

# ***Regenerationist school practice: The model of traditional pedagogical renovation of teachers during Spain's Second Republic<sup>1</sup>***

**Carlos Menguiano-Rodríguez**

email: [carlos.menguianorodr@edu.uah.es](mailto:carlos.menguianorodr@edu.uah.es)  
*Universidad de Alcalá. Spain*

**María del Mar del Pozo-Andrés**

email: [mar.pozo@uah.es](mailto:mar.pozo@uah.es)  
*Universidad de Alcalá. Spain*

**Abstract:** This article attempts to establish the model of traditional pedagogical renovation that persisted among Spanish teachers in the 1930s: the regenerationist model. The origins of this model can be found in the social movement of nineteenth century regenerationism, which spurred a model of school practices based on the *fin-de siècle* concepts of encyclopedism and on the graded school. The fact that teachers active during the Second Republic continued to consider these ideas to be innovative attests to a pedagogical anachronism in school practices. In order to examine this anachronism, we have resorted to the files from the public examination of teachers competing for the position of school headteacher in 1932, and in particular, the part of the exam where teachers give an account of their professional work. Through our analysis of the narratives presented, we are able to conclude that regenerationist ideas, as well as their translation into practice, constituted an important part of the professional identity of schoolteachers during the Republic.

**Keywords:** pedagogical renovation; regenerationism; school practice; integral education; graded school; republican school.

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## **1. Introduction**

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One of the great challenges in the history of education in recent decades involves the continuity and change in school practices within national educational systems. Among the pioneering and best-known works in this area we should mention that of Tyack & Cuban (1995), which established the capacity of the «grammar of schooling» to resist changes and reforms. A few years later, Depaepe (2000) demonstrated the existence of a «grammar of educationalization» (p. 243), which complements the grammar of schooling and regulates the way that an educational institution is transformed. Meanwhile, Viñao (2002) reminds us of the importance of asking into the reasons for changes in educational systems. This paper focuses on the preeminent role that teachers themselves play in these processes of change, given that it is they who incorporate innovations into their professional practice, constantly interpreting and adapting ideas and educational reforms to the reality of the classroom.

As a way of analysing this tension between continuity and change in the school, education historians have turned to new sources in order to discover what goes on in daily school practice. Along with the pedagogical press used by Depaepe in his work, we also have images, ego-documents, schoolwork and school materials, all of which help us to peer into «the black box of schooling» (Braster, Grosvenor & Pozo, 2011). Many of these sources afford us a first-hand look from the point of view of the true protagonists of school practices: teachers themselves. We are convinced that pedagogical renovation is inseparably linked to the way that teachers perceive the novelty of their own teaching practices and the way in which they subscribe to reform movements and the subjective, emotional tensions that this entails (Pozo, 2005, p. 116). In constructing their professional identities, teachers have no choice but to position themselves, consciously or otherwise, on the tradition-renovation continuum, which in turn affects the way changes are made in classroom practices. This is why we believe in the importance of studying the manner in which teachers interpreted their own professional practices, identifying those that they considered to be innovative and then establishing the models of renovation that were being used at a given time. We may discover that practices perceived as innovative by teachers at a given period were already commonly used in the educational system. This lag or mismatch would denote the existence of a model of pedagogical renovation that we could call «traditional». By analysing this mismatch, we can then determine the degree of continuity or change reflected in the classroom practices considered «innovative» in schools at a given time.

In this article we shall be using this approach by applying it to school practices of the 1930s. In doing so, we are following the notion of *pedagogical anachronism*, an expression coined by Ortega in the *Revista de Pedagogía* (Ortega, 1923). In his article, the philosopher diagnosed the constitutive anachronism of pedagogical ideas, observing that pedagogues build their ideas upon those of their teachers, proposing a school built upon the needs of the past instead of organising one around those of the future. If we apply this concept to the moment in which it was expressed, we believe that a «pedagogical anachronism» can be found in the school practices of those very years, when schoolteachers identified with a model of pedagogical renovation based on ideas popularised and considered «innovative» several decades earlier. This can be said to constitute an anachronistic model, then, if the teachers

resorting to it consider these practices – derived from a «reforming tradition» that gave continuance to a model from previous decades – to be innovative.

In this paper we will attempt to identify the «pedagogical anachronism» underlying the model of traditional school renovation – based on school discourses and practices from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – that lived on in the work of schoolteachers during the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939): the *regenerationist model*. This model emerged in Spain at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of a broad social and intellectual movement known as *Regeneracionismo*<sup>2</sup> that had a great impact on the country's social, economic, and cultural life. The impact of regenerationist ideas were not only felt by the general public for decades, but they affected all sectors of society: from politicians, intellectuals and artists to the humblest of workers, represented by the cobbler whom novelist Pío Baroja portrays ironically displaying an advert over the entrance of his shop front: «For the Regeneration of Footwear» (Baroja, 1920, p. 55). Naturally, this movement also affected teachers and their work, inspiring a model of pedagogical renovation that was adopted by many state schoolteachers from the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the Second Republic. In this work, we understand regenerationism to refer to those reformist discourses launched «from above» that reached their apex at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their roots go back before 1898 and their use continued throughout the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as is shown in recent studies such as that by Navarra (2015). While regenerationism is undoubtedly a complex, polysemic movement, there is a consensus about the way it identified the nation's problems and sought solutions for them (Ribas, 2007). Chief among these problems was the question of education, which was seen as a reflection of the country's crisis (Pozo, 2000; Mayordomo, 2007). This helps to explain the fact that the relationship between regenerationism and education has been written about widely in numerous studies (Vicente, 1992; Fernández Soria, 1998; Ruiz Berrio, Bernat, Domínguez & Juan, 1999; Mayordomo, 2000; Salavert & Suárez, 2007; Torreadella, 2014).

One result of this relationship was what we termed, in another study, the «first movement of pedagogical renovation» (Pozo, 2005, pp. 118-120), one whose pillars were encyclopedism and the graded school. Both of these ideas took hold in Spain in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century before being incorporated into the educational system in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Our goal here is to study the perpetuation of these regenerationist ideas and reforms in school practices from the 1920s and 1930s, a subject which has received little attention beyond the work of Viñao (1990) and Pozo (2000). We will tackle this line of research using new sources that allow us to study the way these regenerationist ideas were translated into school practices as chronicled by the teachers themselves in the 1930s. These new sources are the 287 public exam files presented by candidates in the competitive exams held in 1932 for the position of school headteacher in large graded schools – six grades

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<sup>2</sup> The *Regeneracionismo* was a complex and polysemic intellectual and political movement, which stemmed in part as a reaction to the «Disaster of '98» after the Spanish-American War (1898), whose defeat resulted in the loss of the Spanish colonial empire's last remnants. The regenerationists sought to diagnose the causes of the country's decadence and backwardness and to propose remedies for «national regeneration».

or more— built by the Republican government<sup>3</sup>. In these files, active teachers from all over Spain had been asked to write a *memoir* or report about their professional work, backing it up with any additional documents that they deemed to be of value; we consider these files as an «institutional life-archive practice» (Menguiano, Pozo & Barceló, 2020, p. 204). These professional life-archives elaborated by the teachers provide us with a snapshot of the discourses and practices that were most popular among the innovative teachers at the time and which they believed would help them in their aspiration to obtain the position of school headteacher with the new Republican regime. As we will see, all of them, including the most forward-thinking, resorted to elements of the regenerationist model described above.

We will use these professional life-stories to attempt to answer the following questions: Did the ideas of pedagogical regenerationism have a place in the model of pedagogical renovation defended by these candidates? What was their practical translation in the school culture of the time? Were these teaching practices truly innovative in the 1930s? Our study is structured in three parts. First, we will identify the elements of regenerationist discourse invoked by the teachers as part of their professional identity. We will then look at their translation into teaching practices, analysing the two fundamental pillars of the regenerationist model of pedagogical renovation: an «integral» encyclopaedic education and the ideal of the graded school.

## 2. Echoes of the regenerationist discourse in the professional identity of the Second Republic's teachers

At first glance, the files analysed show a majority of the candidates to have identified with the pedagogical optimism that marked the regenerationist movement (Pozo, 2000, p. 65), which envisioned a new school capable of transforming the country. This is evidenced by the frequency with which they give voice to this conviction. Some teachers acknowledge the enormous influence of the movement and feel «proud to belong to a class that can, if it makes up its mind to, change Spain» (Gadea, 1932). Others take as their task «the revitalisation of the school, which is the nation's redemption» (González Martínez, 1932), the «improvement of customs brought about by the efficiency of the School» (Fernández Marcote, 1933) and its constant expansion, which will serve to «reform the outdated life of the country» (Azcárate, 1932). We also find a perception of the new Republican regime as a guarantee of a renewed drive for the «clamour for regeneration» of the teachers (Guzmán, 1932). The regeneration of the country by means of the school is also expressed in the somewhat clinical terms typical of the original regenerationist discourse (Ribas, 2007, p. 49), where an ailing country is healed by the «therapeutic action» of the school (Fernández Villar, 1933). This clinical tone is reinforced by some candidates with their emphasis on campaigns against alcoholism and teachings on hygiene and childcare. These competences are taught in adult classes, popular conferences or school fairs, and they are meant to help combat «errors that

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the files are housed in the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid).

contribute so directly to the physical demise of the race» (Prado, 1932), or to avoid future mothers' having to raise «degenerate children» (Garrido, 1932).

The echo of regenerationist ideas can also be found in the internalisation of one of the proposals heard most often in the educational policies of the different governments in the first third of the century, namely, the priority of extending primary schooling to the entire population and increasing the resources allocated to it. In the professional reports of teachers, these ideas are crystallised in three essential elements: creating new schools, improving schools' conditions, and ensuring an effective means for providing schooling and literacy to the populace. These elements coincide with the demands of the regenerationist discourse that was in vogue during the 1920s and 1930s (López, 1994; Llopis, 1933). The professional files studied here show that the reformist profile of regenerationist teachers included their belief in the importance of becoming involved and playing an active role in school renovation; this much is reflected in their professional discourse. But what exactly are the pillars of the regenerationist discourse of these teachers?

First and foremost, came the procurement of better school premises. There is a reformist rhetoric centred around the school building, one which was quite common at the time and appears repeatedly in the memoirs. It includes two distinct aspects. On the one hand, we find harsh criticisms of schools set up «in dusty or prison reminiscing places» (Pérez Palacios, 1933) or classrooms installed literally «in a deep hole on a rock» (Gómez Gómez, 1933). On the other hand, we have the direct involvement and proactive role of teachers in reforming old schools or building new ones where none exist. Thus, these files give us a view of the central role that teachers played as advocates of the new school buildings, an undertaking that at the time was seen by some as «a kind of historical event» (García Salmerón, 2018, p. 103). The most noteworthy example is that of the teacher Mateos, who describes erecting school buildings in two different teaching posts, the second one being a school complex of four grades that «today is the pride and joy of the city and is admired by everyone who visits» (Mateos, 1933).

A second element that teachers agree upon in their regenerationist discourses has to do with the lack of sufficient resources for carrying out their work. Some teachers recount how virtually every school has «filthy areas piled high with materials that were falling apart from old age. They all boasted of a past intellectualism, a poor conception based on the idea that the more posters, books and sayings you had, the better citizenry you would produce» (Merino, 1933). The teachers' response to this situation was also proactive, and the glaring lack of official support for school materials was addressed in varied ways. Fund-raising campaigns were common, often as a part of activities at school fairs, while the construction of educational materials and furniture, made by the teachers themselves – often with their students' help – was another source of school supplies. These teachers take «the renewal of everything in the school» to be a professional accomplishment and take pride in achieving «a school well supplied with modern, attractive and abundant material» (González Rodríguez, 1933). One initiative that stands out particularly is the acquisition of modern radio and film projecting material, which found use not only among students but in the local community.

The final element of the regenerationist discourse is the rising of school enrolment, together with the improvement of literacy of the general population in the towns where the teachers worked. The teachers offer statistics and comparisons as evidence of the positive steps taken. One of their preferred ways of demonstrating improvement is showing the increase in school matriculations since their arrival at the school, since «teachers get the school attendance that they deserve» (Mateos, 1933). Sometimes this increase is directly related to the improvement in the image of the state school, whose «educational efficiency» surpassed that of private schools (Zaforas, 1933).

The three elements discussed so far are often related to another regenerationist idea, that of «pedagogical propaganda» (Pozo, 2012, p. 262) which some teachers engage in their towns. Newspaper clippings and promotional initiatives trumpet the importance of the state school, raising people's awareness and garnering support for the building and furnishing of new schools. All of these elements are found in abundance in the professional discourse of these teachers, appearing repeatedly in their memoirs. In fact, many of the most personal testimonies revolve around them. However, these accounts of the regenerationist idea of renewing the country by means of more and better schools are only offered here in a merely discursive way; they focus on obtaining the necessary material conditions along with the social acknowledgement necessary to carry out their educational function, but they offer little information about teaching practices. In and of themselves, therefore, they cannot be said to constitute a model of pedagogical renovation *per se*. Rather, they represent the internalisation by the teachers of some of the ideas of regenerationist educational policies, which serve as a kind of framework for their teaching practices.

### **3. Integral Education: the practical translations of the encyclopaedic ideal**

The primary element undergirding regenerationist school practice was the idea of an *educación integral* – «integral» or «comprehensive» education –, a term that was a sort of «buzzword» for the regenerationist movement (Pozo, 2000, p. 74). This idea was key in the construction of the pedagogical renovating discourse because of the way it was defined – like other binomial concepts of the time: old/new school; instruction/education; – *in opposition to* a school tradition that it wanted to leave behind. For these teachers, the traditional school was an outmoded nineteenth century concept, an intellectualist, memory-based, bookish institution that merely instructed rather than educating. In most of the teachers' accounts this caricature of the traditional school seems perfunctory. However, some teachers describe this type of archaic instruction in rural schools as grounded in lived experience and needing to be changed. In these cases, one of the first things the new teacher does is to ask «all of the students to leave at home their thick book-folders, their historical satchels from yesterday's School.... that they forget about what these simple people called their 'memory-books'» (Cerro, 1933). This archaic type of school found in the new «comprehensive» education idea its antithesis, i.e., a school that sought to harmoniously develop the child's different capacities and prepare him or her for a future life in society. The idea is expressed explicitly in many of the memoirs, such

as in the admonition that the school must move away from «what has until now been the traditional Spanish school. The silent, memory-based school». We are reminded of the importance of keeping in mind «the ideal of education, that the school should not merely instruct children and attempt to develop their intelligence. The school must form complete persons» (Mochón, 1933). And yet, in their interpretation of the idea of an «integral education», the notion that school is meant to prepare students for life as adults seems to be taken for granted. But, what does it mean for these teachers «to prepare students for life»?

For some teachers there is a link between preparing students for life and social Darwinism, where education would serve to put students into contact «with the reality of life and offer them an advantage with which to fight in the society they will be a part of and which, as always, involves a harsh battle for existence» (Arribas, 1933). Expressions such as this show that the anthropological model of the «struggleforlifer» (Pozo, 2000, p. 69) was alive and well. As an educational objective, this translates into a utilitarian idea: preparing children to find a livelihood after their schooling. The aim is an education in which the students «acquire as much knowledge and learn as many skills as they will need to live later on» (García Rodríguez, 1933) or «an integral education and an instruction that is as vast and utilitarian as possible» (Estades, n/d).

But what does the translation of these aspirations into school practice look like? The solution embraced by these teachers was to adopt encyclopedism as a curricular model (Pozo, 2000, p. 124), which is exactly what the regenerationists were proposing at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Teaching should be «encyclopaedic to a certain degree» in order to stimulate «all of the faculties» (Fresno, 1932) and offer the student knowledge that is «indispensable but solidly acquired» and «with a view towards their future life» (Juez, 1933). We can see how pedagogical renovation is expressed in the adoption of various subjects introduced in the school syllabus that will help to develop the child's different faculties, in the procedures for teaching these subjects and in the spaces in which they were to be developed. The subjects of the programme were those assigned as compulsory in the curriculum of 1901. However, in the absence of a national syllabus with specific contents for each subject, teachers enjoyed a certain margin of freedom in how they interpreted those contents and in the procedures used to implement them. If many of these teachers perceive themselves as reformists, it is because they themselves have had to provide didactic solutions for many subjects, solutions which they present as innovations that transform the traditional school.

The foundation of these innovations is «intuition, lots of intuition» (Terrero, 1932). In contrast to the old mechanical and memory-based school, intuitive methodologies are seen as an efficient means of providing useful knowledge, since «all our efforts should focus on *helping the student see*, and that everything they see may become an instrument to help them come out ahead in life's struggle» (Pablo, 1932). Teaching should be based on «observation and experimentation, as all subjects and all knowledge can be made observable and experimentable» (Hidalgo, 1932). This accounts for the proliferation of «innovations» such as the object lessons, visual supports, the varied exercises related to daily life and games that rely on didactic resources taken from «the concrete, geographic, social, mathematical, physical

and idiomatic realities of the child, those that are immediately relatable for him» (Calzada, 1932). This is not to say that the traditional teacher-centred lesson was not still the backbone of school life. Some teachers speak of «integral intuition», where the student, «in addition to seeing the objects, handles them» (Machado, 1933), and frequent, indiscriminate use is made of the so-called «active methodologies», understood to mean the constant movement and occupation of the children.

In all subjects the key seems to be the need to provide useful knowledge to pupils. For example, «in mathematics we should go straight into the practical use of this discipline that is so important to the productive man» (Santamaría, 1932), even at the risk of turning all of the students into little businessmen; yet «school should prepare us for life and life is a constant business» (Rodríguez, 1933). In geography class, once the students have studied the school map and know the area well, they go on imaginary excursions where, in addition to learning about other areas, they «figure out the trip expenses, what things they could buy along the way, depending on what is produced there, etc.» (Sánchez-Isasia, 1933). They create itineraries where they describe «everything useful, good and beautiful that we find» (Seco, 1932) and they learn «how to use the railroad guide» (Ugedo, 1933). Natural sciences are considered useful for «overcoming old prejudices and routines involving livestock and crop production» (Santamaría, 1932) or «as a way of learning about rules of hygiene and agricultural and industrial procedures» (Torrego, 1932).

While all of these procedures can be considered to be innovative, there are several subjects and practices which, within the encyclopaedic curriculum, stand out as especially novel and denote a difference with a genuine «integral education». One of these is physical education, «a decisive factor in the future of the races» that «not only helps in developing agile limbs, stamina and a physically toughened body» (Sancho, 1933), but also «develops dexterity, boldness, self-confidence and resistance to rickets, tuberculosis, etc.» (Machado, 1933). This subject is usually accompanied by lessons in physiology, hygiene and singing – either patriotic or popular songs – which, in addition to being «a wonderful practice for physical education, is also a source and medium for noble sentiments regarding Nature and the Homeland» (Calzada, 1932).

In the pedagogical renovation discourse of some of these teachers, the incorporation of physical education into school life is made out to be revolutionary. One teacher describes her surprise «at the hilarity with which all the inhabitants of the town reacted to my introducing gymnastics in the school programme» (Soldevilla, n/d), while others acknowledge as an important milestone the foundation of sports societies and playing fields in the schools. Many teachers take the matter seriously and consider themselves competent to teach the subject after specialised training, although for the most part they follow the *Cartilla Gimnástica Infantil*, founded on Swedish gymnastics and introduced during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930). Not all of them consider this to be the ideal model of physical education for the younger students, however. There are those who, while acknowledging the use of the *Cartilla*, prefer that their female students practice «above all those exercises that correspond to their sex, that is, those that help develop their thorax, rachis and abdomen» (Balbastre, 1933). Others show greater enthusiasm for rhythmic gymnastics and its practice with musical accompaniment, going so far as to mention

the Dalcroze Method, with no disrespect for traditional dances (Badenes, 1933; Gracia, n/d). Finally, the sceptics of Swedish gymnastics and rhythmic gymnastics conclude that although «it is nice as a spectacle and something to watch, it is not as efficient as natural gymnastics. I believe that the games and the work of daily life contain all of those movements, but performed better and more often» (Sancho, 1933).

The incorporation of intuitive procedures and physical education as essential elements of «integral education» leads virtually all of the teachers to allude to the translation into practice of one of the most popular principles of pedagogical regenerationism: open air teaching, taking place outside of the school and including excursions and field trips. The innovativeness of such a practice in the 1930s is questionable, given that it was regularised in primary education by Royal Decree on 10 April 1918, and incorporated into the Graded School Regulations in 1918. In fact, the activity was already taking place in Spanish state schools starting in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Colom, 1999, p. 437; Porto & Vázquez, 2017, p. 153-154). Nonetheless, teachers in the 1930s seem to see it as a significantly innovative practice and consider the transgression implicit in leaving the school grounds as a gesture of pedagogical revolution. A number of teachers tell of the ground-breaking role they played when initiating these excursions before the unbelieving – and even disapproving – eyes of the families. Prado, for example, recounts the hostility with which the practice was met at her first teaching post, a rural girls' school: «We were never able to carry these excursions off happily. The mockery, the attacks on the girls, blocking the way we were trying to go» all resulted in violent actions taken against the teacher's house and her subsequent abandonment of the school (Prado, 1932).

Other memoirs recount how teaching was taken outside the classroom. Open air classes made use of the spaces around the school building, but if there were no gardens or patios «we would take possession of the street that provided access to the school. Maths exercises, lesson planning, and a few other things could be done there where at least we breathe the fresh air and enjoy a little more freedom» (Mochón, 1933). School outings are also explicitly identified with the pedagogical principle of intuition. Castañón (n/d) points out how «outings and excursions put the students in contact with the world around them, encouraging their spirit of observation. Students would focus on practical things from daily life» that were applicable to a variety of school subjects. They proved especially valuable for learning about Geography, since «on these walks and outings they actually see geography as it is in real life, not as they might imagine it in a book; they learn about the surroundings they live in and the influence it has on their lives» (Garmendia, 1933). But excursions are also used in more abstract subjects such as History, where they come into contact with «bones, pieces of hand mills, pottery remains» (Mariño, 1933) found in archaeological sites or in visits to monuments or places of historical interest. The Natural Science subjects are almost inconceivable without these outings, where lessons are given and «abundant material is gathered for the object lessons» (Echereste, 1933). These materials would then become part of the «school museum».

The teachers' discourse becomes considerably more elaborate when referring specifically to field trips. While they continue to be justified by the principle of intuition

and the physical activity involved, we also catch a glimpse of more utilitarian purposes. Field trips are used as a means of professional formation and orientation. For Cobo, «our preference is the factories and big industry. This is for a reason, of course: of this group of girls, they are not all going to study, we can't even pretend they are; most of them will probably become workers; the School aims to hand them over to the workshops with a respectable level of culture» (Cobo, 1932). Soleda takes his students «to the vineyards, so we can see the vines and the plants' growth at different times of the year and then be able to follow the process of the Champagne industry (...) so that the children can see intuitively the workings of the profession that provides employment to most of the town» (Soleda, 1932).

Favourite among these field trips seem to have been those that took the students outside of their town to visit «all that is noble in the region» (Barberán, 1933). Such trips were of great use for «integral education» and included a new goal: traveling beyond the local town and providing students «with a picture of the scientific, literary and industrial world» (Terrero, 1932). Classes were given in preparation for such expeditions to make the most of their intellectual and civic potential, and to prepare students to learn «about what we are going to see and how they are supposed to behave in public venues, in the office buildings of the Governor and the Mayor, in the cafeteria» (Benimeli, 1932), along with «practical lessons about circulating in the big city» (Lorón, 1929). Special emphasis is given to longer trips when students spend «two days in the capital visiting all manifestations of human activity: culture, art, industry, etc.» (Simarro, 1932). In exceptional cases these excursions could last for weeks. This was the case of the teacher Lorón, a school-tour pioneer, who organised various trips with his older students. The most notable of these, a visit to the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition, lasted 15 days and involved meticulous planning. The details are all included in a log attached to the memoir, describing places visited, the free time, meals, expenses and a photographic record of the experience which include snapshots of gymnastic activities (Figure 1a; Figure 1b). This trip was presented as a model for other rural teachers in the regional and national press, clippings of which also appear in the teacher's file (Lorón, 1929). Such trips often included visits to schools in the town or city destination, meant to encourage a sense of fraternity between rural and urban children and between students of different regions. These initiatives gave rise to school interchanges, first in the form of pen-friends, but on occasion personal as well, in a gesture described by Llorca as «a new phase in Spanish pedagogy» (Llorca, 1932, p. 2).

**Figure 1a.** In the Communications Pavilion of the 1929 Barcelona International Exposition. [Spain] Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo General de la Administración, educación, 32/10743.



**Figure 1b.** Gymnastics class with the participation of pupils from Miedes's school. [Spain] Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo General de la Administración, educación, 32/10743.



There are two other curriculum subjects that these teachers find especially attractive: drawing, and handicrafts or «manual work». Along with physical education, these disciplines are seen as being innovative and are associated with regenerationist ideals (Pozo, 2000, p. 146), representing a rupture with the intellectualist teaching of the old school. But how are they interpreted and integrated into school practices? It seems that the most common approach is to present them in a transversal way with regard to other subjects. This has two advantages: a disciplinary one –the result of keeping the students constantly busy and «active»– and a propagandistic one, as all of this activity produces impressive school works that show the efficiency and the fruits of the children’s labour when they are displayed at year-end exhibits, where they are sure to make an impression on authorities and families. Although these two subjects appear together for the most part, in many of the memoirs they are addressed separately.

In the case of drawing, its mere practice is seen as repudiation of the traditional school. Montilla offers us an example of the reformist discourse in the following account: «I remember the impression that my first drawing on the chalkboard caused. They seemed to be unaware that drawing existed and when they saw that the lines left by the chalk turned into pictures of animals or other objects they were familiar with, their delight was indescribable» (1933). Drawing is also considered to be an application of the intuition principle, albeit one of less value than excursions and closer to the traditional object lessons. With the practice of drawing, the students «acquire the habit of observing» (Paredes, 1932), and it «helps, with the practice of graphism, to illustrate all of the lessons» and «helps to keep the child’s interest alive» while «teaching the skill of graphic representation» (Pueyo, 1933).

However, in some of the memoirs we come across the idea that this subject should not only be taught in a transversal way but rather as a proper discipline deserving of «an important position because of its importance in the development of a fair number of faculties» (Monforte, 1933), although it is always understood that its use «refers to motives of application and to useful life practices» (Calzada, 1932). The transformation of drawing includes «the substitution of the mannered and copy-based drawing which was practiced in the other Schools by free and natural drawing» (Maestre, 1933). It was «natural drawing» – drawing from nature – that was seen by the teachers to be most closely aligned with the principle of intuition. When drawing was used as a support for lessons, students traced or copied the picture drawn by the teacher. By contrast, the introduction of «natural drawing» relies on contact with real objects, which is essential for educating the sense of sight and is considered to be «as perfect a language as writing» (Balbastre, 1933). Most of these practices seem to have been inspired by the Masriera method<sup>4</sup>, which teachers were familiar with from having attended his courses or read his publications. Masriera considered drawing to be the perfect educational element due to its «dispensing with book-based teaching (...) and making Nature the principal object of study; the better one knows its different aspects, the better one knows Nature» (Masriera, 1925, p. 6). One practical translation of these ideas appears,

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<sup>4</sup> Víctor Masriera Vila (1875-1938) was a Spanish pedagogue and artist, best known as the creator of a *pedagogical drawing method* for primary schools, which was widely popular at the time

for example, in the report of Echereste, who describes her procedure for teaching natural drawing, where she presents a lesson that is identical to one of Masriera's, using as models «leaves, many different-shaped leaves, then branches, envelopes, handkerchiefs, etc.». But what is presumably a lesson in «natural drawing» becomes a *sui generis* lesson in copying based on the teacher's own drawing on the blackboard, which the students are told «to copy many times, as a correction» (Echereste, 1933). We suspect that this was not an unusual practice when it came to «illustrating» the notebooks in a variety of subjects. We can surmise, based on what we have read in these files, that the «natural drawing» that so many teachers talk of incorporating into their work is often no more than traditional copying.

Concerning handicraft or «manual work», it seems to have been fluidly incorporated into the school culture of these teachers, «even if only as a healthy reaction to the exaggeratedly intellectualist nature» (Quílez, n/d) of the traditional school. Teachers see it as a tool offering two advantages: first, it makes teaching more practical and intuitive; secondly, it counters the fatigue of intellectual work and keep the children's interest alive. As with the subject of drawing, there are varied opinions about its appropriate place within the curriculum. We find the two models identified by Pozo (2000, p. 147) and expressed by Quílez in the following terms: «in the cultured world we can identify two tendencies that have given rise to two systems that are contrary in their consequences more than in the foundations from which they originate; these are the economicist and the pedagogical systems» (n/d). Of the two, pedagogical or educational handicraft is more popular. Incorporated transversally into other subjects, handicraft holds an important place in these memoirs, which describe a great variety of cut-outs, cardboard constructions, wire creations and modelling. The «pedagogical» manual work can be seen as a translation of the aspirations of the encyclopaedic model in the way that it «trains their little fingers, focuses their sight and prepares them little by little for the manual work of successive grades» (Garrido, 1932). It also serves to develop their aesthetic education, «teaching them to admire an object's beauty (...) as well as its usefulness» (Castelló, 1932).

The utilitarian ideal behind handicraft can also be found in these memoirs. While its instructional value and usefulness for other subjects is acknowledged, physical deftness is seen above all as «a general aptitude that is very useful and exploitable in infinite circumstances of life» (Quílez, n/d). Some teachers include as part of this work «exercises in dexterity for life, binding books, folding envelopes, making packages, etc.» (Santamaría, 1932), emphasizing the economicist vision found in countless other memoirs. Raposo, for example, recounts his enthusiasm for his work carried out in a school situated in a working-class neighbourhood: «Seeing that these children would be working constantly with machines in the future and that they needed special preparation (...) I put all my effort into making it so that for practically every subject we used special little devices that we built in the school» (1933). Sanz states that «the great majority of the children are going to make their living through manual work and our primary school – which is without doubt our preparation for life – would do well to keep this in mind» (Sanz, 1931, p. 5). The idea is echoed by many teachers who, in the words of one, turned «the class of manual work into a full-fledged workshop of modest constructions» (Higelmo, n/d). Others put together little carpentry and book-binding workshops «that furnished the school with bookshelves

and racks, refurbished books (...) All of this the work of the children» (Monje, 1933). There were female teachers who emphasised feminine labours and went out of their way to procure sewing machines. In line with the utilitarian ideals of the time, these machines served «to prepare the girls to be future housewives (Badenes, 1933) and provide «future women and mothers with a powerful weapon for life's struggles» (Badenes, 1928), while at the same time supplying clothing for personal use and for the school wardrobe.

The economicist interpretation of schoolwork is also reflected in the support given to the pre-professional training that was highly popular in rural schools during the 1920s and directly related to manual work. Some teachers showed great enthusiasm for initiating their students in silk-raising, bird-raising or beekeeping, or for horticultural experimentation in student-maintained vegetable gardens, most of which had been established as part of teacher training under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. In the words of a director of one of these centres, Ruiz Yagüe, «in a rural village, we must ensure that these children are prepared for what they will be: farmers» (Ruiz Yagüe, 1933). He goes on to say that the goal of these school camps is «to provide the children and their parents access to the latest advances in agricultural science, showing them their uses and advantages, educating the country folk» (Ruiz Yagüe, 1926, p. 6). The teacher sees this as a productive contribution to the push «for a new Spain» and as part of a «national regeneration» (*La vida y la escuela*, 1926, p. 6). There can be no doubt as to the economicist interpretation of manual work in these schools, where the principal concern is crop productivity and experiments with fertiliser, attested to by the many photographs and charts in the attachments of his memoir (Figure 2a; Figure 2b). We can see this as a prime example of how the ideas of the founders of regenerationism were put into practice (Mayordomo, 2007, p. 180).

**Figure 2a.** [Untitled. School's experimental farming camp of Esquivias]. [Spain] *Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo General de la Administración, educación, 32/10718.*



**Figure 2b.** [Pamphlet]. [Spain] *Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo General de la Administración, educación, 32/10718.*

**AVENA. - Experiencia realizada por D. Edmundo Ruiz Yagüe, Maestro Nacional de Esquivias (Toledo)**

*avena a los 40 ctos*  
*Superf 1/1*  
*Nitrato 1/2*  
*Cloruro 3/0*

	Abonos empleados por hectárea			
	N.º 1	N.º 2	N.º 3	N.º 4
Superfosfato de cal . . . . .	—	325 kg.	325 kg.	325 kg.
Nitrato de sosa . . . . .	—	—	243 »	243 »
Cloruro potásico . . . . .	—	—	—	162 »

  

	Producción obtenida por hectárea			
	N.º 1	N.º 2	N.º 3	N.º 4
Grano:	800 kg.	1.100 kg.	1.175 kg.	1.550 kg.

El aumento de producción de 375 kilos de grano por hectárea que en la cuarta parcela se obtuvo sobre la tercera, se consiguió merced al empleo de 162 kilos de cloruro potásico de Stassfurt.

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#### 4. The Graded School: the spread and vulgarisation of an organisational ideal

The second mainstay of the regenerationist pedagogical reform model is the concept of the graded school as an organisational ideal. Previous studies have identified this type of school as a hallmark of regenerationism (Viñao, 1990, p. 15; Pozo, 2000, p. 103), the only school model – in the view of its advocates – that would allow for school reform. The graded school model was also conducive to the efficient application of the encyclopaedic programme (Viñao, 1990, p. 104; Pozo, 2000, 124-139) which many of these teachers were trying to incorporate into their classes in one-room schools or small graded schools. Yet in the 1930s these ideas cannot be considered to have been novel. Theoretical debates on the advantages of the graded school had been taking place in Spain since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and decades earlier in other countries (Pozo, 2000, p. 105), and while they may have been sorely lacking, experiments with graded schools in *ad hoc* buildings dated back to 1900 (Viñao, 1990, p. 14). Outdated as this debate may have been, many of the memoirs show great enthusiasm for the graded school model, which is presented as a pillar of pedagogical renovation.

At the discursive level, these convictions first appear in the way that the role of headteacher is related to the country's regeneration. Garrido, for instance, believes «There is no doubt that, for the common cause of society's renovation, more useful work can be carried out from the headteacher's office in a graded school than from the restricted domain of the one-room school» (1932). Others see school directorship as «a patriotic duty», one that will contribute to «a national resurgence» (Marcos, 1932) or «to building a new Homeland» (Trincado, 1932). Enthusiasm for the graded model tends to identify it with methodological renovation and with the efficiency derived from the division of labour; undoubtedly, «the Graded School is the only model that will suffice for carrying out the great undertaking of popular education in all of its perfection» (Segura, n/d).

However, if we look beyond some of these initial manifestations, we find that this enthusiasm denotes a peculiar appropriation of the idea of the graded school model as an educational ideal. We say this because an analysis of the files shows that many of the candidates had never even worked in a graded school and that of those who had, many were recent arrivals or had only worked in one section of a small graded school. Subsequently, the professional culture from which they were formulating their interpretation of the graded school had its origins in practices carried out in its antithesis: the single-classroom school. And yet all of these candidates considered themselves qualified and capable of overseeing large graded schools. They were, after all, competing for the position of headteacher. This leads us to pose the following question: How did these teachers interpret the ideal of the graded school and what practical translations does it have in their memoirs? In order to answer these questions, we begin with this premise: that these files reveal a popularisation of the concept behind the graded school, based on experiences that were foreign to that school organisational system. This helps to explain the slow transitional process as well as the nature of some of the reticence and keenness that the graded school as school system aroused in the teachers. As the result of the graded school ideal's

vulgarisation, we find different ways or modes in which this organisational system appears represented in the memoirs.

The first and perhaps most basic way of representing the graded school as an organisational ideal associates it with school buildings, much in the way of some of the more revolutionary writing from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some files treat the issue of the graded school or the teaching's «grading» as a matter of physical spaces. We find a number of accounts of the teachers' particular relationship with the school building. The graded school is associated with an *ad hoc* building and the numerous accounts of teachers fighting for new installations is not surprising, bringing echoes of the teachers' involvement in procuring better schools mentioned earlier, only in this case with the graded model. There are especially revealing cases in which the ideal of the graded school is fused with the physical building itself and its implication of spacious rooms and teaching technology. For instance, as a demonstration of his professional achievements, Socías includes in his file a set of postcard-photographs of the graded school, inaugurated in 1930, in which he was interim headteacher. The pictures show the different classrooms, the staff room and a variety of educational collections and instruments. The teacher himself is depicted gazing at newly arrived material and using what was a novelty at the time, a microscope. Such images reveal how the graded school was identified more with its physical spaces and an abundance of material than with the practices carried out there. In fact, not a single student is to be found in these images, which show a school building that is completely empty save for the headteacher (Figure 3a; Figure 3b). Similar accounts describing the creation of graded schools say practically nothing about their organisation; it would seem that achieving the building's construction is proof enough of the candidates' engagement and qualification to become headteachers of such institutions.

**Figure 3a.** 4th Grade classroom. First floor. [Spain] Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo General de la Administración, educación, 32/10768.



**Figure 3b.** Studies with the Microscope. [Spain] Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte. Archivo General de la Administración, educación, 32/10768.



Given the difficulties involved in procuring the buildings they needed, many of the teachers resort to an identification with a practice that could be termed «grading without the graded school» (Viñao, 2020, p. 41). This approach included solutions that were widely used in the 1920s, such as the so-called *desdoblamiento*<sup>5</sup>, or the dedication of different one-class schools to different teaching grades, all in an attempt to group the students more productively. Consequently, faced with the «pedagogical absurdity of all the schools attending to students of different ages and abilities» (Mateos, 1933), many of the teachers recount their efforts to establish a «graded system» in the towns where they taught, and, in the case of one teacher, «turning 13 one-room schools into a graded school» (Álvarez, 1933). This fervour for the graded school system gives rise to some truly original narratives, such as that of the teacher Pons, who, together with her fellow teacher from the boys' school in town, came up with a graded model of teaching consisting of four «grades» that included a co-education essay (Pons & García, 1933). In some cases, the enthusiasm about the graded school system owes much to the considerable complications deriving from the sheer numbers of students matriculated in the often overcrowded one-room school system. We also find examples of one-room schoolteachers offering a clearly distorted version of the graded school concept, applying the name to what is no more than a vestige of an archaic, monitorial system using auxiliary teachers, but which they label «a trial in graded teaching (my ideal)» (Segovia, 1932).

This variety of interpretations of the graded school system attests to an implicit conviction held by many of these one-room schoolteachers: that in their different modes of using and assigning «grades» in their teaching, they were somehow transforming their one-room schools into graded schools. This helps explain how some teachers can claim that «the single-classroom school is actually a graded school, with one person in charge» (Pueyo, 1933), or that «the one-room school does not exist and never has; whatever one thinks of the name, it has always been and will continue to be, to a greater or lesser degree, graded school» (Raposo, 1933). Consequently, these teachers believe that «A teacher with experience in a single-classroom school can, at any time and without too much trouble, take charge of a graded school» (Pueyo, 1933). According to this logic, the practices carried out in a one-room school qualify a teacher to become headteacher of a graded school. The discourse of these teachers shows how they understood there to be a natural transition between the two systems, and evidences how hard it was for them to discern between the single-classroom and graded school systems. In short, teachers in one-room schools and small graded schools had a concept of the graded school that hardly differed from the organisational model they were familiar with. For them the graded system was a practical solution for dealing with overwhelming levels of enrolment and for classifying and organising their teaching in a more efficient, rational manner

Subsequently, another way these teachers had of assuming the graded ideal and appreciating its benefits can be seen in the way they express the importance

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<sup>5</sup> The *desdoble* of schools often consisted of splitting a single-classroom school, with two teachers in charge, in two independent «grades». The division could be achieved by setting up the new grade in a new place or building, or by splitting the previous classroom's space in two.

of a proper classification and «grading» in their teaching. The subject comes up frequently in the descriptions of activities in both single-classroom and graded schools. Classification and «grading», which are treated as novelties with respect to the traditional school, become in practice issues of curriculum distribution and of allotment of school time. Many of the memoirs detail the «graded» organisation of the syllabi and the rationalisation of the timetable in their descriptions of the day's activities. In explaining their programmes, subject by subject, along with the time spent on each one, teachers are not only demonstrating their belief in the enduring validity of the encyclopaedic ideal but also their ability to design plans that adhere to rational pedagogical principles. Most of the syllabi follow the typical guidelines laid out in school organisation manuals known at the time, which were based on ideas first postulated in the late eighteen-hundreds (Viñao, 1998, p. 65) espousing nineteenth century principles of «cyclic teaching» and «concentration of subjects» for organising the curriculum. While allusions to a certain flexibility of timetables and of the curriculum – for the sake of offering one-off classes – does give a touch of novelty to the syllabi, typically «subjects are given on set days within given, approximate times» (Balbastre, 1933). What most stands out about this organisational labour, however, is the proliferation of all sorts of documents, from attendance records, class assessments and timetables to lesson planning books and classroom archives. Such documents serve to monitor the children's progress and to give visibility to the teacher's premeditated labour. Special value is accorded to class diaries and notebooks, where the children «write down hour by hour everything that happens in the school» (Montañola, 1933) and, sometimes, teachers include some examples of these documents as evidence of their professional labour and a way of showing their organisational skills. This is a way of consciously integrating «the empire of writing» (Viñao, 1990, p. 107) –which is characteristic of the graded school system– into their activities as an organisational and evaluational teaching tool, be this in a one-room or a graded schools.

All of this is accompanied by an effort to confer a scientific air to the task of teaching. This wish is inherent in the rationalisation of the graded school (Viñao, 1990, p. 83) and serves as an inspiration for the way many of the teachers conceive the practice of teaching, even when their experience is limited to single-classroom schools. The best example of their applying scientific rationality in the school can be seen in their concern about the classification of students. The criteria and tools they use to classify and evaluate the homogeneity and progress of the groups are invariably presented as innovative school practices. With regard to the criteria used, we find a preponderance of those published in the manuals of the time, which tended to begin with the student's biological age and language level. From there, further groupings, classifications and subdivisions were made in pursuit of homogeneity. As many as five or six different «grades» were established in some one-room schools (Lozano, 1932; Losada, 1933), a situation contemplated in the nineteenth century manuals when proposing the «simultaneous» teaching method as system of classroom organisation. The most innovative aspects of these groupings are to be found in their attempts to discern the «mental age» of students through more rigorous testing that included intelligence tests and pedometric records. Some memoirs describe the creation of modest psycho-pedagogical laboratories and the

use of a variety of assessment tools, the Binet-Simon test being the most popular. Instruments such as these appear cited more frequently by teachers who have actually worked in graded schools, where «the elaboration of a simple diagnosis of mental aptitude in substitution of the teacher's personal notes» (Rubio, 1932) gave added legitimacy to the formation of grades. But there are cases of teachers from one-room schools who use them as well, either individually or in collaboration with other teachers in town. Some teachers use and attach templates to their memoirs, such as the well-known paedological register by José Xandri Pich, clearly designed for graded schools (Pérez Bautista, 1932), or the questionnaires of Anselmo González (Sánchez-Isasia, 1933). There are also numerous paedological files registering students' physiological, psychological and environmental circumstances, whose usefulness «for selecting abnormal or gifted students» (Gómez De la Rúa, 1932) is not lost upon teachers of either type of school.

There is one final aspect, strongly linked to the graded school, for which teachers from both one-room and graded schools show great enthusiasm: the so-called *instituciones complementarias de la escuela* – extracurricular school activities. Graded schoolteachers like to boast of their participation in these institutions in their memoirs –to the extent that they are able to manage them – as they counterbalance the more routine, day-to-day and unperceived work in their grades. In general, graded schools are seen as having more say in their own management and enjoying more resources for carrying out these types of activities. One-room schools, on the other hand, tend to «lack installations such as workshops, school wardrobes, cafeterias, etc., which are systematically incorporated into graded schools» (Sancho, 1932, p. 49). While it is possible to establish them in single-classroom schools, as is attested to by accounts in these memoirs, making them viable seems to have entailed great difficulties. Thus, the graded school ideal included the possibility of expanding and improving these institutions, whose benefits «were indispensable for an integral education» (Sociedad «Amigos de la Escuela» de la Escuela del Portal de Ali, 1932). Cafeterias, school wardrobes, libraries, children's societies and complementary classes of all kinds (workshops, typing classes, accounting, sewing, home economics, childcare, etc.) embodied «the School of today» (Aguirregomezcorta, 1933), which is none other than «the graded school [that] must take in the child at his infancy and deliver him back when he is perfectly useful to society» (Raposo, 1933). These complementary institutions epitomise the ideals of «integral education» and of the *fin-de-siècle* regenerationist concept of preparing youth for life's struggles. Upon them will depend the «renovating function» of the school, whose mission is none other than to mould «citizens who are more robust in body and spirit, who can create a Spain that is great and respected, which is what every good Spaniard desires» (Luzuriaga, 1933).

## 5. Conclusions

Our analysis of the files of candidates for the post of headteacher in 1932 leads us to conclude that regenerationist ideas were alive and well among the innovative teachers active during the Second Republic and that these ideas inspired a traditional

model of pedagogical renovation that ultimately structured their professional identities.

We first examined the way that these teachers incorporated regenerationist ideas into their discourse, translating essential precepts of pedagogical regenerationism and assuming a central role in the building and improvement of schools, and in providing an effective education to Spanish youth. We then saw how this regenerationist discourse was translated into school practice with the establishment of a regenerationist model of pedagogical renovation founded on two elements: integral encyclopaedic education and the graded school.

With regard to the first of these elements, the files show that teachers in the early 1930s still took the encyclopaedic curriculum of 1901 to be a model of «integral» or «comprehensive» education and that they conceived the introduction of different subjects to be representative of pedagogical renovation. The innovative elements that they tend to highlight include the principle of intuition as applied to the curriculum as well as the incorporation of novel subjects such as physical education, drawing and handicrafts. Among the different practical translations of physical education are excursions and field trips, which some teachers describe as a revolutionary change despite the fact that their practice went back decades in state schools. As for drawing, most cases indicate a lack of any significant advances in its practice; it seems to be more a case of giving a new name to the traditional practice of copying, proof of the resistance to change of the grammar of schooling. The accounts of handicrafts or «manual work» reveal an economicist approach much in keeping with the regenerationist concept, while most of the practical translations studied point to a utilitarian concept of education whose priority is to prepare students for life's struggles.

The second element, the graded school, is understood as an innovative organisational ideal that guarantees an integral encyclopaedic education, much the way it was conceived by nineteenth century pedagogical regenerationism. However, the limited implantation of the system in Spain resulted in most of these teachers only knowing a watered-down, popularised version of this organisational model, which they could only interpret from the professional culture that their work in one-room schools or small graded schools had afforded them. Thus, the graded school is identified, first of all, with the school building, as was the case in nineteenth century regenerationism. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that the government policy of school construction under the Second Republic, which is the historical context for the documents studied here, also contributed to this interpretation. Secondly, it is identified with the widespread «grading without the graded school» practices at the time. This is expressed in the enthusiasm for different modes of classifying and «grading» the teaching that often took place in single-classroom schools and whose practice is deemed equivalent to actual graded schools. Their belief in the benefits of graded schooling led them to internalise its scientific rationality and apply it to classification and grading practices in both graded and one-class schools. In addition, we also confirmed the currency of «the empire of writing» characteristic of the graded school system, which can be attested in the proliferation of documents and registers and in the zeal for carrying out scientific classifications of the students by means of psycho-pedagogical evaluations and instruments. Finally, the graded

school ideal is linked to the development of «extracurricular school activities», which fulfil an essential role in a student's integral education and in preparing for life's struggles.

In closing, we have to wonder if these practices, derived from the regenerationist model of pedagogical renovation, constituted an innovation in the 1930s. As we have shown, this model was founded upon ideas from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning on the 20<sup>th</sup> century that had scarcely evolved in the 1930s. Notwithstanding certain changes in the teaching practices of some schools, this model represents a pedagogical anachronism, one whose use was widespread at the time of the Republican government. The persistence of such an anachronism is evidence of the resistances of the grammar of schooling in the face of attempts to introduce innovations. And it shows, through the teachers' own accounts of their professional experience, the slow pace at which change occurs in educational systems.

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