



The classroom in J. B. de Mello e Souza's books, a chair professor at Colégio Pedro II (1938-1943)¹

A sala de aula nas obras literárias de J. B. de Mello e Souza,
professor catedrático do Colégio Pedro II (1938-1943)

El aula en las obras literarias de J. B. de Mello e Souza,
profesor catedrático del Colegio Pedro II (1938-1943)

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Resumo

Este trabalho intenta identificar mudanças e permanências nas salas de aula descritas por J. B. de Mello e Souza (1888-1969), professor de 1914 a década de 1960 em escolas públicas e privadas e catedrático do Colégio Pedro II. Em sua obra, a *sala de aula* é apresentada em recortes temporais e espaços geográficos distintos do final do século XIX até meados do século XX. A análise considera *Majupira* (1938), *Meninos de Queluz* (1949) e *Estudantes do meu tempo* (1943), com atenção às diferenças da *sala de aula* nas obras ficcional e memorialistas. Para tal, os aportes teórico-metodológicos em História da Educação sobre o conceito *sala de aula* apoia-se nas pesquisas de Escolano Benito (2017) e Rosa Fátima de Souza (1998, 2013), dentre outros. O estudo das obras oportuniza discussões a respeito das práticas de ensino e representações dos professores debatidas pelo governo republicano e a manutenção de tradicionais modelos escolares.

Palavras-chave: Sala de aula; História da Educação; Literatura.

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify changes and continuities in the classrooms described by J. B. de Mello e Souza (1888-1969). He was a teacher from 1914 to the 1960s in public and private schools and a professor at Colégio Pedro II. In his work, the classroom is presented in distinct temporal frames and geographic spaces from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. *Majupira* (1938), *Meninos de Queluz* (1949), and *Estudantes do meu tempo* (1943) are analyzed, considering the possible differences in the classroom in fictional and memorialist works. To this end, we seek theoretical and methodological contributions in History of Education on the concept of classroom, based on the research of Escolano Benito (2017) and Rosa Fátima de Souza (1998, 2013), among others. The study of the works provides an opportunity for discussions regarding teaching practices and representations of teachers debated by the republican government and the maintenance of traditional school models.

Keywords: Classroom; Education History; Literature.

Resumen

Este trabajo intenta identificar cambios y permanencias en las aulas descritas por J. B. de Mello e Souza (1888-1969). Profesor de 1914 a la década de 1960 en escuelas públicas y privadas y profesor del Colégio Pedro II. En su obra, el aula se presenta en diferentes marcos temporales y espacios geográficos desde finales del siglo XIX hasta mediados del siglo XX. Se analizan *Majupira* (1938), *Meninos de Queluz* (1949), y *Estudantes do meu tempo* (1943), considerando las posibles diferencias en el aula en las obras de ficción y memorias. Para ello, se buscan aportes teóricos y metodológicos en la Historia de la Educación sobre el concepto de aula, a partir de las investigaciones de Escolano Benito (2017) y Rosa Fátima de Souza (1998, 2013), entre otros. El estudio de las obras brinda una oportunidad para discusiones sobre las prácticas docentes y las representaciones docentes debatidas por el gobierno republicano y el mantenimiento de los modelos escolares tradicionales.

Palabras clave: Aula; Historia de la Educación; Literatura.

Introduction

Then she makes us line up in a row, and we all go into the classroom like little sheep. We sit at desks that have lids that open and close and store everything inside (Vasconcelos, 1968, p. 72).

The classroom is part of the collective imagination of a schooled society, and its descriptions may differ from generation to generation, depending on age and where one experienced daily school life. Escolano Benito (2017) states that:

Since school became compulsory—now widespread in most socially advanced countries—the school experience has become part of our memory as an essential component of our narrative identity (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 179)..

Certain elements, such as school bags, blackboards, murals, and posters on the walls, maps and globes, letters of the alphabet, numbers, and teachers' desks, among others, populate the memories of students and teachers. The researcher states that:

The first aspect that subjects tend to remember about their time at school is the settings in which this process took place. The role that school spaces played in shaping people's early body scheme patterns and early social experiences is essential in the construction of biographical memory (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 186).

Julia (2001), when discussing school culture as a historical object, suggests that through school subjects it is possible to:

identify, both through teaching practices used in the classroom and through the main objectives that guided the creation of the subjects, the core that can constitute a renewed history of education. In any case, to use an aeronautical metaphor, it opens up the 'black box' of the school, seeking to understand what happens in this particular space (Julia, 2001, p. 13).

Organizing a timeline spanning the 16th to 19th centuries in relation to the standardization and models of school culture, the author presents information on how schools were established, specific equipment for this space, the training of teachers, content, and practices in the European context (Julia, 2001). The classroom is an important part of this organization. It's impossible to think about school without seeing it in your mind. This space encourages people to explore and understand it. According to Escolano Benito (2017), the culture of education is shaped by the practices in schools every day. These practices are seen in how students and teachers act (p. 25). The physical space, with all its materials, is dedicated to teaching and learning:

The cultural history of education has led—as one of the paths or drifts of the various approaches to schooling tried over the last few decades—to a focus on objects, images, texts, and voices, which are exponents of the reality of everyday life in institutions. These stories about things and people are part of the school's heritage. The preservation and organization of this heritage have led to its integration into the educational memory of individuals and communities (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 26).

Many Brazilian authors have written about their school memories. These memories are important for understanding their lives and times. They are also valuable as documents that portray a particular era and social context. According to Burke (1992), "if historians care about more types of human activities than their predecessors, they need to examine more types of evidence" (Burke, 1992, p. 14). Here are some of the authors: Raul Pompéia in *O Ateneu* (1888), Viriato Correa in *Cazuza* (1938), Helena de Morley in *Minha vida de menina* (1942), Gilberto Amado in *História da minha infância* (1958), and José Mauro de Vasconcelos in *Meu pé de laranja lima* (1968). These books take us to different times and places, but the descriptions of classrooms are very similar. Like the writers mentioned above, J. B. de Mello e Souza published books in which his school memories sometimes influence and sometimes play a leading role in his narratives. These narratives span from his hometown, Queluz, located in the state of São Paulo, which was part of the coffee production context in the Brazilian Empire (1822-1889), to Rio de Janeiro, the Federal District, at the beginning of the 20th century, and other cities in the Paraíba Paulista Valley, already in the context of the Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932. Amparo, Cândido, and Lima (2022) wrote an article about literary works that refer to school and teaching from the first half of the 20th century. These works:

express both the perceived shortcomings in the education system and in so-called traditional school practices, considered outdated by school-based educators, and present some ideas disseminated in the field of education at the time as to how schools should be transformed to promote student development (Amparo, Cândido, Lima, 2023, p. 03).

The sources studied in this article are two literary works where the author, a teacher, and writer, talks about his experiences as a student and son of a family deeply involved in teaching. There is also a fictional work whose story is clearly inspired by his memories, including the landscapes and characters associated with school. Moraes (1996) also says that literary works are important sources of information. "Teachers seem to think that their novels have magical powers to change reality because of the content and their willingness to write them" (Moraes, 1996, p. 10). When using other sources and bibliographic texts, it is understood that a historical narrative is best constructed using different sources. The choice of concepts that can structure the arguments presented is also important.

J. B. de Mello e Souza was born on May 28, 1888, in the city of Queluz, in the interior of the state of São Paulo. His father, João de Deus de Mello e Souza (1863-1911), owned a school called Colégio João de Deus, an institution for the children of local farmers. His mother, Carolina Carlos de Toledo Mello e Souza (1866-1925), was a teacher in a public school that operated out of their home. The couple had nine children who went to school every day and helped their mother with housework.

J. B. de Mello e Souza was a writer, translator, civil servant in the Ministry of Justice and Interior, journalist, bachelor of Arts and Law, teacher at the Rio de Janeiro Institute of Education, and teacher at Colégio Pedro II (Gabriel, 2020).

Among his many works, *Majupira* (1949), subtitled *Romance Brasileiro da Atualidade* (1930-1934) (*Present Day Brazilian Romance*, 1930-1934), is a fictional narrative. It takes the reader on a journey through the countryside aboard the Rede Sul Mineira express train, a passenger, and freight train often mentioned in his works. The train arrives at the village of Pequiri, described with landscapes of the Paraíba Valley region. ... The story is about a group of boys from the

countryside who create a group based on scouting² and name it after the first syllables of their teacher's name. They form an acronym from Maria Julia Pimentel Ramos (MAJUPIRA) and mix the fun of the past with the school routine in the classroom at the teacher's house in the countryside.

Meninos de Queluz (1949), subtitled *Crônica de Saudade* (Chronicle of Longing), is a memoir that won the Joaquim Nabuco Award from the Brazilian Academy of Letters in 1948. The next year, Editora Aurora in Rio de Janeiro published a thousand copies of the book. Each copy had a number and the author's initials. The work describes the school routines that were part of the family's daily life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It highlights the contact that the author's siblings and he himself had with the school practices carried out by their mother, who was a teacher.

Estudantes do meu tempo (Students of My Time, 1958) provides information about the daily school life of students at Ginásio Nacional, the name given to the educational institution at the beginning of the Republic. The work also has a subtitle: *Crônicas do antigo Colégio Pedro II* (Chronicles of the old Colégio Pedro II). The stories of silly jokes and pranks make the Colégio Pedro II seem less formal and strict. Some parts of the book describe the classrooms the author went to in the early 1900s. There is also a photograph.

The analysis of the literary works, based on elements from the History of Education, aims to identify changes and continuities in classroom characteristics. It considers geographical spaces and periods between the late 19th century and mid-20th century, as recorded by the writer and teacher. To understand this better, it is important to compare the fictional work and the memoirs with the classroom setting. We should also consider the characteristics of the classrooms in isolated schools in the Paraíba Paulista Valley and those of Colégio Pedro II in Rio de Janeiro. To this end, the ideas of school culture (Escolano Benito, 2017; Julia, 2001), school material culture (Paulilo, 2019; Souza, 2013), and school groups (Souza, 1998) are important. These ideas help us understand the issues that, over time, have shaped spaces, times, practices, and objects in the classroom.

The classroom as an object of study in the history of education

When addressing the constitution of the classroom as a teaching space, referring to Nation-States, Arriada, Nogueira, and Vahe (2012) argue that:

The classroom space is a mirror of this harsh reality, where, in the constant presence of the teachers, under their gaze and control, little remains for the students. In this environment, a relationship permeated by discipline, time allocation is measured, and school activities are carried out with frightening regularity and in well-defined steps (Arriada, Nogueira, and Vahe, 2012, p. 53).

School, in its form, shapes the collective imagination with such intensity that “[...] school memories have become embedded in some of our behavioral patterns, often even in the form of physical responses” (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 178), and “[...] the functionality of the elements that make up the material culture of schools has come to overdetermine bodily practices, gestures, forms of writing and graphics, modes of orality, calculation techniques, and topology” (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 178). People are studying it more now than they did in the past for the following reasons:

² According to Souza (2000), "Scouting started in England around 1907. It was started by General Lord Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell. He wrote a book called *Scouting for Boys* (1908)." (Souza, 2000, p. 119). It started spreading throughout Europe and the United States, and then it began spreading in Brazil in 1910. The author explains that people in and out of the education world defended the practice. Scouting included physical activities and learning about civics and morality.

The current sensitivity to the materiality of the media that give a text its reading and to the creation strategies of its sources, whether they be written texts, oral testimonies, images, or artifacts, has contributed to the denaturalization of school institutions. The research that can be gathered in this regard responds in many ways to the challenges of the analytical procedures of the so-called new cultural history. (Paulilo, 2019, p. 03).

From 1895 onwards, J. B. de Mello e Souza had his first experiences of school, at which time, according to Souza (1998), the school's graduation began to establish itself as a paradigm for the organization of primary school:

[At the] end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, popular education was widespread worldwide and followed the model of graded schooling based on the homogeneous classification of students, with several classrooms and several teachers (Souza, 1998, p.15).

School groups began to appear in the state of São Paulo, but the school Meninos de Queluz (1949) is an isolated school³, as is the one in Majupira (1949), which, according to the author, was written in the context of the Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932. Both works portray cities in the interior of São Paulo, for which isolated schools were perennial models of school organization: “[...] the need for isolated schools was an indisputable fact. During the first decades of this century, they survived in the shadow of school groups in cities, neighborhoods, and the countryside” (Souza, 1998, p. 51).

When comparing the three works presented here, the classrooms differ from Colégio Pedro II in terms of physical structure and the arrangement of students in grades, with isolated schools having mixed classes with different ages and grades studying in the same room. In one or the other, however, the organization of students always seated, except when responding to oral calls, attendance calls, use of books, reading aloud, performing exercises, recitations, and festive and patriotic events are similar. Souza (1998) states that:

The classroom model for primary schools that is common in most countries, including Brazil, followed the idea of being practical and having clear rules. The classroom was arranged in a rectangular layout, which was the best design for the space. This issue caught the attention of many professionals, including architects, educators, doctors, and hygienists. These professionals used their role in society to suggest what the ideal conditions for air, light, furniture, and student posture should be (Souza, 1998, p. 139).

Over time, some objects have been added, others have been changed, but some have remained the same. Classrooms today have televisions, computers, digital whiteboards, and charts that students fill in with special pens. But these new tools still do the same things as old-fashioned blackboards. Individual desks can be grouped together when necessary, but they can also be found lined up in rows. Students have various materials for use in the classroom, including notebooks, pens, pencils, erasers, rulers, and books. Over time, classrooms, and the things in them can tell us a lot about how society has been taught. Paulilo (2019) wrote about museum material and research. He argued that:

³ An isolated school was a classroom run by a teacher who taught students of different ages and levels of advancement. According to Souza (2016), “[...] the term isolated school became commonly used among teaching professionals in the last decade of the 19th century” (Souza, 2016, p.366).

Just like buildings and their architecture, school objects have raised questions about understanding the history of schooling and how people remember this process. The way in which objects like the sand table, slate, stone pencil, metal pen, graphite pencil, paper, and notebook have helped people learn to write has already been studied. This has also led to people thinking about how disciplinary devices and their corrective and hygienic procedures have been used in schools. Even things like school notebooks, study materials, and uniforms have been studied to understand how they are a part of the school's social and institutional memory. The presence of wall clocks and the abundance of teaching materials such as wall charts or geometric solids were also important for understanding how teaching strategies were developed in the past (Paulilo, 2019, p. 6).

J. B. de Mello e Souza wrote books from 1938 to 1949. It's not clear if they were written in the order they were published, but the descriptions of classrooms in his memoirs and fiction show materials and resources from the late 19th century related to the school that operated in the Mello e Souza home. Souza's (2013) text explains how classrooms and the things in them have changed and stayed the same over time. When discussing educational technology in the 1960s and 1970s, the researcher lists the following methods, techniques, and objects:

sophisticated technologies, such as distance learning programs and educational radio, and simpler didactic objects: serial albums, brochures, felt boards, charts, posters, slides, transparencies, films, exhibitions, radio, blackboards, puppets, wall newspapers, dioramas, models, specimens, loudspeaker systems, newspapers, magazines, origami, overhead projectors, relief maps, photographs, books, hectographs, linoleum, pantographs, drawings, didactic murals, figures, and illustrations (Souza, 2013, p. 116).

It can be seen that blackboards, drawings, figures, and illustrations are what appear in the literature. In the 20th century, new resources emerged, even if they were inaccessible to all schools.

In *A Escola como cultura: experiência, memória e arqueologia* (Escolano Benito, 2017), there is an interesting selection of photographs showing various schools at different points in space and architectural conditions. School buildings, classroom furniture, school and teacher notebooks, activity books, didactic textbooks, reading books, and many other everyday school objects are critical for the archaeology of the school discussed in Escolano Benito's work (2017):

The archeological study of how schools function is a safe and reliable way to learn about educational practices. It allows you to explore the elements or situations that created the school universe or the representations of it. Archaeological sites that preserve these remains of the material history of schools, which are generally obsolete, hold many of the silent truths of the educational past that we are interested in uncovering (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 226).

Considering these aspects, literature is an ally in this archaeological process focused on classrooms. Narratives highlighting everyday school life with its practices, content, and objects are relevant sources. Cândido (2011) argues that:

Literature has been a powerful tool for teaching and education, entering school curricula and being suggested to everyone as something that helps you think and feel. Society advocates for or considers harmful values to be present in various forms of fiction, poetry, and drama. Literature lets us experience problems in a way that's both positive and negative, which is something that Cândido (2011, p. 177) has confirmed.

The literary works of teacher and writer J. B. de Mello e Souza, as well as those of the other authors cited, offer important clues that, together with the archaeology of the school, reveal the stories of classrooms in terms of teaching, socialization, relationships, and learning in different contexts of time, space, and materiality.

Three storylines about classrooms between memory and fiction

Critic Antônio Cândido (2011), when referring to literature, defines it as “in the broadest possible sense, all creations of a poetic, fictional, or dramatic nature at all levels of society, in all types of culture” (Cândido, 2011, p. 176), listing folklore, legends, and even forms that he considers to be more complex writings of great civilizations, which leads us to infer the relevance of these records to history. Literary works as sources raise important reflections. Lopes (2005) states that:

Literature can offer history a representation of the state of humanity at a given time, in a given place. Customs, opinions, affections, disagreements, men and women, children, one or the other sex or gender, and private effects of public events (which are more appropriately called historical) (Lopes, 2005, p. 157).

Denice Catani (2023) explains that "the idea of trying to understand, through literature, various parts of our lives, including those that occur at school and through school, or even in educational processes in general, is supported by several studies (Catani, 2023, p. 19). According to the sources presented here, the analysis is based on the idea that descriptions of experiences lived by others, like autobiographies, memoirs, and training reports, can also be especially helpful in education (Catani, 2023, p. 19). Therefore, it is an important contribution, in its variety of types, which over time records characteristics, including physical ones, of this space created for teaching. According to researcher Escolano Benito (2017):

To understand the school, to comprehend and interpret what has occurred and occurs within its walls, as well as the culture that has been invented and recreated there, it is imperative to immerse oneself in the daily life of institutions, to engage in systematic observation of what really happens within the spaces we call classrooms, and of the elements that constitute the setting in which formal and informal education is practiced (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 35).

The author shares with his readers a letter he received from teacher and researcher Santiago Petschen, along with an essay by the same author entitled *El arte de dar clases* (The Art of Teaching), highlighting the fact that much has been written about education:

But not from the classroom, “since the classroom is like the kitchen of the entire academic building.” For example, he mentions a book that is almost 1,000 pages long. It was recently published in Spain. The book contains more than 60 works on different educational topics. In these works, “the classroom appears only as an exception.” Professor Petschen's essay tries to resolve this problem because he considers the classroom to be a “minor work of art.” He says it's a mix of “logic, magic, drama, and rhetoric” (Escolano Benito, 2017, p. 33).

Considering the above considerations, paradoxically, there are many literary works, both memoirs and fiction, in which authors bring classrooms to life on the page. As noted in the presentation text of the books in the *Saraiva Collection*, organized by the publisher of the same name, in November 1949, under volume number 17, the book *Majupira* was published in its second edition. The first edition was published by Editora Pongetti in 1938. The *Coleção Saraiva* published national and foreign titles, stating that its interest was to encourage Brazilian authors to disseminate works with a national spirit. Among the authors are Pedro Calmon, Paulo Setúbal, Ciro dos Anjos, Galeão Coutinho, Menotti Del Picchia, Lucia Miguel Pereira, Malba Tahan, and Orígenes Lessa.

In the introduction to the work, the editor announces that it is “[...] a wonderful book, which describes mountainous and pleasant corners, the peaks of the Mantiqueira Mountains in the area of the famous tunnel”⁴ *Majupira* takes the reader on the adventures of children in the countryside: climbing Pico dos Marins, in the city of Piquete, and defending the honor of the teacher, fiancée of the young doctor from Rio de Janeiro, Osvaldo Luna Moreira. Led by Pedro Luiz, described by the author as reserved and suspicious, J. B. de Mello e Souza relates him to the native sertanejo, characterizing him as dominated by the impulses of the heart.

The story is complicated by the conflict between MAJUPIRA, a group of junior scouts, and the dishonest education inspector Altino Soares, a lawyer and bureaucrat in the State Education Department. This conflict reveals the daily life of the cities of Cruzeiro, Lorena, Cachoeira Paulista, Guaratinguetá, Queluz, Silveiras, Lavrinhas, Aparecida, Taubaté, Tremembé, and Jacareí, which are located along the Paraíba do Sul River Valley and the Bocaina mountain range. The story is full of typical characters: Colonel José Alves, the region's political leader, is portrayed as an uneducated and traditional man. Elvira, Maria Julia's rival teacher, is also featured. Other characters include postman Jarbas Feitosa, station agent Genelicio, Lucinha Freire, Afonso, Guaraciaba, Carlota Silvino, Marcelo, and Glorinha. The plot, set in the 1930s, is gradually revealed (Gabriel, 2020).

The “seventh mixed school in the rural area of Cruzeiro [...] operates in the teacher's own residence” (Mello e Souza, 1949, p. 95) and is introduced to the reader when the doctor, coming from Rio de Janeiro, is hosted by her father in the family home: “My daughter, who is a state professor, is teaching in the room next to the living room, but you won't disturb her at all” (Mello e Souza, 1949, p. 13). While waiting, the young doctor listened to the conclusion of the class:

“Guaraciaba,” said the teacher, “collect the second-year language notebooks.” You there, have you finished copying these exercises? Hurry up, I need the blackboard. Sebastiana, write properly, my dear. I've already told you that's not how you hold a pen. What's that noise, Pedro Luiz? Maria Augusta, has your toothache gone away? (Mello e Souza, 1949, p. 13).

⁴ Tunnel on the border between São Paulo and Minas Gerais, scene of the battles of the Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932.

In the following pages, we learn that one of the day's activities is a description of the bandeirantes, the "pioneers of the sertão," and the execution of Tiradentes in history class. The teacher ends the class by ringing a bell three times. Among the materials available were: a Brazilian flag made by the teacher and some students; the book of terms filled out by school inspectors, doctors, and other visitors to the isolated school classroom; a piano; a school chart; primers; and exercise books. In the classroom, it was common to take attendance, sing school songs, and check the children's health.

When visitors came to the class, the children stood up to greet them. Poetry recitals were also common. The school inspector visited to check the books, school supplies, the class's progress, and the enrollment and attendance records (Mello and Souza, 1949). According to Souza (2013):

The continuous expansion of the primary school network in the state of São Paulo in the early decades of the 20th century occurred through a process of multiple differentiations. In addition to the different types of schools that existed—such as isolated schools, school groups, model schools, and combined schools—the conditions of facilities and materials differed depending on the location where they were located, whether in urban or rural areas, and also depending on regional economic and social development (Souza, 2013, p. 107).

The author goes on to systematically record the materials used: “[...] primers and reading books and routine lessons using the blackboard and chalk, notebooks and pencils. [...] maps and posters” (Souza, 2013, p. 107). When looking at the illustrations in the works analyzed, these are the materials most frequently mentioned.

Figure 01 – Cover of the book *Estudantes do meu tempo* (1958).



Source: Researcher's private collection.

In *Estudantes do meu tempo* (*Students of My Time*, 1958), J. B. de Mello e Souza recounts his memories as a student at Ginásio Nacional, as Colégio Pedro II⁵ was called at the beginning of the republican period. This was the second in the chronological sequence of the teacher's publications. Following this reading order, the differences observed in relation to classrooms are highlighted. It is a school in Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil. A secondary school attended by members of the Brazilian elite, the narrative is written by a former student, now a teacher at the institution. According to the author, the book was born from an invitation from his students:

One day (several years ago now), the leaders of the Mello e Souza Literary Society at the Pedro II Boarding School approached me. One of them told me, "Teacher, the Ministry of Education wants us to be on their weekly radio program, Hora do Estudante, on PRA-2." We hope students from the day school and other schools will join in the music and singing. We now want you to take part in our programs (Mello e Souza, 1958, p. 07).

The teacher's radio appearance was to tell stories from his time as a student at the high school where the book is set. The book cover (figure 01) shows a picture of a student who looks bored and sad. He is sitting at an old desk with his arm resting on it and his hand on his face. The stories do not focus on the classroom, but the activities that take place there provide important information. For example:

The classes were fascinating lectures; with the teachers' permission, we would bring their chairs close to the semicircle formed by our six desks, and there, in a cordial and serene atmosphere, in the front room, which was also the Natural History office [...], we took our journeys through the realms of science, art, and fantasy (Mello e Souza, 1958, p. 185).

Praise predominates in references to secondary school teachers, with emphasis on their knowledge and the demanding treatment they gave their students. According to Cândido (2012), on the professional knowledge of teachers:

These must also be understood in relation to their classroom work; the use that each teacher makes of their knowledge depends on their work and the situations that arise daily, in addition to the physical and material resources available to them that condition this work (Cândido, 2012, p. 147).

⁵ Colégio Pedro II was founded on December 2, 1837 (the 12th birthday of D. Pedro de Alcântara), during the Regency Period (1831-1840). It had boarding and day school programs. According to the exhibition *Memória Histórica* (*Historical Memory*): "Under the republican regime, the name of the school was changed four times, first to Instituto Nacional de Instrução Secundária (National Institute of Secondary Education) (1889); later to Ginásio Nacional (National Gymnasium) (1890); Externato Nacional Pedro II (Pedro II National Day School) and Internato Nacional Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos (Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos National Boarding School) (1909). Finally, in 1911, when he was President, former student Marechal Hermes da Fonseca restored its name – Colégio Pedro II" (EXHIBITION Historical Memory. Official online historical gallery of Colégio Pedro II. [S.l.], ColégioPedroII,2025). Available at: https://www.cp2.g12.br/images/comunicacao/memoria_historica/index.html. Last accessed on January 30, 2025.

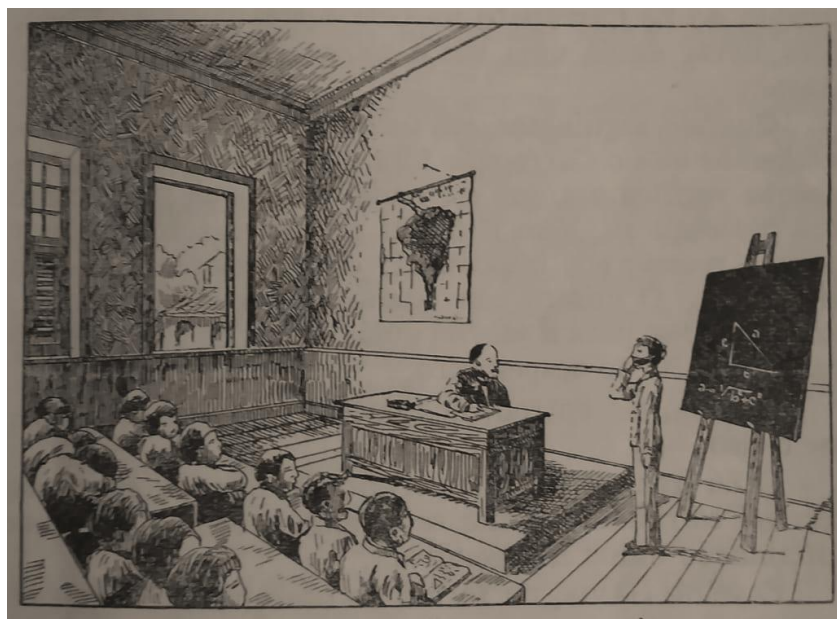
Some students developed close relationships with their teachers. These relationships may have been due to shared interests or family friendships. In fact, some students were even invited to visit their teachers' homes on days off (Mello e Souza, 1958). There is also a lot of criticism of the more serious, authoritarian teachers, including those who committed "[...] clear injustices and extreme whims" (Mello and Souza, 1958, p. 2016).

On each page, there are only a few elements of the Old College of São Cristóvão's classrooms: long corridors, a cafeteria, teachers' and administrators' offices, and a study room. In one of the passages about the visits that would be received in the building due to the 3rd Latin American Scientific Congress in 1905, when the building was cleaned, the author describes it as "[...] fixing up its old shacks, eagerly awaiting the new buildings that promise it a dignified facility" (Mello e Souza, 1958, p. 210).

When reporting that he would assist in a class taught by Professor João Ribeiro, J. B. de Mello e Souza mentions the blackboard. Further on, he reports that the “physics room, despite being a little dark, is the largest we have” (Mello e Souza, 1958, p. 211) and there was a “[...] window stuck due to age” (Mello e Souza, 1958, p. 212). The blackboard is an element present in school memories; as a teaching tool, it is part of the school furniture and also a space for students to express themselves through play (Bastos, 2005). As can be seen in Figure 2, the blackboard is also noted in school photographs. The author explains that:

It is present in the famous end-of-year school photos: students sitting at the teacher's desk, with the blackboard in the background, the flag, and the globe. In short, everyday school life was and still is governed by this writing device and the discipline of time management and schoolwork, from nursery school to university (Bastos, 2005, p. 135).

Figure 02 – Illustration on page 51 of the book *Estudantes do meu tempo* (1958)

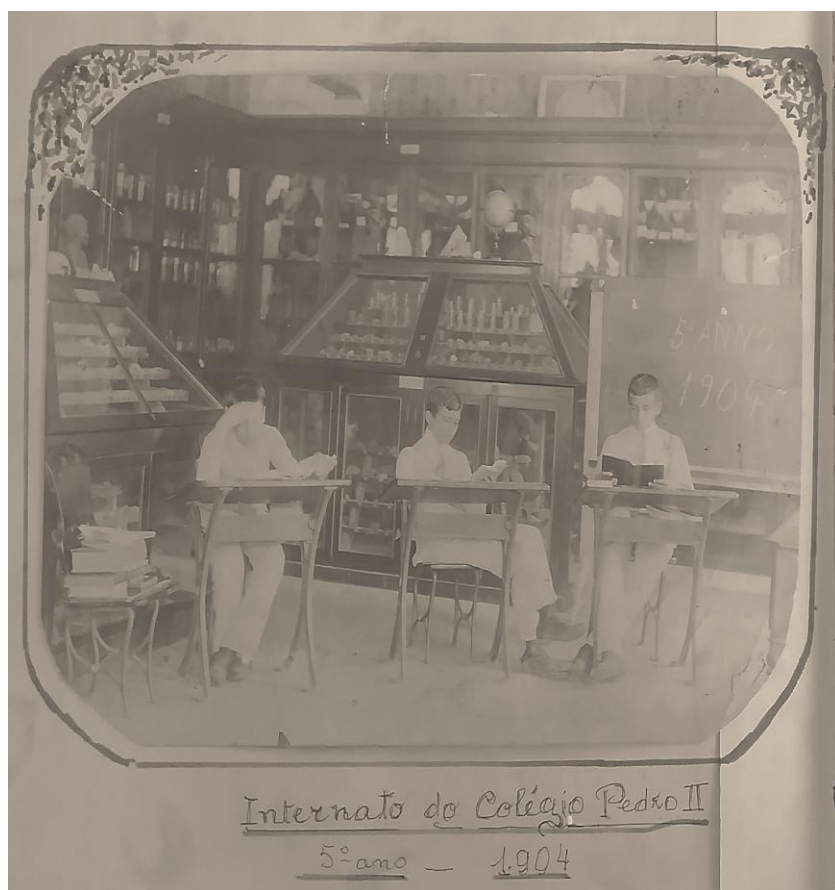


Source: Researcher's private collection.

On page 51, there is an illustration of one of the classrooms: two tall windows, one closed and the other open; two rows of desks, each desk occupied by three students; and one of the students has an open book or notebook. In front of them, the teacher is seated behind a large desk on a platform. There is a book on the desk. On the wall behind the teacher, there is a map, and, next to a student being assessed, a blackboard on an easel (Figure 02). On the following pages, we see some materials and functions of some of the classrooms, such as the logarithm table, books, blotter, teachers wearing suits, students in uniforms, and the tutors' room:

It is in this room that Quintino
With a serious and scholarly air,
Gives a lecture to the boy
Who cannot, foolishly,
Find a main clause! (Mello e Souza, 1958, p. 67)

Figure 03 – Photograph taken inside one of the classrooms at Colégio Pedro II, 1904. The image was reproduced in the book *Estudantes do meu tempo* (*Students of My Time*) (1958).



Source: Researcher's private collection.

On page 223, the author included the image above (Figure 03). This photo is also in the photo album of J. B. de Mello e Souza, which is available for research⁶. J. B. de Mello e Souza is the student in front of the blackboard. The date 1904 is written on the blackboard. The room is full of books, stacked on chairs and on individual desks. There are also glass-door cabinets with various objects in them, including a globe and a bust. There are other objects in the cabinets, but we don't know what they are right now. The three students in the center of the room are wearing uniforms that look like the ones worn by the armed forces. The room in the book is different from the room in the story. The room in the book has many desks and students. There is no identification in the album, so we can guess that it is one of the reading rooms, study rooms, or rooms for different subjects taught at Colégio Pedro II.

When we compare this information with that of Majupira (1949), we see two different groups: one in a primary school in the rural interior of São Paulo and the other in a secondary school for the elites of the Federal District. In the first, the classroom is the school. The second is a school in an urban area. It is in a large building with rooms for different subjects. The materials in the two classrooms are different. In one classroom, the teacher's voice is loud. In the other classroom, there are plenty of materials.

In *Meninos de Queluz* (1949), we see a primary school classroom. It is similar to the classroom in Majupira (1949), but it is located in the urban area of Queluz. Queluz is a coffee-producing city in the state of São Paulo. It is experiencing its first years of republican rule. This memoir is about the Mello e Souza family. The mother, who is a teacher, and her school are important characters in the story. In fact, the original title was *Os filhos da professora* (*The Teacher's Children*), according to the original typescript. Teacher Dona Carolina's public school was in her home. It had four glass windows that faced the street. School inspectors visited her to check her work, and at first, only girls attended the school. It included a blackboard, books, and school furniture. The text also mentions pencils and desks. Recess usually took place in the backyard of the house.

There is a picture of Professor Carolina's classroom between pages 40 and 41 of the book. The picture shows a blackboard, table, map on the wall, and books. It is a perfect scene, as the teacher's students are not shown. Instead, her children are shown studying while the teacher takes notes for the next day's class. On page 86, there's another picture of the blackboard, the globe, and a big easel with sheets of paper. On the paper, there are drawings of a boy telling stories to several girls, most of whom are sitting on the floor (Mello e Souza, 1949). In the classroom of *Meninos de Queluz* (1949), poetry, recitations, drawings, songs, and many books are a recurring theme. The author says that the way his mother, a teacher, lived her life and her classroom influenced his children to choose teaching as a profession.

Final considerations

In conclusion, the three works we studied show us how classrooms have changed. Previously located in teachers' homes, as the teaching degree became established as a model for school organization (Souza, 1998), they now have their buildings. The layout of the building includes rooms for different subjects. This shows the connection between the knowledge the school wants to teach and how the building is arranged (Julia, 2001).

But we also see in the writings of J. B. de Mello e Souza memories that insist on living on, even when things are changing. You can see the control of bodies in descriptions from the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century. The disciplinary perspective uses different technologies as schools gain more resources, but it is still a practice that schools must teach (Julia, 2001).

⁶ The album we're talking about is kept in the researcher's personal collection.

In J. B. de Mello e Souza's literary stories, which were first published between 1938 and 1949, there are parts that talk about classrooms and how students and teachers moved around from about 1895 to 1949. These parts show how the school kept traditional ways of doing things but also changed over time.

It is important to note that the writer and teacher taught students in elementary school, secondary school, teacher training colleges, and universities from 1914 to the 1960s in public and private institutions in Rio de Janeiro. The texts show that the classroom settings and organization are similar in all three stories. Female teachers instruct classes at remote schools for younger students, while male teachers work at Colégio Pedro II for older students. The work *Estudantes do meu tempo* (Students of My Time) (1958) shows that the teachers come from various backgrounds, such as engineering, medicine, law, and many are also graduates of the institution itself. In *Majupira* (1949), the teacher graduated from a normal school.⁷ The author's mother's school memories in *Meninos de Queluz* (1949) and the work of fiction *Majupira* (1949) are set in different periods of time. Despite this, the two schools are similar.

Despite Escolano Benito's (2017) observation that the classroom is unattractive to many of the works dedicated to understanding schools, the works analyzed here abound in descriptions and reflections on this teaching space. In this sense, we argue for the relevance of literary works to a history of education that is attentive to school culture in its practices, spaces, times, and materialities (Lopes, 2005). The potential of literature lies precisely in providing material for analysis that combines description and narrative, highlighting how much the classroom is present in the memories of those who had a significant part of their childhood embraced by school.

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⁷ Schools focused on preparing teachers. "The first Brazilian normal school was established in the Province of Rio de Janeiro by Law No. 10 of 1835" (Tanuri, 2000, p. 64).

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