



Methodo Penido: state and municipality in the struggle for literacy training in the society of Minas Gerais at the end of the nineteenth century¹.

Methodo Penido: estado e município na luta pela alfabetização na sociedade de Minas Gerais, no final do século XIX.

Methodo Penido: estado y municipio en la lucha por la alfabetización en la sociedad de Minas Gerais, a finales del siglo XIX.

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Abstract

Beginning in the 1890s in Minas Gerais, Brazil, a governmental concern arose regarding general public education, with an attempt to overcome illiteracy and create structures for progress in education through drafting a law of public education (1892) and regulation of schools (1893). Other practices were also encouraged, such as publication of the *Methodo Penido* (Penido Method) by Agostinho Penido, which was published in 1890 and widely distributed among schools in Minas Gerais. However, no remaining copy of this method is known, nor studies on its author. This study used sources of the Public Archives of Minas Gerais and the Municipal Archives of Ouro Preto. We aimed to recover the trajectory of Agostinho Penido, the process of evaluation, granting awards, and adoption of the method on the part of the government, and the subsequent spread of the method. The importance of literacy training in the society of Minas Gerais at the beginning of the Republic and the participation of intellectuals in education in seeking alternatives to deal with this issue are in evidence.

Keywords: Literacy training, Penido method, Minas Gerais

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Resumo

A partir da década de 1890, em Minas Gerais, observa-se preocupação governamental com a instrução pública, tentando superar o analfabetismo e criar estrutura para o progresso da educação, com edição da lei de instrução pública (1892) e do regulamento escolar (1893). Estimulou-se também outras práticas, como a publicação do *Methodo Penido*, de Agostinho Penido, que foi publicado em 1890 e largamente distribuído entre as escolas mineiras. No entanto, não se tem notícia de qualquer exemplar remanescente desse método e nem de estudos sobre seu autor. Foram utilizadas fontes do Arquivo Público Mineiro e do Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto. Buscou-se recuperar a trajetória de Agostinho Penido, do processo de avaliação, premiação e adoção do método por parte do governo e da difusão posterior do mesmo. Percebe-se a importância da alfabetização na sociedade mineira do início da República e a participação de intelectuais da educação na busca de alternativas para seu enfrentamento.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização, Método Penido, Minas Gerais

Resumen

A partir de la década de 1890, en el estado de Minas Gerais, se observa preocupación gubernamental con la instrucción pública, intentando superar el analfabetismo y crear estructura para el progreso de la educación, con edición de la ley de instrucción pública (1892) y del reglamento escolar (1893). Se estimuló también otras prácticas, como la publicación del *Methodo Penido*, de Agustín Penido, que fue publicado en 1890 y ampliamente distribuido entre las escuelas de Minas Gerais. Sin embargo, no se tiene noticia de cualquier ejemplar remanente de ese método y ni de estudios sobre su autor. Se utilizaron fuentes del Arquivo Público Mineiro y del Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto. Se buscó recuperar la trayectoria de Agustín Penido, del proceso de evaluación, premiación y adopción del método por parte del gobierno y de la difusión posterior del mismo. Se percibe la importancia de la alfabetización en la sociedad de Minas Gerais del inicio de la República y la participación de intelectuales de la educación en la búsqueda de alternativas para su enfrentamiento.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización, Método Penido, Minas Gerais

Reorganization of a society is a Herculean challenge under any circumstances or place, and History assists us, offering records of experiences that have been multiplied over time, whether caused by violent transformations or by the express will of the people. Brazil went through various transitional situations in its trajectory in the nineteenth century, among which we would highlight the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in 1808, independence from Portugal in 1822, the freeing of slaves in 1888, and the proclamation of the Republic in 1889. It is this last event which is most directly of interest to us.

In its passage through all these times of crisis and transformation – and various others, such as the abdication of the first imperial ruler, the separatist movements, the war of Paraguay, etc. – Brazil matured and sought new ways that might allow the impediments it was facing to be overcome. In many cases, it was successful, but in several others, it was not able to advance to levels necessary for continuity of the process of development, such as implementing industrialization, incorporating freed slaves, or creating an educational system that would ensure the foundation for building up a national spirit, the principles of citizenship, and preparation of labor resources necessary for a society that aspired to be part of the *concert* of developed nations. Unfortunately, in this case, it was not even possible to overcome the initial barrier of illiteracy, which comprised more than 80% of the population at the dawn of the Republic.

In regard to the advanced proposal of free public education contained in article 77 of the Constitution of 1824, the goals of the primary school legislation of 1827, and the various reforms undertaken, good news was not very abundant in the imperial period for the field of education, though it must be acknowledged that, in its gasps, the debate over the need for creating a national system of education had been engaged. Nevertheless, facing this issue would be left to the Republic, in preparing the country for the twentieth century that drew near and, with it, the promises of a future marked by the beat of progress. The theme of general public education, however, was left out of the concerns of those who worked on the federal constitution of 1891, which merely established the secular nature of education but did not propose directives for what could become a national educational system. Thus, responsibility for elementary education of the population fell on the states, which placed their specific proposals in effect according to their financial conditions and/or appraisal of regional elites regarding education. As there were 20 states at that time, if all had been successful in their intentions, we would have had a score of educational systems and not one national project for education.

This is the backdrop of multiple transformations in which education and schooling enter in the agenda of the entities of the newly-created Brazilian federation, for public school reform comes to be a necessary and urgent measure because it constitutes the sphere that can adapt society to the republican project of civilization, even though actions in this direction set in motion by the states were quite asymmetrical. In Minas Gerais, one observes an indecisive beginning, in which, according to Paulo Krüger Corrêa Mourão, “There were decrees of little importance, with diverse provisions on primary education that continued with norms not yet modified from the imperial period”⁴. This situation reflected regional specificities because

⁴ *O ensino em Minas Gerais no tempo da República*. Belo Horizonte: Centro Regional de Pesquisas Educacionais de Minas Gerais, 1962, p. 19.

modernization [in Minas Gerais] had a complex and multifaceted trajectory. Due to diverse factors, modernity was not fully implemented not even once. Perhaps the main factor is that the ideals of modernity diffused throughout the state were mixed with elements of a traditional society whose population was expressively rural, whose economy was built on agrarian production directed to an internal market, and whose political power was oligarchical⁵.

Constitutional committee members of Minas Gerais, however, perceived the directive as a greater mission and included it in an incisive manner in the state constitution (also of 1891), followed by complementary legislation that regulated the offer of this right to all state residents: in 1892 law no. 41⁶ was issued and in 1893, Decree no. 655⁷. Thus, in spite of a delay of 3 years after the beginning of the Republic, one perceives in the state a particular concern in the search for alternatives in the field of education that could promote progress in its territory or, at least, reverse the situation of profound illiteracy of its population. In addition, the demand of literacy for political participation made the spread of primary education imperative. In the words of Rosa Fátima de Souza, in the broad civilizing project of the republic, “education was tied to citizenship and, that way, its indispensability for training citizens was instituted”⁸. Furthermore, as education was given responsibility for civic training of the population, it would also perform complementary functions of social control and maintenance of order.

Yet to achieve good results in primary education, the first objective of the state, more would be necessary than simply creating schools and hiring teachers. Financial resources, teacher training schools, an inspection structure, textbooks, raising awareness of parents, and effective methods, among other mechanisms, would be necessary for creating an educational system.

Although we recognize that the importance of each one of these elements cannot be assessed separately and the whole depends on the parts, we intend to focus on the question of the method and, more specifically, in regard to a determined method that was created by an intellectual from Minas Gerais in the 1890s and that was widely distributed among the schools of the state. This specific focus does not diminish the importance of the study, but rather the contrary, for as expressed by Maria do Rosário Longo Mortatti,

In our country, the most visible aspect of the history of literacy training is in the history of the methods of literacy training, around which, especially since the end of the nineteenth century, tense disputes have been generated in relation to “old” and “new” explanations for the same problem: the difficulty of our children in learning to read and write, especially in public schools⁹.

⁵ CARVALHO, Luciana Beatriz de Oliveira Bar de; CARVALHO, Carlos Henrique de. *O lugar da educação na modernidade luso-brasileira no fim do século XIX e início do XX*. Campinas: Alínea, 2012, p. 98.

⁶ MINAS GERAIS. Lei n. 41 – Dá nova organização á instrução publica do estado de Minas. *Colecção das leis e decretos do estado de Minas Geraes em 1892*. Ouro Preto: Imprensa Official de Minas Geraes, 1893.

⁷ MINAS GERAIS. Decreto n. 655 – Promulga o regulamento das escolas e instrução primaria. *Colecção das leis e decretos do estado de Minas Geraes em 1893*. Ouro Preto: Imprensa Official de Minas Geraes, 1894.

⁸ *Templos de civilização: a implantação da escola primária graduada no Estado de São Paulo (1890–1910)*. São Paulo: UNESP, 1998, p. 26-27.

⁹ História dos métodos de alfabetização no Brasil. In: *Seminário Alfabetização e Letramento em Debate*. Brasília: MEC/SEB, 2006, p. 1.

In this respect, we will confine our analysis to the rise and dissemination of the *Methodo Penido* (Penido Method), developed by Prof. Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido of Ouro Preto in 1890, in an attempt to recovery something of the trajectory of this figure and of his method in the lands of Minas Gerais. At the same time, we seek to advance understanding of the relations between the state and municipalities in the common effort for education of the populace, observing how the presentation and dissemination of the method under analysis had an influence on both the local and state level. We also examine how both spheres stimulate or complete each other in the effort to spread the method.

1. Agostinho Penido

Before addressing this method, it is appropriate to minimally contextualize the period and the training of the author, as well as his professional trajectory and socio-political relationships. Information in regard to this figure is available, but it is scattered. The documentation worked with identified him as having a bachelor's degree, having studied at the Colégio do Caraça (Caraça High School) and at the Faculdade de Direito de Recife (Recife School of Law), judge and prosecutor in cities of the state, and teacher in Ouro Preto, where he also developed business activities and was a member of the administrative personnel named by the governor of Minas Gerais in 1890. Records still place him in Belo Horizonte in the first decades of the twentieth century, where he also worked in the field of journalism. However, we cannot go much beyond this, as we will try to show below.

We were not able to identify basic elements of his biography, such as dates of birth and death and of beginning studies, the full period in which he worked as a teacher, etc. Nevertheless, certain local records – which may serve as a basis for future searches for his itinerary – allow us to understand a considerable part of the route taken by Agostinho Penido and contextualize the concern that motivates us regarding the method of literacy training he developed.

Checking the enrollment records of 1860 of the Colégio do Caraça, we found number 278 noted, which refers to his entrance in this establishment in October 1860 and indicates in following that he remained there until January 31, 1862. Enrollment number 277 refers to his brother Antonio Maximo Nogueira Penido, where the name of their father, Dr. (honorific given to attorneys) Jeronymo Maximo Nogueira Penido, is found and indication of having come from Ouro Preto. A complementary notation indicates that he is a “teacher in B. Horz.te [Belo Horizonte]”¹⁰. These data show that not only did our figure of interest have access to one of the most respected secondary schools of Brazil in the nineteenth century, but also allow us to presume that his birth likely occurred in the beginning years of the 1840s. This is further confirmed by the data of the marriage of his parents, which occurred on July 29, 1839¹¹.

Although we are not able to define how his whole period of secondary studies occurred beyond this little more than one year in the Colégio do Caraça, we were able to identify, subsequent to his graduation, a record that confirms a bachelor's degree, which he always exhibited in presenting himself (and which subsequently appears in this text as “bachelor”, as a title), with his educational formation in “Legal and Social” sciences, which occurred at the Recife School of Law in 1872¹².

¹⁰ COLÉGIO do Caraça. Livro de Matrícula 1860. Available at: <http://www.santuariodocaraca.com.br/livro-de-matricula-1856-1910/livro-de-matricula-1860/>. Cf. also: COLÉGIO do Caraça. Lista de Ex-alunos. Available at: <http://www.santuariodocaraca.com.br/lista-de-ex-alunos/lista-de-ex-alunos-letra-a/>. Accessed on: 7 May 2015.

¹¹ PENIDO, Jeronimo Maximo Nogueira. Base de dados de todos os parentes, colaterais e não parentes. Available at: <http://www.geocities.ws/basededadoscastro/pafg56.html>, Accessed on: 7 May 2015.

¹² MARTINS, Henrique. *Lista geral dos bachareis e doutores que têm obtido o respectivo grão na Faculdade de Direito do Recife, desde sua fundação em Olinda no ano de 1828, até o ano de 1931*. Recife:

In 1873, in a report presented to the Provincial Legislative Assembly by then President of the Province of Minas Gerais, Venancio José de Oliveira Lisbôa, there is mention of one of the activities that had been developed by Agostinho Penido. This document reads: “From the 1st of March until now, I have named as Public Prosecutors: Major Manoel José Ferreira Bretas to the judicial district of Cabo Verde. (...) Bachelor Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido to that of Rio das Mortes”. This report allows us to follow his movement through cities of the state, but without certainty that he had truly exercised the function, because at the end is added: “Those of the [judicial districts] of Paranahyba, Rio das Mortes, Murihaé, Jacuhy, Prata, Cabo Verde, Itajubá, and Itapirassaba will not yet come into operation”¹³.

The following year, in a communication in the “Official Section”, regarding the Ministry of Justice, the newspaper *Diário de Pernambuco* added one more piece of information on the circulation of Agostinho Penido through the province: “Through decrees of the 7th of August of the current year: (...) Were named: (...) the bachelor Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido municipal judge and judge of orphans of the subdistrict of Lavras in the province of Minas-Geraes”¹⁴. In 1888, in the newspaper *A Provincia de Minas*, “Organ of the Conservative Party”, of February 10, 1888, we find an indication of a new nomination: “For the positions of substitute of the municipal judge, in the special districts, in the diverse subdistricts of the province, in the four-year period beginning on the upcoming March 22, were nominated: (...) Bomfim. (...) 3rd Agostinho Nogueira Penido”¹⁵. From these references, we can gather that Agostinho Penido began his career as a public servant in the judicial area soon after his graduation, as a prosecutor and as a judge, although it appears that he did not concentrate only on this, through the data we have compiled on the following years.

Another document shows us that in 1876 Agostinho Penido also entered in the political arts, for in the list of representatives and senators of Minas Gerais of the imperial period, we find the name of our figure of interest as a provincial representative in the years 1876-1877. In this same document, we are informed that his father, Jeronymo Maximo Nogueira Penido, had also dedicated himself to political duties from 1840 to 1863¹⁶.

In spite of these family connections and that of Agostinho Penido himself with the political world, we found other records related to business activities, some years later. Decree no. 8248 of September 3, 1881, of the Imperial Government, indicates that

In response to what was requested of me by the Bachelors Jeronymo Maximo Nogueira Penido Junior and Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido, it is fitting to grant them permission to prospect for gold in the grounds of Congonhas de Campos, subdistrict of Ouro Preto, in the Province of Minas Geraes¹⁷.

Typographia Diario da Manhã, 1931, p. 11. Available at: <https://www.ufpe.br/ccj/images/bachareis/bacharis%201828%20-%201931.pdf>, Accessed on: 7 May 2015. Cf.

¹³ LISBÔA, Venacio José de Oliveira. *Relatório que á Assembleia Legislativa Provincial de Minas Geraes apresentou na sessão ordinária de 1873 o Presidente da Provincia*. Available at: <http://brazil.crl.edu/bsd/bsd/480/000008.html>, Accessed on: 7 May 2015.

¹⁴ PARTE Oficial. *Diario de Pernambuco*, anno L, n. 18, 23 de janeiro de 1874, p. 1. Available at <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/17555/1x?vo=3>, Accessed on: 7 May 2015.

¹⁵ SUPPLENTES do Juiz Municipal. *A Provincia de Minas*, Anno VIII, n. 513, 10 de fevereiro de 1888, p. 2. Available at: <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/Hotpage/HotpageBN.aspx?bib=222747&pagfis=1314&url=http://memoria.bn.br/docreader#> (Accessed on: 18 Jan. 2018).

¹⁶ HISTÓRIA das Minas de Ouro e Diamante: a Lista dos 120 Ex-Alunos do Caraça na Política. Available at: <http://monlewood.blogspot.com.br/2015/02/historia-das-minas-de-ouro-e-diamante.html>, Accessed on: 7 May 2015.

¹⁷ BRASIL. Decreto n. 8248, de 3 de setembro de 1881. Available at: <http://legis.senado.gov.br/legislacao/ListaTextoIntegral.action?id=57457&norma=73310>, Accessed on: 7 May 2015.

In this branch of activity, our author appears to have persevered for a longer time, since after the proclamation of the Republic, we find him seeking the continuity of this privilege, now without the company of his brother. Decree 609/1890, of July 31, 1890, of the Provisional Government of Marechal Deodoro da Fonseca, “Grants permission to Bachelor Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido to prospect for gold and other minerals in the state of Minas Gerais”¹⁸.

Moreover, in the field of business, we find mention in 1887 of another initiative of Agostinho Penido, now in the urban development branch of Ouro Preto, then capital of the state of Minas Gerais. André Luiz Mantovani, making use of reports from presidents of the Province, tells us that on “October 1, 1887, the bachelor Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido was granted the privilege for gas lighting of the capital”¹⁹.

Continuing on the political track, now in the period that is most directly of interest to us, we find him in 1891 as a member of the Council of Administrators of the city of Ouro Preto, which is set up after the closing of City Councils as a result of the establishment of the Republic in 1889. In this function, he proposes, on June 13, 1891, the creation of 4 night schools in sectors of Ouro Preto, indicating on September 3 of the same year “so that, effective immediately, a branch of public education be created, composed of one of the officials of the Department and two amanuenses”²⁰, etc. This included observations in relation to the method of literacy training that he had created the previous year, as we will see later in this text.

Finally, within the time limits that we established for the present study, we should note that our figure of interest begins his activity as a teacher in 1891, according to correspondence he sends to the President of the Municipal Administration of Ouro Preto on August 22, 1891, in response to an official letter from the same Administrative body, in which he informs that he has practiced “the teaching profession since February 17 of the present year and named by the government after that date, I have carried out this same activity without ever having interrupted it”²¹.

Although it goes beyond our period of focus, it is noteworthy that Agostinho Penido also returned to journalism, although we have not been able to precisely identify the years of that activity. Pedro Nava, in his memoirs related to the period in which his family moved to Belo Horizonte, probably between 1913-1916, indicates that he was a neighbor to our figure of interest: “This Dr. Penido was a grand old man of Jewish profile and flowing white hair that gave him an air of a prophet in activity. He always walked in a frock coat and top hat; he was extremely pompous in manner and in speech”. In addition to these characteristics, he adds:

He was knowledgeable of other things and was a good teacher, good journalist. He published the *Vanguarda*, the official organ of his personal interests, in the beginning a daily paper, then weekly, bimonthly, monthly, every two months, every six months, finally episodically, and only being issued on the day in which our Dr. Penido had something to resolve or when he wished to thank the President of the state, the honorable Department Heads or the noble Representatives²².

¹⁸ BRASIL. Decreto nº 609, de 31 de Julho de 1890. Available at: <http://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1824-1899/decreto-609-31-julho-1890-523693-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>, Accessed on: 7 May 2015.

¹⁹ MANTOVANI, André Luiz. *Faça-se a luz: modernidade e demandas sociais na eletrificação da iluminação pública de Ouro Preto, 1880-1920*. Mariana: UFOP, 2005, p. 37 (monografia de bacharelado).

²⁰ CÂMARA Municipal de Ouro Preto. *Livro de Registro de Atas (resoluções) da Intendência Municipal – 1890-1894*. Ouro Preto: Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto, Livro n. 894.

²¹ CÂMARA Municipal de Ouro Preto *Caixa Instrução*. Ouro Preto: Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto (vários anos).

²² NAVA, Pedro. *Balão Cativo: memórias/2*. Rio de Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1977, p. 99-100.

From this collection of information, it can be seen that Agostinho Penido was a multi-faceted intellectual, who had enjoyed first-rate education and socio-political prestige in the imperial period, which extended at least into the initial years of the Republic. He entered into diverse fields – politics, mining, judiciary, prosecution, journalism, authorship of textbooks, and teaching profession. Such is the richness of our figure of interest, even though the data we were able to gather on him are a bit imprecise. However, we believe they are sufficient to outline his profile and encourage the continuity of studies on him.

2. The emergence of the Method

We were not able to find references that would allow us to understand the reasons why an attorney, involved with politics and private enterprise, decided to pursue the direction of education and, more specifically, production of a textbook directed toward literacy training. Perhaps his involvement with the problems of the municipalities in which he was active and the political discussion in which he was involved had raised his awareness toward a search for alternatives for overcoming serious problems of illiteracy and learning to read, as he writes in various letters, in which he highlights his particular appreciation for education. From what we were able to ascertain, the history of the method of literacy training developed by Agostinho Penido begins by the documentation found in the Minas Gerais Public Archives through correspondence of the author, of February 12, 1890, presenting his proposal for utilization on the part of state authorities:

The Bachelor Agostinho Penido respectfully states that having invented a new method of reading that greatly facilitates primary education, he requests Your Excellency to deign to choose a commission that, observing an experiment undertaken by the petitioner with illiterate persons that he has taught for only a few days, or by others chosen by the commission, may deliver its opinion in regard to its approval and adoption²³.

The order of the then acting governor, João Pinheiro, was positive, though brief: “To the Department of Inspection of Public Education, to take due measures”. At its side, the Inspector General, Affonso Brito, added the names of teachers named to compose the evaluation commission of said method, establishing the 15th of February for the meeting and indicating the place and time.

In these same proceedings, with the date of February 14, 1890, we find another document, signed by Rev. Candido Ferreira Vellozo, “teacher of primary and religious education and Chaplain of the Jail of this Capital city”, providing his testimony regarding the benefits of the literacy training method:

I attest that the Honorable Dr. Agostinho Penido, in the interest of readily assisting illiterate persons with a clear method for learning to read, achieved his ambition and to such an advantage that upon conducting an experiment in the school of the Jail of this Capital city with four completely illiterate students, he obtained that said students in the space of twenty-five minutes could effortlessly know the letters, the syllables, and without obstacle read the two lessons presented.

²³ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. SG1052, 1890. Arquivo Público Mineiro. The following information regarding the emergence of the Method Penido are derived from this same group of documents.

This experiment was made in my presence and I can affirm that said method carries with it true advantage for primary education, removing many difficulties and quickly instilling a liking for it in students.

With this method in hand and this testimony, the commission, composed of the teachers Camillo de Brito, Maria Fiusa de Oliveira, and Cherubina Rodrigues Pombo de Miranda, dedicated itself to evaluation and on the same day, February 15, sent its opinion to the *Conselho Litterario* (Literary Council) in the following terms:

Named to issue our opinion on the Method of immediate reading by Dr. Agostinho Penido, after observing the practice of teaching performed on a child of three years and on illiterate adults, we can affirm that the process used is of intuitive advantage.

Among the methods employed until now, none is considered incomplete or defective, but some are not very amenable and others require protracted application. This method of immediate reading achieves its end through gradual recognition of the letters and syllables, in 58 lessons and quick exercises; at the same time, the students reproduce the lessons on the blackboard, coming to write that which they will read without new learning. It is the modification of the two processes, phonetic and spelling, which can be adopted to great advantage in schools; the children easily understand since the formation of letters, syllables, and words is simple and rational. Among the systems published in great number, none exceeds that of immediate reading in mechanism and in adaptation to the intuition of the children.

The Conselho Litterario, for its part, proceeded to analyze this question on February 20, 1890, likewise issuing a favorable opinion. It should be noted, however, that 3 votes in the minority against the measure were registered among the 8 members of the council. In spite of being considered “useful and therefore in conditions of being adopted in primary Schools”, the method did not achieve unanimous approval.

The characterization made by the evaluation commission regarding the type of method presented, showing both the advance of the *Methodo Penido* and its variations over methods in use at that time and, furthermore, the discussions that occurred in the Conselho Litterario, show us that the issue of the method, as we have already indicated, was one of the aspects considered of central importance at the end of the nineteenth century. It may be that Agostinho Penido perceived the importance of these issues and decided to participate in the “quarrel over methods”, as this issue has been called within the historiography²⁴. Although we have not found any copy of the *Methodo*, which could serve as material for more precise analysis regarding the way it was contemplated and constructed to promote literacy training, we have located, once more in Pedro Nava²⁵, a summarized description regarding its manner of application:

As a teacher, there was a sure process of teaching the alphabet, stimulating the memory of the children with a figurative or homophonic association for each letter. My brother Paulo [1908-1998], who learned to read from it, reminded me of some a long time ago. B, for example,

²⁴ Maria do Rosário Longo Mortatti provides us with a synthesis of this discussion and an interesting chronology regarding the progress of the debate on methods of literacy training in Brazil in “A ‘querela dos métodos’ de alfabetização no Brasil: contribuições para metodizar o debate” (“The ‘quarrel of methods’ of literacy training in Brazil: contributions to systematize the debate”). *Revista ACOALFApp: Acolhendo a Alfabetização nos Países de Língua portuguesa*, ano 3, n. 5, 2008, p. 91-114.

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 100.

was fixed in the mind with the phrase – *Bezerro (calf*) twists its foot. C was Cabrito (goat) climbs the serra (mountain). G, Goiaba (guava) delicious fruit; M, Melado (molasses) is good sweet; U, Uva (grape) good and sugary; V, Veado (deer) has a rack; X, Xico crosses his legs; Z, Zebra grumpy deleted...* (* translator's explanations in parentheses)

Proceeding with the bureaucratic tasks regarding publication of the method approved in the commission and council, on February 21, 1890, the Inspector General of Public Education, Affonso Luiz Maria de Britto, sends an official letter to the state Governor informing:

In fulfillment of your decision of the 12th of this month, I submitted the Method of Immediate Reading of Dr. Agostinho Penido for examination by a commission of primary school teachers and later to the Conselho Litterario. From the combination of opinions rendered, you may see that the Method was considered useful and in order to be adopted in primary Schools. This Department of Inspection judges that the opinions were well grounded and that the author of the Method has provided a relevant service to Public Education.

On February 27, 1890, the Municipal Administration of Ouro Preto, showing that the interest in advances in education were penetrating into municipal concerns, also manifests its position on the auspicious method that had just been created:

The Municipal Administration of the Capital of the state of Minas Geraes spontaneously establishes in its conference of this day, February 27, 1890, its words of praise for the Illustrious Citizen Dr. Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido for the reading method which he invented, through which he was able to have four illiterate persons, with few lessons, in his presence, learn to recognize the letters, form syllables, spell, and read phrases written by the same Dr., and in view of this result, it applauds and praises the inventor of such a beneficial teaching method.

The experiment with the illiterate persons cited, which had occurred on the same day, with the participation of four prisoners of the jail of Ouro Preto, already mentioned in the correspondence of Rev. Cândido Velozo, appears to have really attracted the attention of the society of Ouro Preto, because it was also registered in a document of this same day, signed by the jailkeeper Jose Simplicio Guimarães:

I send to you, in virtue of the order of Mr. Dr. Chief of Police, for an experiment before the municipal administration, the prisoners Innocencio dos Santos Queiroz, Isidro Pereira dos Santos, Luis and Silverio, that have received teaching instruction from you for only two hours, with half an hour before the teacher of this Jail, half an hour before the Governor of the State, who had also deigned to observe your experiment and one hour more in subsequent days.

After this sequence of procedures, with the endorsement of the evaluation commission and of the Conselho Litherario, the testimony of the chaplain and teacher of the jail, of the jailkeeper, and the words of praise of the Municipal Administration, the acting governor, João Pinheiro da Silva, makes his decision on the method on March 11, 1890:

The Dr. Vice-Governor of the State of Minas Geraes, in view of the information from the General Department of Inspection of Public Education No. 439 of this past February 21, which accompanied the opinions rendered by a commission of three teachers nominated by the same Department of Inspection, and by the Directive Council, in which it is affirmed that the method of immediate reading of Dr. Agostinho Penido achieves its end through gradual knowledge of the letters and syllables in 58 lessons and brief exercises, and as such considered useful; I resolve that said method be adopted in the public schools of this State.

This approval of the publication and adoption of the *Methodo* on the part of the state government should not be considered atypical or in benefit of some favored politician, not only on account of all the evaluative activities through which it passed, but also because the publication of textbooks produced by teachers was not an unknown phenomenon on the Brazilian educational scene at the end of the nineteenth century. The involvement of teachers in the evaluation process or in generation of school manuals, such as that which involved the *Methodo Penido*, had its roots in the imperial period, as told to us by Alessandra Frota M. de Schueler and Giselle Baptista Teixeira, discussing a school textbook of 1883:

In the proceedings that involved school textbooks, teachers were not simply passive consumers of these objects that assisted their classes, but became active subjects, whether analyzing and evaluating the works that needed to be authorized for use in schools, as required by the government, or in producing such manuals. Primary and secondary school teachers came to create books and didactic materials, thus making them authors of works directed to teaching in primary and secondary schools²⁶.

This practice ended up being refined in Minas Gerais, with the inclusion of specific encouragement for this type of work in the legislation that came to be established in the years following the approval of the *Methodo Penido* by the government. In law no. 41 of 1892, cited above, we find precise directives regarding contests and the offering of awards to authors of school textbooks “regarding all the materials taught in the urban schools”, as well as regarding their distribution by public schools of the state:

Art. 327 – The government will establish and announce awards to authors of school textbooks that through contests are adopted as manuals in the primary schools, which will become property of the State. Judging the contest will belong to the higher council of public education, observing the principles and formalities to be established in special regulations, in order to ensure the most scrupulous fairness in decision making (...) Art. 328 – Having definitively adopted the manuals referred to in the previous article, the government will order them to be printed inside and outside the country in stereotyped editions of at least fifty thousand copies each, reserving the printing blocks for subsequent print runs (...) The respective teacher [who will

²⁶ Civilizar a infância: moral em lições no livro escolar de Guilhermina de Azambuja Neves (Corte imperial, 1883). *Revista de Educação Pública*, v. 17, n. 35, set-dez 2008, p. 564.

receive the books], responsible for this deposit, with the assistance of the local inspector or inspection council, will freely distribute the manuals at the beginning of the school year to students recognized as poor and figure in enrollment as such. For those who are not poor and any other persons, the manuals will be sold at the prices the government establishes in advance.

Through these requirements, which will be taken up again in articles 186 to 189 of decree no. 655 of 1893, which regulated teaching in the state, we see that Minas Gerais institutionalized holding contests, with procedures similar to those which were practiced in the process of evaluating the work of the teacher Agostinho Penido. It may even be supposed that his process may have served as a “model” for provisions that were later placed in legislation.

3. The spread of the Method

Although we did not find an indication of the exact number of books published, through what is contained in the documentation gathered, thousands of copies of the *Methodo Penido* were made available in the following year and were widely distributed by the schools of the state. Various requests present in the correspondence of the *Secretaria do Interior* (Secretary of State) clearly show its effective use and that it must have been well accepted by teachers. However, given the general lack of textbooks in the period analyzed, these requests do not ensure recognition of the quality of the material. They do, however, indicate that the method had repercussions on the educational institutions of Minas Gerais.

We will initially address the circulation of the work in the municipality of Ouro Preto, through documentation from the local City Council. In the minutes of meetings of the Municipal Administration of Ouro Preto, of which Agostinho Penido was a member in 1891, we find some comments referring to use of the *Methodo Penido* in the schools of the capital city and its surroundings, as well as the interest of the author in expanding its use in his proposal for literacy training. In the session of October 10, 1891, the following is registered:

An official communication of the head of the administration was read, making it known that various citizens from outside this municipality have requested books of the method – Agostinho Penido – and as he is unable to act without orders, he brings this matter to the knowledge of the Administration to resolve. Addressing this issue, the Administrator Dr. Penido made it known that, willingly and for the good of public education that is so in need of protection, he freely offers the copies necessary for distribution, which the Administration accepted, ordering that in this act be registered an expression of gratitude to the same Dr. Penido as a permanent record²⁷.

In the following year, on October 1, 1892, with the Administrative body *Intendência* terminated – from which Agostinho Penido had withdrawn at the beginning of that year – and with city council members sworn in since March, we once more find our figure cited in the sessions of the City Council, this time to make a request for financing to produce a new edition of his method, in which he claims to have made improvements:

²⁷ CÂMARA Municipal de Ouro Preto. *Livro de Registro de Atas (resoluções) da Intendência Municipal – 1890-1894*. Ouro Preto: Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto, Livro n. 894.

The following papers are on the table and shown for consideration of the City Council. A representation from Dr. Agostinho Maximo Nogueira Penido, freely granting to schools of the municipality six thousand copies of his method of teaching said to have been delivered to the past administration, and requesting, in a singular way, assistance in the amount of ten *contos de reis* to reprint the same work after refinement, assuming the obligation of supplying ten thousand more copies and to carry out the teaching of this new method in the municipality during the period of school vacation. – To the internal commission²⁸.

Through records found in the city council activities of this same year, we can confirm that the books were truly distributed by schools of the municipality and that Agostinho Penido was at this time seeking resources for a second edition, according to him, revised and modernized. In another set of documents, we find the text of the aforementioned representation sent to the city council members, although strangely with a data after that recorded above, on the date of October 10, 1892:

Most Honorable Dr. President and most worthy representatives of the municipality. Only virtue is of true value. It is the anchor in the ocean of life. A beacon in the immensity of the heavens! You know of the efforts of the petitioner for the cause of education. You know that in the struggle, he has forgotten himself and his own so as to think only of his Country. Therefore, for all this and considering that he has already granted to the City Council six thousand copies of his Method and that they have been freely distributed and with the best results, as proclaimed by the press, he has the honor of making a proposal. The petitioner will receive nothing from the municipal treasury for the books of his sacred property and which, by the same City Council, have been distributed by schools. In just compensation, however, and by the most legitimate equity, the Council will assist the petitioner with the quantity of ten *contos*, paid a single time for the following purposes: 1st. Publish his latest and refined teaching system. 2nd. Stereotype the publication so as to print in large number, with the petitioner giving ten thousand issues to the City Council for it to distribute through the municipality. 3rd. The petitioner is obliged in the period of school vacation to carrying out teaching of his method throughout the municipality. As a basis for all, the petitioner exhibits his Method still under testing and, appealing to your patriotism, he awaits due Justice²⁹.

The petition is dispatched “To the internal commission” and it is not known if the municipality approved the petition of the teacher Penido. However, by the content of the official letter from the City Council sent to the President of the state on August 12, 1892, we can perceive the inclination of the municipality toward publication of textbooks for its schools in compensation for the state action of providing Ouro Preto with schools under state responsibility, releasing the City Council from these expenses. Indeed, it may be that because of this information, our figure presented the petition above, or that his contacts with the municipal authorities stimulated the publishing inclination of the City Council. In this official letter, it contends:

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ CÂMARA Municipal de Ouro Preto. *Caixa 1892*. Ouro Preto: Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto. The summary of this correspondence can be found registered in the Council minutes on October 1, 1892: CÂMARA Municipal de Ouro Preto. *Livro de Registro de Atas (resoluções) da Intendência Municipal – 1890-1894*. Ouro Preto: Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto, Livro n. 894.

From all points of this Municipality, the provision of books for primary education is called for, and from many other municipalities I have received requests to grant them those that by chance this City Council may have available. From personal observation, I know that in some schools, children are reading newspapers and other printed material that do not always nurture good ideas and pure disposition of young minds. Under these circumstances, the City Council desires to order the printing of textbooks necessary which are to be offered to State Schools of the Municipality, seeing as how the State has fortunately created and maintained these schools in sufficient number, thus releasing us from the charge of establishing new ones³⁰.

In spite of this willingness of the City Council, the advance of the discussion does not allow us to know for sure if these intentions of publication became concrete, especially because during these years of the Republic, the City Council was always newly beset by financial problems, reported in its minutes. At any rate, these passages that exhibit the efforts of the author, along with the willingness/reluctance of the state and municipalities, allow us to expand a bit more another field of clashes at the end of the nineteenth century, in regard to relationships between authors and publishers, notably those that produced books directed toward education, which was marked by tensions, conflicts, agreements, discriminations, etc. not always perceptible to the public. Circe Maria Fernandes Bittencourt³¹, analyzing this issue in the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, draws attention to the complexity of these relationships:

The author of a school textbook should, in principle, follow the official programs proposed by educational policy. However, beyond the connection with official dictates, the author is dependent on the publisher, the manufacturer of his text, a dependence that occurs at various times, beginning with acceptance of the work for publication and throughout the process of transformation of his manuscript into an object of reading, a textbook to be placed on the market.

The results presented by Circe Bittencourt, as well as the efforts made by Agostinho Penido, show us that the life of authors of textbooks in the period that concerns us was not easy, whether to achieve publication of the material generated, or to gain some profit or even recognition by means of the text. This incessant toil can be seen later on when we encounter a change in strategy – nearly desperate – of Agostinho Penido in his search for resources for his survival associated with dissemination of the *Methodo*, now with a new petition, attempting to receive some cash payments for books previously donated to the municipal schools, alleging to be passing through financial difficulties and with health problems. On October 20, 1894, the president of the City Council convokes the city council members to discuss various pending matters, and among them,

³⁰ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 723, 1892-1897. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

³¹ Autores e editores de compêndios e livros de leitura (1810-1910). *Educação e Pesquisa*, v. 30, n. 3, set./dez. 2004, p. 479.

An appeal from Dr. Agostinho Penido. To the administration of which he would be part on October 8, 1891, this citizen offered the books of his fabrication that would be necessary to the primary education of the youth; a donation that the council accepted and for which it expressed its gratitude in the name of the municipal, I mean to say, in the name of the municipality. Three years later, he came to claim the copies still remaining at the city council buildings and request payment for those already then distributed. His request was met in the 1st part, though not in the 2nd, through being a wholly unfitting pretension since there was no purchase but rather simple acceptance of an offer spontaneously made. Mr. Claudionor Guites, with a view toward maximum usefulness of the books distributed and the difficult circumstances of the petitioner was willing to recommend that simply through equity, if compensation were given to him, it could be this value of 500\$000. The demand, however, of the copies that after being donated will return to the hands of the offeror, dissuaded him from this, I mean to say, from that proposal and [to be inclined] to not grant for his part the plaint, which [was] unanimously refused³².

From this last fragment, we can presume that the relations of the teacher Penido with the City Council were not proceeding in a very harmonious manner, and that the benefits recognized from the method were not sufficient to ensure him enough power to make the council members accept his petitions.

On the side of the relations with the state of Minas Gerais, there were also misunderstandings, and a certain distrust is seen in respect to the work developed by said teacher in the Penido School, which had been authorized to operate after the award received due to approval of the method that carried his name. With the date of August 18, 1891, an official letter was sent from the General Department of Inspection of Public Education of Minas Gerais to the president of the Municipal Administration of Ouro Preto in the following terms: “For fitting conformity to regulations of the accounting of this Department, I request that you inform me of the date the teacher of the Penido School, citizen Dr. Agostinho Penido, assumed the exercise of his functions.” The response presented by Penido, already mentioned above, was soon sent on August 22: “I have exercised the teaching profession since February 17 of the present year and named by the government after that date, I have carried out this same activity without ever having interrupted it”³³. In regard to the creation of this school and naming of the teacher, in correspondence of January 26, 1892, sent to the President of the state by the General Department of Inspection of Public Education of the State of Minas Gerais, it is indicated that Agostinho Penido had previously requested resignation from the position of teacher, as well as from the position of member of the Administrative Council of the Capital, but that now he requested cancellation of the request of resignation as teacher. Agreeing with maintaining Penido on the roll of teachers, the inspector informs:

The aforementioned – Escola Penido – was created by Decree no. 462 of March 14 of the past year and this creation preceded the objective of fulfilling the thought of the Government, which ordered awarding the author of the Penido Method to experiment with application of the same Method in public education. The results of this attempt have

³² CÂMARA Municipal de Ouro Preto. *Livro de Registro de Atas (resoluções) da Intendência Municipal – 1890-1894*. Ouro Preto: Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto, Livro n. 894.

³³ CÂMARA Municipal de Ouro Preto *Caixa Instrução*. Ouro Preto: Arquivo Municipal de Ouro Preto (vários anos).

been highly satisfactory, due not only to the excellence of the Method used, but also to the expertise and dedication of the teacher. Under these conditions, in the event of granting the resignation requested, the School in question, if not abolished, should be supplied with another teacher, arising from that moment on serious losses to public education because no other would be found like the petitioner who is so suitable for application of the Method of his invention³⁴.

Regarding the continuity of this school, we find two mentions of equal content in the documentation consulted – one from October 3, 1895 and another from September 29, 1896: “The Dr. President of the State of Minas Geraes resolves to name the bachelor Agostinho Penido to the job of teacher of the ‘Penido School’, created in this capital by Decree no. 426 of March 1891”³⁵. From this information, we can conclude that at least until 1896 Agostinho Penido continued as a public teacher, maintained by his condition as author of the *Methodo Penido*, in what was then the capital of the state.

In spite of the declaration of stable and responsible exercise in 1891, 4 years later, on October 14, 1895, in a letter from the Secretary of State, with the observation “reserved” at the beginning, forwarded to the Ouro Preto Municipal School Inspector, we find the following directive: “In the name of Mr. Dr. Head of the Secretary of State, I bid you [to exercise active] supervision in relation to the school, administered by Mr. Agostinho Penido, because there is an accusation that he does not regularly fulfill his duties”³⁶. We were not able to locate the outcome of this verification, but its existence denotes tremors in his relations with the state, in the same way that had occurred with the municipality, as well as the presence of individuals that did not have faith in his work, leading to complaints to the constituted authorities.

Furthermore, in respect to his relationship with the state of Minas Gerais and to the untiring efforts of an author to bring about circulation of his book, as well as to receive some financial result from it, we find him trying to sell his copies of the *Methodo Penido* soon after publication of the first lot of copies. In correspondence of March 5, 1891, sent to the governor of the state, he says that since this authority

had been just to him by authorizing the purchase of his books instead of awarding him the 25 *contos* that was decided upon, since he judged this as attribution of Congress, he requests, to clarify well his right, that you determine the purchase of the no. of copies in accordance with the 1st proposal of the General Department of Inspection of Education (20 thousand at 500 *rs*) and also in accordance with your respectable order, only to be paid when there are the necessary funds. Justice!³⁷

Attached to this petition were testimonies from diverse people and entities from Ouro Preto and other cities of Minas Gerais, printed in the form of a pamphlet, full of praise regarding the quality of the method and the results achieved from it. The testimonies attest to the efficiency of the Method and refer to children and adults learning to read in a short period of time.

On January 2, 1892, there was a new offensive from Agostinho Penido, writing directly to the president of the state upon receiving news that there were resources in the budget directed to acquisition of books: “Alert! – Alert am I! Such are your words to the

³⁴ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 723, 1892. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

³⁵ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 881, 1892-1897. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

³⁶ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 646, 1895. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

³⁷ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 176, 1892. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

people ensuring study through instructions! Assured of the value of your words and given the current budget [having] funds for books, I propose the sale of 15 thousand copies of my method (most recent edition and duly corrected), or that quantity judged necessary, for the price of 1\$ [1\$000] each³⁸. In this case, however, the General Department of Inspection of Public Education of Minas Gerais does not receive the petition well, sending the following correspondence to the president of the state on January 11, 1892:

I have the honor of informing you that this Method substitutes only the appearance of ABC, and that it is not so much of this book, but rather of other books, such as grammars, arithmetics, etc. that schools need and for which they make urgent request to this Department. Under these conditions and as this Department of Inspection still has 2500 copies of this Method, I judge that, at this time, the proposed acquisition should not be made. Nevertheless, resolve this matter as you may in fairness understand³⁹.

Nevertheless, Agostinho Penido seemed untiring in his labors for circulation of his method in state schools. He must have made new political contacts with the aim of altering the opinion issued above and, as it seems, he obtained positive results. In correspondence of the Department of Inspection of Public Education of the State of Minas Gerais to the President of the state on July 6, 1892, reference is made to the order of the government on June 28, followed by a series of considerations about the health conditions alleged by Agostinho Penido (“finding himself sick, without resources for his treatment, having weakened his health from the great efforts made in creating the method referred to”), about schools of Minas Gerais, and about the importance of textbooks for school work:

I have the honor of providing information to you in respect to what was requested. This department suffers from absolute lack of textbooks to administer them to the schools that complain to us daily. As most of the primary schools are attended by poor children, without resources for their education, they will not fulfill the goal for which they were created, of disseminating education to all social classes, without the means of achieving this objective being administered to them, which are free distribution of books to students bereft of fortune. Without this condition, it will be an anomaly to achieve a good result from the public teaching profession, which is composed of men who have no lack of abnegation and generosity in performance of their calling, but that, just as their students, lack financial resources because they are poorly paid. Thus, I judge it indispensable that you authorize the purchase not only of a sufficient number of copies of the aforementioned “Penido Method”, but also of the 2nd and 3rd reading manuals of Abilio and João Ribeiro, grammars for the teachers’ schools, and other objects, with this expense being taken from the special funds of 15:000\$000, dealt with in § 4 of art. 1 of the current budget legislation⁴⁰.

³⁸ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 723, 1892. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

³⁹ Idem.

⁴⁰ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 176, 1892. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

After that, we find new correspondence from the Department of Inspection to the president of the state on July 15, 1892, mentioning the order of the President, indicating that “of the 12,000 books bought from Dr. Agostinho Penido, there are currently in this Department only 300 copies”. In spite of the concern over the funds remaining for this type of expense, the purchase of 6000 more copies of the *Methodo Penido* is suggested and 13,000 more copies of other textbooks⁴¹.

In 1893, we come across a new offensive of our author toward the state government in search of more resources because of his *Methodo*. In correspondence to the Secretary of State on February 9, 1893, “appealing to equity, I request the same that was granted a short time ago to the grammar book of a colleague (2:000\$00 and free publication of the book by the government), believing that at least this will be granted to the petitioner”. In a note made at the side of the document, on February 11, 1893, it is discovered that the request was quickly accepted: “Purchase five thousand copies of the Penido Method, at the rate of the price for which the last copies were purchased, however, with a discount of 20%”⁴². And on July 10, 1893, we find correspondence from the Secretary of State to the Secretary of Finances, related to the Teachers’ School of Uberaba, requesting to “pay Mr. Agostinho Penido the amount of one *conto de reis* (1:000\$000), the value of books supplied to this Secretary of State by him”⁴³.

In regard to circulation of the *Methodo Penido* through the schools of the state, there are many documents confirming the sending of copies on the part of the Secretary of State to the municipalities for distribution among poor students. In a report sent by the itinerant inspector of Uberaba on November 30, 1895, after analyzing the conditions of two rural schools, male and female, indicates: “I found adopted in both schools the following books: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd reading manuals of Abilio, Arithmetic and Measures of Conturier and of Trajano, Grammar of J. Brandão and Ortiz and Pascal, and the Method of A. Penido”⁴⁴. Also in the press, communications of the Secretary of State appear regarding the remittance of copies of textbooks. In the newspaper *Minas Geraes*, “Official Organ of the Powers of the State”, in the edition of September 24, 1893, in the section “Acts of the State Government”, under the title of “Books for primary schools”, we find the information that 100 copies of each one of the books discriminated were sent to 60 cities, for a total of 24,000 copies all at once, of which 6000 would be of the *Methodo Penido*: “Sent to the primary schools of the municipalities mentioned below by the Secretary of State were the following copies of books – of Portuguese grammar of João Ribeiro (1st year); of the multiplication tables of Barcker; of arithmetic of Conturier; and of the Penido method”⁴⁵. There were also the direct remittances to the schools, communicated by correspondence from the Secretary of State, such as that of June 17, 1895 to the teacher Noé Madureira de Oliveira of Santo Antonio do Rio do Peixe, in the municipality of Serro:

⁴¹ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 175, 1892. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

⁴² MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, Serie SI 4-1, n. 229, 1893. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

⁴³ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 654, 1893. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

⁴⁴ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 677, 1895. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

⁴⁵ ACTOS do Governo do Estado. Jornal *Minas Geraes*, ano II, n. 258, 24/09/1893, p. 5.

Sending you, in name of Mr. Dr. Head of the Secretary of State, on this date, ten copies of the 3rd reading manual of Hilario Ribeiro, ten of arithmetic of R. da Costa, and 20 of the Penido Method, I recommend that you make suitable distribution of them among the poor students of the school under your charge, observing the provision of §§ 1 and 2, art. 187, of the regulations of primary education. The Director⁴⁶.

There are many other exchanges of correspondence like this one between the Secretary of State and municipal authorities, reporting the sending of copies or their petitions, although the demand was more inclusive, directed to various other works of arithmetic, mother tongue, etc. There is also abundant information in the press, in sections directed to acts of the government. Various references are made in reports of school inspectors in the period, such as cited above, highlighting both the use made and the praise given to the method on the part of the teachers of the schools visited.

One last aspect is noteworthy: in spite of the search made through various libraries and archives of cities of the state of Minas Gerais, no remaining copy of the *Methodo Penido* was located, which reveals an unfortunate gap for studies on the schooling and literacy training at the beginning of the Brazilian Republic. Regrettably, this was not observed only in relation to the work of the teacher Penido. This gap was also noted by Isabel Cristina Alves da Silva Frade and Francisca Izabel Pereira Maciel⁴⁷ in a study on sources for the history of literacy training, making reference to the circulation of this work in Minas Gerais, but without reporting the discovery of any copy of it. In spite of the impossibility of physically handling the *Methodo Penido*, the set of records found in the documentation allow us to ensure that the book was widely accepted and circulated throughout the state of Minas Gerais, at least in the 1890s.

Final remarks

The documentation in the archives of Minas Gerais allow us access to and understanding of diverse aspects of the past of the state, notably of education, because of the quantity and diversity of the records that exist, a considerable part of which have not yet been dealt with or duly interpreted. Sometimes these sources hold surprises, fortunately agreeable ones in our case. Upon consulting the minutes of the City Council of Ouro Preto and some sets of documents from the Public Archives of Minas Gerais, in search of elements that would allow us to expand knowledge regarding the relations between the state and municipalities in organization of public education at the beginning of the Republic, we found repeated mention of a figure and also of a method of literacy training that was to have been invented by him. This led us on a certain “detour” from the original proposal so as to dedicate ourselves to the search for complementary elements that would allow us to reveal, even if partially, the universe of training and activity of this author of a textbook approved and adopted by the government of Minas Gerais in the first decade of the Republic.

Data and historiography assisted us in composing the result that was presented, though in a provisional manner on account of the gaps that still need to be filled due to lack of localization of a single physical copy of the *Methodo Penido* and due to the impossibility of expanding the research to archives of other cities or sets of documents, such as the press, etc.

At any rate, we believe to have advanced in the debate regarding the process of creation of textbooks at the end of the nineteenth century, of the challenges faced by authors

⁴⁶ MINAS GERAIS. Secretaria do Interior. Fundo Instrução Pública, n. 670, 1895. Arquivo Público Mineiro.

⁴⁷ A história da alfabetização: contribuições para o estudo das fontes. In: *29ª Reunião Anual da ANPED*, 2006, Caxambu-MG.

in finding publishers or in reprinting their texts, and of the difficulties in selling them, especially to their biggest customer, the state of Minas Gerais. We also saw how state and municipality draw near to each other in the search for creating conditions so that the schooling process is institutionalized, at times by joining forces, as in the case of the proposal of publication of textbooks on the part of the City Council of Ouro Preto. The importance of relationships of influence is also in evidence, upon noting that Agostinho Penido was not only a businessman, but also a politician and son of a politician, and obtained a refined education on both the secondary school and higher educational level.

Finally, it is important to note how the high rates of illiteracy, of around 80% in Minas Gerais at the beginning of the Republic, placed this as one of the central issues in concerns of successive state and municipal administrations in the first decades of the Republic. Because of that, as well as the motivations of school authorities in the search for alternatives that would allow them to overcome or reduce the challenge, announcement of the invention of a nearly “miraculous” method for promoting literacy training, both of adults and of children, must have stirred up part of the elite, as well as the general population. This encouraged the government of the state to invest in this new proposal which, in addition to all else, had been developed by a person from Minas Gerais, who was even willing to apply it experimentally in the school he created under the sponsorship of the state and placed in operation already in 1891.

Many questions remain and much needs to be done to clarify this initiative, both to better understand the importance and spread of the method and to promote a critique on the effectiveness or originality of it.

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