



**Literacy school culture: influence of teaching reforms in the  
Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves (1909-1938)<sup>1</sup>**

Cultura escolar de alfabetização: influência das reformas do ensino no  
Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves (1909-1938)

Cultura escolar de alfabetización: influencia de las reformas docentes en el  
Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves (1909-1938)

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**Abstract**

The research discusses the school culture of literacy and the processes of organization of primary public education and has as its locus the Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves. It is historiographical, it is located in the field of Cultural History, having as object of study the processes of organization of primary education. The aim is to discuss the school culture of literacy in Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves, in order to understand the different issues, problems and contradictions that were present in the literacy process in the first decades of the twentieth century. The question is: What did the questions, problems and contradictions constitute the school culture of literacy in the Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves in the first decades of its operation? It was possible to verify the influence exerted by the João Pinheiro (1906) and Francisco Campos (1927) Reforms in the constitution and organization of primary education in Minas Gerais, and the global method now composes the school culture of the Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves.

**Keywords:** History of Education; Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves; Literacy.

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## Resumo

A pesquisa discute a cultura escolar de alfabetização e os processos de organização da instrução pública primária e tem como lócus o Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves. É historiográfica, situa-se no campo da História Cultural, tendo por objeto de estudo os processos de organização da instrução primária. O objetivo é discutir a cultura escolar de alfabetização no Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves, de modo a compreender as diferentes questões, problemas e contradições que se fizeram presentes no processo de alfabetizar, nas primeiras décadas do século XX. Como problema questiona-se: Quais questões, problemas e contradições constituíram a cultura escolar de alfabetização no Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves nas primeiras décadas de seu funcionamento? Foi possível constatar a influência exercida pelas Reformas João Pinheiro (1906) e Francisco Campos (1927) na constituição e organização do ensino primário em Minas Gerais, sendo que o método global passa a compor a cultura escolar do Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves.

**Palavras-chave:** História da Educação; Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves; Alfabetização.

## Resumen

La investigación discute la cultura escolar de alfabetización y los procesos de organización de la educación pública primaria y tiene como locus el Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves. Es historiográfico, se ubica en el campo de la Historia Cultural, teniendo como objeto de estudio los procesos de organización de la educación primaria. El objetivo es discutir la cultura escolar de la alfabetización en el Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves, con el fin de comprender las diferentes cuestiones, problemas y contradicciones que estuvieron presentes en el proceso de alfabetización en las primeras décadas del siglo XX. Como problema, la pregunta es: ¿Qué cuestiones, problemas y contradicciones constituyeron la cultura escolar de la alfabetización en el Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves en las primeras décadas de su funcionamiento? Fue posible verificar la influencia ejercida por las Reformas de João Pinheiro (1906) y Francisco Campos (1927) en la constitución y organización de la educación primaria en Minas Gerais, y el método global compone hoy la cultura escolar del Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de la Educación; Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves; Literatura.

## Introduction

In the Brazilian national scenario at the end of the 19th century, schools were necessary as a tool to produce development, which led to the implementation of educational reforms, public policies and intense discussions among intellectuals and teachers. In the 19th century, the teaching of reading and writing became a battleground for rulers, intellectuals and educators, who began to understand reading and writing skills as a factor in the development and economic and cultural progress of individuals and societies. As stated by Mortatti (2000), literacy began to be adopted as a resource for the modernization and development of society, although there was also discussion about the inability of schools to fulfill their fundamental historical task and, therefore, to respond to the social and political emergencies that support them (MORTATTI, 2000).

In this context, research was conducted in the field of History of Education, focusing on the school culture of literacy within the scope of “Gonçalves Chaves” — the first school group in the city of Montes Claros. Julia (2001) describes school culture as a set of norms that define knowledge to be taught and behaviors to be inculcated, as well as a set of practices that allow the communication of this knowledge and the incorporation of these behaviors; norms and practices coordinated with purposes that may vary according to the times (religious, sociopolitical or simply socialization purposes). For the author, these norms and practices cannot be analyzed without taking into account the professional body of agents who are called to obey these orders and, therefore, to use pedagogical devices responsible for facilitating their application, namely, primary school teachers and other teachers.

School Culture permeates all the actions of the school's daily life, whether “[...] in the influence on its rites or its language, whether in the determination of its forms of organization and management, whether in the constitution of the curricular systems” (SILVA, 2006, p. 2).

This article aims to discuss the school culture of literacy at *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves*, in order to understand the different issues, problems and contradictions that were present in the literacy process in the first decades of the 20th century. The problem was defined by the following question: What issues, problems and contradictions constituted the school culture of literacy at *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* in the first decades of its operation? And, aiming at greater visibility and focus for the study, some guiding questions were structured and proposed, which are: What are the different issues, problems and contradictions that crossed the city of Montes Claros and the literacy field of *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves*? In what way do political, social and educational concepts influence pedagogical practices in the classroom?

The time frame of the study was established in the first decades of the 20th century, between 1909 and 1938. The definition of this period begins with the year in which the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* was created and ends a decade after the group was installed in its own building.

Discussing literacy culture within school groups is a doubly important task. On the one hand, there is the centrality of literacy and, on the other, the prominent place occupied by school groups that, in Minas Gerais, were installed from 1906 onwards. According to Gil and Caldeira (2011), based on the discourses on school organization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Minas Gerais, it is clear that there is an attempt to disqualify a way of organizing educational institutions, formed mostly by isolated schools, in order to then praise the reform of the Minas Gerais school that is intended to

be implemented through school groups. The authors also note that some categories are established and praised while others are disqualified and discarded.

In Minas Gerais, the first school groups were established in Belo Horizonte, the state capital, in 1906. The Minas Gerais government, led by João Pinheiro, decided to invest in primary education within the school groups and expanded this educational model to other regions. Despite being a city in the interior, Montes Claros was not left out of this debate and the changes underway. This process began in the northern region of Minas Gerais by State Decree No. 2352 of January 5, 1909, which:

Creates the school group of the city of Montes Claros  
The Vice-President of the State of Minas Gerais, in accordance with the provisions of art. 22, combined with art. 45 of the regulation issued by decree no. 1960, December 16, 1906, resolves to create the school group of the city of Montes Claros.  
Palace of the Presidency of the State of Minas Gerais, in Belo Horizonte, January 5, 1909. (DECREE No. 2,352/1909, cited by FREITAS, 2009, p.56).

The group was created three years after the first institutions in the capital of Minas Gerais. Initially called *Grupo Escolar de Montes Claros*, later *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* — in honor of the great Montes Claros jurist Dr. Antônio Gonçalves Chaves. In the 1970s, the group became *Escola Estadual Gonçalves Chaves*.

The *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* emerged from the need to keep up with the transformations that encompassed the State of Minas Gerais and other regions of Brazil, with the purpose of transforming the way in which educational institutions operated, shaping customs and civilizing society. For Almeida (2011), this group built a place with defined school times and spaces; organized educational practices; brought to the city of Montes Claros a foundation for the first years of school, giving a new form to the primary course, inaugurating growth in the educational area, promoting a significant change in the school context.

The school group did not receive its own building immediately. Initially, it operated in a place rented by the authorities of the Municipality of Montes Claros. In 1927, construction was completed and the school group acquired its own building. However, it was in March 1928 that classes began in this building, due to health problems, which required adjustments.

In this context, the study conducted in Montes Claros uses Cultural History as an approach to reconstruct aspects of the school literacy culture. This is a field that has been used to reference research that has produced a shift from the social history of culture to the Cultural History of society. For Chartier (2002), the main objective of Cultural History is to identify the way in which, in different places and times, a given social reality is constructed, thought about, and given to reading. For the author, it is through the possibility of capturing representations of the social world that we reach data from the past, using the concepts of appropriation, practice, and experience as a methodological reference.

In order to access the past context and capture representations and practices conceived in the context of primary schools — specifically the Gonçalves Chaves School Group — we used official documents preserved by the *Arquivo Público Mineiro* (APM) in Belo Horizonte, such as reports from the *Insperotres de Ensino da Instrução Pública* e Legislações. In order to broaden the analysis, the reconstruction of memory was complemented by three other sources: the newspaper *Gazeta do Norte* and the

newspaper *A Palavra*, available at the *Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação Regional* (CEPEDOR); as well as thematic oral history, through an interview with a primary school teacher who completed the *Curso Normal* at the *Escola Normal Oficial de Montes Claros* and began teaching at the *Grupo Gonçalves Chaves* in the early 1930s.

Three categories of analysis were established for the reading and historiography of the Gonçalves Chaves School Group: literacy, school culture, and educational reforms. We considered the approach of the João Pinheiro and Francisco Campos Reforms due to the importance that both carried for the constitution and organization of primary education in Minas Gerais, in the first decades of the 20th century. The operational importance of studies of school culture imposed this category of analysis on us, as it gives visibility to practices and processes that took place in different times and spaces. Thus, addressing literacy from a historical perspective became a natural choice, as it outlines a discussion that takes as its reference teaching at the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves*.

The text was organized into three sections. In the first, we present literacy from a historical perspective; then, the concepts of the João Pinheiro Reform and primary education in Minas Gerais; finally, the Francisco Campos Reform and the initial reading and writing teaching program also in Minas Gerais. Discussing the teaching at the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* in the early 20th century based on the aforementioned reforms.

## 1. Literacy in Brazil

In Brazil, Education has been highlighted as a utopia of modernity since the end of the 19th century, especially with the proclamation of the Republic. The school was established as an institutionalized space for the instruction of new generations, with the aim of meeting the ideals of the republican State, guided by the need to establish a new political and social order. According to Mortatti (2006), the universalization of schooling assumed a significant role as an instrument of modernization and progress of the Nation-State, as the main driver of enlightenment for the illiterate masses.

In this way, knowing how to read and write, in the context of these republican ideals, became a privileged instrument for acquiring enlightenment and an imperative for modernization and social development. Reading and writing — which until then were cultural practices whose learning was limited to a few and occurred through the unsystematic transmission of their rudiments in the home private sphere, or in a less informal but still precarious way, in the few schools of the Empire (“royal classes”) — became the foundations of compulsory, secular and free schooling and the object of school-based teaching and learning. As they were technically teachable, the practices reading and writing skills were thus subjected to organized, systematic and intentional teaching, requiring the training of specialized professionals for this purpose (MORTATTI, 2006).

In our country, the history of literacy is linked to teaching methods. Mortatti (2000) considers that, in the country, the literacy culture associates literacy methods with textbooks, teaching content and literacy concepts. In this regard, Frade (2007) questions the specificity of literacy methods within the scope of other teaching methods, stating that “literacy methods are consolidated together with general ideals and those that provide the basis for choosing the specific language content to be taught to children, in the initial process of appropriation of writing” (FRADE, 2007, p. 22).

In this context, it is important to point out some of the main literacy methods used from the end of the 19th century onwards to teach children to read and write. There are two fundamental milestones in the history of these methods: those that prioritize

understanding and those that prioritize deciphering. Both have writing as their content, but they differ in terms of their starting point.

The methods initially proposed were synthetic: they move from smaller units to larger units and are known as the alphabetic, phonic and syllabic methods. The alphabetic method, also known as the spelling method, has the letter as its main unit. In this method, "Once the alphabet had been learned, they combined consonants and vowels to form syllables, to finally arrive at words and sentences. It was the spelling method, supported by the so-called ABC cards, alphabets, syllabaries, and  $b + a = ba$ " (SOARES, 2016, p. 17). Learning focused on spelling, ignoring the oral-written and phoneme-grapheme relations. The phonic method uses the phoneme as its main unit, and the alphabet is taught through sounds; in the syllabic method, the syllable is used as the main unit. According to Mortatti (2000), synthetic methods involved acquiring a technique for deciphering text.

Still at the end of the 19th century, but especially in the first decades of the 20th century, following the renewal movement proposed by the New School, criticisms of these methods and defenses of analytical approaches were presented. In analytical methods, the process is reversed, starting from the larger units of the language to the smaller units, subdivided into the wording method, the sentence method and the global method. According to Amâncio and Cardoso (2006):

The analytical approach proposal condemns the presentation of language facts based on isolated and meaningless elements and emphasizes a global presentation of something that has real meaning, for example, a word, a phrase or a short text, giving rise to the methods of wording, sentence writing and short stories (AMÂNCIO; CARDOSO, 2006, p. 204).

The wording method has the word as its unit of analysis; the sentence writing method has the sentence as its main unit and in the global method of short stories, the texts are the starting point for teaching and learning. According to Mortatti (2000), analytical methods direct the student to perform an analysis of the whole, which can be a phrase, or words, short story or text, with the aim of reaching the simplest parts such as syllables.

From this historical period onwards, literacy practices began to oscillate: sometimes one type of synthetic method or another — syllabic, phonic and alphabetic —, sometimes one type of analytical method or another — wording, sentence formation, global (SOARES, 2016). According to a movement analyzed by Mortatti (2006), there was a continuous alternation between “innovative” and “traditional” methods — a “new” method is proposed, then criticized and denied, replaced by another “new” method that qualifies the previous one as “traditional”; this other “new” method is in turn denied and replaced by yet another “new” method that, sometimes, is just the return of a method that becomes “traditional” and is reborn as “new”, and so on.

This movement of methodological alternation began in Brazil in the last decades of the 19th century. Previously, during the colonial and imperial periods, there was no structured school system. It was considered that learning to read and write depended basically on learning letters, more specifically, the names of letters. These discussions occur throughout the country, although not necessarily at the same time or with the same intensity. For this reason, it is important to situate the issues and problems that occurred in the State of Minas Gerais, as well as in the municipality of Montes Claros, in order to give visibility to local history, which constitutes aspects of the history of Brazil.

## 2. João Pinheiro Reform (1906) and primary education in Minas Gerais

At the end of the 19th century, Education became a banner of struggle and began to integrate the concerns of society — a time when intellectuals mobilized to propose reforms to school institutions and methodological approaches. According to Veloso and Cordeiro (2020), in Minas Gerais, the confrontation of educational difficulties was processed through different public policies.

João Pinheiro da Silva took office as president of the State of Minas Gerais in 1906, at a time when, despite the need to educate and civilize the people of Minas Gerais, isolated schools prevailed in primary public education. In this context, Law No. 439 of September 28, 1906 (MINAS GERAES, 1906a) authorized the State to reform primary, normal and higher education, establishing guidelines and enabling the publication of decrees that regulated changes in education. Thus, Decree No. 1,947 of September 30, 1906 (MINAS GERAES, 1906b) approved the primary education program, while Decree No. 1,960 of December 16, 1906 (MINAS GERAES, 1906c) approved the Regulations for primary and normal education in Minas Gerais, also establishing school groups.

With the João Pinheiro Reform of 1906 (Law No. 439, of September 28, 1906), the education system was restructured, creating school groups and proposals for teaching. Thus, paragraph II of Article 3 of the aforementioned Law establishes that primary education — free and mandatory — will be provided in school groups, but also in isolated schools and in model schools attached to normal schools. Paragraph II of Article 6 states that the Government will be responsible for organizing the school program, adopting a simple, practical and intuitive method.

Faria Filho (2000) states that, in Minas Gerais, the creation of school groups was defended not only to “organize” teaching, but mainly as a way of “reinventing” the school, aiming to make its contribution to the projects of cultural and political homogenization of society and subjects, desired by the elites of Minas Gerais, more effective. Reinventing the school meant, among other things, organizing teaching, its methodologies and content; training, monitoring and supervising teachers; adapting spaces and times to teaching; rethinking the relation with children, families and the city itself (FARIA FILHO, 2000). From this perspective, the defense of school groups was seen as an instrument of progress and change, as a way of organizing and shaping teaching and practices, and establishing serialization and the simultaneous method for teaching.

According to Faria Filho (2000), the seriation created the possibility of simultaneous teaching and several other “pedagogical imperatives” necessary for the establishment of mass schooling. Simultaneous teaching required a more homogeneous organization of classes, based on expository explanations, repetition of exercises and memorization of content. In this context, Article 2 of Decree No. 1,960 of December 16, 1906, establishes that education must strictly follow the intuitive and practical method and be based on the simultaneous system. Regarding the school as an intellectual institution, in Article 1 of Law 439 of September 28, 1906: “The Government of Minas Gerais is hereby authorized to reform the primary and normal education of the State, so that the school may be an institute of intellectual, moral and physical education”. Thus, Article 1 of Decree No. 1,960 of December 16, 1906 states that education must always aim to promote intellectual, moral and physical education, and shall be primary, normal and professional. And in Article 22 of Law 439 of September 28, 1906, which establishes conditions for the operation of schools, it states the following:

For the development and improvement of popular education under the three aspects of physical, intellectual and moral, the Government will employ all possible means to have schools installed in appropriate buildings and provided with textbooks, furniture and all practical and intuitive teaching material.

Single paragraph — The Government will choose the plan for school buildings and the model of furniture, and will adopt or organize books that assist teachers in the education of children (MINAS GERAES, LAW 439 OF SEPTEMBER 28, 1906, p. 3).

In Decree No. 1,947 of September 30, 1906, in the guidelines for school groups in Minas Gerais, the renewal of practices was suggested, instructing that reading and writing should be taught in the following way:

For the first reading lessons, the process adopted in this program is new in our education; it therefore requires the teachers' attention of.

I. Instead of memorizing sounds and letter values, and then forming the combinations that produce the word, the child will begin with the latter, immediately linking the idea expressed by the word to the body of letters that form it.

II. Once they are familiar with a certain number of simple words during the first lessons, students will find it easy and even fun to break them down to form new ones.

III. It is advisable that the first words studied represent concrete things.

IV. Starting from easy syllables to more complicated ones, until the entire syllable of the language has been covered, the student will have been prepared for the reading lessons of the 2nd semester.

V. It would be of great advantage if teachers adopted, from the outset, this method, preferably over syllabification and spelling. The latter should be abolished completely, as it is now universally condemned in modern education (MINAS GERAES, DECREE No. 1947, 1906, p.05).

As it can be seen, in the primary education program described, the processes prescribed for literacy indicate the application of analytical methods — starting with words —, replacing synthetic methods, which focused on working with syllables, and the method that had letters as the starting point for teaching should be abolished. This constitutes an innovation proposed for literacy, already reflecting innovative positions inscribed in the New School movement, which began to be structured in Europe since the end of the 19th century.

Also in Decree No. 1,947 of September 30, 1906, there is a prescription on the didactic processes to be adopted, focusing on the pronunciation of words, the selection of texts of adequate length and the understanding of the content read, this being a defense that places analytical methods in contrast to synthetic methods, which until then predominated in school practices:



VI. The student should get used to pronouncing the final syllable of words correctly from the first lessons. This is largely what good diction consists of.

VII. Do not let him read in a hurry, distorting sounds and words, but rather slowly and thoughtfully, so as to show that he understands the subject of the reading.

VIII. In order to achieve good reading, lessons should be short, and students should not move on to the next chapter or section without the previous one having been correctly read and interpreted by most of the students (MINAS GERAES, DECREE No. 1947, 1906, p. 05-06).

These guidelines for the Education Reform in Minas Gerais reflect discussions that took place in a broader context. Discussing issues in the State of São Paulo, Mortatti (2006) states that the primers produced at the beginning of the 20th century began to be programmatically based on the analytical method.

Unlike the synthetic methods used until then, the analytical method, strongly influenced by North American pedagogy, was based on didactic principles derived from a new conception — of a biopsychophysiological nature — of the child, whose way of apprehending the world was understood as syncretic. Despite the disputes over the different forms of processing the analytical method, the common point among its advocates was the need to adapt the teaching of reading to this new conception of children (MORTATTI, 2006, p. 7).

Regarding the teaching of writing, Decree No. 1,947 of September 30, 1906 prescribes vertical writing, considered easier, more economical and hygienic:

#### Writing

The program requires the round *vertical type* of letter for teaching writing. It will be easy to adopt it, with the first models provided. This type of letter, which is commonly called *upright writing*, in addition to being easy, is fast, economical and hygienic.

I. Children should not be left to their own devices when they draw their first letters; they should have their hands trained in how to hold the pen and handle it, according to the type of letter adopted.

II. In the first semester of this discipline, students will use slates or pencil and paper, instead of pens, because this way they will better overcome the mechanical difficulties of the first learning (MINAS GERAES, DECREE nº 1947, 1906, p. 06).

According to Villela (2014), vertical writing is a style of writing, with vertical letters having an axial inclination of 90° in relation to the horizontal. The new systems, under the name of vertical writing, had a notable presence throughout the Western world, and are still the predominant systems in several

countries, including Brazil (VILLELA, 2014). When explaining the historical context in which this style of writing began to be defended in the last decades of the 19th century, the author states that it is: “[...] important to remember that, from the 1870s onwards, an important invention — the typewriter — emerged to revolutionize official and commercial correspondence” (VILLELA, 2014, p. 25).

According to Faria Filho (1998), by requiring the teaching of vertical writing, they were doing more than simply changing the format of the letters to be used in primary schools. For the reformers, it would be one of the moments of greatest school rationalization.

By emphasizing that the new type of writing, in addition to being easy, was fast, economical and hygienic, the reformers were pointing to some central aspects of the modern Brazilian school. Thus, on the one hand, they revealed a concern in finding ways to facilitate learning by changing the way of teaching itself and, on the other, they clearly assimilated the functioning of the school institution according to the rhythms, social patterns and behavior typical of the emerging capitalist society (FARIA FILHO, 1998, p.138).

In Minas Gerais, in order to make these proposed practices viable, there was a need for The Decree included a weekly class schedule along with its teaching program, which included a greater number of classes for reading, writing and arithmetic compared to other curricular components such as Geography, Brazilian History, and Natural Physics, for example.

The primary education program, contained in Decree No. 1,947, includes a total of 11 subjects for the 1st and 2nd years; and 12 subjects for the 3rd and 4th years. The contents provided for the primary course are: reading, writing, native language, arithmetic, geography, Brazilian history, moral and civic instruction, natural history, physics and hygiene, physical exercises, manual work, vocal music, geometry and drawing.

In the context of the city of Montes Claros, in 1913, municipal inspector Herculino Pereira de Sousa criticized the teaching programs that, in his opinion, were merely work guides and were not sufficient weapons. In order to combat ignorance and improve teaching results, the inspector attributed a fundamental role to teachers. And, in relation to teachers, the inspector considered that “[...] only the government can create them, or at least improve them, transform them through encouragement” (SOUSA, 1913).

In 1916, inspector Honor Sarmiento also discussed the issue and considered that the Teaching Program provided for by the reform was unfeasible. In constructing his position, the inspector did not discuss the performance of teachers or literacy methods, nor did he focus on the inflexibility of time and the difficulty of complying with the rigidly established schedules for the different curricular components. Furthermore, taking into account the students' development, the inspector considered that the number of subjects was excessive and that the planned content was too complex for the local reality. Inspector Honor Sarmiento also proposed that the primary course should place emphasis on reading, writing and counting:

The remodeling of the program for instruction in its legitimate terms is necessary and will bring great benefit. Reading well, writing better and counting very well is enough for the child, who with such knowledge, even though it is elementary, will be able to serve intelligently and demonstrate these difficulties in practical life.

The child will gain a slight notion of other subjects in adapted reading books, once the teacher understands his duty to teach.

Reading well, writing better and counting very well, this is, in my humble opinion, what is enough for primary schools destined to pave the way for a more solid institution, if possible.

In order to complete primary education, I believe that courses of work attached to the School Groups are essential, as a powerful element of education.

In this way, the dissemination of primary education will be improved and illiteracy will be combated more easily. Let us combat it by facilitating primary education, for me, simple programs and [illegible word]. This is what I think as a teacher, without fear of being legitimately challenged by those who think they are, but have never faced the [illegible word], difficult and arduous mission of teaching children (HONOR SARMENTO, 1916).

When criticizing the teaching program established for the school groups in Minas Gerais, the inspector suggests that it be remodeled. He advocates for the simplification of primary education, in which reading well, writing better and counting well would be sufficient in primary school instruction. For the inspector, the role of primary school was to eradicate illiteracy and pave the way for children to continue their education — which is why he advocated simplifying programs and ensuring effective teaching of reading and writing.

This was a complex issue that sparked intense debate. In addition to the position taken by municipal inspector Herculino Pereira de Sousa and inspector Honor Sarmento in inspection reports sent to the Secretary of the Interior in 1916, the newspaper *Gazeta do Norte* also published an article in its *Horas Vagas* column, criticizing parents who wanted their children to pass, even if they did not have the corresponding learning. In the case of the newspaper article, this is not a discussion specific to the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves*, but it allows us to capture representations that were present and circulating in the city of Montes Claros.

Parents' impatience is already noticeable in primary school. And now this absurdity: students' parents and the students in a great hurry, and the government arranging huge, overflowing programs.

The worst of all is that there are some backward teachers, certainly hard-headed and even harder-hearted, who decide to fail students when they have not made sufficient progress... What a shock! What a hassle! What a nuisance!

What a shock! What a hassle! What a nuisance!

This erroneous direction does not stand up to the slightest scrutiny. The teacher who always passes, despite being certain that the student is poorly prepared, is not fulfilling his duty, let's be frank. Instead of being a friend and an upright judge, he is a dangerous guide: he flatters by deceiving.

The parent who thinks the same way does not want to prepare his child for life, he only wants to give him superficial instruction, like an inexpressive label. He does not educate; favors the expansion of bad instincts and leaves them to the upper class, committing a crime almost equal to the tug of war that did not give sufficient instruction to its soldiers and, despite this, threw them into the fight, to die at the hands of the most trained (SOUSA, 1916).

It is clear from the article that, in addition to criticizing parents, who wanted their children's approval at any cost; as well as the approval criteria and the teachers who gave in to the teachers were criticized for their lack of knowledge and approved unprepared students; the criticisms were directed at the teaching programs — extensive, inadequate and imposed by the Minas Gerais government on the schools.

Regarding the teachers, the teaching and the results produced in the context of the city of Montes Claros, the newspaper *A Palavra*, in 1919, published some humorous texts that revealed the reality. The publications criticized the teachers' lack of knowledge, the Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves and the students' performances. The newspaper was published bimonthly and was written by João Chaves. With the title "Perguntas Inocentes", it presents a harsh criticism of the work developed by the teacher responsible for physical activity: "Why does a certain teacher from the school group in this city, when they are going to teach military maneuvers to the students, almost only say 'let's march'?" (JOCHA, 1919, p. 2 - author's emphasis).

Under the title "Singing", the same newspaper publishes new criticisms, this time directed at a teacher, who he considers uneducated and incompetent for his professional practice:

A nosy teacher,  
Who I don't know what he trusts,  
Now takes on the habit  
Of correcting what is correct

Perhaps he would become upright  
The unschooled teacher,  
If he wore *sunglasses*  
To see what is correct (JOCHA, 1919, p. 8 — author's emphasis)

On two other occasions, in the section "The gossips say", the same author addresses his position to a student from the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves*, regarding his performance in the field of arts:

They say...  
That *an opaque* young man said not long ago that 'music is a dark thing' (1919, p. 4 — emphasis in the original)

They say...  
That a distinguished young man of our society, never recites again, without first memorizing the recitative well (JOCHA, 1919, p. 4)

Finally, in the same logic of criticism, the newspaper publishes a short note about the working conditions at the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves*, which it considers precarious and insufficient for good work: “That the school group here has no ink, pen, paper or chalk. Congratulations to the teachers and students of the aforementioned group” (1919, p. 4).

It is in this context, of criticism and difficulties of the schools of Minas Gerais — including those of Montes Claros — in meeting the demands for Education, that the government of Minas Gerais establishes a new reform of primary and normal education, aiming at changes and renewal of teaching.

### **3. Francisco Campos Reform (1927-1928) and the initial reading and writing education program in Minas Gerais**

In the 1920s, Brazil was experiencing a period of transformation, with struggles to expand the liberal State in order to meet the pressures for democratization coming from the urban working and middle classes. In addition to the challenges of a political and social nature, there were others that also influenced the need to review institutions. Among them, the progress of science and technology stands out, which determined new forms of social organization and, mainly, the emergence of a set of democratic ideas that embodied new ideals of solidarity and cooperation among men. Thus, the Secretary of State for Business and the Interior, Francisco Campos, in the Government of the President of Minas Gerais, Antônio Carlos Ribeiro de Andrada, proposed a government program, highlighting the administrative reform of the State, social justice, secret ballot, women's suffrage and the provision of schools (PEIXOTO, 1992).

Within the proposed program, we highlight the reform established by Decree No. 7970-A, of October 15, 1927, which approved the Regulation of primary education in Minas Gerais and brought new guidelines for literacy; and by Decree No. 8162, of January 20, 1928, which approved the Regulation of normal education. According to Peixoto (1992), Francisco Campos' objective was to modernize the Minas Gerais school, so that it would become an important influencer in the consolidation of the new urban-industrial order that was underway in Brazil. According to the author, the program aimed to rehabilitate the Minas Gerais school, making it an efficient collaborator of the family and society, in the construction of a new order in the country, and so that the schools could develop this role, Campos subjected them to a profound reform, inspired by the New School ideology. According to Peixoto (1992):

Despite its authoritarian and bureaucratic nature, the Francisco Campos reform brought advances to the primary school system. The New School ideology, by insisting on the study of children, by recognizing childhood as an important phase of human development, by emphasizing the participation and activity of students in the learning process, by valuing other forms of expression besides oral and written language, by establishing new patterns of relation between teacher and student, helped to soften discipline, eliminating physical punishment in schools and making education more accessible to children (PEIXOTO, 1992, p. 16).

In this discussion, the centrality of children in the teaching and learning process is defended, even condemning the use of physical punishment as a form of discipline and education. For Frade and Maciel (2006, p. 96), “the pedagogical principles of the

New School proposed a break with the traditional pedagogical model". The new model enacted an educational revolution by centralizing teaching on the child.

Indeed, the Francisco Campos Reform (1927-1928) sought to base itself on the principles of the New School: democracy, freedom, and citizenship. Veloso and Cordeiro (2020) state that, with the Reform, the curricula of the Normal School and the Primary School were restructured, and, in relation to literacy, the adoption of the global analytical method of stories to teach literacy was imposed. Thus, "in Dewey, Claparede, Decroly, Kilpatrick, Campos seeks the elements of a new way of organizing school work. His adherence to the pedagogical model is justified in the name of the modern" which "in opposition to the traditional, has the student as the center of the educational action" (PEIXOTO, 1992, p. 15). This focus on the child can be captured in article 249 of Decree No. 7970-A, which in its single article states:

Single paragraph: Primary school has its purpose in itself, not to prepare children for higher levels of education, but to provide them with knowledge that can be used in their childhood experiences, based on the principles that only notions that can be used in the ordinary operations of life are effectively incorporated, as mental habits, into their knowledge (DECREE No. 7970-A, OCTOBER 15, 1927).

According to Peixoto (1992), methods, programs and the teacher are the most important elements in the school organization. "The methods must have, in the student's activity, the central point of the educational process — 'it is learning to do by doing'" (PEIXOTO, 1992, p. 15), and it is essential to consider the individualities of each child, so that their learning is personal and effective. Let us see what is stated in Article 250 of the Regulation in this regard: "Uniformity in primary education does not mean the leveling of individualities, and the teacher must seek to reconcile the demands of collective instruction with the interests and particularities of each child" (DECREE N° 7970-A, OF OCTOBER 15, 1927).

As for teaching programs, as revealed by Peixoto (1992), they must be organized taking into account their meaning for The student and his/her adaptation to the environment. As stated in the Regulation of Primary Education in its Art. 252:

The subjects that constitute the primary education program should not be taught as if they were ends in themselves, but as means of developing children's reasoning, judgment and initiative, offering them the opportunity to exercise their powers of observation, reflection and invention and to apply the acquired notions (DECREE N° 7970-A, OF OCTOBER 15, 1927).

The third element is the teacher, who through his/her encouragement and teaching methods, will develop children's interest and learning. In the sole paragraph of Article 251 of the Regulations, it is emphasized:

The teaching processes must be as socialized as possible, establishing true cooperation between the teacher and the students and between the students and each other in studying, in lessons and in experiences, in order to always keep the spirit of the class active and to awaken in the students the stimulus that

results from the feeling of their collaboration in the development of the lessons (DECREE N° 7970-A, OF OCTOBER 15, 1927).

Campos expected to guarantee the good functioning of the school by controlling the three elements mentioned above. Thus, the reformer adopted an authoritarian stance in dealing with the institution, causing the growth of bureaucracy in teaching services and greater rigor in the supervision of the activities developed in the school. “What, when, how and why should be taught, nothing escapes the legislator — the documents that regulate the reform go into details such as the size and shape of the desks, the color of the walls, the arrangement of the windows in the classrooms, etc.” (PEIXOTO, 1992, p. 15).

Therefore, considering the rigor valued by Francisco Campos and the fact that the structuring of school buildings influences the reception and development of children, we highlight Art. 140 of Decree 7970-A. The aforementioned article states that, in the construction and furnishing of school buildings, as in the choice of location and materials, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the child should feel happy at school and that the environment is an agent of Education of relevant importance.

According to Peixoto (1992), the importance attributed to schools in the creation of a new social ethos is due to the widespread belief, during the period of industrial growth, when problems related to the training of labor were brought to light, of their potential for the construction of individuals and, therefore, of society.

Education was introduced during the government of Antônio Carlos for political and ideological reasons. From a political point of view, by transferring the commitment to education to the state, he placed an important instrument of social control in the hands of the class that holds power. In addition, by meeting the demands of the population in this regard, Antônio Carlos gained the support of important segments of society for his government program. From an ideological point of view, due to their liberal stance, by investing in education, Antônio Carlos and Francisco Campos hope to be contributing to promoting a broad reform of consciences. And, from that point on, both hope to create a new social order — a democratic, open society, in which struggles and conflicts are unknown. It is social reconstruction through school (PEIXOTO, 1992, p. 13-14).

For the purpose of this social reconstruction through school, the Francisco Campos reform chooses to address primary education, due to the strategic character that President Antônio Carlos and Secretary Francisco Campos attribute to primary school in the process of democratizing society. “A strategic character that is directly related to the teaching of reading and writing, an indispensable condition for exercising the right to vote, in this period, and consequently, for enjoying the benefits of citizenship” (PEIXOTO, 1992, p. 14-15).

It is important to highlight that the concern with literacy was thought of from kindergarten onwards, as indicated in Art. 233 of the Regulation, when it states that these educational institutions have as one of their purposes:

4th - To cultivate and develop the gifts of language and expression, including the enunciation of words, tonality, and the education of the ear for the perception and understanding of gradations of sounds, using, for this purpose, vocational games

that appeal to the instinctive interests of children (DECREE N° 7970-A, OF OCTOBER 15, 1927).

As can be seen, item 4 highlights the development of language skills, through games associated with the interests of children. Still listing the purposes of kindergartens, the Regulation provided for “6th - To prepare the child to receive primary education with benefit, initiating him/her in reading, writing, drawing and arithmetic, through appropriate games, recommending the Decroly method for this purpose” (DECREE N° 7970-A, OF OCTOBER 15, 1927).

As stated in Art. 236, among the modalities included in the games provided for by the Regulation are: those aimed at literacy — “of indication for reading; of enunciation of words and understanding of language”. In Art. 237 it describes a concern with narratives, stories and stimulation of children’s imagination:

the exercises of thought, language and recitation must be done every day and at every moment, whether in special lessons, or in connection with class work or recreational games. It also says that they will consist of narratives, anecdotes and short stories appropriate to stimulate the imagination of the child and satisfy the interests specific to his/her age (DECREE N° 7970-A, OF OCTOBER 15, 1927).

Complementing these prescriptions, Article 240 provides that: “The teaching of reading, writing, drawing and arithmetic should never be done directly, nor be the object of special lessons, but should result from children’s games, activities and experiences, skillfully used by teachers” (DECREE N° 7970-A, OF OCTOBER 15, 1927).

Peixoto (1992) believes that Francisco Campos, recognizing Education as a specific field of study, caused the government to encourage research and face teacher training head on. In this sense, normal schools and the advanced training school were created, which was the first Brazilian institution focused on training specialists in Education. In this school, among other studies and scholars, Lúcia Monteiro Casasanta conducted research for the application of the Global Method to the teaching of Reading and Writing; and with Casasanta's instruction, Anita Fonseca created the pre-book that was called *Livro de Lili*, from which several generations of Minas Gerais residents were taught to read and write (PEIXOTO, 1992). From this perspective, *Livro de Lili* was born from the difficulty that teachers in Belo Horizonte had in adopting the global method, given the lack of teaching materials and knowledge (FRADE; MACIEL, 2006).

According to Frade and Maciel (2006), the Reform was comprehensive, but there was an emphasis on changing the paradigm of learning to read and write. The Reform can be considered a milestone in the history of literacy in Minas Gerais - “from it, the use of the global method was decreed for teaching children to read and write in this state” (FRADE; MACIEL, 2006, p. 97). Also according to the authors, the pre-book called *Livro de Lili* had characteristics specific to the global storytelling method — it was accompanied by posters, a manual for teachers' use and the student's book, in the form of an insert, was created throughout the child's literacy process.

If in the Minas Gerais context, discussions about the global method expanded with the Francisco Campos Reform, in the city of Montes Claros, a similar debate only took place in 1933. According to Veloso (2010), this was the moment in which the *Escola Normal Oficial Montes Claros* adopted these concepts, starting to guide students, teachers in training, about the use of the global method. The debates were



intense, which also took place in the newspaper *Gazeta do Norte*, which published several articles on the subject.

Still in the context of Montes Claros, regarding the use of the global method, we highlight the positions of Misses Maria Celestina Almeida<sup>2</sup>, a primary school teacher who was born on April 17, 1915, completed the *Curso Normal* in 1933 and began her career at the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* in the early 1930s. In the year she gave the interview, the teacher was 94 years old and, between memories and forgetfulness, she narrates the use of the global storytelling method, which was used to teach children to read and write at the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* and represented an innovation in practices.

This global style, we used it when we went to the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* to teach, we thought it was wonderful, because in the past we studied with primers, later with the modification of the system, the objective was always the same, to instruct, but the teaching was transmitted in a freer manner, it was not mandatory to follow the basics of the primers (ALMEIDA, Interview conducted in 2009).

Still in the context of Montes Claros, Dona Maria Celestina Almeida talks about Lili's Book, recalls the lessons, the teaching materials complementary to the pre-book, the pedagogical practices in the classroom:

Teaching was very advanced at that time [1930s]. Then primers were adopted in books, that "Lili" was introduced, which was pre-book. Look, they sent those huge posters, each poster focused on a stage of teaching. The first poster was "My name is Lili", "I ate a lot of candy", "I really like candy", "Do you like candy too?" We would go back and forth all day long, and it became a kind of global education, which each person applied according to their skills.

The poster that we started teaching with came, the big poster, then came the small one, divided into lessons, which we worked on in blocks. I remember that I had two blocks made at the printer for my class. I would stick the small poster together like the big one and we would illustrate it, and that was how it went until the end.

All my children studied with Lili's Book. And those types of primers that started with a, e, i, o, u, "b" with "a" "ba", "b" with "i" "bi", those were left behind, but in a certain way, they weren't just isolated to that ABC section, it was through teaching classes from other opportunities that we followed the objective of teaching (ALMEIDA, Interview conducted in 2009).

It is clear that the proposal of Lili's Book, with literacy based on the global method of stories or comic strips, was carried out by teacher Maria Celestina. We can also see from the teacher's speech that synthetic methods were becoming outdated, that the lessons contained in these approaches stopped guiding literacy practices, which began to be thought of based on analytical methods. According to Frade and Maciel

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<sup>2</sup> At the Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves, Misses Maria Celestina Almeida served as a teacher and director from 1956 onwards. She was later transferred to the Regional Education Office – now the Regional Education Superintendence – and retired in 1979 from E. E. Belvinda Ribeiro.

(2006, p. 99), “the government declared that teachers should abolish the use of letters and syllables to teach reading and writing [...]”.

As we have already mentioned, Francisco Campos, in his reformist intention, seeks to ensure the proper functioning of the school, and to this end he adopts an authoritarian stance in the processes with the institution. This authoritarianism is a fact that we can observe in the speech of teacher Maria Celestina Almeida, who reveals centralizing and controlling aspects done by the government:

We separated the classes by age, first grade for example, at that time despite the demands of the government, which was very demanding at that time, demanding a lot, but helping little, but depending on the teacher's ability to transmit what he knew to achieve the final objective (ALMEIDA, Interview conducted in 2009).

It is possible to see that the teacher addresses the way classes are organized and ends by criticizing the lack of support to implement the education reform. Despite the intentions to promote changes, the reformist's stance was authoritarian and imposing, and the material and human conditions for its implementation were not produced, and there was a lack of support for the reform to be carried out. We also highlight, in the teacher's speech, that achieving the final teaching objective with the children depended on the teacher's ability to transmit his/her knowledge. Thus, we emphasize that there were demands and little help, which caused dissatisfaction on the part of the teacher. We can notice that not everything was just wonderful and successful. According to Frade and Maciel (2006, p. 98-99), “for teachers, one of the biggest obstacles was the lack of pedagogical support, especially in the case of initial learning to read and write, as they did not have teaching materials that were adequate to the assumptions of the global method”.

Despite the demands and little technical, pedagogical and material support, Dona Maria Celestina Almeida says she had little difficulty in applying the analytical methodology to teach literacy and highlights the cooperation among teachers.

I did not have much difficulty in teaching, I resolved everything my way, and with the parents' advice, there was also a lot of cooperation from the teachers, at that time there was no such thing as “I created this”, “I created this way of teaching”. We all had the right to do the same thing; this cooperation among teachers made a lot of progress (ALMEIDA, Interview conducted in 2009).

Thus, the teachers developed their strategies for the work — the partnership was essential. Dona Maria Celestina Almeida also reports that the tests to be given to the students came from the capital of Minas Gerais. They were part of this centralizing and authoritarian movement of the reform, which meant control of the pedagogical processes developed in the classroom.

Then, when the students passed, at the end of the year, the printed tests came from Belo Horizonte. The counselor, the principal and the teachers administered these tests, but the secretary was in charge of whether they passed or not. The number of points limited to promotion at that time was 5, which means that the teaching average was 50%, and the results were excellent, very good (ALMEIDA, Interview conducted in 2009).

Regarding this pedagogical control through testing children's knowledge, Mortatti (2006), when dividing the history of literacy into 4 moments, addresses, in the 3rd moment, "Tailored literacy", which meant the educational measure through the application of tests to assess the level of maturity of students. According to the author, "tailored literacy, which results in *how to teach* being subordinated to the maturity of the child being taught; didactic issues, therefore, are subordinated to psychological issues" (MORTATTI, 2006, p. 10). Thus, we can say that the tests applied at *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* had the purpose of measuring the level of intellectual maturity of students and monitoring the results.

### Final Considerations

In Montes Claros, the study of the school literacy culture at the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* allowed us to conclude that primary education at the beginning of the 20th century faced significant challenges, but also sought to promote the development of children's reasoning and initiative. Students were encouraged to exercise their powers of observation, reflection and invention.

This study revealed that the education system was initially restructured with the João Pinheiro Reform of 1906 (Law No. 439, of September 28, 1906). Based on this reform, school groups were created, criticisms of synthetic literacy methodologies were made, and guidelines for overcoming teaching focused on letters and syllables were proposed within the scope of the reform instituted by the State of Minas Gerais.

The Francisco Campos Reform of 1927 (Decree No. 7970-A, of October 15, 1927) had methodological innovations as its guiding axis. It was comprehensive, but we can see the transition in the paradigm of learning to read and write, as it was through this reform that the use of the global method was decreed to teach children to read and write in Minas Gerais. The Francisco Campos Reform sought to base itself on the principles of the new school, such as democracy, freedom and citizenship.

The research also identified criticisms regarding the teaching programs, which were considered by education inspectors to be extensive and complex for the level of children in Montes Claros. Criticisms and challenges faced by teachers who worked at the *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves* during the period of implementation of the educational reforms were also identified, with limitations in the education system, such as demands and lack of support. The teacher interviewed, Maria Celestina Almeida, criticized the lack of support for the implementation of the education reform, which innovated by proposing the use of the global method of stories to teach literacy. However, she emphasized the authoritarian stance of the reformist Francisco Campos, as well as the lack of support for the implementation of the reform instituted. It is important to recognize that these criticisms also reflect the social conditions and expectations of the time and that political, social and pedagogical influences shaped educational practices at *Grupo Escolar Gonçalves Chaves*.

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