Cenas Educacionais

ARTICLES

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DAD WANTED ME TO LEARN ARITHMETIC: NARRATIVES FROM MRS. ZEZÉ

PAPÁ QUERÍA QUE APRENDIERA A CONTAR: NARRACIONES DE DOÑA ZEZÉ

PAPAI QUERIA QUE EU APRENDESSE A FAZER CONTA: NARRATIVAS DE DONA ZEZÉ

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Abstract
Brazilian Education has always progressed unevenly. One can point to geographical aspects, among others, where inequalities are noticeable, such as the differences between Southeast and Northeast, central and peripheral regions, and urban and rural areas. The aim of this article addresses this context by proposing to list the main challenges to children's literacy in Serraria, a rural region of Maragojipe in the Recôncavo of Bahia, during the 1940s. To this end, the methodology used encompasses bibliographical research and biographical narrative, from which the information, or rather, the meanings that composed the discussion, were derived through the biographical narrative of Mrs. Zezé, the author's mother. To understand the lived experience, this article also relied on narrative research. A qualitative approach underpinned everything. Ultimately, it was observed that accessibility, availability, and political neglect were among the obstacles to literacy during the depicted period.

Keywords: Recôncavo of Bahia; Rural area; Literacy; Mainha[2].

Resumen
La educación brasileña siempre ha sido desigual. Se pueden señalar aspectos geográficos, entre otros, en los que se notan las desigualdades: sureste x noreste, centro x regiones periféricas y, urbano x rural, etc. El objetivo de este artículo bordea este contexto al proponer enumerar los principales desafíos para la alfabetización infantil en la Serraria, región rural de Maragojipe, en Recôncavo da Bahia, en la década de 1940. Para ello, la metodología utilizada implica la investigación bibliográfica y la narrativa biográfica. Esta última, en voz de D. Zezé, madre del autor, aportó las informaciones que componen la discusión. Para comprender la experiencia vivida, este artículo también se apoya en la investigación narrativa. Todo tiene como telón de fondo el enfoque cualitativo. Al final, se percibió que sobresalió la determinación del padre del entrevistado frente a las dificultades inminentes, de las cuales se destaca la lejanía geográfica del lugar donde vivían de los centros urbanos; La falta de caminos de acceso transitables y el abandono político fueron algunos de los obstáculos para la alfabetización en el período retratado.

Palabras-clave: Recôncavo da Bahia; Zona rural; Literatura; Mami.

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[2] I chose to write the word "Mainha" and “Painho” with a capital letter throughout the article, as it specifically refers to my mother

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Resumo
A educação brasileira sempre caminhou de maneira desigual. Pode-se apontar aspectos geográficos, dentre outros, em que são perceptíveis as desigualdades: Sudeste x Nordeste, regiões centrais x periféricas e, urbana x rural etc. O objetivo desse artigo beira esse contexto ao se propor a elencar os principais desafios para a alfabetização de crianças na Serraria, região rural de Maragojipe, no Recôncavo da Bahia, na década de 1940. Para tanto, a metodologia utilizada perpassa pela pesquisa bibliográfica e pela narrativa biográfica de onde as informações, ou seja, as significações que compuseram a discussão vieram através da narrativa biográfica de D. Zezé, mãe da autora. Para compreensão da experiência vivida, esse artigo contou ainda com a pesquisa narrativa. Tudo teve como pano de fundo a abordagem qualitativa. Ao final, percebeu-se que a acessibilidade, a disponibilidade e o descaso político foram alguns dos obstáculos para a alfabetização no período retratado.

Palavras-chave: Recôncavo da Bahia; Zona rural; Alfabetização; Mainha.

Introduction

Dad wanted me to learn arithmetic. That was what my mother said when I asked her why my grandfather persistently sought a teacher to teach her to read and write. An unexpected and straightforward answer, a mix of innocence and the imminent need of those who are always excluded: learning to count to have a more promising life, not to be deceived. For this reason, the title of this article could not be otherwise.

Life is a constant learning process. This is a commonplace phrase, a cliché. However, beyond overused statements, the ability to listen and tell another's story is a scientific exercise that requires rigor and care. After all, both the words and the world belong to them. With this as a guideline, the essential aspect of recounting someone else's lived experience is to reveal the knowledge they have gained with the same care a craftswoman uses to cut each piece of fabric precisely, sewing them together to create a beautiful patchwork quilt.

I understand alphabetization as the process by which a child or adult acquires the written system of their mother tongue, and literacy as the socially situated use of that system. Both are inseparable paths that every individual within society must traverse.

Anchored in this perspective, my goal with this writing is to outline the main challenges to children's alfabetization in Serraria, a rural region of Maragojipe, Recôncavo, Bahia, in the 1940s. The method used to gather information was the biographical narrative of Mrs. Zeze, my mother. In addition, to gain a clear understanding of the phenomenon, both bibliographical research and narrative research were employed, with a strong focus on the qualitative approach.

The article is divided into three parts. In the first section, I outline the methodology used, with an emphasis on the biographical narrative and narrative research approaches. The second part provides the theoretical foundation, including a summary of the history and geography of the Recôncavo of Bahia, a discussion of Mainha and her contexts, and brief reflections on Education in rural Brazil and mathematical literacy.

In the third and final part, I share a segment of Mainha's memories, focusing on my grandfather's quest to find a teacher. I also discuss the experiences with each of them, who, in some way, left a mark on her memory. Finally, I highlight the significance of teaching mathematics alongside literacy in one's native language.

Methodology

This investigation is characterized as qualitative because it aims to connect all elements involved in the process, linking them so that the researcher and the researched object do not exist in isolation. According to Chizzotti (2017, p. 98), "O conhecimento não se reduz a um rol de dados isolados [...]; O sujeito-observador é parte integrante do processo de conhecimento". According to Bicudo (2011), there is a focus on quality, as the object cannot be definitively separated from the researcher, the storyteller, and the story being told.

I understand research quality as the meticulous care taken to examine the investigated phenomenon to ensure its validity. This can also be confirmed through narrative research, which "“é uma forma de compreender a experiência. É um tipo de colaboração entre pesquisador e participantes, ao longo de um tempo, em um lugar ou série de lugares" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2015, p.51).

The authors further state that "A experiência da narrativa do pesquisador é sempre dual, é sempre o pesquisador vivenciando a experiência e também sendo parte da própria experiência" (Clandinin; Connelly, 2015, p.120).

Thus, the understanding and interpretation of the narrative become more accurate because, beyond the records, the relationship between the research actors connects them in a way that transforms it from a cold story into something meaningful.

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In addition to what has already been noted, bibliographical research is also used here, as the source of data for reading and interpretation was printed documents, books, among others. According to Severino (2016), bibliographical research:

> é aquela que se realiza a partir do registro disponível, decorrente de pesquisas anteriores, em documentos impressos, como livros, artigos, teses [...]. Utiliza-se dados ou categorias teóricas já trabalhadas por outros pesquisadores e devidamente registrados. Os textos tornam-se fontes de dados dos temas pesquisados. (Severino, 2016, p.131)

Concluding the characterizations, it is worth mentioning that the biographical narrative also fits into this work by emphasizing that the subject's account has undeniable validity precisely because it brings aspects of their human experience to light. It is something essentially human (Maffioletti, 2016).

Bondía (2013) states that "pensar não é somente "raciocinar" ou "calcular" ou "argumentar", como nos tem sido ensinado algumas vezes, mas é sobretudo dar sentido ao que somos e ao que nos acontece" (Bondía, 2013, p.02). From this perspective, the strength of the biographical narrative, the primary source from which this article draws information, lies in the lived experiences of the individual, as they begin to see themselves and their life, experienced and recounted, through the meanings attributed to it, recognizing themselves as the subject of their own story.

I recall that, as a child, I would listen with my siblings, some sitting and others lying on the mat laid out on the porch, to the stories my parents told. I would travel through the words, creating images that have always stayed with me. Over time, I developed a desire to share those stories, filled with emotions and, above all, knowledge.

Therefore, in April 2022, while sitting on the same porch, I asked my mother if she could retell the stories so I could turn them into writings. After she agreed, I grabbed my cell phone recorder and asked a few questions, listening to her recollected answers.

Four sessions amounted to fifteen pages once transcribed. A very rich material that, besides this, will yield other articles.

Contexts, Education in the rural area, and mathematical literacy

This second writing phase involves developing the theoretical framework. It reflects on the various contexts in which my mother was involved. I start with the Recôncavo Baiano, the region where Maragojipe[3] is located, the Municipality where my mother comes from. Next, I introduce Serraria, her birthplace in a rural area, and the family background of the biographical subject. Then, I give a brief overview of rural Education in Brazil. Finally, I end this segment with a short discussion of mathematical literacy.

- The Recôncavo of Bahia: geography, history, and people

The Recôncavo of Bahia, or:

> o Recôncavo histórico e cultural – área da Grande Salvador – está contido, na face litorânea da Zona da Mata, entre o Sauípe e o Jequiriçá, com um limite a sudoeste ao longo do Rio da Dona, formando uma faixa em semicírculo de cerca de 50 a 70 km de largura, em torno da Baía de Todos os Santos. Vem daí sua designação como Recôncavo da Bahia ou simplesmente Recôncavo. (Brandão, 2007, p. 24)

Like Brandão (2007), I will refer to the region where the city of Maragojipe is located as the Recôncavo. However, unlike her, I will use the division based on the Territories of Identity, which are defined by "critérios ambientais, econômicos, culturais entre outros. Além de observar as populações como grupos sociais relativamente distintos, os quais indicam identidade, coesão social, cultural e territorial" (Bahia, 2023, n.p.).

Dividing by Territories significantly reduces the area, which now includes the municipalities of "Cabaceiras do Paraguaçu, Cachoeira, Castro Alves, Conceição do Almeida, Cruz das Almas, Dom Macedo Costa, Governador Mangabeira, Maragogipe, Muniz Ferreira, Muritiba, Nazaré, Salinas da Margarida, Santo Amaro, Santo Antônio de Jesus, São Felipe, São Felix, Sapeaçu, Saubara, Varzedo" (Bahia, 2023, n.p.).

Besides being a coastal strip or close to it, the region is also notable because its inhabitants took up arms against the Portuguese in the fight for the Independence of Bahia, and consequently, of Brazil, on July 2, 1823. Historically, the Municipality of Cachoeira was a pioneer in the independence movement (Brasil, 2023). Since 2009,

[3] Two spellings for the city were found: Maragojipe and Maragogipe, but I opted for the former, as it is the one used on the municipality's official website: https://www.maragojipe.ba.gov.br/#/home

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every June 25, the city temporarily becomes the capital of Bahia, given its significant role in the "emancipation" of the state, and consequently, the country.

The protagonist of the narrative used in this article, Josefa Silva da Cruz, was not born in Cachoeira but in Maragojipe, a municipality located "a 133 km de Salvador. [...] com vasta extensão territorial, totalizando 438.182 km² [...] possui seis distritos: São Roque do Paraguaçu, Nagé, Coqueiros, Guaí, Guapira e Sede" (Maragojipe, 2023, n.p.).

The following map shows the location of the Recôncavo within Bahia, Maragojipe within the Recôncavo, and its relation to Salvador.

Map 1: Location of the Municipality of Maragojipe.

Source: http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidades-e-estados/ba/maragogipe.html

Just as it holds historical importance, the Recôncavo also exerts a significant cultural influence. It is one of the Brazilian regions most affected by African culture, as it was a hub for the arrival of enslaved Africans. Santos (2018, n.p.) states that "o Recôncavo foi o berço do samba de roda, e tem sido o lugar onde, por volta de 1860, teriam surgido as primeiras manifestações do gênero musical".

Besides the strong and unique presence of African peoples and culture, Portuguese culture is also prominent in the region. This is evident because "A inventividade afro-brasileira inclui, portanto, uma incorporação bastante original das tradições lusitanas, em especial de dois elementos: os instrumentos musicais e a forma poética" (Mattos, 2018, p. 92).

As mentioned, it was within this rich historical and cultural context that D. Zezé was born. Therefore, I will focus on discussing the districts of Nagé, Coqueiro, and Serraria. Additionally, I will discuss the family environment of my distinguished narrator.

- The geographical context

My mother was born in a place called Serraria, now known as the "Community of Serraria". This is shown on the map *Districts and Rural Areas of the Municipality of Maragojipe* (Figure 02). This community is in a remote area, far from the town center of the Municipality, and is closer to the districts of Nagé and Coqueiros. Because of this, the relationship with these districts is more direct, and in the narrative, they are portrayed as cities, but in reality, they are districts of Maragojipe. Regarding this "confusion," my mother (2022, n.p.) said: "It's because... it's not... I don't know what it is... It's like Coqueiro, Nagé, and Maragogipe are together as one".

Additionally, another key geographical factor is that Serraria is very close to the municipalities of Cruz das Almas and São Felix. This explains why she says that one of her daughters is from Maragojipe, even though she was born in a different city: "Nalva is also from there, but was born in São Félix" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.).

This is a widespread relationship in border areas, whether between countries, states, or municipalities. The border lines are unclear, and the sense of belonging is not directly tied to the place of birth but to where someone lives or has lived for a significant amount of time.

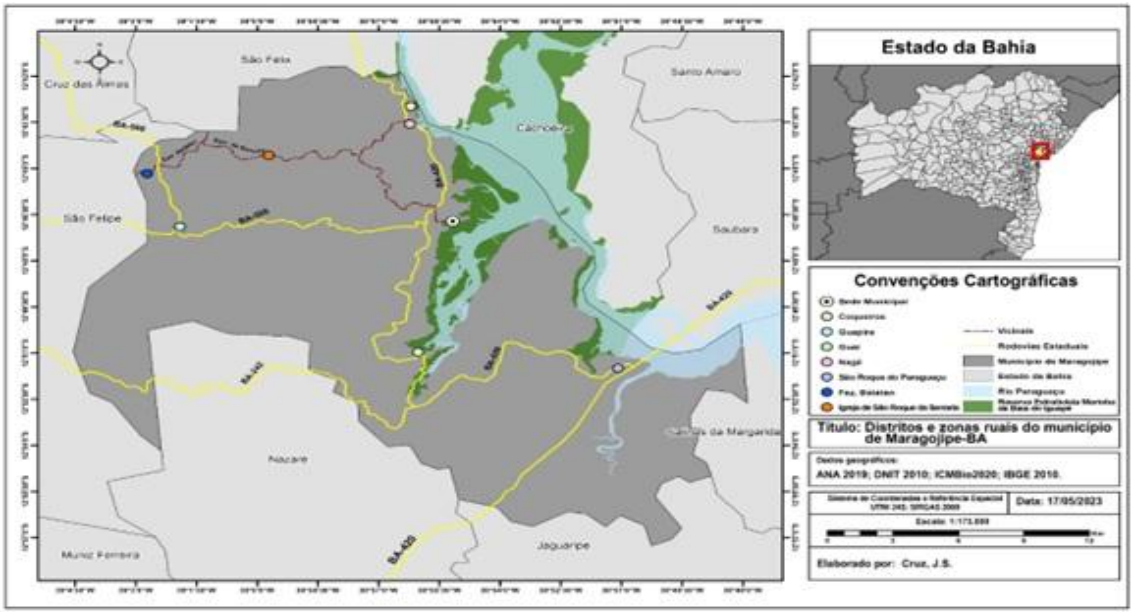
In the following map 2, I used the geographic point where the church of São Roque de Serraria is located to define the Community of Serraria (Marked in orange in the upper left part).

Given the distance from the urban area of the Municipality to which Serraria belongs, it does not receive some of the benefits that closer rural areas do. Education is one of these benefits.

> There was a time... specifically an election period. The mayoral candidate was going to speak. Calixto spoke with him, arranged for me to go for an interview, and met me there in Batatã since no car was available to go to Serraria. Batatã always had a small van that went. We went on a Sunday from noon until the afternoon. It was arranged with the mayor and the candidate. We were going there to discuss receiving a grant from the city hall. And there was no school there. It was just me. So we went to Batatã, arrived, spent the afternoon, and the candidate didn't show up. We went back [...] I'm not chasing after anyone anymore. I didn't call them anymore. (Mainha, 2022, n.p.)[4]

[4] When this happened, Mainha was already married, had children, and there were still no schools in Serraria. She taught her children and some of the local children how to read and write, which led to the request for a "bonus" or allowance. Calixto was my father.

Map 2: Districts and rural areas of the Municipality of Maragojipe[5].



Source: own authorship.

Another noteworthy fact is that "no car went to Serraria" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.); thus, besides Education, it shows that there was no road, and as a result, they were also deprived of health, security, and everything else necessary to provide a minimally dignified life.

Batatã, a rural area with easier access, had a school, but Serraria stayed at the mercy of its own strength and luck.

- The family context

According to the data from the marriage certificate (figures 3 and 4), Mainha, the only daughter of Pedro Marques da Silva and Emidia Cavalcante da Silva, "Grandma Iaiá," was born on May 20, 1939. At the age of 17, on November 27, 1956, she married Calixto Félix da Cruz, her husband and love of her life.

[5] The map "Districts and Rural Area of Maragojipe" was created specifically for this article, as I could not find one online, and contacting the city hall and some residents did not yield any results. Therefore, I emphasize that the road shown there is part of the current layout and did not exist at the time this article recalls. I chose to include it precisely because I was unable to obtain a cartographic depiction of the mentioned rural area.

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Image 1: Third section of the marriage certificate - bride's information

A NUBENTE

Estado Civil

Naturalidade

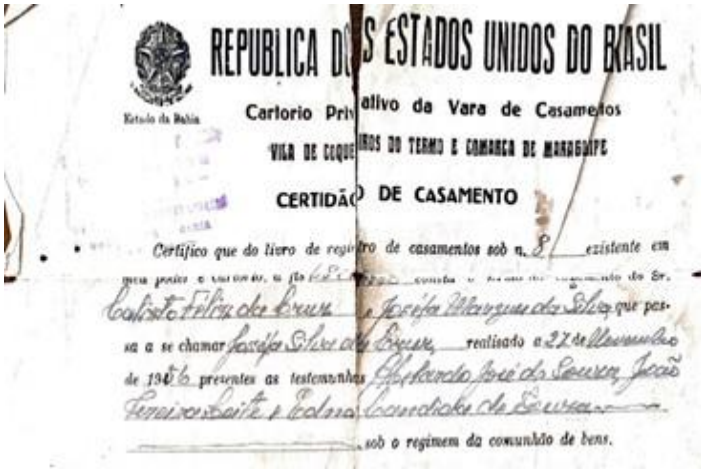
Profissão

Nascida em 20 de Maio de 1927

Filha legítima de Pedro Marques

Residente no Lugar: Serraria

Image 2: First section of the marriage certificate - general information



REPUBLICA DOS ESTADOS UNIDOS DO BRASIL

Estado da Bahia

Cartorio Privativo da Vara de Casamentos

CERTIDÃO DE CASAMENTO

Certifico que do livro de registro de casamentos sob n. 8 existente em

Calisto Felix da Cruz

Josefa Marques da Silva

que passa a se chamar Josefa Silva da Cruz

de 1946 presentes as testemunhas

Source: Own authorship.

From this joyful union, twelve children were born. However, the conditions imposed on those living in Serraria, even though they owned their land, caused the loss of two of their children before they turned three. As I write these memories in mid-2023, at 84 years old, Mrs. Zezé still blesses nine of her children daily. In 2011, a severe illness took her eldest son, Isaac.

After the premature death of the two children, Painho decided to sell the small piece of land they had, and the whole family (the couple and eight children, with the last two born in their new home) moved to Tapera, which belongs to the Municipality of Cruz das Almas. Although Tapera was a rural area, it was about 6 km from the city and provided better conditions, both in Education and healthcare.

I was born in Cruz, the youngest of my siblings. However, this story isn't about me, so I mention my memories only because I recall Painho saying he left Serraria because the children needed to go to school, and there wasn't one there. Education was also important to my late father, just as it was to my maternal grandfather. After losing the children, I believe the lack of schools was the last straw that caused the somewhat bitter water to overflow from the cup.

This signals the start of the following subsection: Education in rural Brazil.

- Paths and Missteps in Rural Brazil's Education

The contrasts present in Brazilian society are centuries old, and the neglect of Education is one of the main foundations supporting them. Ribeiro states that "em relação à educação, a década de 1850 é apontada como época de férteis realizações, no entanto, restritas em sua maioria ao município da Corte, por força da lei em vigor" (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 38). Later, he mentions that "A instrução primária continuou constituída de aulas de leitura, escrita e cálculo. Pressupõe-se que cerca de um décimo da população a ser atendida o era realmente. Não se tem certeza, já que não existiam estatísticas educacionais" (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 39-40).

Continuing along this path of missteps, it was not until 1932, with the Manifesto of the Pioneers of Education, that the idea was proposed to treat both rural and urban Education equally (Ribeiro, 2011). It is essential to mention that this "contemplation" was merely a proposal:

> a instrucção publica não tem sido, entre nós, na justa observação de Alberto Torres, senão um "systema de canaes de exodo da mocidade do campo para as cidades e da produção para o parasitismo" E' preciso, para reagir contra esses males, já tão lucidamente apontados, pôr em via de solução o problema educacional das massas ruraes e do elemento trabalhador da cidade e dos centros industriaes já pela extensão da escola do trabalho educativo e da escola do trabalho profissional, baseada no exercicio normal do trabalho em cooperação, já pela adaptação crescente dessas escolas (primaria e secundaria profissional) ás necessidades regionaes e ás profissões e industrias dominantes no meio. (Brasil, 2010, p. 12)

In 1937, the Brazilian Society of Rural Education was founded to expand and preserve the culture of rural communities. However, "na década de 1950, foi criada a Campanha Nacional de Educação Rural e o Serviço Social, visando programas de melhoria de vida, sendo que a mesma não discutia efetivamente a origem dos problemas vividos no campo" (Ribeiro, 2014, p. 06).

Finally, "em 1960, a Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação (LDB n.º 4024/60) deixou a educação rural sob a responsabilidade dos municípios" (Ribeiro, 2014, p. 06).

Walking through this brief history of Brazilian Education, I could see that, born in 1939, Mrs. Zeze found herself in a period when the responsibility for literacy was with the federal government. This government lacked the political will to develop a comprehensive literacy plan. Political will was also absent in the mayor, who showed no concern for his distant constituents.

Thus, the dream of having the daughter learn arithmetic did not come true. Like Grandpa Pedro's postponed dream, it remains a mathematical education.

- One, two... Mathematics is Left for Later

Mathematics[6] was not always called Mathematics. Araújo and Lando (2020) reveal that "a Matemática enquanto disciplina, só foi assim denominada após a Reforma Francisco Campos em 1931, anteriormente, os componentes eram ministrados separadamente: Aritmética, Álgebra e Geometria" (Araújo; Lando, 2020, p.8).

Going further back in time, Delfiol (2022) explains that, since the Jesuit education system, the discipline has been divided into three parts. The author also mentions that it was only added to the curriculum in secondary Education, specifically within philosophy training. The fact that teachers were priests and theologians might be one reason why it did not appear as a separate discipline or specialized training.

Mainha's account supports both Araújo and Lando (2020) and Delfiol (2022) by stating that "she taught us, taught mathematics, taught Arithmetic. I know that I was already studying the third year, fourth" (Mainha, 2022, n/p. - narrator's emphasis). She learned Arithmetic during the period when the Campos Reform was being implemented, referring to it as mathematics in a general sense. However, she quickly corrected herself, aware that when she studied, it had a different name.

The BNCC considers mathematical knowledge essential for developing critical citizens. It also defines the discipline as a human science. As a human science, it has a direct connection to the history and culture created and experienced by different peoples (Brasil, 2017). In other words, teaching this discipline cannot happen in isolation from the various contexts where the child is situated.

In Brazil, the teaching of Mathematics, especially regarding mastery of operations and fundamental problems, still occurs separately and after the process of acquiring and mastering the mother tongue. However, there are already well-established studies indicating that learning both can happen simultaneously. Santos, Oliveira e Oliveira (2017) state that:

[6] In certain occurrences, the word mathematics is written with a lowercase letter. This usage does not denote the school subject, but rather the act of performing calculations

> nos Primeiros Anos do Ensino Fundamental em que busca a alfabetização com métodos e práticas pedagógicas, torna-se viável uma alfabetização onde as duas formas de linguagem possam estar presentes, em harmonia, onde se unificam: a Linguagem Matemática e a Língua Materna, de forma a promover a aprendizagem Matemática visando à aquisição significativa das ideias básicas pertinentes à Matemática e de suas linguagens. (Santos; Oliveira; Oliveira, 2017, p. 46)

In this case, both will function as a transition from thought to writing. To support this statement, the BNCC for the early years provides more clarification:

> nessa fase, espera-se também o desenvolvimento de habilidades no que se refere à leitura, escrita e ordenação de números naturais e números racionais por meio da identificação e compreensão de características do sistema de numeração decimal, sobretudo o valor posicional dos algarismos. (Brasil, 2017, p. 268/269)

According to Neves (2018), mathematics is connected to understanding and creating meanings. Furthermore, it should have the qualities of discovery and construction. Therefore, as a human science, it relates to the individual and promotes autonomy.

Leaving mathematics for later, as the title suggests, means sacrificing a complete education. Providing comprehensive literacy — enabling mastery of reading, writing, understanding relationships between objects, and solving simple problems — uses the creativity and imagination inherent in children and the world they live in, rather than relying solely on more autonomous and independent growth.

This aspect contributes to the fear of mathematics and its parts, stopping both children and adults from overcoming the mathematical barriers that they have not had the chance to see and understand as part of their everyday lives.

- My grandfather had no education, but…[7]

According to Bondía (2013), experience, the story told by a subject, is what passes through them, what happened to them, and what touched them. The researcher-self is influenced by what the subject-self experienced, to the extent that certain events are so powerful and meaningful that they shape their history. These events may even take on idealized forms, but they remain real.

[7] The title consists of a paraphrase of the song Marvin, performed by the Brazilian music group Titãs. It is the Portuguese version of the song Patches, written and performed by the Jamaican artist King Sounds.

Through the Greeks, the idea became clear that humans are social beings, and this social nature exists in two ways: the first, the most obvious, is being with others, which is visible and external, representing an individual's place in society. The second involves what cannot be seen, which is how society is reflected within the individual.

For both, narration is essential; however, it is especially vital for the second. This was the case with my mother: by telling her story, she recognized herself as a social being, but not only that, she became aware of the values and customs of the society that inhabited and still inhabits her.

As previously mentioned, Mainha lived in a rural area that was very difficult to access. There were no schools there, but my grandfather, a poor man who was aware of his own difficulties, limitations, and the consequences of little schooling, wanted his daughter to get an education. As the title indicates, he had no formal education, barely able to write his name or put together "two letters." However, he was aware that life and the future could be different.

Thus, I asked the owner of these memories whether it was her father or mother who wanted her to study. The answer came promptly: "Daddy. Mommy also wanted it, but Daddy wanted me to study, to learn to do arithmetic" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.).

I could see that, although she mentioned her mother also wanted her to be literate, it was clear that her father, Grandpa Pedro Marques, was the most concerned about her Education. He signed his name, but that was the extent of it; however, Grandma knew nothing about reading and writing (Mainha, 2022, n.p.).

Another fact worth noting is that Grandpa Pedro was already looking for someone to teach his daughter the basics, even when she was just six years old. As she clearly states: "I started before making my first communion" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.). A simple calculation shows him as a pioneer; after all, it was 1945. The patriarchal society went hand in hand with political neglect. Still, a humble, poor, and semi-literate man defied the odds and aimed to raise his only daughter beyond this environment.

I emphasize that, since there was no public commitment to Education, "Daddy paid. Moreover, there were about six students, not just girls, there was a boy too" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.). The school then operated as a kind of cooperative. Although the residents had limited means, those who could pay did so, and their children, like Mainha, could learn arithmetic.

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To better understand Grandpa Pedro's desire, I divide this discussion into his initiatives, presenting the four searches for a teacher to meet his only daughter's needs.

- The first school and the first teacher

I asked the lady in this story what her school was like and what she remembered about her first teacher. In response, she said:

> it's a bit tricky, isn't it? Remembering things. I recall some memories. I know that my first teacher was a man. He wasn't just any teacher, no. Oh my God, what was his name...? He lived in a nearby town called Coqueiro. He had a family – a wife and children. He couldn't find work, so he came. He came to teach in the countryside where we lived. My first school was a straw house by the roadside, with two doors and a window. But my father was already teaching me the ABCs at home during those early days.Then I started school, and I played with other girls. After a while, I moved from the ABCs to the Primer; back then, it was called the Mother's Primer. (Mainha, 2022, n.p.)

Saying that the first school was a teacher shows there was no formal school as a public institution. Instead, just one person was teaching a few people. He needed to support his family but had no official job. However, because he knew how to read, he took on the role of a teacher.

Another key point is that, despite his limited knowledge, the father, after all, "he didn't know how to read, almost nothing, a word or two" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.). D. Zeze had already been introduced to the ABCs by her father. The desire to give a different life, with more opportunities, was powerful.

Finally, still referring to the transcribed narrative, it's easy to picture the first school in your mind. Without romanticizing the value of sacrifice, the school, being a simple straw house by the roadside, emphasizes even more the hardships faced.

It was with this teacher that she reached the Primer. Without knowing why, this first teacher left. Therefore, "my father started looking for a teacher to teach me" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.).

- In addition to teaching, she sewed and embroidered: the second teacher

After the first teacher left, Grandpa looked for another teacher and found a woman:

> then, my father went, talked to her, and she accepted. Every day, my father would take me to that school. It was a little far away. I was small, probably around 7 or 8 years old. Then I started school to learn. There was so much to learn that when I finished the. Primer, I moved on to the first book, called First Book. I don't remember... it was that one about Our Brazil. That was its name. I read that book repeatedly, three or four times, to be able to move on to the next one. I remember one day we studied hard, then we would give a lesson. She, besides teaching, sewed and embroidered. She would be at the foot-operated, old sewing machine. She would set the book there to review what we read so she could teach it to others later. (Mainha, 2022, n.p.)

What is interesting to observe in this part of the interview is that lay teachers indeed carried out that literacy, and they did not dedicate themselves exclusively to teaching. This lack of exclusivity may have been caused by both the lack of necessary training and the low pay, which, as families had limited resources, was more symbolic than a proper salary. Therefore, teaching was merely an addition.

This second teacher was named "Benedita da Purificação [...] A while after she got married, she... started to open a school again in her house; it was even farther, a horrible path, a slope we had to go down" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.).

At this new school, Mainha was already 8 years old; her father did not accompany her, and she went with a friend, but their friendship did not last long. The teacher became pregnant, gave birth, and could not continue teaching at the school. Therefore, I introduce the third teacher.

- He committed to bringing the teacher and placed him in the house.

Maffioletti (2016) highlights that:

> podemos até não ter um álbum de família, mas não termos fotos da família é como não ter provas de nossa história. Arrumando e desarrumando nossas coisas, somos levados a produzir lembranças e histórias que elas evocam porque não as ter significa uma existência de segredos. (Maffioletti, 2016, p. 54)

From this perspective, I see this narrative article as a portrait album. I did not know my maternal or paternal grandparents, nor did I have access to photographs of them. Therefore, writing about my mother's literacy is like constructing images within

me, assembling a portrait album. By making her recall, I walk the same paths, visit the same places, and talk to the same people.

And, walking together, I get to know her third teacher:

> **Mainha**: He obliged himself to bring the teacher and put him in the house.
> **Jacilene**: From your house? Look at Grandpa being resourceful…
> **Mainha**: An old man, he was already old, but he didn't want to be old. He didn't consider himself old, despite having a white beard, and claimed to be 25 years old.
> **Jacilene**: Do you remember his name?
> **Mainha**: His? João Bastos. Yes, he was constantly combing his hair. He wouldn't let a single strand stick up; he always combed and shaved on Wednesdays and Saturdays. To avoid looking old, he was always on the lookout for a young girl to marry. At school, he taught a little, slowly; he didn't know much. (Mainha, 2022, n.p.)

The description of this third teacher evokes both admiration and concern in me. The first feeling comes from the fact that this man, already of a certain age, since *Mainha* was the daughter of his second marriage, had the strength, courage, and determination to find someone who could educate her.

At the same time, living in a reality that causes many fears, thinking about the violence that women and children are exposed to, fear approaches me. The desire, the will to provide his daughter with what he did not have, led him to bring a stranger under the same roof.

Moving away from this sphere, it is interesting how the narrated form and the words used convey the significance given to the act of instructing by my grandfather: "He forced himself to bring the teacher, to put him inside the house" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.). The chosen words reveal that the representation constructed by the person who lived the story is often already interpreted. By selecting the verb "force," it highlights the importance and the recognition that Mainha gives to Grandpa's effort and perseverance in educating her.

It was not a straightforward search; what stayed in the lived memory was the effort, the force of will over reality.

Regarding the third teacher, João Bastos, who arrived and taught during the last four months of the year, "nobody liked him. My uncle, who lived on my father's farm, would say, This, this teacher knows nothing. Zezé, who was me, right?! Zeze knows more than he does; he knows nothing. Zezé knows more than he does" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.). And so, he was dismissed, especially since, as narrated, "he was only looking for a young girl" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.).

- Grandpa did not leave mathematics for later.

The "cooperative" formed by neighbors to educate their children was essential in teaching the children, born in that politically forgotten and abandoned piece of land, to read. According to D. Zezé's narration:

> it was the father of one, another neighbor of his, who had two sons and two daughters. One son was studying in the city. There was a school located a bit away from the farm where we lived, in Batatã. The teacher, my mother's cousin, was married and had no children. She was about to leave Batat. This neighbor of my father went and hired her. He had an empty house, hired her, and put her in charge of teaching. She was the one who taught us what we know. We learned with her. She taught us punctuation. All punctuation, she taught us. She also taught mathematics and arithmetic. I know I already left; I was in the third or fourth grade. She told my father to buy a "Natural Sciences" book for me to study. I studied grammar, science, and the history of Brazil. I studied all these books. [...] I didn't write anything. I made scribbles; I didn't know how to write, but I wanted to write, so I made those scribbles. Then she taught me to write. Today, my handwriting isn't good, but when I stop writing by hand, my hand starts to shake, and I can't produce anything good. Still, I've accomplished a lot. (Mainha, 2022, n.p - emphasis placed by the narrator)

Benedita Marques was the name of the fourth and final teacher, who, although a relative, was not directly recommended by my grandfather to teach Mainha how to read. However, as stated in the narrative, it was a neighbor who hired her. It is not only family ties that make me admire my grandfather. On the contrary, the relentless search shows that he was a man who understood himself in the world around him and used the resources at his disposal to give his daughter better conditions to deal with the reality they faced.

If Serraria was far away and hard to reach, Grandpa took it upon himself, while selling what he produced, to find someone willing to live there, in that place accessible only by foot or horseback, and to teach his and the daughters of those who shared similar ideas. If it lacked a school and was abandoned by political authorities, he and others would cover the costs and care for their homes. Still, they would not allow ignorance and unconditional submission to continue.

Of course, reading and writing were equally important. He himself taught his daughter "the few letters he knew" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.). But she needed more than just literacy in her native language. Other forms of literacy were just as essential. Grandpa did not know the names of any of them, but he understood through practice that they existed, which motivated his constant search to find someone to teach her the four basic operations.

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Mathematics, regarded as a science that reflects knowledge rooted in its historical and cultural context, was, for my grandfather, on the same level as reading and writing. The knowledge it would provide would help the daughter better understand the world she lived in, foster independence, and consequently, improve her chances of survival.

Finally, the significance of this teacher was not only that she taught reading, transforming my mother's scribbles into legible writing, as she said, but also that she taught math. Benedita Marques left a far greater legacy: she was an indirect teacher to many other children. Although the famous phrase may not fully apply here-"the disciple surpasses the master" the fact is that "the little nonsense I learned was with this, this last teacher, so much so that when she left, I took her place teaching" (Mainha, 2022, n.p.).

The example and dedication of the teacher shaped another teacher. "Yeeees, I became a teacher, started teaching, and taught a bunch of kids (Mainha, 2022, n.p.). But that will be part of another writing. For now, I will conclude Mainha's narratives in my grandfather's search for someone to teach her math. I imagine the joy of the father who, aware of the power of knowledge, was persistent and, by educating his only daughter, enabled many other daughters and sons of equally aware and persistent parents to learn as well.

Final Perceptions

At the end of this research journey, I realized that the biographical narrative is a well of knowledge that sometimes leans toward nostalgic imagination. Still, precisely because it does so, it manages to tell itself with more liveliness and realism.

While trying to list the main challenges to children's literacy in Serraria, a rural area of Maragojipe, Recôncavo da Bahia, in the 1940s, I traveled through time and space, filling a family album with my mother's memories, as she recounted her lived world word by word.

Thus, I can affirm that access to the rural area where my grandparents lived with their only daughter and some other relatives was the first obstacle for the children, especially my mother, to get their first Education.

Moreover, finding someone willing to go to those remote places, settle down, and teach was unlikely, especially considering that, at the time, Education, although legally regarded as a right for everyone, was not a reality. Therefore, finding a teacher was no easy task. The searches and negotiations were ongoing.

Ultimately, I identified political neglect as a major issue. There was no public school, nor any space designated for such a purpose. As the owner of this story states, the first school was a teacher. This supports the claim of political neglect, since it was the parents who sought out a teacher and also arranged the space for the school to operate. Like Grandpa Pedro Marques, who was semi-literate, they lacked wealth; they were small rural producers who ate what they grew and sold the little extra.

Another fact that attracts attention is that some teachers lacked teaching materials to serve as a basis, but this story will be covered in another article.

Teaching Mainha to do arithmetic was not an easy task, not because of her lack of ability or her parents' neglect, but because the problems were many and complicated. By the time she finished studying all she could, becoming a teacher went way beyond what anyone expected.

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