

# The choice of private schools in families from low-income groups<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the arrival of private schools in a district in the east side of Sao Paulo and it is based on secondary treatment of statistical data, questionnaires applied in public and private schools, and interviews with parents, teachers, and youngsters in the district. The initial hypothesis proposed that the modification on local school offer would reveal the process of internal differentiation of low-income groups, derived from the increase of income on the base of Brazilian social pyramid during Lula's government. The results of the statistical study allowed us to propose a typology of subprefectures according to school offer. The interviews revealed a slow process of cultural capital accumulation and lifestyle modifications, connected to the university diplomas owned by the second generation of interviewed families. This fraction of low-income classes, in which cultural capital is higher, essentially composes the demand for private education in the district. On the particular case of this district, the article approaches the characteristics of offer and educational strategies identified in this reduced group of families, a process connected to the acquisition of cultural capital during two generations, as well as to women's work.

## Keywords

Private school – Educational inequalities – Cultural capital – Educational strategies – Sociology of education.

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# ***A escolha da escola privada em famílias dos grupos populares<sup>1</sup>***

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## **Resumo**

*Este estudo procurou investigar a chegada de escolas privadas em um distrito da zona leste de São Paulo, com base no tratamento secundário de dados estatísticos, questionários aplicados em escolas públicas e privadas e entrevistas com pais, professores e jovens do distrito. A hipótese formulada inicialmente propunha que as modificações da oferta escolar local seriam reveladoras do processo de diferenciação interna dos grupos populares, derivado do aumento da renda na base da pirâmide social brasileira dos anos Lula. Os resultados do estudo estatístico permitiram propor uma tipologia das subprefeituras segundo a oferta escolar. As entrevistas revelaram um lento processo de acumulação de capital cultural e de modificações do estilo de vida, ligados à conquista do diploma de ensino superior pela segunda geração das famílias interrogadas. Essa fração das camadas populares, na qual o capital cultural é mais elevado compõe essencialmente a demanda por ensino privado no distrito. A partir do caso particular desse distrito, o artigo aborda as características da oferta e das estratégias educativas identificadas nesse grupo reduzido de famílias, um processo ligado tanto à aquisição do capital cultural em duas gerações das famílias como ao trabalho feminino.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Escola privada – Desigualdades educativas – Capital cultural – Estratégias educativas – Sociologia da educação.*

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Among the different forms of educational inequalities that characterize Brazilian public system<sup>1</sup>, the one that contributes more to the maintenance of a high level of inequality is the subdivision between public and private schools. According to the data of the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira- Inep), the enrollment in private schools decrease during school trajectories in the city of Sao Paulo: 27,4% during fundamental I school, 25,6% on fundamental II school, and 18,2% on high school. These rates are slightly higher than the national average, but are representative of what happens in other large cities of the country<sup>2</sup>. As described by Fritz Ringer (2003) on the internal subdivisions of European education systems, the separation between public and private in Brazil can be considered a way of segmentation in parallel tracks of schooling that can be distinguished by students' social origin, educational programs, and the destiny they tend to lead. Parallel tracks that have a hierarch among themselves and in which the distribution of students is not done according to their "vocations", but follows the inequalities prior to the school, derived from their social hierarchy. The hypothesis that kindled this researched is that the unequal division of Brazilian educational system is an aspect of great importance in the maintenance of social differences, observed and described by urbanists and social scientists in Sao Paulo<sup>3</sup>.

The recent development of public policies which aimed to promote more equal opportunities to access higher education- for instance, the programs of Sao Paulo state universities<sup>4</sup> and

quotas law<sup>5</sup> – reveals the centrality of the division of school population between public and private systems in Brazil. Differently from other countries in which affirmative actions were centered in racial criteria<sup>6</sup>, in Brazil, the correlation among the type of school, parental socioeconomic level, and skin color is so strong that these instruments are mainly based on students' school origin<sup>7</sup>. Such instruments represent a great innovation in educational policy in the last decade and cannot be understood without considering that almost 20% of school population enrolled in private schools until high school represented more than 60% of students in public universities.

However, there are still many gaps to understand the social meaning of private education in Brazil. In this article we aim to contribute to bridge these gaps, investigating the specificities of school offer in Ermelino Matarazzo, an old industrial district on the east side of Sao Paulo. When we think about "private" school, the representations of the common sense, the media, and even some researchers are connected to the big private schools, firmly anchored in the posh neighborhoods of the city and known for their social and educational selectivity. In fact, Brazilian private schools receive mainly students from families of professionals, senior employees of public and private sectors, owners of large industries and commerce<sup>8</sup>. However, this scenario has been changing. Between 2002 and 2013, the private sector has grown 36% in the state of Sao Paulo. A more expressive increase among families with lower income, even if they still represent a small percentage of enrollments in the sector (CAMELO, 2014).

USP implemented the Inclusp (Programa de Inclusão Social- Program of Social Inclusion), which awards extra points to students from public schools.

**1-** By educational inequalities we understand the differences of access and *direction within the educational system* connected to social and geographic origin, race, and gender. Several statistic studies show important educational inequalities in the country (ac. HASENBALG; SILVA, 2003; RIBEIRO, 2011; MONT'ALVÃO NETO, 2014).

**2-** Source: Censo Escolar MEC/Inep and Centro de Informações Educacionais da Secretaria de Estado da Educação, 2015. For more information about the topic, see Camelo (2014).

**3-** See, especially, the studies of Lúcio Kowarick (1993), Flávio Villaça (2001), and Eduardo Marques and Haroldo Torres (2005).

**4-** In 2004, Unicamp proposed the Paais (Programa de Ação Afirmativa para Inclusão Social- Program of Affirmative Action for Social Inclusion). In 2006,

**5-** The quota law (2012) reserves half of the places in federal public universities to students from public school, of those 50% are for those with lower family income and 50% for those self-declared as African-Brazilians and indigenous.

**6-** Ac. Oberti e Prêteceille (2016).

**7-** Recent statistical studies confirm this correlation. For example, Menezes Filho, and Kirschbaum (2015) show that, in Brazil, the majority of students that declare themselves as African-descendants are in public schools, while white ones are overrepresented in the private sector until high school. As we know, the situation is the opposite in higher education.

**8-** About this topic, see the works of Maria Alice Nogueira (1998), Ana Maria Almeida (2009), Graziela Perosa (2009), among others.

This research started faced by the presence of private schools in Ermelino Matarazzo, where 13 new private schools opened between 1990 and 2010.<sup>9</sup> In a period marked by the universalization of access to public school, how can one explain the arrival of private school in this region of the city? Was the phenomenon connected to the increase of income in the base of Brazilian social pyramid in the 2000s? Which were the factors that contributed to explain the recent modification of this school offer? The private school buildings, the gyms, the private party houses for birthdays, and the big commercial chains incited us to explore the hypothesis of differentiation of the local social fabric. The first hypothesis is that the social differentiation noted within the district was translated in the characteristics of school offer and the educational strategies of families.

The second hypothesis proposes the modifications observed in the school offer pointed to the existence of an upper fraction of low-income groups that would distinguish itself from the average families in the area due to a higher income and schooling level, as well as changes in women's conditions, especially the increase of schooling and formal employment.<sup>10</sup> The notion of "fraction" cannot be understood without referencing Pierre Bourdieu and his empirical researches on the social stratification in France. Aiming to go beyond Marxist tradition, in which one presupposes the existence of two classes - those who own the means of production and those who sell their work force - Bourdieu proposed a sociology in which the identification of social groups would be done with the same rigor as the one done by a zoologist or a botanist when creating their classes. This means that, based on a series of objective indicators, we can differentiate groups from each other, based on their volume and structure of their capitals (BOURDIEU, 1979). In this sociological perspective, school action is never neglected

**9-** We excluded for this study the enrollment in Fundamental I and preschool.

**10-** In this article, due to space restrictions, we could not deeply explore the relation between women's work and the increase of school offer. This topic was explored in a previous article (PEROSA et al., 2015) and will be analyzed in future articles.

and the different forms of cultural capital have a decisive weight in defining material and symbolic frontiers between groups<sup>11</sup>.

The present study is based on the analysis of public statistics from the Population Census of IBGE (2010) and School Census (INEP/MEC, 2010/2015), which were treated and made available in the districts and subprefectures<sup>12</sup> of Sao Paulo City Hall<sup>13</sup>. In parallel, we developed a research with questionnaires in two public schools and a private one (n=243). A second phase, still on-going, is based on interviews with parents, grandparents, and former students of public and private schools of the district.<sup>14</sup> So as to test our hypothesis of fractions within the social groups, we were interested in defining the distinctive traces of public and private school families, in their more predictable aspects- such as income and parental educational level- as well as less explored elements, such as fertility rate, and women's schooling and participation in the work force. Observations with ethnographic characteristics took place in local social movements, especially those led by the Catholic Church. Finally, we talked over the phone with informants in all private schools in Ermelino, aiming to gather information on study programs and teaching methods, tuition fees, school periods, and extracurricular activities.

## School offer in the city

The rapid demographic growth of Sao Paulo during the first half of the 20th century was followed by a re-composition of the social

**11-** It is not in the scope of this article to present a review on the long tradition of sociological studies on social classes. Thus, we suggest the reader the literature review done by Antônio Sérgio Guimarães (1999) and, more recently, Brochier e Pulici (2015).

**12-** The city of São Paulo is formed by 98 districts and, at the time of the research, 31 subprefectures. In this article, we dealt with the district of Ermelino Matarazzo which names the subprefecture Ermelino Matarazzo formed by this district plus the district of Ponte Rasa.

**13-** One can find the statistic data, by district and subprefecture, in Infocidade, a portal maintained by the Secretaria Municipal de Desenvolvimento Urbano (SMDU). We also used the data available in Fundação Seade and in Observatório Cidadão, run by the NGO Rede Nossa São Paulo.

**14-** We thank the participation of the students: Helena Marcon, Isamara Lopes, Eliton Rocha, Viviane Costa, Raimundo Justino, Caroline Santos, and Paloma Sanches, for helping us contact the schools, apply the questionnaires, conduct and transcribe a part of the interviews.

structure of the urban space, having as the main effect the installation of the working class on the outskirts of the city, mainly migrants from the Northeast of Brazil, as well as from the countryside of Sao Paulo and other states. Urban studies on Sao Paulo argue that the dichotomy center-outskirts was related to the unequal occupation of the space, in which there was a distance between the spaces occupied by the elites and by *manual workers* (KOWARICK, 1993; VILLAÇA, 2001). The notion of outskirts was associated to poverty, precariousness, violence, and other “city dangers” (KOWARICK, 1993; CABANES et al., 2011). As it has happened in many other metropolises, this negative image contributed to a stigmatized and stigmatizing representation of their inhabitants<sup>15</sup>. When exploring the social heterogeneity of this district, the research allows grasping the ambiguity of this representation.

More recent studies, that examine the patterns of social segregation in Sao Paulo, reveal a scenario that goes beyond this dichotomy, pointing to more and more selective spaces in the richer regions and revealing that the outskirts have become more heterogeneous, contradicting the hypothesis of polarized metropolises described by some urbanists. A good part of studies on world metropolises are based on this duality and illustrate their investigations with extreme situations, such as the rich gated communities and the favelas, forgetting what happens in the intermediary groups which sometimes represent the great majority of the population (OBERTI; PRÉTECEILLE, 2016). The decision to study the changes on school offer in Ermelino Matarazzo aimed to shed a light in the process of social differentiation that is making the outskirts more heterogeneous and question such morphologic modifications of the population which are translated in school offer.

School offer can be defined as a set of public and private schooling establishments available in a certain area of the city (FRANÇOIS; POUPEAU, 2008). Through mechanisms

**15-** For a discussion on this process in European metropolis, see Sylvie Tissot (2012).

instituted by education policies, but also by family preferences, there is a tendency to prioritize closeness to residence when defining school, especially in the initial levels of education. As shown by other studies, families tend to search for schooling circuits adapted to their economic and cultural resources and try either to avoid or to get closer to other families in the area, bypassing establishments with lower reputation and searching for better schooling opportunities for their children in the area they live (OBERTI, 2007; ZANTEN, 2009; COSTA, KOSLINSKI, 2011). This sense of guidance tends to happen in certain spatial configurations, as geographical displacements impose to families a complex, and sometimes, exhausting routine.

To avoid adopting the case of Ermelino Matarazzo as a particular one without knowing what this area represents in the city of Sao Paulo as a whole, we aimed to identify the position of the district in the social structure of Sao Paulo through a statistical analysis based on a set of social and educational indicators from the subprefectures (PEROSA; LEBARON; LEITE, 2015)<sup>16</sup>. This previous phase of the research contributed to control the autochthonous representation of the team on the district of Ermelino as an “outskirt neighborhood”. Based on an analysis of main components (AMC), two axes distinguish the subprefectures of Sao Paulo. A first axis opposes rich and poor neighborhoods and expresses the great social inequality that characterizes the city. A second dimension opposes the subprefectures that have the highest rates of high schools and public infrastructure from those with lower rates of high school completion and fewer public infrastructure. Such results allowed us to identify the intermediary position of Ermelino Matarazzo, corroborating the thesis of social differentiation of the outskirts. Under the light of this study, we grouped the subprefectures according to the characteristics of school offer.

**16-** Even though the subprefectures have very different sizes, they are territories with a main political representant (the submayor), selected by the mayor. When opting to this scale of analysis, we intended to contribute to the quality of local public action.

**Table 1** – Subprefecture groups, according to schooling rate in the private sector\*

High proportion of enrollment in private sector	Low proportion of enrollment in private sector
<b>Group 1:</b> Subprefectures of Pinheiros and Vila Mariana, concentrate the houses with more than 20 minimum wages and where more than half of the inhabitants have a higher education degree. The enrollment in the private sector is over 50%.	<b>Group 3:</b> Subprefectures of Ermelino Matarazzo, Itaquera, Pirituba, higher number of houses with income between 2 and 5 minimum wages, less than 10% of inhabitants with higher education diploma. The enrollment in the private sector is over 10%.
<b>Group 2:</b> Subprefectures of Mooca, Santana, Sé, higher number of houses with income between 5 or 10 minimum wages and at least 25% of inhabitants with higher education diploma. The enrollment in the private sector is over 38%.	<b>Group 4:</b> Subprefectures of Cidade Tiradentes, M'Boi Mirim, Parelheiros, strong proportion of houses with income under half minimum wage, high number of houses without sewage system, less than 5% of inhabitants with higher education diploma. The enrollment in the private sector is under 5%.

Source: Censo Escolar MEC/Inep and Centro de Informações Educacionais da Secretaria de Estado da Educação, 2008\*\*.

\* Adapted to the case of São Paulo, the typology proposed by Marco Oberti (2007) to city of Paris.

\*\* Available in: <<http://infocidade.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/>>. Accessed in: July, 08th, 2017.

**Table 2** – Enrollment rates in the private sector, in Sao Paulo State Technical Schools (Etec), and schools with stronger performances in ENEM, by subprefecture.

Subprefecture	Enrollment rates in private sector	Enrollment rates in Etecs	Rate of schools with stronger performances in Enem (2015)
Pinheiros	63,8	16,3	8,1
Vila Mariana	61,8	0,0	9,6
Sé	46,6	10,1	7,4
Santo Amaro	42,7	6,5	5,9
Lapa	39,6	9,8	5,9
Santana	38,8	9,3	6,3
Mooca	38,6	24,6	7,7
Butantã	27,5	4,8	8,5
Aricanduva	24,4	8,1	4,0
Ipiranga	24,2	12,6	4,8
Penha	23,8	14,5	5,1
Jabaquara	21,4	0,0	1,8
Casa Verde	16,8	5,7	2,2
Vila Maria	16,6	10,1	1,8
Ermelino Matarazzo	14,0	0,0	1,8
Campo Limpo	14,8	1,2	3,3
Vila Prudente	13,4	5,6	2,2
Itaquera	13,3	1,7	2,6
Pirituba	10,5	3,5	2,2
São Miguel	10,5	0,0	0
Jaçanã	10,2	0,0	0,4
São Mateus	9,6	2,4	0,7
São Mateus	9,6	2,4	0,7
Capela do Socorro	8,9	1,3	1,5
Cidade Ademar	8,9	0,0	0,7
Freguesia	8,7	1,0	2,2
Perus	5,0	4,6	0,4
M'Boi Mirim	4,2	3,8	1,5
Guaianases	4,1	4,1	0,7
Itaim Paulista	3,9	0,0	0,7
Cidade Tiradentes	1,3	3,5	0
Parelheiros	0,1	0,0	0

Source: Censo Escolar MEC/Inep e Centro de Informações Educacionais da Secretaria de Estado da Educação, 2008\*\*

\* Percentage of high schools, by subprefecture, among the 20% of schools with the highest performance levels in Enem (2015). Source: created by authors

\*\* Available on: <<http://infocidade.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/>>. Accessed on: July 08th, 2017.

When observing the inter-municipal distribution of enrollments by system, we can observe the intermediary position of Ermelino Matarazzo in the context of the city, with 14% of enrollments in the private system (see table 2). We can see a strong concentration of this resource in the subprefectures of group 1 (see table 1), richer, in which more than 60% of enrollments are in the private sector<sup>17</sup>. In group 4 (see table 1), which include Parelheiros and Cidade Tiradentes, poorer regions of the city, this rate is close to zero. In groups 2 and 3 we have distinct situations. Mooca and Santana have 38% of enrollments in the private system and in the “intermediary” outskirts of group 3, such as Ermelino Matarazzo, this rate is of 14%.<sup>18</sup> The enrollment in the private sector actually follows the social characteristics of the population of each subprefecture. It correlates to higher income and higher education rate. We can see by observing the table that there is a vertical social segmentation of educational system, in the terms of Fritz Ringer<sup>19</sup>.

These statistics, however, refer only to the tip of the iceberg of educational inequalities, as both sectors are internally segmented. We know that in groups 1 and 2, the families have a rich and varied school offer, with laic and religious establishments, bilingual ones, and important variations regarding pedagogical alignment. A *tailored* education that varies according to economic and cultural resources in the different fractions of the elites (NOGUEIRA,

**17-** If we consider that the subprefectures are heterogeneous territories and that we did not have the data on parents' occupation, it is very likely that, in some professional categories, this number can reach 100%.

**18-** Butantã, Aricanduva, Ipiranga, Penha and Jabaquara have private enrollment rates between 20 and 30%. They were not grouped in a separate category because they have different rates regarding educational level and income.

**19-** Ringer distinguishes vertical and horizontal dimensions in education system segmentation: “Regarding education, the most common way of segmentation is the social vertical, that is, when one of the education system tracks is guided towards a more socially “elevated” public than another. However, there are cases in which segmentation can be overlaid by certain social horizontality” (RINGER, 2003, p. 7). When the access and distribution of the small and the big bourgeoisie are distinct, within secondary education, between the classical and general ranks, a pertinent subdivision for example on the German secondary education, we have a social horizontal segmentation.

1998; ALMEIDA, 2009; PEROSA, 2009). One of the important opposition in the field of private schools in these regions is the subdivision between schools centered on the preparation for exams and those called constructivists, most founded during the military dictatorship as enclaves for pedagogical experimentation (ROCHA; PEROSA, 2008). This horizontal social segmentation tends to differentiate the schools of the intellectual fractions of upper classes (journalists, teachers, researchers and most liberal professionals) and the schools of economic bourgeoisie (senior employees of private sector, industry and big commercial owners), a recurrent distinction also within European educational (BOURDIEU; 1989; RINGER; 2003; ZANTEN, 2009).

The preference for the private sector in Brazil, however, cannot be understood without considering the dimension of school results, measured by indexes such as Idesp (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação- Index of education development) or Enem (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio- High School National Exam). Far from perfect, such measurements can be used to give the dimension of academic segregation. In countries like Germany or France, this segregation is differently institutionalized. In secondary school, or even prior, the students are enrolled in different ranks according to their school performance, which is strongly correlated to the socioeconomic level of the families (MERLE, 2012).

When observing the results of Enem 2015 on table 2, we can see how much the academic segregation is based on the subdivision between public and private. Regardless of how internally heterogeneous these sectors may be, among the 100 establishments with the best academic performance in Enem 2015, only 9 were public schools<sup>20</sup>. Among the 9 public schools with highest performance, 8 were Sao Paulo State Technical Schools (Etecs), places that can be

**20-** Available on: <http://www.brasil.gov.br/educacao/2016/10/inep-divulga-resultados-por-escola-do-enem-2015>. Accessed on: February 15th, 2017.

considered as *selective public schools*, in which the entrance is done by exams, teachers are selected by school staff, and there is a strong mobilization of students around the school (ARCO NETTO, 2011; ROCHA, 2015; BASILIO, 2016). These establishments are concentrated in the subprefectures of group 2 (Mooca, Ipiranga) and are another example of horizontal social segmentation present within public high school. Insufficient in many regions, this type of school structure is inexistent in many subprefectures (groups 3 and 4) in which school offer tends to be limited to regular public school and, in the best case scenario, to initiatives of NGOs. In these regions, besides other difficulties, families do not have schools that can provide an efficient school strategy. However, the demand for public education is not only guided by school performance. Bourdieu (1989, p. 414) reminds us that, in a socially heterogeneous educational system, there are “a series of hierarchic ranks, open to groups that are, themselves, socially hierarchic. Private education offers in one shot the ‘intellectual advantages’ of public education and the ‘moral security’ of private education”. This segmentation corresponds to the diversity of family reproduction strategies according to their economic capital and the specificities of social, professional, and cultural capitals<sup>21</sup>.

### **Modifications of school offer in Ermelino Matarazzo**

Ermelino Matarazzo has been developed in a period of quick industrialization in Sao Paulo, when it received cellophane and glass industries in the 1940s, attracting workers, craftsman, and small shopkeepers from the Northeast of Brazil and other states<sup>22</sup>. Initially, the neighborhoods were created around the train tracks, where the first factories and

worker villages were installed. Later, they expanded to a hilly area, boosted by real-estate exploitation of low-income and/or self-build houses. When arriving in the district, around 1960, one would find a region with little or no public infrastructure (PEROSA et al., 2015). There was no pavement, light, or basic sewage, as well as housing, schools, and daycare centers<sup>23</sup>. The evidences of a strong familiarity can be seen in the names given to public equipment, such as schools, train stations, hospitals, and neighborhoods, which have the name of Matarazzo family. Historic conditions led to a strong social movement, led by the Catholic church, which intensified self-building initiatives, demonstrations for daycare, schools, hospitals and, later, universities (SPOSITO, 2002; IFFLY, 2010).

According to the data of IBGE (2010) population census, 6.4% of houses in the subprefecture of Ermelino Matarazzo lived in extremely vulnerable conditions: no basic sewage and with an income lower than the minimum wage<sup>24</sup>. The situation was worse in 2000 when 12,4% of houses had no sanitary facilities. Regarding house income, the data of 2010 suggests three groups: 32% had a house income of until 2 minimum wages; 38% income between 2 and 5 minimum wages; and 29% received more than 5 wages.

Following the national trend, there was a decrease in illiteracy rate and an important increase in the schooling level in the area<sup>25</sup>. In 2000, 51.8% of the population had not finished the Fundamental school II, 21.5% had finished high school, and 4.5% had a higher education diploma. Ten years later, in 2010, 39.5% of the population had not finished Fundamental school II, but 31.7% had finished high school, superior

**21-** On the adjustment between capital forms and the use of private school, see the articles of Monique de Saint Martin (1990) and Jean-Pierre Faguer (1991).

**22-** Paulo Fontes approaches in Um nordeste em São Paulo (2008) the case of a neighboring district (Sao Miguel Paulista) and aptly describes the industrialization, migrations, and formation of the working class in the city.

**23-** As shown in the documentary Ermelino é Luz, of Pedro Dantas (2009). Available in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPOKif2zewg>>. Accessed in: May, 05th, 2015.

**24-** In 2010, the subprefecture of Ermelino Matarazzo had 207 thousand inhabitants, and was formed by the districts of Ponte Rasa and Ermelino Matarazzo. Source: Infocidade.

**25-** As shown by the studies of Hasenbalg and Silva (2003), and Arretche (2015).

to the city average of 26.5%. In 2010, 9.4% of the population had finished higher education, while the average of Sao Paulo was 16.3%. Families that have one member with higher education are a minority in the subprefecture of Ermelino Matarazzo, as well as in the Brazilian population as a whole<sup>26</sup>. However, it is a particularly interesting group to the research,

**26-** According to studies of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), 14% of adult Brazilians reach higher education, a lower rate than other Latin American countries (Chile, 21%; Colombia, 22%; and Costa Rica, 23%). Source: <<http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>>. Accessed in: May, 08th, 2017.

as it allows us to grasp the double movement of differentiation in the social trajectory of low-income groups in relation to the middle classes. Especially, in a period marked by the debate on the emergency of a *new middle class* in Brazil (NERI, 2008; POCHMANN, 2012). Initially, we asked ourselves if the arrival of thirteen private schools in the district would not be another trace of this new middle class. The research on the characteristics of local school offer and the interviews revealed, nonetheless, a much more complex reality.

**Table 3 – Fundamental II schools and high schools in the district of Ermelino**

Name	Type	Foundation date
Octavio Mangabeira	Public	1956
Condessa Filomena Matarazzo	Public	1960
Profa. Eunice Laureano	Public	1961
Profa. Benedita Rezende	Public	1963
Centro Educacional SESI	Private	1964
Ermelino Matarazzo	Public	1971
Prof. Lúcio C. Marques	Public	1977
Jornalista Francisco Mesquita	Public	1977
Prof. Dr. Geraldo C. Moreira	Public	1977
Profa. Leonor Rendesí	Public	1979
Pedro de A. Machado	Public	1979
Colégio Floresta	Private	1982
Prof. Joaquim T. Santiago	Public	1985
Therezinha A. Mantelli	Public	1988
Prof. Umberto Checchia	Public	1990
Colégio Argumento	Private	1992
Prof. João Franzolin Neto	Public	1994
Dep. Januário M. Neto	Public	1997
Colégio Abílio Augusto	Private	1997
Colégio Sena De Miranda	Private	1997
Colégio Integração	Private	1998
Colégio Inovação	Private	1998
Colégio Conexão	Private	1999
Parque Ecológico	Public	1999
Irmã Annette	Public	2000
Colégio Amorim	Private	2000
Colégio Forth	Private	2001
Colégio Sena de Miranda	Private	2001
Colégio Mont Martre	Private	2002
Colégio Pedro Peralta	Private	2004
Centro Educacional Nova Jornada	Private	2005
Colégio San Marino	Private	2006
CEU Rosangela R. Vieira	Public	2008

Source: Secretaria de Educação do Estado de Sao Paulo.

On table 3 we can see that public schools arrived late in the district when considering the migratory flow to the region since the early 1940s. The first public school in the area was inaugurated only in 1956. From 1960 on, the investment rhythm in public schools followed the demographic growth in the district and decreased after 1990 (DANTAS, 2013). Until 1982, school offer in Ermelino was limited to public school and a Sesi<sup>27</sup>, initially free to workers' children. The lack of Catholic schools, historically focused on elite families and intermediate sectors, is one more particular feature of school offer in the area that distinguishes it from richer areas of the city. The lack of a Senai unity, a key institution on the formation and cultural transmission of workers' culture, and of an Etec may have also contributed to the search for private schools, especially among families interested in controlling children's education through school investment.

Except one case, all private schools in Ermelino organize students' school experience through didactic material developed and used by business groups which have schools in the richer areas and are focused on the preparation for university admission exams (such as Objetivo, Etapa, Anglo, etc.). Commercializing their *education systems*<sup>28</sup>, such establishments give credibility to smaller and unknown private schools. Through the interviews, we notice how the didactic material and physical infrastructure tend to be perceived as signs of a reasonable structure. The two private schools observed for this research were not chosen at random. They compete between each other for the best position in Enem in the district. Similarly to what Anne Catherine Wagner describes of some French elite schools, such places are characterized by

[...] the intensity of work, by the concentration of all student existence around exclusively scholar worries, by the logic of entrance exams which impose a full investment on competition and the subordination of learning to the imperatives of urgency, favoring an intensive use of time. They also produce a relation with culture that is, at once, docile and safe, that predisposes to power. (WAGNER, 2012, p. 173, our translation).

Schools that tend to be classified as *content-based*, by the intellectual fractions of upper-classes as well as by contemporary pedagogical discourse. However, it is exactly this functional school, able to lead students to public universities that seem to make sense to this 'frontier' fraction of low-income and middle-class groups. The choice for the private sector, in this case, is associated to an educational and professional project that aims to give the children a work *ethos* and the necessary virtues to follow other circuits of school and job market.

When consulted by telephone, those responsible to present us the schools spontaneously reported the criteria used to award scholarships, an euphemism used to refer to discounts in tuition. Such criteria include a generic evaluation of families' social condition, the number of children in the school, and the student's school performance in previous years. One of the schools in the district with best performance in Enem (71st position in the city) awards scholarships until 100% to students from public schools with top grades in their exams. A policy of school selection guided to compete for the best students from public schools. With tuition fees varying from 300 to 800 reais, private schools in Ermelino Matarazzo attract its clientele by extending school hours offering extracurricular activities, which are paid extra. Faced by a four-hour public school, private schools are an interesting option for mothers that need to work and are interested on a *concerted cultivation* (LAREAU, 2003).

**27-** Sesi and Senai are private organizations with public interest, managed by the sector of industries in Brazil. Sesi offers basic education and leisure and cultural activities for the workers and their families. Senai aims to offer professional education, in professional level, technical level, higher education, and post-graduation.

**28-** On the commercialization of educational systems, see Adrião and collaborators (2009).

## Comparing public and private schools

What are the differences and similarities between families that seek public and private schools in this region of the city? Faced by the difficulty of finding data on the characteristics of parents and grandparents by public and private school, the research by questionnaire aimed to produce comparable data on families of both sectors. Following, we explored some results from interviews (n= 40) by using the testimony of two mothers. Based on questionnaires answered by students in the senior year of high school of a private school (n=120) and by those of two public schools (n=141), we aimed to identify some morphologic characteristics of this population<sup>29</sup>.

School 1 is private and Schools 2 and 3 are public. School 2 is in an intermediary and socially heterogeneous neighborhood of Ermelino Matarazzo and is considered one of the best public high schools in the region. School 3 is in an area of more recent occupation, in which many houses do not count with basic public infrastructure (pavement, sewage, etc.). As we could not explore in this article all the data generated by the questionnaires, we presented a part of some of the mothers' characteristics that contribute to differentiate the families of

**29-** The questionnaires of the research were answered by students of two of the most reputable private schools in the district and three public schools. The students were in the last year of fundamental school and the senior year of high school. Considering the two phases of the research, we have a total of 120 questionnaires applied in two private schools and 271 in three public schools of the district, adding to a total of 391 questionnaires. Some alterations on the questionnaire and the differences on the answers from students of different levels led us to prioritize, in this study, the answers given by high schoolers of three schools (1 private and 2 public).

public and private sectors and to control the results from the interviews.

Regarding parental socio-professional category, high school students from both sectors described precisely the parents' work: "self-employed mason", "driver in the bus company X", "works in a radio, in the audio control", answers which were categorized according to the occupational classification proposed by Ribeiro and Lago (2000). As expected, those self-declared as African-descendants were much more frequent in public schools, reaching 67% of students in school 3, 62% in School 2, and 17% in the private one.

On table 4, we notice that more than 65% of mothers in these schools are workers, a number superior to the average number of economically active women in Sao Paulo (52%). In School 1 (private) and in the public ones, the families are composed by working mothers which differ, mainly, considering schooling level and position in occupational structure. In the category defined as manual workers, we included cleaning ladies, maids, clerks, cashiers, etc. They constitute 13% in School 1, 24% in School 2 and 47% in School 3. In the category *high school level jobs*, we included commerce employees, such as saleswomen, office assistant, and nursing technicians. We can see that 65% of private-school mothers have higher education. However, it is worthy to highlight that 46% of them have high school level jobs and not higher education ones.

Besides the mothers' job and schooling level, the fertility rate was another distinctive characteristic among the families. The number of

**Table 4** – Synthesis of the mothers' social characteristics

	Work outside home	Manual workers	High-school level jobs	High-education level jobs	With higher education diploma	Families with 2 children or less	Female-headed monoparental family
School 1 (private)	77%	13%	46%	17%	65%	80%	15%
School 2 (public)	68%	24%	12%	5%	12%	53%	18%
School 3 (public)	65%	47%	0	5%	8%	26%	65%

Source: questionnaires. Created by the authors.

families with an only child or with 2 children is much higher among families with children in the private sector. Contrary to popular representation, we perceive very similar percentages in female-headed monoparental families in schools 1 and 2. In school 3, however, which is in a more vulnerable area, the proportion of this type of family is much higher. A hypothesis to explain the variation on the rate of monoparental families is related to the area and the period of studies. School 2 is located in an intermediary neighborhood of Ermelino Matarazzo, while School 3, in a much poorer area, with unpaved streets and at least 16% of houses with no sewage. Additionally, School 3 questionnaires were applied during night classes, mostly attended by students-workers. The proportion of students that declared they work or had worked was 44% in School 3, 32% in School 2, and 35% in School 1. Far from being a detail, the age to enter the job market is a valuable indicator when studying social position, especially in Brazil. A hypothesis to explain this similarity in the percentage of youngster who declared to have worked in the three schools, even in the private one, refers to parental socialization. A great part of the parents of the three schools are children of factory workers, manual workers, and owners of small stores, who were socialized fundamentally through work and give a strong importance to it in the educational experience.

### **Social trajectories and educational strategies**

The analysis of some of the elements arising from the trajectory of the two mothers interviewed here contributed to understand how the families of students from public and private sectors in the district have relatively common social origins, yet have trajectories with distinct senses. Thanks to the interviews we could gather information on, at least, two generations of the families.

Regularly, we notice that the first generation of these families arrived in Sao

Paulo in the 1960s. The men came as workers in constructions and factories, while most women were maids or factory workers<sup>30</sup>. In the second generation, born in Sao Paulo between 1960 and 1970, some members reached higher education or finished high school. Most times they attended night school and already worked, as was the case of Elisa<sup>31</sup>, the mother of a student from the private school: "I normally say I did Unibina, you know? You call there and you are enrolled [laugh]"<sup>32</sup>, in reference to the private universities with non-demanding selective processes which offer night courses to students-workers. These parents, in many cases, are the first and the only ones in the family to reach higher education.

The testimonies illustrate paradigmatically the two fractions of low-income groups. Born in the outskirts of the east region of Sao Paulo and daughters of manual workers, Elisa (47 years old) and Elis (37 years old) are, respectively, the mothers of a student from a private school and of a public school in the district. Both were very receptive to the interviews, revealing a strong concern to the schooling of their children and willingness to reflect on it. The logic of their educational strategies, however, expresses very different life conditions. Elisa's father was a self-employed wall painter and the mother became, when adult, a nursing aid. During her childhood, her parents and her five siblings lived in Guaianazes, a region in the east area of Sao Paulo, even more vulnerable than Ermelino. The only child of the family to reach high school, she finished her studies in the night shift and had her first daughter at the end of high school. Living with her mother, so as to support her daughter, she dropped out towards the end of high school and, for some years, worked in two jobs- as a shop cashier during the day and a waitress at night. Entering in

**30-** The first interviews (n=20) were done with families of former factory workers and small craftsman, who lived in the neighborhood of Jardim Belém. The second set of interviews was done in Parque Boturussu (n=20), a neighborhood with gentrification signs (DANTAS, 2013; MARCON, 2014).

**31-** Fictional names.

**32-** A word play with an old telephone device (called Bina).

public service, in a high school level job, was the beginning of financial stability, marked by a new marriage, a second child, and, finally, higher education.

I always tell my kids: if you have a university diploma, everything can go wrong, but even so you will be fine. Comparing with what I had, you know? My daughter studied until she was 14 in a private school, full time. When she reached high school, I thought: it's time to invest more money. I looked for a school, which I paid a bit more, but that had a better structure, that she could try to go to USP or such. I thought: "I'll look for a school that is not so expensive and that has a reasonable structure". Then I checked the prices and the *ranking* of schools. (Elisa, married, mother of two children, university-level job).

Elisa aspires that her children can follow other paths on school and professional markets: "to go to USP", as she says, represents going much farther than her diploma in an "Unibina". Even though she was socialized through work and the only one in the family to reach this social position, the logic of her educational strategies is closer to those of intermediary and high classes, based on the search for school excellence within her financial possibilities. By telephone, she was informed of schools' fees, as she says: "I checked the prices and the *rankings*."

Elis's testimony is an example of another social trajectory possible for the women in this social group. As Elisa, Elis is the daughter of manual workers, the father a bus driver and the mother a housewife. They are a family of many children, out of those, two became teachers. Elis, however, could not finish Fundamental school II. Nowadays, she visibly tries to balance, as well as she can, her job in a small shop in the neighborhood and bringing up her four daughters, without their father's help.

So, schools today are disgusting. Starting by the entrance gate. The gate of the school is a funk party. If you go to F. in the beginning of the classes...Most of them don't go to classes, because there are a bunch of cars playing funk loudly. There's a square inside the school where the children smoke. Doesn't anybody see it? Don't they smell the smoke? The school bell is the music of Pink Panther, I can't understand that! These girls have all these hormones, then you go and play such a song! They will insinuate themselves to the guys, don't you agree? (Elis, separated, four daughters, works in a shop).

When we visited the school referred by Elis, we did not find the situation she described, even though the number of grades at the entrance and the secretary impresses visitors. Besides this, not all parents we interviewed in her neighborhood have the same perception. Part of the parents interviewed was satisfied with the public schools. Part of them was not satisfied, but resigned: "if I could, I would enroll them in a private school". One can argue that Elis's testimony has all the traces and associations that make up the stereotype of poverty: dirtiness, promiscuity, and noise. However, what allows us to better understand her aversion towards the school is her own trajectory. Recently-arrived in Ermelino, she moved from Vila Matilde to her parents' house after the separation from the father of her four daughters, so as to save on rent. The public school in Vila Matilde "was a dream school! Full-time, with extracurricular activities, and a principal that was concerned with the school and the students". Elis's testimony reminds us of the feeling of impotence from families that notice dangers, real or imaginary, and do not see the school as an ally to confront those problems. In these circumstances, they can end up having few expectations towards school.

To interpret the logic of the educational strategies and concerns of these mothers, we

should mention the study of Marco Oberti (2007) which distinguishes the *school excellence logic*, *protective logic*, and *resignation logic*. The first would be characterized by high levels of school expectations and demands that lead families to more selective public and private institutions. Far from being the privilege of private-school mothers, families that search for Etecs, selective public schools, can be included in this category. In the protective logic, school performance is not the focus and the children's balance and well-being is more important. Without ignoring the schooling aspect, is this logic the main concern is the school as a socialization space. Finally, Oberti (2007) suggests that there is also a *resignation logic* which characterizes parents from more vulnerable fractions of low-income classes who live in such uncertainty that the relation with the school is distant and school expectations are very low.

## Final remarks

This research calls attention to the second generation of families from low-income groups, originated mainly from Brazilian Northeast, the countryside of Sao Paulo, and from other states, that came to the city of Sao Paulo to work during the industrialization and growth of the city. This second generation is

a central aspect to understand this new social group, which is in the frontier between low-income classes and the middle-classes. This new middle class would be the product not only of the elevation of life conditions and purchasing power, but also the result of a long process of cultural capital accumulation acquired by the graduation on high school and attendance to private universities night courses.

The analysis of the specific case of Ermelino Matarazzo also reveals how the formation of social classes and the processes of social mobility can be related to the role of women. In this context, the choice for private schools expresses the interest of second-generation mothers to provide their children with other paths in the market of higher education formation and in the job market, differently from those followed by them. They show the desire to go beyond the future that was possible for previous generations, accepting pragmatically the rules of the game, imposed by dominant groups, of social ascension by school diploma. Finally, the sociological study of this school offer and demand aimed to provide elements to create public policies that recognize the needs of families from different fractions of low-income groups and proposes a public school offer that maintains a dialogue and matches their interests.

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