto unsuspected critical and literary verve. His long career as a columnist testifies that political and administrative conditions had changed.

Taken together, read as a whole, Ataliba de Oliveira's texts constructed the interpretation that "the failure of the New School reform" (OLIVEIRA, 1939h, p. 5) occurred because its apologists did not know how to read the example of the past. On the one hand, many of them assured the interpreter, transited through the pedagogical world to get to know foreign literature, but without traveling too far, going "around the world around their room" (OLIVEIRA, 1939f, p. 5) through books and magazines. On the other hand, they also did not consider the data and situations of the São Paulo school reality, the conditions faced by teachers and students in the educational task. By acting in this way, understood Ataliba de Oliveira, after eight years of indoctrination by and by a new school, aiming to transform the school culture of São Paulo, there was a triumph of tradition, according to the maxim that, like old beliefs, school traditions do not they decimate easily.

Ataliba de Oliveira's criticisms suggest advancing a little further in the reflection on the subject studied so far. Despite having achieved official status in the São Paulo public education system, the new school did not take root in terms of generalization of practices or homogeneous coordination and organization. This can be perceived from two aspects: the administrative and the normative. Although its main apologists occupied the highest positions in the instructional normative hierarchy, the rotation imposed difficulties on the continuity of the orientations. Between 1851 and 1930 – almost eighty years –, the leadership of public education in São Paulo was supervised by 13 names; while, from October 1930 to April 1938 – less than eight years – no less than ten names passed through this position, including Ataliba Antonio de Oliveira. Putting this in technical terms, it can be seen that, during the first eight years of the 1930s, the primary school in São Paulo was balanced between renovating and conservative ideological impulses. As the chronicler knew (OLIVEIRA, 1941d, p. 5), "the influence of high departmental leadership in the adoption or refusal of new forms of pedagogical action in the camps of primary education in São Paulo is undeniable and decisive", because "every movement around a new form of school activity, it operates under the auspices of higher education management" (OLIVEIRA,

1941d, p. 5).

The volatile flows in the administrative leadership of the direction of education in São Paulo in the period caused normative turbulence and didactic-pedagogical orientation. Primary schooling coexisted with at least three different programs. In the name of didactic autonomy – obeying Lourenço Filho's 1930/1931 determination and, later, following the official guidelines of the 1933 Education Code – some of the teachers designed, organized, and followed their teaching programs. Others adopted the guidelines of the 1934 minimum program, endorsed by Francisco Azzi, then director of education. Still, others instructed São Paulo children through the 1925 program, even though it was classified as a program “armed under the cover of tradition” (AZEVEDO, 1926, p. 15); “camouflage of retrogression” (ESCOBAR, 1926, p. 75); “reflux to the past” (MENNUCCI, 1926, p. 110); “towards the past” (LOURENÇO FILHO, 1926, p. 131). The best sources of information about the pedagogical scene in São Paulo, in times of the New School, are not the criticisms of Ataliba de Oliveira, but the reports of inspectors, directors, and teaching delegates at the time (Cf. ANUÁRIO DO ENSINO, 1935–1936; 1936–1937)

Ataliba de Oliveira's announcements about the burial of the new school did not materialize either. In the dynamics of change, a new network of meanings was formed through the combination of renewing pedagogical vocabulary and the resilience of practices and programs present in schools, as watchwords are insufficient both to preserve the past and to modify the present. The combination of old and new educational objectives, between renewal and persistence of practices, acted against the intended pedagogical break in the 1930s, but in favor of reordering concepts (VALDEMARIN, 2010). Although the proponents of the new school simultaneously monopolized the meanings of the new and the modern and designated their opponents as traditional (CARVALHO, 2002), the chronicles and style of Ataliba de Oliveira made this intention difficult daily.

In his texts, a problem appears that haunted (haunting?) Brazilian education, regardless of doctrinal affiliation. When interpreting the pedagogical context of São Paulo, Ataliba de Oliveira assured that the reforming action of the New Schools resulted in “two unspeakable faults: it discredited the traditional school and diverted the attention of governments and the country's living forces from the greatest national problem, which is 'literacy of the Brazilian people'” (OLIVEIRA, 1939h, p. 5), a problem that successive generations of teachers and directors had to face.

## NOTE TO THE READER

Throughout this article, Ataliba de Oliveira's writings have been referenced according to the date of publication of each one, so that the reader can follow the evolution and connection of the author's interpretations.

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Author 1 - Project coordinator, document indication, supervision, and active participation in data analysis, writing, and review of the final writing.

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