

## **Pedagogical Know-How and Government Proposals on Literacy in Mato Grosso do Sul: From Pretension to Practice**

**O fazer pedagógico e as propostas oficiais para a  
alfabetização em Mato Grosso do Sul: da pretensão à  
prática**

**La pratique pédagogique et le projet officiel pour  
l'alphabétisation à Mato Grosso do Sul: la prétention  
et l'application**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the past several decades, literacy has enjoyed the privilege of being a constant object of analysis and reflection. Several studies have sought to understand this multifaceted and complex phenomenon. In this work, we try to contribute with some reflections on the theme by studying the situation in Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), 1979-1982 in regards to the relationship between pedagogical know-how and official government proposals. Our aim is to retrieve the projects and the proposals involving literacy that were sent to schools and teachers in the 1979-1982 period. Later on, we will reveal whether or not these projects were effective in quotidian education, and what relation existed between pedagogical know-how and official documents. For this, we used two sources to collect the *data*: first the analysis of official documents from the State Department of Education of Mato Grosso do Sul during the given period. The retrieval and analysis of these documents is of great importance to us, keeping in mind that even though MS was one of the newest Brazilian states at the time, record-keeping of its educational history was poor and presented us with enormous challenges in procuring the documents we needed for our research. Our second source of data are semi-structured interviews with the teachers that were part of the State Department of Education at the time the project was implemented. The analysis of these *data* indicates a wide gulf between what was presented as the official proposal for literacy during this period and what was actually carried out in classrooms.

**Index terms:** literacy, proposals, practices, Mato Grosso do Sul.

## RESUMO

A alfabetização vem sendo, no decorrer das últimas décadas, objeto privilegiado de reflexão e análise. Diversas pesquisas têm sido feitas no sentido de tentar compreender este fenômeno multifacetado e, por isso mesmo, de difícil compreensão. Neste trabalho, tentamos contribuir com algumas reflexões acerca do tema estudando-o no limite da rede estadual de ensino de Mato Grosso do Sul - 1979-1982 - e no que concerne especificamente à relação entre o fazer pedagógico e as propostas oficiais postas para a alfabetização durante esse período pela Secretaria de Estado de Educação. Assim, temos como objetivo primeiramente, resgatar os projetos e propostas envolvendo a alfabetização que foram encaminhados às escolas e aos professores no período relativo a 1979-1982. Em segundo lugar, esperamos desvelar como estes projetos se efetivaram ou não no cotidiano escolar e qual relação foi estabelecida entre o fazer pedagógico da escola e os documentos oficiais. Para isso, utilizamos basicamente duas fontes para a coleta de dados: primeiramente a análise dos documentos oficiais produzidos pela Secretaria de Estado de Educação de Mato Grosso do Sul durante o período em foco. O resgate e análise desses documentos nos parecem ser de suma importância, tendo em vista que, mesmo sendo Mato Grosso do Sul um dos mais novos Estados da Federação, o registro de sua história educacional apresenta-se bastante comprometido, tal a dificuldade encontrada por nós para resgatar os documentos produzidos no período. Em segundo lugar fizemos uso de entrevistas semi-estruturadas com professores que fizeram parte da equipe da Secretaria de Estado de Educação na época de implantação de cada projeto. A análise desses dados nos indica haver uma grande distância entre o que foi apresentado como proposta oficial para a alfabetização neste período e o que se efetivou na prática pedagógica da rede.

**Palavras-chave:** alfabetização, propostas, práticas, Mato Grosso do Sul.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'alphabétisation a été, au cours des dernières décennies, l'objet privilégié de réflexion et d'analyse. Plusieurs recherches ont été faites pour essayer de comprendre ce phénomène multiforme et, par conséquent, difficile à comprendre. Dans ce travail, nous étudions cette question au

*Mato Grosso do Sul* (MS) - 1979-1982 - et plus particulièrement en ce qui concerne la relation entre la pratique d'enseignement et les propositions officielles pour l'alphabétisation. Ainsi, nous visons, d'abord, présenter les projets et propositions concernant l'alphabétisation qui ont été envoyés aux écoles et aux enseignants dans la période couvrant 1979-1982. Deuxièmement, nous espérons montrer comment ces projets sont venus passer ou non à la vie quotidienne de l'école dont la relation a été établie entre la pratique de l'école et les documents officiels. Pour cela, on utilise essentiellement deux sources de collecte de données: une première c'est l'analyse des documents officiels produits par Secrétaire de l'Éducation du Mato Grosso do Sul au cours de la période de mise au point. La récupération et l'analyse de ces documents semblent être d'une importance capitale, considérant que l'enregistrement de l'histoire de l'éducation de Mato Grosso do sul est un peu compromise, face à la difficulté que nous avons eu pour récupérer les documents produits au cours de la période. Deuxièmement, nous avons utilisé des entrevues semi-structurées avec les enseignants qui faisaient partie de l'équipe de Secretaria de l'Éducation au moment du déploiement de chaque projet. L'analyse de ces données indique qu'il y a une grande distance entre ce qui était présenté comme une proposition formelle de l'alphabétisation dans cette période et ce qui a été accompli dans les écoles.

**Mots clés:** alphabétisation, les propositions, les pratiques, Mato Grosso do Sul.

## 1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, literacy has enjoyed the privilege of being a constant object of analysis and reflection. Several researchers have tried to understand this multifaceted *phenomenon*, which points to the complexity of the topic.

In this paper, we try to contribute to the subject by studying it in the context of the public schools of Mato Grosso do Sul (1979-1982) and specifically with regard to the relationship between pedagogical know-how and the official proposals made by the state's Department of Education during this period.

Thus we aim to first resurrect the projects and the proposals that were sent to the schools and teachers through the analysis of official documents produced by the Department of Education during the period in question. This seems to be of paramount importance in light of the fact that even though Mato Grosso do Sul is one of the newest members of the Federation, the difficulty we faced in procuring relevant documents suggests that records of its educational history are quite compromised.

Note that we needed to make use of the materials found in the personal files of some teachers and others found in the schools analyzed in this study. When we conducted our research, there was no systematization of these projects by the State Department of Education.

Secondly, we hoped to understand through interviews with the staff members of the State Department of Education at the time of implementation of each project as to how life in the schools has been affected or not and what relationship was established between pedagogical know-how and the documents produced.

## **2. Literacy in Mato Grosso do Sul: From Proposals to Practices**

The State of Mato Grosso do Sul's main economic activity is agriculture. In the 1970s when Mato Grosso do Sul became an official state of Brazil, its population was predominantly rural. The make-up of the population underwent profound changes in subsequent decades, as indicated by the following *data* supplied by IBGE<sup>1</sup>:

Table I

Year	1970	1980	1991
Urban Population	452,177	919,123	1,414,447

<sup>1</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística

Rural Population	544,481	450,444	365,926
Total	996,598	1,369,567	1,789,373

The birth of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul came in the midst of the political unrest of the late seventies and was created by Complementary Law No. 31, signed by President Ernesto Geisel, on October 11, 1977. The division of the state of Mato Grosso into two separate states was the result of an old struggle of the oligarchies in the south of Mato Grosso. Despite many years of lobbying by the southern oligarchies, Mato Grosso do Sul only became a state during the military dictatorship. To be more precise, the state was born in a time when the military regime showed signs of exhaustion. What is the meaning behind the creation of a new state in this context?

There are at least two explanations for this creation. On the one hand, we have the federal government's explanation, which is based on technical matters such as that of a broader national integration strategy and better territorial redistribution. On the other hand, some argue that the causes were not so technical and that political and economic issues guided the signing of the Supplementary Law.

The studies for the territorial (re)division were incorporated into the National Development Plan (PND) II of 1975. In 1974, SUDECO had already begun to prepare studies for this purpose (see ROCHA, 1992).

The need to divide the State of Mato Grosso<sup>2</sup> was justified by the federal government as a result of Brazil's large territory and geographical, economic, historical and cultural differences. The official justification pointed to the fact that the execution of this division had been the result of a long historical process of struggle for the emancipation of southerners. According to Rocha (1992), we cannot see a direct and immediate link

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<sup>2</sup> **Mato Grosso** is one of the states of Brazil, the third largest in area, located in the western part of the country.

between the historical claims favoring division of the state and the law that actually brought the partition to fruition. For this author, there was a clear need for reproduction of capital in the partition process. In the PND II, we can find the justification for this assertion, since in it the farming sector is assigned the role of sustaining the "high" dynamism of the economy, reducing the trade deficit, collaborating in maintaining rapid growth and opening new frontiers in the conquest of foreign markets. It was thus argued at the time that it was necessary to fully exploit the productivity potential of the agricultural regions of the country (see ROCHA, 1992, p. 27).

As the oligarchs of the south had an economic structure grounded primarily in livestock, the creation of a new state would provide conditions for accelerating all of the economic goals detailed above. Furthermore, the creation of a new federal unit would serve as a support to the military regime. The new state meant the addition of three senators and eight deputies to the federal government, which meant the expansion of the military dictatorship's parliamentary basis (cf. FERREIRA Jr, 1992), guaranteeing the regime's two thirds majority in Congress and thus ensuring approval of any of its proposals. Control of Parliament was an indispensable condition for the government of the "revolution".

According to Rocha (1992), although a direct and immediate link between the partition and the historical claims did not exist, given that the partition would serve other purposes, it is undeniable that the creation of the new state satisfied the claims of the groups involved. Thus the State of Mato Grosso do Sul was born and it was created to "contemplate the political interests of the local ruling class and to reinforce, in immediate terms, the government of the military dictatorship" Bittar (1992, p. 17).

The official installation of the government was on January 1, 1979, with the inauguration of the Legislative Assembly, elected in 1978 with

constituent powers. Harry Amorim Costa, a technocrat endorsed by Geisel<sup>3</sup>, became Mato Grosso do Sul's governor under Complementary Law No. 20 / 74 in an attempt to soften the differences within the situationist party in Mato Grosso do Sul: the ARENA<sup>4</sup>.

Differences fragmented the ARENA into three factions that fought for hegemony in local politics: the "Orthodox" wing remained faithful to the ideals of the "Revolution of 64"; the "Independent" wing, which was organized around the name of Pedro Pedrossian, who represented the interests of the agrarian elites and the urban middle classes; and a group called the "Reformers," a dissident group of the "Independent" wing.

The federal government had an interest in a strong party because elections for state governor were approaching. From the point of view of the federal government, although Pedrossian was the most appropriate candidate to administer the new state, because he was rejected by the "orthodox" wing, which went so far as to accuse him of corruption, his appointment became impossible. The quarrels between situation advocates did not contribute to the strengthening of the central power, which led Geisel to administer the fights between the members of ARENA through a non-government appointee, who would keep Geisel in a position of neutrality in dealing with local politics.

However, the tranquility envisioned by the federal government was far from what actually ensued. Harry Costa Amorim's government had successive crises during its short existence, many of them caused by the fact that both him and his collaborators limited the scope of his political action, since

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<sup>3</sup> **Ernesto Beckmann Geisel** (3 August 1907 – 12 September 1996) was a Brazilian military leader and politician, who was President of Brazil from 1974 to 1979.

<sup>4</sup> The **National Renewal Alliance Party** or *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (ARENA) was a conservative political party that existed in Brazil between 1966 and 1985. It was the official party of the military that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

[G]overnmental decisions were taken without the participation or with partial participation of the state and federal deputies and senators also (...) decisions were taken without state or federal senators or with [only] partial participation. (ROCHA, 1992 p. 37)

Of course, in a state with an established oligarchy of power and strong customs of patronage, the attitude of the governor and of his team did not please state politicians, whether from the situationist or opposition party. Rocha (1992) argues that the state legislators, whether ARENA or MDB<sup>5</sup>, had the intention of continuing to influence the appointment of officials and of mayors of the areas considered vital to "national security".

However, Harry changed his style of governing, seeking the support of mayors (until then, the only group that supported him was the "reformer" party led by Levy Dias) and state legislators in his search of political support. However, even upon reaching his goal, it was not enough to keep him in power. The governor was dismissed by President João Batista Figueiredo, who assumed the presidency in March 1979 and responded to pressure from groups such as ARENA that finally had resolved their differences and ensured the appointment of a member approved by the "orthodox" and "independent" groups: Marcelo Miranda Soares (see ROCHA, 1992).

Soares' government also failed to please the federal government and it lasted for only a short duration. A year and four months after his appointment, he was dismissed because of Pedrossian's lobbying against him, in view of Soares' manifest desire to become Mato Grosso do Sul's governor.

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<sup>5</sup> The **Brazilian Democratic Movement** (Portuguese: *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*, *MDB*) was a political party in Brazil that existed from 1965 to 1979. It was formed in 1965, when the military government that overthrew President João Goulart abolished all existing political parties. The new electoral rules were so restrictive as to permit the existence of only two parties—the National Renewal Alliance Party (ARENA) and the MDB.



As expected, the third name indicated for the governorship was Pedrossian, who was considered by Figueiredo as "the greatest electoral strength of the state" (see ROCHA, 1992). However, protests against his appointment emerged on many fronts. On the one hand, Paulo Brossard, PMDB *gaúcho*, repeated the argument he had made at the time of Soares' nomination, challenging the legality of the president's act, in light of the fact that the state was autonomous and therefore should elect its governor via an electoral college. On the other hand, Pedrossian's enemies returned to accusations about his moral aptitude with serious accusations of corruption. However, the third candidate was chosen for governor, passing the Senate with 33 votes in favor and 24 against and he was sworn in on November 7, 1980 (see ROCHA, 1992).

The federal governments' successive endorsements and nominations for governor when the state of Mato Grosso do Sul was already politically and legally constituted can only lead us to the conclusion that, as already noted, the creation of the state was precisely to enable the expansion of political representation by the ruling party. However, the government was still not at ease, because Pedrossian's administration was marked by the centralization of power and authoritarian attitudes through a policy of "wage squeeze" (see BITTAR, 1992) and especially because of corruption charges.

With regard to teaching, starting with the end of the school first semester of 1981, the government began to delay the payment of wages in addition to the wage squeeze already imposed on teachers (cf. FERREIRA Jr, 1992), thus generating the first attempt at striking by teachers of the new state.

Such attitudes and accusations leveled at Pedrossian's administration led to a deep erosion of his government that, with the attempted democratization of the society, made it so that in the eyes of the federal government, "the greatest electoral strength of the state" could not choose his successor.

One of the pretensions proclaimed by the Presidential Palace in relation to the creation of the State of Mato Grosso do Sul was that it would be a model of public administration (see ROCHA, 1992). Based on this aspiration, a government structure was created with few Secretaries of State: General Planning and Coordination, Finance and Administration, Human Resources Development, Economic Development, Regional and Urban Infrastructure, Justice and Public Safety (see ROCHA, 1992).

To develop government policies on education, the Education Foundation was established in January 1979 and was linked to the Department of Human Resources Development (SDRH) in order to promote, guide, coordinate, implement and control activities directly and indirectly linked to education (See ROCHA, 1992). However, this compact structure was never solidified and as soon as the first governor, Harry Costa Amorim, was replaced by Marcelo Miranda Soares, there was also a replacement of foundations by respective secretaries of state, for example, the State Department of Education in October 1979.

The position of Secretary of Education, as example of and also as a consequence of what happened with the appointment of the governors, faced regular turnover as well, because every newly appointed governor would make changes in state departments.

These constant changes in departments, department secretaries and governors reflect the fact that the claim pronounced by the federal government that Mato Grosso do Sul would be a model of administration had not been achieved. In fact, what can be observed is that

[...] the newly created state was nothing more than a political fiefdom, where patronage ruled to the detriment of technocratic policies and principles as outlined by the government itself. During the 1979 to 1982 period, government posts were manipulated as opportunities to be leveraged and exploited, according to the interests of the current political class. (ROCHA, 1992, p. 59)

In 1978 (thus before official creation of the state on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979), the "Group of Executives for Human Resources Development" was created with a specific education team. It was this team that was responsible for drafting the proposal of the first guidelines for the education of the new state, including guidelines on literacy.

The guidelines were initially developed by a group consisting of experts from the former Department of Education of the State of Mato Grosso and members of the Teaching Delegations of each region, who were assisted by professors from the University of Passo Fundo, Rio Grande do Sul. However, for reasons of dispute between the different party groups, the guidelines would only be published in 1980 under Marcelo Miranda Soares's government and by a team different than the one who had prepared them.

The guidelines consisted of two volumes: the first contained the theoretical foundation that introduced teachers to the principles that guided the conception of education proposed by the State of Mato Grosso do Sul. These principles were described under different aspects: legal, philosophical, psycho-social and socio-cultural bases. The second volume, published as a "handbook for implementing 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade curricular guidelines," offered methodological suggestions for teachers to use, based on the principles described in the first document.

In regards to the legal basis, the guidelines affirmed that they they were founded on the conception of education expressed in the Constitution and Federal Law No. 5692/71. This law is the clearest manifestation of the precepts of pedagogical technicism and perhaps because of this, it is possible to identify many instances of this trend in the curricular guidelines, for example, the excessive concern with the formal aspects of planning, often characterized as the solution to all educational problems.

In explaining the philosophical basis of the guidelines document, we can observe some contradictions. If on the one hand, it often looked for a

liberating theory of education, citing Paulo Freire and talking of man as a "change agent," (MS-SE, 1980, p. 9), on the other, the "harmonious development of man," who should "integrate" himself into the middle of society, is a serious concern expressed throughout the document. This "integrate oneself" with "harmony" seems more like an invitation for submission than the reflection suggested by the pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

The "man" with whom the text was concerned seems to be a decontextualized and ahistorical man, hovering over social conflicts:

[...] education is to allow, through the diversity of opportunities, that each individual will be a person in the broadest sense of the term. (SE-MS, 1980, p. 10)

What "a person in the broadest sense of the term" means becomes quite difficult to define. On biopsychosocial grounds, we can already see in some instances terms from Piagetian theory, such as in Law 5692/71:

The individual develops in two ways: biologically and psychologically - intimately related and dependent, with a common characteristic: orient each other towards equilibrium. (SE-MS, 1980, p. 11)

Or:

In recognizing the characteristics of children ages seven to 11 years old, who are in the phase of concrete intellectual operations and moral and social cooperation sentiments, the *curriculum* will be founded in activities. (SE-MS, 1980, p. 11)

It is difficult to say whether the drafters of the guidelines were already concerned about including a few principles of Piagetian theory to rethink the *curriculum* or if the presence of these terms can be explained simply by their being present in Law 5692/71 and were taken as a reference for the development of the *curriculum* guidelines.

With respect to literacy, the main concern of the document is what it says in regards to the formation of concepts by those learning literacy and

the lesson plans and activities used for the first several years of elementary school, in accordance with the guidelines contained in Federal Law 5692/71.

The activities students would engage in over the course of the school year would be developed from several main ideas. These ideas were: a) Man is an identifiable being; b) Man feels and perceives the world in which he lives; c) Man has a body made up of different parts and each part has its function; d) Man is capable of performing movements; e) Man is not alone in the world he lives in; f) Man has needs; g) Man can communicate through different ways; and h) Man is able to create (SE-MS, 1982 p.17-39). Based on these key ideas, other activities would be developed in all areas, through the techniques of "Operational Unit," "Center of Interest" and "Projects," always seeking to work in an integrated manner.

The document is comprehensive in regards to developing goals and behavioral expectations to be exhibited in each of the main ideas, reinforcing our assertion about the excessive preoccupation with formal aspects of planning. Few theoretical considerations are outlined in the proposed work, transforming the document into merely a prescription without a lot of theoretical consistency.

With regard specifically to the acquisition of written language, the guidelines do not present any suggestions apart from those to be used during the preparatory period, extremely reinforced as key to a child's literacy success, as well as serving as a criterion for regrouping classes.

There is also a brief description of each of the suggested techniques (Operational Unit, Center of Interests and Projects). Again however, the biggest concern lies in "teaching" how to organize the planning by presenting each of its steps in detail - the development of goals through evaluation - without further theoretical considerations.

We can see in the two volumes of the document produced by the Department of Education very strong marks of technicism, which is

somewhat understandable, because that was the prevailing trend in the educational scene of the time.

If, on the one hand, the document is exhaustive with regard to the formal aspects of the planning of teaching, on the other hand, it is quite silent with regard to the acquisition of written language: of the 644 suggested activities listed in the document, less than 40 are dedicated to written language acquisition.

The *curriculum* guidelines did not recommend the use of any specific primer or workbook (*cartilha*)<sup>6</sup> and their framers believed that the teacher could create it together with his students. As explains teacher Jan, one of the experts involved in drafting the first version of the document as a representative from the city of Três Lagoas:

When we finished the preparation of the guidelines, we are also in doubt: and now, what book, what cartilha should we choose to implement the guidelines? No, no there wasn't any, it was determined that we wouldn't have a cartilha, because the teacher would not be able to work with this or that material [...], he could have cartilhas or books to consult, but not to adopt in the classroom [...].

We believe that the fact of giving up on the *cartilha* by relying on the teacher's capability to elaborate his own didactical material represented an advance for a time when *cartilhas* were practically the only instruments used for literacy. However, precisely because it allowed the teacher to draw up his own reading material, it became indispensable to enrich the suggested activities on developing written language, keeping in mind that up to that point, teachers had depended on *cartilhas* to perform their work and were thus inexperienced in creating their own curriculum. Asking teachers to abandon old practices without providing them with an alternative was quite dangerous or at a minimum ineffective.

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<sup>6</sup> N.T.: Didactic book for literacy, a workbook or primer

However, the introduction of guidelines through the school network did not happen as predicted by the group that prepared the guidelines. Because of the group's political composition, the group was disbanded by the Department of Education and another team was assigned to the task of distributing the guidelines.

During this process, some changes were made at the expense of the initial design that recommended the dispensing with *cartilhas*. Considering that the teacher's job would be "too loose" if it was not supported by some sort of manual (second testimony of teacher Jan), the team responsible for deployment, unlike what had been decided by the group responsible for preparing the work, decided to adopt a *cartilha* to be used throughout state schools in 1st grade classrooms. "The Little Yellow Boat: Method of the Creative Experience"- a *cartilha* by Iêda Dias da Silva (1978, 1979) with an analytic approach to literacy, was chosen because it was considered more appropriate for what was proposed in the guidelines.

The adoption of this approach to teaching literacy proved to be quite complicated. As teachers had been taught the synthetic approach to literacy, most of the teachers had great difficulty in performing their work from another perspective, leading to confusion and dissatisfaction in all schools.

In fact, we can say that only in a few classrooms was the work done as formally expected (this is confirmed by all the technicians who participated in the establishment of the *cartilha* "The Little Yellow Boat" as an obligatory primer in schools). According to Mr. Mar, a teacher at the time of deployment of the "The Little Yellow Boat" in a public school in the city of Campo Grande:

We were trained to do planning. Only. You know what everybody did? They did the planning, handed it to the principal, entered the room and did what he or she knew. The teacher returned to A-E-I-O-U, BA-BE-BO-BU-BI.

What we can see from teacher testimonials is that once again the major concern was with the formal aspects of planning, with care given to what the teacher would present to the school's administration. However, what happened in the classroom was not always consistent with what was stated in the plan. This idea is corroborated by the words of Mr. Ter, who at the time was principal of two state schools in the city of Três Lagoas:

There was desperation among parents; there was desperation among teachers; the teacher weren't aware of waiting [to highlight the syllables]. I had a teacher who hid from us [the school administration]. He excelled in the first lesson; he already marked the key word.

There is a consensus among the experts interviewed for this study that the proposal put forth by the guidelines failed to materialize in practice. Why did this happen?

We can observe that, on the one hand, the teacher resisted implementing this proposals, perhaps because of his unfamiliarity with what was being proposed; surely blame also falls on the government for the way in which they conducted this trial deployment.

The training course offered by the Department of Education, taught by Iêda Dias da Silva (the same author whose cartilha was adopted), was given only to the administrators who were in charge of distributing the materials and training the teachers.

It is clear that this practice made it very difficult to persuade literacy teachers and to help them understand the guidelines, who preferred to continue with what, in one form or another, they knew. They felt unsafe to venture into a new and completely foreign proposal.

Another aspect to consider is that the change in methodology along a vertical shaft (which, incidentally, is quite common, and is much more the rule than the exception throughout Brazil and not only in Mato Grosso do Sul) as established by the Department of Education was undertaken without



teachers having first expressed true concern and unease with current literacy methodology. Thus the change in methodology, initially determined by the guidelines and, subsequently, with the introduction of the *cartilha*, responded to a need of the Department of Education and not to the needs of teachers in the classroom.

Mr. Ter's testimony corroborates our assertions that the *teachers highlighted the syllables ahead of schedule and unbeknownst to school administrators. Aside from proving our claim, this demonstrates the level of democratization that existed in school practice.*

However, in what ways exactly did the analytical approach used in "The Little Yellow Boat" differ from the synthetic approach proposed by other *cartilhas*? Actually, both approaches to writing are only a code for transcription that converts sounds into graphics and are a system of representation that needs to be understood. It is for this reason that so much importance is given to visual and auditory discrimination that are prioritized in the "preparatory period".

In "The Little Yellow Boat," "writing is addressed as 'tracing of the letters' and as something that 'begins with the copy'" (SILVA, 1978, p.47), therefore depending on "the arm's, the hand's and the fingers' muscular maturation" (SILVA, 1978, p.44). At no time is writing presented as something that involves other mechanisms besides motor skills.

It is not the objective of this study to evaluate the problems presented in *cartilhas*, which have already been repeatedly denounced. However, we believe that "The Little Yellow Boat" cannot be exempted from the most common criticisms of *cartilhas* in general: they have uninteresting and meaningless texts and are merely concerned with showing certain language structures, as stated by Bettelheim<sup>7</sup> (1984):

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<sup>7</sup> While Bettelheim's critiques refer to American *cartilhas*, they are equally applicable to Brazilian *cartilhas* and particularly to "The Little Yellow Boat."

[...] The simplicity of the propositions does not encourage the investment of mental energy in reading or allow the transmission of anything interesting. The diction used is literally baby talk, similar to “telegraphic,” truncated talk of children who are learning to walk; however, the child should be made to feel that learning to read is something progressive and not something that leads to regression in thinking and talking back to a level that the child has already overcome quite well. (BETTELHEIM, 1984, p.174)

As we have stated, the *cartilha* “The Little Yellow Boat” was never used effectively in most schools. However, in 1982, teachers in several cities signed a petition addressed to the Secretary of Education asking for the end of the implementation of guidelines and the mandatory use of the *cartilha* “The Little Yellow Boat.” The attempt to use the analytical approach to literacy in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul came to an official close.

At the end of the government of Peter Pedrossian, “by a decision at the level of the secretary” Mr. Fauze Scaff Gatass Filho (teacher and second testimony of Jon), a second project, the “Alpha,” was developed and marketed by the publishing house Abril. However, perhaps because of its high cost, its use did not follow the mold of “The Little Yellow Boat” and it was used in only a few classrooms.

“The Little Yellow Boat,” and “The Alpha Program” were discontinued without an accurate assessment of their results. The project was abandoned for lack of funds (according to testimony by Mr. Jon) and some years after the beginning of its use, it was possible to see in some schools abandoned remnants of the material used for the project.

What we can conclude about school use of Alpha is that, despite being a project of very high cost to the government, the monitoring of its effectiveness was irresponsible, without any evaluation of its results.

### **3. Final Thoughts**

Analyzing the circumstances of the attempted use of *curriculum* guidelines and the cartilha "The Yellow Little Boat" and "The Alpha Program," we can see that there was a deep gap between the proposals contained in official documents and effective teaching practices in public school classrooms. Different reasons can be given for this. The first is that the nature of the government, an authoritarian military dictatorship, was reflected in the education proposals it put forth. The centralized decisions - imposed from above without proper participation of the school community - characterized the treatment accorded to issues of education during this period.

The proposals submitted by the Secretary of Education for literacy did not respond to the anxieties and questions from teachers and therefore teachers did not feel convinced of the proposals' necessity or validity. Another issue, which was not studied in this research but cannot be overlooked, is the training of literacy teachers to deal with these new proposed guidelines. It is irresponsible to impose new rules without proper training.

Finally, we believe that the teachers' rejection of these proposals can be understood as a veiled form of resistance to referrals made by the Department of Education, given the authoritarian situation in which they were gestated.

The school, while undeniably crossed by social contradictions posed by a particular historical moment, can also be the stage of resistance and the creation of "the new".

Thus, between the pretensions of official documents and effective teaching know-how, we wonder if what remains is merely nothing or if what emerges is the teacher's need to resist and become a subject of history, a right which has been systematically denied for decades.

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