



**Grupo Escolar de São Mateus through the lens of school inspectors:  
contradictions of a discourse (1908-1930)<sup>1</sup>**

O Grupo Escolar de São Mateus pelas lentes dos inspetores escolares:  
contradições de um discurso (1908-1930)

El Grupo Escolar de *São Mateus* desde el enfoque de los inspectores escolares:  
contradicciones de un discurso (1908-1930)

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**Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the constitution and operation process of Grupo Escolar de São Mateus through the lenses of school inspectors who worked in the northern region of the State of Espírito Santo from 1908 to 1930 by considering appropriations and contradictions that involved the implementation of school groups in that State. We used inspection and government reports and messages as sources under a microanalytical approach (GINZBURG, 2002; LEVI, 2020). Analyzing Grupo Escolar de São Mateus, we infer that the educational model in Brazil ran into local economic difficulties that interfered with the construction and maintenance of school groups. In the northern region, the schooling process occurred mainly from the creation of isolated schools. They operated precariously, indicating discontinuity and mismatches between the republican discourse and its local developments.

**Keywords:** Grupo Escolar de São Mateus; School inspectors; Espírito Santo.

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## Resumo

Este artigo objetiva compreender o processo de constituição e funcionamento do Grupo Escolar de São Mateus, pelas lentes dos inspetores escolares que atuavam na região norte do Espírito Santo, entre 1908 e 1930, considerando apropriações e contradições que envolveram a implementação de grupos escolares no Estado. A partir de uma abordagem microanalítica (GINZBURG, 2002; LEVI, 2020), toma como fontes relatórios de inspeção, mensagens e relatórios de governo. A análise do Grupo Escolar de São Mateus indica que, localmente, o modelo em circulação no Brasil esbarrava em dificuldades econômicas que interferiam na construção e manutenção de grupos escolares, de modo que, na região norte, o processo de escolarização ocorreu, principalmente, pela criação de escolas isoladas, que funcionavam precariamente, indicando descontinuidade e descompasso entre o discurso republicano e seus desdobramentos locais.

**Palavras-chave:** Grupo Escolar de São Mateus; Inspetores escolares; Espírito Santo.

## Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo comprender el proceso de constitución y funcionamiento del Grupo Escolar de *São Mateus*, a partir de la visión de los inspectores escolares que actuaron entre 1908 y 1930, en la región norte de *Espírito Santo*; considerando las apropiaciones y contradicciones que implicó la implementación de grupos escolares en el Estado. Desde un enfoque micro analítico (GINZBURG, 2002; LEVI, 2020), se adoptan fuentes como: relatos de inspección, mensajes e informes gubernamentales. El análisis del Grupo Escolar de *São Mateus* indica que, localmente, el modelo educativo en funcionamiento en Brasil tuvo dificultades económicas que interfirieron en la construcción y mantenimiento de los grupos escolares, por tanto, en la región norte, el proceso de escolarización se produjo principalmente a través de la creación de escuelas aisladas, que funcionaron de forma precaria, indicando discontinuidad e irregularidad entre el discurso republicano y sus avances locales.

**Palabras clave:** Grupo Escolar de *São Mateus*; Inspectores escolares; Espírito Santo.

## Introduction

School groups, representative institutions of a republican ideology in circulation in Brazil since the late 19th century, began to be implemented in the State of Espírito Santo from 1908<sup>2</sup> onward under the initiative of Jeronimo Monteiro, who governed the State at that time. Among various government modernizing actions, public education configured a “foundation of the announced social reform” (SIMÕES; SALIM, 2012, p. 95), postulating “access to schooling as a condition for progress” (p. 96).

The model to be followed came from the state of São Paulo, where the first initiatives that sought to overcome the system of chairs and isolated classes took place by implementing school groups based on models imported from Europe and the United States and associated with the modernization needs of the Brazilian society (NOVAES, 2020). São Paulo’s state capital constituted the radiating center of the new project in the wake of an ideal modern primary schooling that instituted new relationships between school subjects and knowledge. Primary education teacher Carlos Alberto Gomes Cardim came from São Paulo in July 1908 as a member of the missions to reorganize schooling, reform teaching, and implement school groups in Espírito Santo (SALIM, 2009; SIMÕES; SALIM, 2012; LOCATELLI, 2012; ALENCAR, 2016; NOVAES, 2020).

Cardim created the first school group in the State by Decree No. 166 of September 5, 1908. Named after the reformer, the institution should follow the same organization as Escola Modelo Jerônimo Monteiro, a space that had just been inaugurated as an annex to Escola Normal to model primary education according to the practical application of knowledge students acquired in that institution.<sup>3</sup> At that Escola Normal building, Grupo Escolar Gomes Cardim would also come provisionally into operation (INSTRUCÇÃO..., 1908).

In its eagerness to keep up with other Brazilian states (especially southeastern ones), this new educational enterprise began in Espírito Santo by creating school groups as model institutions, a process that was characterized “by improvisation, signaling the weakness and ambiguity of state government actions in the area of public instruction” (SIMÕES; SALIM, 2012, p. 99). Permeated with incongruities, this initiative would move very slowly along the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The implementation of these school institutions belonged to a process to expand primary education, especially in central and southern Espírito Santo. Novaes (2020) claims that this growth occurred much more in isolated schools due to financial and political difficulties historically faced by the State, which, as Vidal (2006) points out, went beyond it.

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<sup>2</sup> Vidal (2006, p. 3) points out that school groups in Brazil began to be implemented by “[...] laws from 1893 onward in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which were regulated and installed beginning in 1894 in the State of São Paulo. School Groups emerged over the first two republican decades in the states of Rio de Janeiro (1897); Maranhão and Paraná (1903); Minas Gerais (1906); Bahia (1908), Rio Grande do Norte, Espírito Santo, and Santa Catarina (1908); Mato Grosso (1910); Sergipe (1911); Paraíba (1916); and Piauí (1922); and were only extinguished in 1971 with the enactment of Law 5,692.”

<sup>3</sup> This space had the São Paulo Escolas Modelo as reference, which were created as a “[...] prototype for the organization of school groups” (SOUZA; FARIA FILHO, 2006, p. 20).

Its northern inland area faced difficulty of access and poor public investments toward implementing and maintaining educational institutions, pointing to the popular need to follow other paths<sup>4</sup> to offer education. Alencar (2016) points out that the acclaimed republican educational model had echoes in the region, though less intense than in other places. In this context, the building created in the municipality of São Mateus in 1913 to be a school group, was, for more than 10 years, the only institution in northern Espírito Santo that aimed to represent (at least in discursive terms) modern and republican schooling in those early years.

Although this region occupied a vast territory of Espírito Santo and had a privileged nature (abundant rivers, fertile soil, and hardwood) and a structure that enabled commercial and cultural exchanges with neighboring regions via its ports, it only had one building for the operation of a school group for many years. Moreover, government reports and other documents scarcely mention it and other schools in the region.

If we consider that school groups occupy a significant space in research on the history of Brazilian education since the 1990s (VIDAL, 2006; SOUZA; FARIA FILHO, 2006; SOUZA-CHALOPA, 2019), we must point out that the production on these school institutions in Espírito Santo remains timid. Regarding local research, we must question the low visibility of these institutions (and of other schools in the region, mostly isolated), which also relates to the difficulty of accessing sources about schools in Espírito Santo.<sup>5</sup>

Among the documents that bring us closer to these institutions, we find reports by inspectors who visited the urban and rural schools in many State regions. Using the reports on the schools in northern Espírito Santo as a lens, we seek to understand how the first facility specifically built to house a school group in the region was constituted and organized in the context of getexpansion of primary schooling in the State according to its relations with local schooling. We aim to “bring a magnifying glass closer” to this institution to become acquainted with its specificities and understand it as part of a complex “web of social relations” (REVEL, 2010).

Inspection reports<sup>6</sup> configure privileged sources as they contain inspectors’ impressions and evaluations of schools in Espírito Santo. Chosen out of the most competent individuals, the government designated these men to supervise schools, sometimes instrumentalize teachers within the current pedagogical propositions, and correct their practices and in-service training (BERTO, 2013; BERTO; SIMÕES, 2016).

As Faria Filho (2000) states about mining inspectors, these professionals were responsible for delivering detailed observations on the educational reality to the government. According to the regulation in force in Espírito Santo, they were “immediate assistants of the Secretary of Education, in charge of inspecting and supervising primary education and performing any services related to that education in accordance with the school organization requirements” (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1924a, p. 14).

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<sup>4</sup> Among the sources in Biblioteca de São Mateus, we highlight petitions to create schools that were addressed to the local Chamber and the existence of schools unlisted as education institutions in the State (ALENCAR, 2016). This may indicate that the people in the region sought to mobilize children’s access to education.

<sup>5</sup> Locatelli (2012) pointed to the general lack of documents on the creation of school groups and especially on Grupo Escolar de São Mateus. Alencar (2016) corroborates this lack of documents, which remains an issue.

<sup>6</sup> The reports available for search are sparse and diverse. They contain clues about other reports, which are absent in the searched collections and impossible to locate. The reports that refer to the municipality of São Mateus were produced in 1922, 1927, 1928, 1929, and 1930 by Archimimo Gonçalves Ferreira, Claudionor Ribeiro, Flavio de Moraes, Olavo Rego, and Francisco Generoso da Fonseca, respectively.

We compared these inspection reports with government messages and Education secretaries' reports as they dealt with the structural, material, and human conditions of schools in a region. They offer a particular perspective of the men who acted as the eyes and ears of the government in the farthest corners of the state, thus constituting documents that must be understood in their production context (GINZBURG, 2002) in a reading contrary to the intentions of those who produced them.

Understanding history as “a science of general questions and ‘local’ answers” (LEVI, 2020, p. 20), our examination of these sources focus on the space that Grupo Escolar de São Mateus (later called Grupo Escolar Amâncio Pereira) occupied in the reports of inspectors who visited it from 1922 to 1930 to identify possible relations between these professionals' impressions about the institution and the republican discourses common in government advertisements, which involved investing in school groups as exemplary institutions to educate children.

### **Grupo Escolar de São Mateus in the set of educational policies: Espírito Santo between intention and reality**

Generally speaking, facilities intended to function as school groups were designed to be sumptuous, well-located, and built under health and hygiene precepts. They should include proper equipment and a faculty prepared to act according to current methods. As Schueler and Magaldi (2009) state, the model propagated throughout the country and implemented in several Brazilian cities took urban and modern schools housed in facilities built specifically for them as a parameter that should consist of:

A monumental and edifying architecture that placed the primary school at the height of its political and social purposes and served to propagate the republican regime, its signs, and rites. [...] In addition to the majesty of the school buildings, the administrative and didactic-pedagogical organization of these educational establishments was considered by reformers as superior to that of the unitary (isolated) schools, giving them public visibility and social prestige (SCHUELER; MAGALDI, 2009, p. 43-44).

This ideal spread across several Brazilian states following São Paulo, becoming (as the governmental messages of Jeronymo Monteiro indicate) known and desired in Espírito Santo, so that “No subject other than this should deserve the zeal of republican governments” (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1913, p. 7). Monteiro said he was committed to modernize the State in various instances but the conditions for erecting modern school institutions (as the case of school groups) proved insufficient. Thus, much of his intentions remained in the scope of his discourse and of subsequent governments.

The project of initial Reformulation of Education in Espírito Santo during Jeronymo Monteiro's government (which involved hiring educator Carlos Alberto Gomes Cardim from São Paulo) provided for modernization works and the construction of schools “In the cities of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim, São Matheus, and Santa Leopoldina [in which were projected] spacious, hygienic, and comfortable facilities to install School Groups in these cities” (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1913, p. 443).

In the following year, the government report again claimed having “[...] built in the city [of São Mateus in northern Espírito Santo] a building for the School Group where there used to operate isolated schools. It is, however, devoid of furniture, sanitary facilities, and water” (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1913, p. 48). This indicates that, despite the use conditions of the facility and the attempts to relate it to the republican ideology, northern Espírito Santo still had an idea of a school group, “indeed at the price of becoming something else” (REVEL, 2010, p.442).

Analyzing the architecture of school groups in Espírito Santo, Locatelli (2012) found that the surveyed sources indicated only two school institutions thus called in the state in 1920: one in the capital, Vitória, and another in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim, a prosperous southern municipality. What had happened to the planned “spacious, hygienic, and comfortable” school group buildings?

The documentation shows the existence of an idea of a school group that fails to materialize as expected, and of schools that suffered from a lack of resources and government negligence in the following years. Given the meager economic conditions of the State, the space these school institutions occupy in the sources — either as an announcement of an intention or as mere propaganda — indicates that the São Paulo school group model seemed distant from local possibilities and interests.

These sources show that Jeronymo Monteiro’s government indeed organized a first adapted school group in 1908 in downtown Vitória (the state capital) and built three other facilities from 1911 onward intended to serve as school groups. One was in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim, in the south, one in Santa Leopoldina, in the central region; and one in São Mateus in the north. Although these institutions received the designation of school groups and the aim of representing an idea of a republican school as São Paulo, they gained distinctive features and representativeness in each locality, becoming more or less visible, or more or less worthy of attention by subsequent governments.

For example, Grupo Escolar Gomes Cardim (which had been *impromptu* organized together with Escola Normal in 1908) was transferred to a remodeled building the following year to somehow meet the pedagogical determinations required of a school (SIMÕES; SALIM, 2012). The facilities in São Mateus and Santa Leopoldina received the denomination of school group but initially functioned as spaces to house local isolated schools, as President Marcondes de Souza’s (Monteiro’s successor) government message informs us, justifying his decision by the scarce number of students:

Facilities were built for school groups in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim, Santa Leopoldina, and São Matheus, but only that in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim currently functions regularly. **Isolated schools operate in the Santa Leopoldina and São Matheus facilities due to the insufficient number of students in these cities to install school groups.** I hope I will soon be able to install them as the frequency of students in the schools of these cities grows daily (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1913, p. 27, emphasis added).

The government also specifically reported the São Mateus facility as “devoid of furniture, sanitary facilities, and water” (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1913, p. 48), as was the case with Santa Leopoldina. Therefore, the issue also involved resource scarcity. On the insufficient number of students, Alencar (2016) indicates the opposite: a large number of invisible children placed on the margins of the schooling process.

Thus, we claim that, of the facilities whose construction began during Jeronymo Monteiro's government, only Grupo Escolar Bernardino Monteiro in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim was built at that time following the eclectic architectural model and with the specific purpose of functioning as a school group in compliance with hygiene and location requirements (LOCATELLI, 2012; LIMA, 2013). The State President said that the recently inaugurated "Grupo Escolar 'Bernardino Monteiro' was a first-order establishment fully fulfilling its end" (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1913, p. 60).

The president also points out that the region had a rich soil, varied agricultural production, and the best road in the state. Along with its economic and structural potentialities, they counted on the proximity to Rio de Janeiro and the cultural and intellectual effervescence in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (LIMA, 2013, p. 62). The municipality was also open to Republican ideas.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of the reasons why the surviving school groups were in the most prosperous cities, we should state that the Cachoeiro de Itapemirim and Vitória school groups were, for some time, the only ones functioning with any regularity within the initial plans in subsequent years. Lima (2013) claims that these cities constituted the center of governmental attention, which involved the modernization Jeronymo Monteiro had projected and begun.

Bernardino Monteiro's 1916 Message only list these two facilities as school groups. Government reports contain long silences on the matter. The São Mateus school is only mentioned again as a school group in these sources in 1924 as if by a lapse, indicating its complete future reconstruction. However, the institution loses its position as a school group two years later. The governmental message would call them Escolas Reunidas de São Matheus, as in State President Florentino Avidos' pronouncement:

The schools of Veado, Castello, Collatina, São Matheus, and Santa Leopoldina are gathered in buildings specially built by the Government for this purpose. Those in Mimoso await their own facility, which is in the process of completion. [...] Regularly functioning are the 'Gomes Cardim' school groups in Victoria; 'Bernardino Monteiro' in Cachoeiro de Itapemirim; and 'Marcondes de Souza,' installed in Muquy in July 1925 (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1926, p.23).

Considering the discourse and advertisements around a modern and republican school from Cardim's 1908 initiatives onward, these government messages indicate that Espírito Santo had, more than a decade later, only three school groups functioning within (or close) to what was expected for such a school. This suggests that understanding the Grupo Escolar de São Mateus constitution and functioning process also means questioning the ways in which the discourses around school groups were appropriated locally, especially in view of the economic moment the State was experiencing and the contradictions around the attempts to implement it in these regions.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Locatelli (2012, p. 104), the first republican club of Espírito Santo had been created in this city at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "[...] The city was the axis of democratic politics in the state in the period. In it was located the headquarters of the club, its permanent commission, and a significant party newspaper, O cachoeirano, which widely collaborated with the new regime propaganda."

## Grupo Escolar de São Mateus through the lens of school inspectors

After building the facility for Grupo Escolar de São Mateus in 1913, government efforts began to move toward keeping it standing, rather than bringing it closer to the idealized image of school groups and São Paulo references. This effort involved reforms and reconstructions throughout its first years, as Bernardino Monteiro would state (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1917, p. 63):

During school holidays, cleaning and repairs were carried out on several isolated school buildings. [...] Among these works, the most expensive was the fixing and repair of the building of schools in the city of S. Matheus. This very facility, built in 1911, was in a very bad state, threatening to collapse. [...] To avoid damage to the State, in addition to what resulted from the non-conservation of the building for more than 5 years, the government was forced to spend the sum of 18:000\$000 on the carried-out works, saving a building that cost the State no small quantity of funds from ruin.

Later, Nestor Gomes would state that “The São Matheus school building was, so to speak, built all over again, so terrible were the conditions of what remained, despite having been fixed some two or three years ago” (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1921, p. 23). At the end of his mandate, the president stated again that the building underwent a “complete reconstruction” (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1924b, p. 102). Thus, despite featuring in government speeches and propaganda as the only public educational institution in northern Espírito Santo that came close to the current ideology, the frequent needs for reform indicate other meanings for this institution.

Our first observation concerns the location and structural configuration of that school. School groups should generally occupy the central points of cities, near squares and gardens. Its architecture should express sumptuousness and aesthetic visibility and its hygienic design should foster a modern and orderly teaching that could prepare subjects for the world of urban work. Thus, school groups belonged to a project to modernize society and integrate urban reordering, marking the implementation of a republican ideology and establishing new elements for a school culture that could dialogue with the social environment and the spaces and times of the city and prepare citizens of the future. In ideal terms, these institutions should dialogue

with urban culture, creating and/or appropriating representations about the social as a whole from its specific place in the city. The culture of a school was literally and symbolically located in the center, aiming to influence the ‘constituted powers’ and, in this movement, to constitute itself as a power of influence over ‘others,’ i.e., those in the periphery (FARIA FILHO, 1998, p.146).

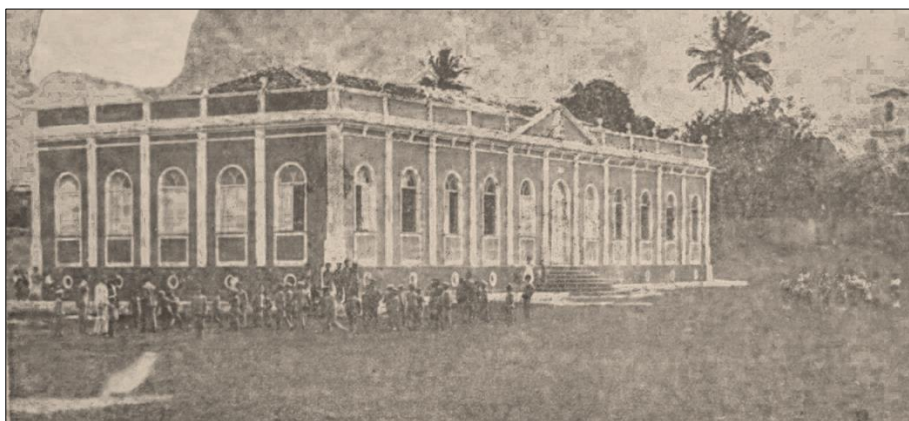
The building destined for Grupo Escolar de São Mateus seemed to go against this reference. Of the searched inspection reports, the first to better detail an analysis of this institution dates to 1922. Produced by inspector Archimimo Gonçalves Ferreira, his records describe the unfavorable conditions in which the facility was built:



This building had an unhappy construction as Your Excellency may well be aware. As it was built on low ground, it is always subject to fixes and repairs as the current one, even though it has been through major renovations recently; there are leaks and a lack of water in the sanitary premises, whose drawbacks are easy to calculate because leaks spoil the walls and hygiene suffers from the lack of water. It is true that I prohibited the use of its toilets, but it will be easy to circumvent this order given the lack of keys for their respective doors (FERREIRA, 1922, p.1).

If we think that the main buildings of that city were installed on higher ground, the “low ground” to which the inspector refers would be the equivalent of a disadvantaged area, far from downtown São Mateus, in an unprivileged location with sanitary problems. A 1924 photograph (Figure 1) indicates a location in the city unlike that planned for such schools: far from the main square that housed the Catholic church (whose tower can be seen in the image) and the city hall.

**Figure 1** – Grupo Escolar de São Mateus Building.



**Source:** Pimentel (1924).

Still on the dialogues between school buildings, social life, and the city, we must state that São Mateus was an inner peripheral region, with strong *coronelism* and enslavement marks, economically moved by production and trade of coffee, wood, and cassava flour. Preparing subjects for the world of urban work meant betting on a future that still seemed distant. Thus, the construction of a school group in the intended framework might have made little sense in a context with new isolated schools (ALENCAR, 2016).

Problems surrounding proper functioning of the São Mateus school included a complaint of a cleaner’s low salary. The inspector asked the government to increase it by 50% so he could demand a little more attention from this worker. After various repairs up to 1921 and the remaining complaints in the 1922 reports, in 1927 (during Florentino Avidos’ government), Claudionor Ribeiro’s inspection report shows the only positive impression of the building<sup>8</sup> despite the need for repairs:

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<sup>8</sup> Between 1921 and 1927, government messages report no new interventions in the building structure. The 1924 Secretary of Education Mirabeau da Rocha Pimentel’s report only contains one photograph (Figure 1).

The city of São Matheus has a beautiful, well-installed school building located to meet the requirements of modern pedagogy. It has seven large well-ventilated and sanitized halls. It is only in need of slight repairs (RIBEIRO, 1927, p. 2, 3).

Ribeiro's (1927) general analysis points out that teaching in São Matheus failed to serve all children. As a significant part of them were still illiterate, building other schools configured a necessity. The schools operating in the building intended for Grupo Escolar Ribeiro (1927) were called isolated schools. They were governed by primary education teachers and organized into two isolated girls' schools and two isolated boys' schools. A fifth unnamed school lacked a teacher. Together, they totaled 186 enrolled students, which led the inspector to request the transformation of this set of isolated schools into gathered schools within the new didactic organizations. A year later, the school appears in Flávio de Moraes' reports as Escolas Reunidas Amancio Pereira. His impressions of the structure of the school are completely different:

The Escolas Reunidas Amancio Pereira building in the city of S. Matheus has rotten bracings, not offering, therefore, the roof any security. This was the reason that led me to suspend classes in that city and then rent houses to which I transferred the schools [...] (MORAES, 1928, p. 7).

The problems of the São Mateus main school reflected the yearslong abandonment of local schools. The inspector's report shows the ills of education in northern Espírito Santo, emphasizing the hygiene issues of local schools and their consequences for students and teachers' health and indicating it as a widespread problem exceeding the conditions of school buildings:

Heartbreaking were my impressions when visiting certain schools in the municipalities of S. Matheus and Conceição da Barra regarding school hygiene. It is an area, except for a few places, whose sanitary conditions are very poor. [...] Malaria rages horribly there and poor children suffer their consequences immensely. Sanitation of the entire northern region is very difficult and expensive for the government, but it should be implemented not only to alleviate the suffering of those who inhabit those plagues, but also to facilitate immigration, which does not take place due to its appalling sanitary conditions. It remains an almost uninhabited area whose fertile lands, still without agriculture, are covered with virgin forests and huge meadows and watered by numerous rivers and streams (MORAES, 1928, p. 5).

This concern had long deserved government attention. It occupied a significant space in Secretary of Education Mirabeau Pimentel's 1921 report as he stressed the urgency of organizing a medical-school inspection in schools throughout the State since "Hygienists, doctors, pedagogues, and artists, in a communion of intelligent views in civilized countries, seek to safeguard the destinies of the youth, guarantee the health of students, and provide them with examples and habits of hygiene they can apply to family life" (PIMENTEL, 1921, p. 38). The secretary continued to register such conditions up to 1924 but we find no news of the effective delivery of this service in the schools in the period, especially in inner Espírito Santo.

Specifically on the São Mateus school building, school inspectors' varying impressions in such a brief time indicate its current condition. Ribeiro (1927) describes the building as a facility that met the requirements of modern pedagogy (excelling in hygiene and health), whereas Moraes (1928) finds it unusable for classes and under a new remodeling. According to another inspector, the building still had serious sanitary problems two years later:

An irregularity that unfortunately I could not and will not be able to prevent is the exit of students at the time of recess, and, consequently, also that of teachers; the private schools in the group do not work, making it indispensable to let students go to their homes during recess (FONSECA, 1930, p. 1).

References to facility problems appear in the sources even after the building was officially named Grupo Escolar Amâncio Pereira in 1931. However, this issue, as we said, went beyond Grupo Escolar de São Mateus or the schools in Espírito Santo. Souza and Faria Filho (2006, p. 29) claim that

The quality of school buildings – beauty, grandeur, and exuberance –, a relevant landmark of public investment in education, did not predominate in all regions of the country and not even in the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. With the exception of a few buildings that were considered true 'palaces,' modest buildings had few internal differences beyond classrooms. The precariousness and insufficiency of the buildings is also registered, a problem accentuated in primary education throughout the country.

In dialogue with the conditions and sanitary problems of school buildings, we find other complex issues involving the relation between republican discourses and the conditions of the São Mateus institution, namely, the materials that constituted the space, teaching conditions, and employed teachers. The materials and furniture that were (or should be) distributed among school groups belonged to the process of implementing a new logic involving the didactic-pedagogical organization of schools and the constitution of a more productive and efficient teaching with more attractive classes (SOUZA; FARIA FILHO, 2006).

From Secretary of Education Mirabeau da Rocha Pimentel's 1921, 1922, and 1924 reports, Alencar (2016) indicates the type and quantity of materials and furniture in each year in the São Mateus school and the teachers and their training:

**Chart 1** - List of teachers and materials at the Amâncio Pereira Schools in 1921, 1922, and 1924.

Teacher in 1921	Furniture in 1921	Teacher in 1922	Furniture in 1922	Teacher in 1924	Furniture in 1924
Agenor de Souza Lé (Teacher)	18 chairs, 1 Parker's chart, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 school bell, 1 flag, 1 counter, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 metric system map, 1 Map of the Americas, 1 teacher's table	Agenor de Souza Lé (Teacher)	1 counter, 1 table, 1 flag, 1 school bell, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 Map of the Americas, 1 Map of E. Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 25 old chairs	Agenor de Souza Lé (Teacher)	1 guestbook, 1 student attendance book, 1 student enrollment book, 1 counter, 1 clay water filter, 1 table, 1 chair, 1 flag, 1 school bell, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 Map of the Americas, 1 Map of E. Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 24 old chairs
Aflordisio C. da Silva (Teacher)	17 chairs, 1 Parker's chart, 1 counter, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 map of the Americas, 1 metric system map, 1 chalkboard, 1 school bell, 1 flag, 1 table	Aflordisio C. da Silva (Teacher)	1 guestbook, 1 student enrollment book, 1 counter, 1 table, 1 flag, 1 School bell, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 2 Maps of the Americas, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 15 old chairs	Aflordisio C. da Silva (Teacher)	1 guestbook, 1 student attendance book, 1 enrollment book, 1 clay water filter, 1 counter, 1 table, 1 chair, 1 flag, 1 School bell, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 Map of the Americas, 1 Map of E. Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 9 old chairs
Carmelina Rios (Teacher)	12 student chairs, 1 Parker's chart, 1 counter, 1 chair, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 map of the Americas, 1 metric system map, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 flag	Carmelina Rios (Teacher)	1 student attendance book, 1 student enrollment book, 1 counter, 1 flag, 1 school bell, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 Map of the Americas, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 7 old chairs, 8 American student chairs	Carmelina Rios (Teacher)	1 guestbook, 1 student attendance book, 1 student enrollment book, 1 counter, 1 table, 1 chair, 1 flag, 1 school bell, 2 chalkboards, 1 clock, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 11 old chairs, 15 American student chairs
Euridice R. Rodrigues (Teacher)	12 chairs, 1 Parker's chart, 1 counter, 1 chair, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 map of the Americas, 1 metric system map, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 flag, 1 table	Ubalдина Santo Amaro	1 student attendance book, 1 table, 1 chair, 1 flag, 1 school bell, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 Map of the Americas, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 9 old chairs, 6 American student chairs	Vaga	1 guestbook, 1 student attendance book, 1 student enrollment book, 1 counter, 1 table, 1 flag, 1 school bell, 1 chalkboard, 1 clock, 1 Map of the Americas, 1 Map of Espírito Santo, 1 Map of Brazil, 1 metric system map, 1 Parker's chart, 14 American student chairs

Source: Alencar (2016).

This information shows that the São Mateus school was equipped with a necessary minimum of materials that were deemed modern, such as clocks, flags, maps, and Parker's charts.<sup>9</sup> Note also the reference to American chairs, as per Alcantara (2014, p. 271), as a model more widely adopted in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro schools since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century under the guidance of a medical knowledge that proposed "[...] an ergonomic model that would avoid the diseases resulting from students' poor posture and compromising their development." However, the author points out that the adoption of imported chairs required great government investment, which seemed impossible in Espírito Santo, thus rendering the indicated number as insufficient.

The variety of existing materials also fell short of what was required for school groups. Each year, the number of materials changed and objects that previously made up the list ceased to exist. We find, for example, the absence of cabinets among furniture items. Building renovations and reconstructions continued to be carried out frequently, which may have caused the poor conditioning of materials, which deteriorated rapidly. In the Secretary of Education's reports, complaints and requests for more purchases appear often in the first half of the 1920s:

In the list of purchases of this Secretariat, which I present above, Your Excellency will see how I have sought to meet the needs of the schools of the State and will also be assured that there is still much to be done to accommodate them conveniently. [...] I must add that, as I took over the direction of the public education of the State, more than a hundred schools were completely devoid of everything, and those that had something, had it in their third part or half. In Your Excellency's government, the number of schools was increased by about a hundred. This means that two hundred schools do not have the necessary materials (PIMENTEL, 1922, p. 49).

The Teaching Regulations published by the Secretariat of Education during Florentino Avidos' government (which lasted for the following decade in Espírito Santo), officially provided for the material for the collective use of schools to consist of benches and desks; tables and chairs; cabinets for class workbooks and objects; canvases or chalkboards; spheres and geographical maps; maps and collections of weights and measurement systems; mural maps to teach reading and lessons; collections of geometric solids and models for drawing; wall clocks and clay water filters; mechanical counters for teaching arithmetic; Parker's charts; sand trays for teaching geography, as well as school record items (ESPIRITO SANTO, 1924a). However, in subsequent years, school inspectors' reports indicated a lack of materials in all schools in the São Mateus region. Inspector Flávio de Moraes (1928, p. 8-9) would claim that:

In all schools I have inspected, I found a lack of materials, which has somewhat slowed down the progress of educational work. Teaching takes place with great difficulty as some schools have no maps to teach Geography or History of Brazil; in others one finds an absence of charts to teach arithmetic, of solids to teach geometry; and some have no charts for language and intuitive teaching. [...] Schools must be provided with the material they need because, without them, one lies under many demands in supervising education.

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<sup>9</sup> According to Valente (2008, p. 4), Parker's letters consisted of a "[...] set of pictures whose purpose was to help the teacher to methodically conduct education of, above all, the four fundamental operations. [...] an [intuitive] teaching of Arithmetic."

Francisco Generoso da Fonseca's (1930) report also registered the materials of Grupo Escolar de São Mateus. His visit included the "noble mission" of propagating the ideals of an active school. He asserts that, despite the increase in student attendance, "the very scarce materials existing here" (FONSECA, 1930, p. 1) would forbid duplication. In a later excerpt, we have another indication of the incompatibility between demands and material availability:

I ask Your Excellency to provide for the material that is largely missing from Grupo Escolar Amancio Pereira [...]. We have neither cups nor a flag in good condition, and the chalk itself has been bought by the teachers. Fortunately, I had the foresight to bring certain indispensable materials with me (FONSECA, 1930, p. 3).

An initiative that seemed a way to fill this gap involved creating school funds. Flavio de Moraes (1928) offers the first record of such an initiative in São Mateus, indicating that he had founded:

on March 20, in S. Matheus, a school box that [...] received the name of the illustrious mathematician Dr. Constante Sodré. I got from the Local Mayor a monthly aid of (50\$000) fifty thousand réis for the fund. The number of members is already very high, and it is to be hoped that the people of Mato Grosso do not let this philanthropic institution wither given the spirit of charity that is noted in all the inhabitants of that exquisite city. The results of the mentioned association have already been felt, because several children have received books, shoes, pens, clothes, etc. (MORAES, 1928, p. 7-8).

The need to create a school fund reinforces Alencar's (2016, p. 105) argument that "a minority concentrated power and regional wealth in São Mateus, living with large contingents of the poor and disadvantaged, among whom were children who lacked everything, from clothes and shoes to books and pens that would give them access to schools." Fonseca's report (1930, p. 2) two years later pointed to the need of reorganizing school funding, "[...] which is completely scorned and disordered."

Between 1928 and 1930, Aristeu Borges de Aguiar ruled the State. Attilio Vivacqua headed its Education chair. He was responsible for the school reform carried out during this period. Even in the face of the expansion of the modernization discourse (especially via teacher training), the demands that came from school facilities remained difficult to solve since the State faced serious economic problems after the 1929 crisis.<sup>10</sup> The secretary had to admit that the schools at that time offered, in fact, "[...] few resources to make children [find] activity table sets, objects of interest that would incite them to work" (VIVACQUA, 1929, p. 87). Despite this reality, he justified that as

The school building could not constitute a basic preoccupation of the reform, which is, in its essence, a plan of didactic transformation, whose guarantee of realization depends fundamentally on training teachers to understand and put it into practice. The old, small, and poor houses of the traditional school, as long as they penetrate the new, fruitful, and radiant spirit of dynamic pedagogy, will no longer have the Great Wall of China among their walls separating them from the life of society (VIVACQUA, 1930, p. 25).

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wanick (2009).

Grupo Escolar de São Mateus, rather than a “small house of the traditional school,” occupied a facility that had been built to be “spacious, hygienic, and comfortable,” following the idea of school groups in circulation at the time. But if change depended on training teachers, in the absence of training programs that served all teachers in the state, this mission would also fall to school inspectors.

### “Teacher’s teachers:” the role of school inspectors in the in-service training of teachers in São Mateus

In 1924, Mirabeau Pimentel asked the government for changes in the body of school inspectors, considered insufficient to meet the state schools, which led to an “imperfect” inspection and non-fulfillment of their functions. Inspectors had insufficient time to properly visit all schools. Thus, they had to rush their work. Pimentel (1924, p.22-23, emphasis added), demanded

a modification in the body of inspectors. It is necessary to augment it and endow it with legitimate professions. The position of inspector requires special competence requirements, nor can any individual be regularly shown to be able to perform well the office of a school inspector. **The inspector must often be the teacher’s teacher.** How can one achieve this when one has insufficient pedagogical competence? As long as we lack a group of inspectors who are familiar with school subjects, know something about methodology and have regular teaching practice, school supervision will not represent a reality among us.

Inspectors were expected to act as teacher trainers, especially if training programs were unable to include all employed teachers (since many of them had lacked even basic training and worked under a provisional regime).

This role became more important with the 1928 New School Reform, after the initiative of Secretary of Education Attílio Vivacqua. Focusing on training state teachers, the first crucial step of the reform was creating a Higher Course of Pedagogical Culture (CSCP) to train a selected group of teachers from Espírito Santo within the new methods (BERTO; SIMÕES, 2016). The curriculum of the course provided, in its section destined to Technical and Social Questions, specific topics about the work of school inspectors: “The school inspectorate – Its social claiming function – The school inspector as a technical element coordinating the great guidelines of teaching” (VIVACQUA, 1930, p. 11). Course participants<sup>11</sup> included Francisco Generoso da Fonseca, who visited Grupo Escolar de São Mateus in 1930, where he would put the knowledge he received into practice.

The active school, by which the New School would enter Espírito Santo state, would be organized, according to Vivacqua (1930), in transitory and integral types, promoting the implementation and circulation of elements, such as radio and cinema, a newspaper of fortnightly circulation called *Resumo Escolar*, itinerant libraries, parent and teacher meetings, Scouting, among others, which would act as elements of pedagogical innovation (VIVACQUA, 1929).

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<sup>11</sup> Of the 36 teachers, school principals, and inspectors who participated in the course, the following were or acted as school inspectors: Claudionor Ribeiro, Mario Ribeiro dos Santos, João Ribas Costa, Alfredo Lemos, Sezefredo Garcia de Rezende, Sylvio Rocyo, and Francisco Generoso da Fonseca (BERTO, 2013).

Visiting Grupo Escolar de São Mateus in October of that year, Fonseca (1930, p. 1) began his report by saying he had had a “rather unpleasant impression.” He reports the increase in the number of enrollments and reinforces the complaints in previous reports about “very scarce materials” and the non-functioning of private schools. The report also describes the minutiae of the role of the school inspector as an organizer of school activities responsible for training the teachers working in schools farther from the capital.

Having attended CSCP, Fonseca fulfilled the role of propagator of good news as he was responsible for implementing the “great teaching guidelines” in force. For this, he indicates having held parties and public class demonstrations with the support of the teachers at the school group:

On October 5th, Sunday, I intend to hold another party, which I have been preparing for several days and which will obey the following program:  
I-- Public demonstration of active classes, in which the following should be taught:

- (a) Arithmetic: surface measurements: Inp. Franc. Generoso.
  - (b) Manual Activities: Professor Ubaldina Tatagiba.
  - (c) Natural History: flowers, fruit, seed: Professor Maria Candida Senna.
  - (d) Arithmetic: unit, quantity, eye evaluations. Professor Ubaldina Santo Amaro.
  - (e) Geography: geographical accidents: Professor D. Carmelina Rios.
  - (f) Geometry: circumference, circle. Professor Ascelina Assis Cunha
- After the active classes, the S. Matheus circle of Parents and Teachers will and the already founded Caixa Escolar Constante Sodré will be reorganized, which is completely ignored and disordered.

In the evening, according to what I have agreed with the teachers, a festival will be held in the halls of the group for the benefit of the aforementioned Caixa Escolar. The party has aroused great interest (FONSECA, 1930, p. 1-2).

The activities he proposed followed the guidelines of the course he attended in 1929: teacher training was based on experimentation and public class demonstrations involving themes and elements of daily life. Moreover, the “primacy of visibility” was at the heart of a school that pretended to be republican, as Carvalho points out (2003, p. 24):

To make see, the school had to make itself seen. Hence the necessarily majestic, spacious, and illuminated buildings, in which everything was on permanent display. Furniture, didactic material, performed student and teaching activities – everything had to be seen so that the conformation of the school to the precepts of modern pedagogy evidenced the Progress the Republic established.

If the building intended for that school group was not so majestic and well located, visibility was given by other means, especially by the public demonstration of its practices, including teachers who worked in rural schools in the region. Fonseca (1930) claimed he had invited teachers who worked there to attend the demonstrations, for which he requested some passages from the government, justifying it by: “The profit that comes from these classes must be greater, without a doubt, than such a small expense” (FONSECA, 1930, p. 2).



Its role as a multiplier of the New School ideology, as provided for by the government, was being fulfilled. However, against modern precepts, Fonseca (1930) found that a lack of materials had already constituted a historical mark of that school, indicating the commitment of the teachers who worked in Grupo Escolar de São Mateus, who even bought chalk at their own expense. But lack of materials and conditions of school buildings went beyond St. Matheus at that time. By analyzing the reports of school inspectors that circulated throughout the state, Berto (2013) indicates that the precariousness of schools is the main complaint of these professionals in Espírito Santo.

Moreover, the São Mateus inspection reports suggest that the echoes of the educational reform that had begun in 1928 reached that place with more elements in 1930 via Fonseca (1930). The inspector stated: “In successive lectures I have explained the new and efficient methods of the Active School and I must confess I have met teachers’ greatest interest and goodwill” (FONSECA, 1930, p.1).

In an attempt to inform the Secretary of Education about the work in São Mateus, Fonseca (1930, p. 2) denounced the difficulties teachers experienced, indicating that “[...] teachers, with the greatest dedication and good will, have been constantly helping me to the point of obtaining at their expense the materials I had asked for these classes.”

As direct employees of the Department of Education, aiming to report about public education in the various regions of the State, inspectors faced the difficulties teachers experienced and the obstacles regarding travelling and access to schools in northern Espírito Santo. They also faced the imminent possibility of contracting diseases for which both medical treatment and medicines were scarce, which may have decreased the interest in inspecting schools in that region.<sup>12</sup>

## Final considerations

The educational discourse in circulation in the period we addressed announced school groups as institutions capable of preparing children for the world of work that was constituted by the process of industrialization, imbuing them with the necessary notions of time, health, hygiene, and discipline. This type of school was supposed to prepare future citizens for the society that projected itself as republican. In this climate of renewal, Espírito Santo government leaders tried to reproduce the republican educational experience in the State, even hiring renowned educators from São Paulo, who worked promoting educational reforms in other Brazilian states, to spearhead the transformation of education in Espírito Santo.

However, the intended local model ran into great economic difficulties that prevented the construction of a school group in each city. Northern Espírito Santo lacked enough isolated schools that could be grouped together, as in several regions in which school groups were created. The process of schooling in that region moved slowly, with the creation of isolated schools that, in many cases, remained devoid of teachers for a long time. This disproportionality shows both a significant discontinuity in the process of expansion of education in northern Espírito Santo during the First Brazilian Republic and a mismatch between the republican discourse and its actual developments.

São Mateus was a municipality that, despite its port and a large population, failed to constitute an urbanized space. A large part of its population consisted of Indigenous survivors of numerous massacres, by *quilombo* Black individuals who traded cassava flour or were sponsored by their former masters, and European settlers subjected to situations

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<sup>12</sup> In his 1928 report, Archimimo states that he was unable to complete his excursion to the fifth zone and inspect the schools in São Mateus and Conceição da Barra as he had contracted, between Santa Cruz and Riacho, fevers that altered his health.

analogous to slavery by local farmers (ALENCAR, 2016). These groups seemed to constitute unsuitable candidates for a Republican education. Thus, government or local powers made little effort toward this.

This leads us to question the real conditions of local appropriation of the discourses that proposed a republican education. The Grupo Escolar de São Mateus facility had been built to be “spacious, hygienic, and comfortable” as presupposed by the idea of a school group in circulation. However, considering the setbacks that permeated its constitution process, the discontinuities of its functioning, and the choice of places for its construction, we conjecture that the objective of transmitting an image of sumptuousness, dignity, hygiene, and comfort with this construction failed to achieve its objectives.

Faced with these issues, bringing the magnifying glass closer to Grupo Escolar de São Mateus means bringing to the scene a school and a region of Espírito Santo that seem to have historically suffered with the slow and precarious expansion of schooling (which, as we said, went beyond Espírito Santo). Thus, the operating conditions school inspectors reported help us to understand broader issues about schooling in Espírito Santo and Brazil. Therefore, it suggests us the continuities and discontinuities involving public schools of Espírito Santo and Brazil, many of which still function in precarious conditions and spaces. It also returns to questions about teacher training and the valorization of teachers who, historically, have been put on the background by governments and continue, in many cases, to invest their own resources in their practices.

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