



Civil marriage records and the History of Education: some methodological discussions¹

Registros civis de matrimônio e História da Educação:
algumas interlocuções metodológicas

Registros civiles de matrimonio e Historia de la Educación:
algunos diálogos metodológicos

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Abstract

The production of literacy rates based on signatures from civil records in the Antônio Prado, Caxias, Garibaldi, Nova Trento and Bento Gonçalves towns, belonging to the Italian Colonial Region of Rio Grande do Sul (RCI/RS), it is an investigative path that demands methodological explanation, which is the focus of this article. In view of this, we discuss the use of signatures as an indicator of written knowledge, based on authors who have already mobilized similar sources, such as Chartier (1991) and Magalhães (1994). In this text, we present excerpts and choices for measuring signatures, report the procedures for constructing the data and the analytical movements to support the narrative. This study corroborates the need to highlight and explain the path taken in documentary sources and shows that there are not many national studies that use signatures to investigate educational processes, showing possibilities for using, systematizing and interpreting these signatures.

Keywords: History of education; Literacy rates; Civil records.

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Resumo

A produção de taxas de alfabetização com base em assinaturas dos registros civis das localidades de Antônio Prado, Caxias, Garibaldi, Nova Trento e Bento Gonçalves, pertencentes à Região Colonial Italiana do Rio Grande do Sul (RCI/RS), é um caminho investigativo que demanda explicitação metodológica, foco deste artigo. Diante disso, realizamos a discussão da utilização de assinaturas como indicador de conhecimento de escrita, com base em autores que já mobilizaram fontes semelhantes, a exemplo de Chartier (1991) e Magalhães (1994). Neste texto, apresentamos recortes e escolhas para a medição das assinaturas, relatamos os procedimentos para a construção dos dados e os movimentos de análise para embasar a narrativa. Este estudo corrobora para destacar e explicitar o percurso realizado em fontes documentais e evidencia que não há muitos estudos nacionais que utilizam assinaturas para a investigação de processos de educação, mostrando possibilidades de uso, sistematização e interpretação dessas assinaturas.

Palavras-chave: História da educação; Taxas de alfabetização; Registros civis.

Resumen

La producción de tasas de alfabetización basadas en firmas de los registros civiles de las localidades de Antônio Prado, Caxias, Garibaldi, Nova Trento y Bento Gonçalves pertenecientes a la Región Colonial Italiana de Rio Grande do Sul (RCI/RS) es un camino de investigación que exige explicación metodológica, foco de este artículo. Discutimos el uso de firmas como indicadores basados en autores que ya han movilizado fuentes similares, como Chartier (1991) y Magalhães (1994). En el texto presentamos recortes y opciones para la medición, informamos los procedimientos para la construcción de los datos y los movimientos de análisis para apoyar la narrativa. Este estudio corrobora para resaltar y explicar el recorrido realizado en fuentes documentales y mostramos que no son muchos los estudios nacionales que utilizan firmas para la investigación de procesos educativos, mostrando posibilidades de uso, sistematización e interpretación.

Palabras clave: Historia de la educación; Tasas de alfabetización; Registros civiles.

Initial considerations

This study presents² the methodological path of the literacy rates production based on signatures in civil marriage records from the towns of Antônio Prado, Caxias do Sul, Garibaldi, Nova Trento and Bento Gonçalves, municipalities belonging to the Italian Colonial Region of Rio Grande do Sul (RCI/RS)³. The use of the term ‘literacy rate’ is inspired by Chartier (1991). For the author, signature rates can be qualified as ‘literacy rates’ with the “condition of not assuming that they immediately indicate the percentage of the population that knows how to read and write” (CHARTIER, 1991, p. 114). In other words, signatures are considered, in this study, as a possible indicator, among others, of some knowledge of writing, which is done through historical analysis of documents.

The broadening of the historian's understanding of documentary objects, approaches and typologies has allowed for an enrichment of the set of analyses and narrative potentialities, given that, according to Albuquerque Júnior (2019, p. 91), we believe that documents are manufactured, created and invented, “made of layers of meaning and significance, many of which have been deciphered”. In this article, the analytical focus is on the use of civil registry signatures for research in the History of Education. Since this constitutes an unusual documentary *corpus*, it is important to record the production process, demonstrating to other researchers the record of methodological trajectories, thus corroborating studies on the history of education, literacy and writing.

With this introduction, we clarify how this study is divided: in the next section, we address theoretical aspects for the production of literacy rates and the emergence of civil registries; in the third, the choice/selection of rates; and then, in the fourth, we discuss the organization of data and results production. Finally, in the final considerations, we return to the methodological path taken and discuss considerations on the production of signature measurements.

Setting some references for the production of literacy rates based on signatures and the emergence of civil records

We understand that the signatures of individuals are relevant documentary sources for research in the History of Education, literacy and writing, as they provide information about the subjects, such as whether or not they know how to sign their own name. Regardless of the level of analysis, this source provides, at least in an introductory way, signs about the person's writing ability/skill and/or an introduction to the world of writing. In the historiographical operation, if the researcher wishes, he can use Paleography⁴, analyze handwriting and think about written culture in different depths.

² Part of this work is part of the proceedings of the event VI *Encontro da História da Educação do Centro-Oeste, intitulado “A utilização de assinaturas nas pesquisas da história da alfabetização: breve histórico e possibilidades”*.

³ The documentary mapping is part of a research project in the final phase, at the doctoral level of the Postgraduate course in Education at the University of Caxias do Sul (PPGEdu/UCS), which aims to investigate the education of Italian immigrants and their children in the time period from 1875 to 1920, using the assumptions of Cultural History and the History of Education.

⁴ Chapter 1 of the work *Grafias do cotidiano*, by Castillo Gómez (2020), deals with the topic and presents relevant contributions.

Another possibility lies in the quantitative grouping of signatures, which can indicate evidence about a given community, in order to help in the understanding of the historical processes of education, which is the path we followed in this study. To this end, we rely on the contributions of Cultural History and History of Education, since there is flexibility in the construction of sources that previously had other purposes (FEBVRE, 1989), so much so that it is now “possible to reread some types of official records in new ways” (BURKE, 1992, p. 25), which is what this source – civil records – produced for another purpose, allows, as is the case of the analysis of immigrant’s literacy.

According to Vincent (2014), the use of signatures to understand education is credited to Great Britain, after administrative reforms in the 1830s, which standardized birth, marriage and death records, measuring them. The author explains that Thomas Lister, the country's secretary-general, made the first attempt at measurement, an action that proved to be relevant for the production of a cultural indicator and, “since that moment, in the early 1940s, there have been constant activities with simple and contextualized measurements” (VINCENT, 2014, p. 550).

In the scientific community, the emergence occurred decades ago, by researchers who noticed gaps in school sources to understand the education processes. The construction of genealogy began with Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary, who began research in 1957, in “a pioneering and remarkable study based on information collected following the inquiry ordered in France, in 1877-1879, by Inspector Louis Maggiolo” (SILVA, 1986, p. 102). Roger Schofield and Lawrence Stone then produced contributions, with the former emphasizing the importance of the signature as an indicator of literacy, as did Furet and Ozouf (1977). It is also relevant to cite Carlo Cipolla⁵ for understanding the spread of reading and writing in the Western world, with *Istruzione e sviluppo: il declino dell'analfabetismo nel mondo occidentale*, originally published in 1969. In line with this bias, Graff (1994) listed different possible types of documents for research into literacy, mentioning marriage certificates and, in addition to them, censuses, wills, deeds, inventories, deposits, catechism exam records, petitions, military enlistment records, criminal records, to name a few (GRAFF, 1994, p. 30-31).

New studies emerged in the following decades in Europe, mainly in Spain, France and England (SILVA, 1986), followed by North America. A more in-depth study was carried out by Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel (2009), in which they reflect⁶ about the historiography of reading and writing. With regard to Brazil, some studies, such as the one produced by Jesus (2015), can be found, but we are unaware, until now, of the use of signatures for the production of scientific studies, mainly in the region studied in this article, the RCI/RS.

Regarding the use of signatures by researchers, Ragazzini (2001, p. 19) says that “the signatures in marriage records, studied with the aim of determining illiteracy levels [...] are sources [...] for the history of school and education”. Ferraro and Kreidlow (2004, p. 180, emphasis added) explain that, “no matter how small the gain represented by literacy, measured by the criterion of **knowing how to read and write a simple note**, it represents the first – decisive – step in the schooling process”, reflections that allow us to think about the management of these signatures as a documentary *corpus*.

⁵ Cipolla [1969]/2012.

⁶ What this analysis itself is based on.

Like Chartier (1991), in this study, signatures are taken as indicators of education, that is, they are indicators, since it would not be possible to measure the ability/capacity of writing or reading (level). This warning was also made by Magalhães (1994). From this perspective, statistical approaches have emerged to investigate the history of educational practices (BURKE, 1997), however, it is worth noting that:

The quantitative approach to history in general, or to cultural history in particular, can be criticized, of course, as reductionist. [...] Quantitative historians can count the signatures on marriage registers, the books in private libraries [...] etc. The problem that remains is whether these statistics are reliable indicators of literacy [...]. Some historians have raised doubts about the validity of these numbers, others have accepted it. Some have used other types of evidence to make the statistics meaningful; others have not (BURKE, 1997, p. 93).

Burke's (1997) warning is in line with the reflections of Chartier (1991) and Magalhães (1994), that is, that these sources can be *indicators* of the level of writing and that they can make up part of the range of sources for understanding the processes analyzed, but that they will not respond to problems by themselves. Regarding this process, Magalhães (1994, p. 24) states that:

Taking the signature as a fundamental autographic indicator to infer levels of literacy from it, historical sources that present the evolution of comprehensive and systematic sets of signatures are privileged in order to constitute data series [...] An indication of literacy, the autographic mark of the signature becomes an epistemic instrument on the capacities, levels and processes of literacy through the careful application of a scale of signatures. An analytical tool, the signature scale, when applied to defined historical situations and contexts and after being duly tested, allows us to understand and explain the different uses and processes of appropriation of literacy skills and practices.

According to Magalhães (1994), signatures constitute the basis for thinking about methodological procedures for coherent production, requiring systematic excerpts and sets of them in order to produce data – we will explain more about this in the next section. But first, it is important to understand the emergence of civil records in the RCI/RS, which are the sources from which the signatures were constructed for this study.

The Brazilian population census began after Law No. 1,829/1870, and in art. 2, the General Directorate of Statistics was established, which would be responsible for the table of births, marriages and deaths. Based on this, Decree No. 9,886/1888 emerged, which, in art. 11, defined:

The parts or their attorneys shall sign these records with their full names, and so shall the witnesses, in cases where they are necessary. If, however, any of these persons cannot write for any reason, a declaration of this shall be made in the record, with another person signing at their request (BRAZIL, 1888, p. 248)⁷.

It is possible to verify that art. 11 brought instructions regarding the mandatory signature, since if the individual did not know how to read and write, in addition to the declaration, another person should sign in his/her place. Regarding the regulations of civil records, the obligation its establishment throughout the Brazilian territory was based on Decree No. 10,044/1888.

The beginning of civil registration in the RCI/RS occurred gradually and can be associated with the expansion of colonies for the immigrants' settlement. The first location to begin registering marriages was Caxias, in 1879⁸, and Bento Gonçalves, in 1889, followed by Antônio Prado, in 1895, Nova Trento, in 1896, and Garibaldi, in 1905. The records had to follow a pattern⁹ with the date of registration, information about the witnesses and individuals present, names of the spouses, filiation and closing with the signatures, varying in the additional information and in the order of the information, such as the nationality of the parents and residence.

As Albuquerque Júnior (2019, p. 60) states, the document is a “fragment of a time that has passed” and, when considering it in the investigation, it is important to characterize it, understand it in its context of production, in the regulations it undergoes due to the rules of the time in which it was materialized, to whom it was addressed, what and how it dealt with, in this case, the marriage record it produced. Furthermore, the author claims that: “The layers of time that are embedded, materialized in that support” need to be considered in the investigative work, in the documentary analysis (ALBUQUERQUE JÚNIOR, 2019, p. 61).

In other words, the documents present in the registry offices and collections can contribute a lot to understanding past issues that have not yet been clarified, such as literacy rates. Some excerpts and evidence for the production of literacy rates.

Some clippings and evidence for the production of literacy rates

When considering which locations would be selected for the production of literacy rates, we began by producing a list of the locations/municipalities that make up the RCI/RS, considering: a) the beginning of civil marriage records; b) until what year they would be available¹⁰ for measurement; and, among these regions, c) which would include the records of others, now dismembered and/or that began civil records later. From this production, we

⁷ In order to make reading easier, when transcribing older documents, they were adapted to the current standard of the Portuguese language.

⁸ In much of the book from 1879 to 1883, the groom introduces himself and makes the declaration that the couple had married in the Church. After this period, there is a lack of books that are resumed, standardized with the presence of both spouses and, thus, our measurement occurred with the initial cut from 1889 onwards, impacted by the obligation established by the Republic.

⁹ In some cases, information is missing; these are moments of the emergence of the record, in some of the colonies, and then they are standardized.

¹⁰ Remotely, with documents digitized on microfilms, which, by law, are accepted and will produce legal effects as original documents (BRAZIL 1968).

verified that they could be grouped according to Table 1. We warn that the records do not follow the chronological order of territorial dismemberment, hence the importance of the table, to understand in which locations they were carried out, which current municipalities they include and until what year they would be archived in the “headquarters”.

Chart 1 - Locations studied for the construction and production of literacy rates

Colonies	They would include ¹¹ marriage records from:
Caxias (1889-1921)	Sede (Caxias); Nova Trento (until 1896); Nova Pádua (until 1904); part of São Marcos (until 1916); part of Farroupilha (until 1903), Galópolis (until 1914) e Criúva (until 1916).
Dona Isabel (1889-1921)	Sede (Bento Gonçalves); Monte Belo (until 1893); Pinto Bandeira e Santa Tereza; Part of Farroupilha (until 1903).
Conde d'Eu (1905-1935)	Sede (Garibaldi desde 1905); Carlos Barbosa (until 1910); Coronel Pilar (until 1898); Imigrante (until 1919).
Antônio Prado (1895-1935)	Sede e Nova Roma (until 1923).
Alfredo Chaves (1889-1935)	Sede (Veranópolis), Vila Flores, Fagundes Varela (until 1907) e Cotiporã (até 1904)

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

For the sake of understanding, Caxias began to register records that could be measured in 1889; and, at that time, it included the records of Nova Trento¹². However, the separation of these municipalities occurred in 1896, when the civil registry was created in the latter, so from 1896 onwards, the headquarters of Caxias no longer included information about Nova Trento residents. Likewise, the records of Farroupilha began in 1903; previously, some of them were included in the records of Caxias or Bento Gonçalves, which also occurred with Nova Trento, in 1896; Nova Pádua, in 1904, and São Marcos, before 1916, which had records in Caxias.

In order to understand the RCI/RS, when choosing the locations, we considered that, for example, the records of Nova Milano¹³ and Farroupilha, at least until 1903 (the date when civil registration began in Farroupilha), were held by the registry office in Caxias. This is also the case of Nova Roma, which belonged to Antônio Prado and, therefore, he still has the records of that one, made until 1923. With the grouping, it became clear that there was a need for a cut-off point for the production of the rate, because despite investigating the RCI/RS, it would not be possible to do so throughout the entire RCI/RS.

We chose to exclude the city of Alfredo Chaves, because it has its own characteristics and a significant presence of Polish immigration; Caxias was included because it is a “nucleus” of the RCI/RS. Furthermore, considering civil records, we included information related to several locations, today districts and/or bordering municipalities, and the records of Nova

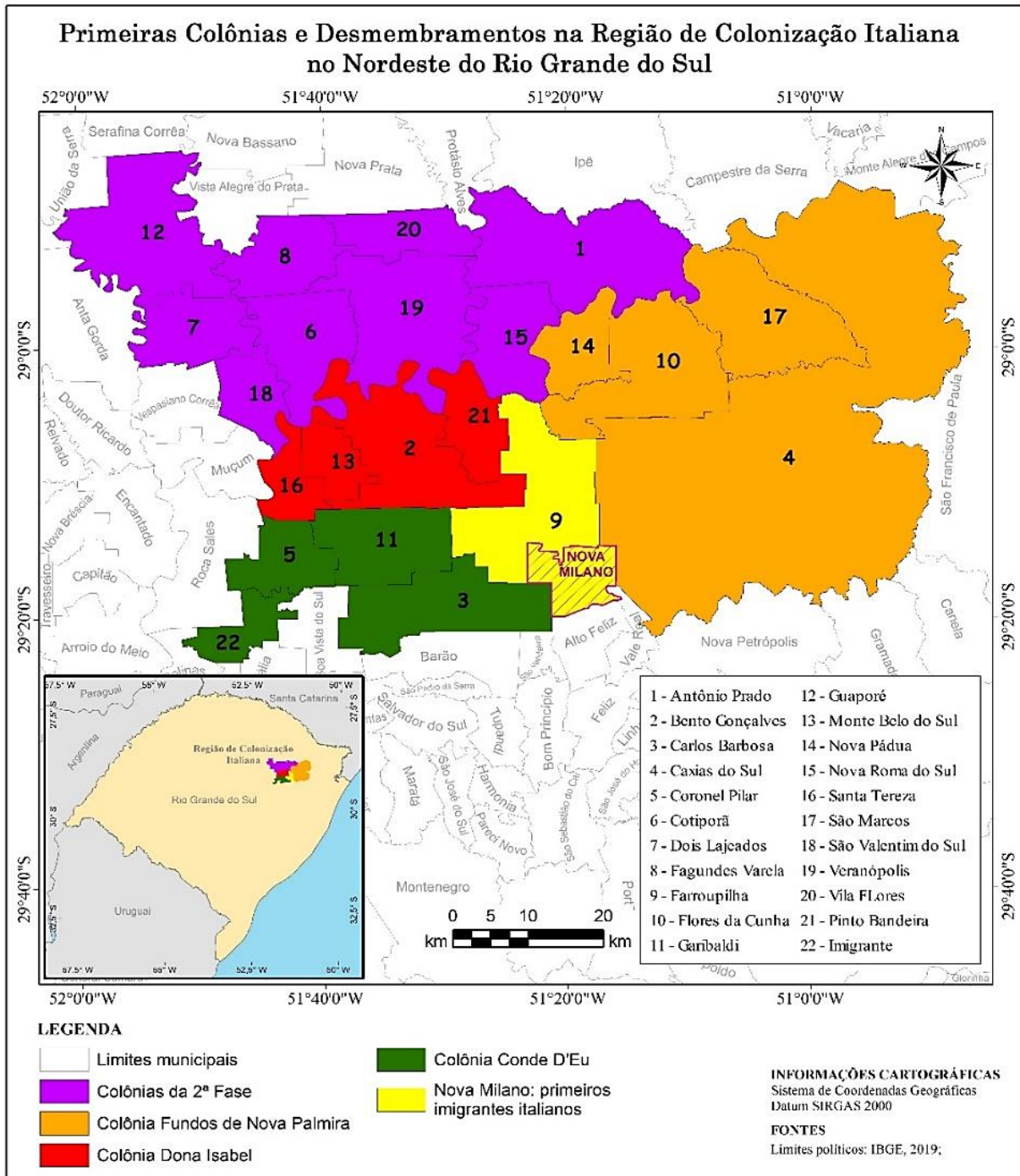
¹¹ Since they belong to other locations, the records would be archived at the headquarters. We contacted some of the registry offices to confirm these questions, and several had difficulties to answer. We made a list and considered that it is likely the records from smaller locations are in the headquarters colonies to which they belonged.

¹² In 1935 the town changed its name to Flores da Cunha

¹³ Considered the birthplace of immigrant settlement in RCI/RS.

Trento were added for two reasons: both because they began in 1896, and from a territorial perspective, that is, we extended the discussion by thinking about Caxias – Nova Trento – Antônio Prado in terms of bordering territories. Map 1 presents the delimitation of the analysis.

Map 1 – Italian Colonial Region (RCI) of Rio Grande do Sul



Source: Belusso (2020, p. 54).

Legend: Title: **First Colonies and break up in the Italian Colonization Region in the Northeast of Rio Grande do Sul**

- Municipal boundaries
- Dona Isabel Colony
- Colonies 2nd phase
- Conde D'Eu Colony
- Fundos de Nova Palmira Colony
- Nova Milano: first Italian immigrants

By analyzing the map, we can see the scope of the geographic delimitation of the analysis, going a little beyond the oldest colonies created in 1870. It is also possible to analyze the current municipal scope from the map. We note that it was not possible to leave out the records of Garibaldi and Bento Gonçalves, which according to the table, have at the beginning of the civil records information from several locations, and these choices cover a satisfactory territorial space for understanding the RCI/RS. The choice, then, was defined in five headquarters locations for measurement: Caxias, Nova Trento, Antônio Prado, Bento Gonçalves and Garibaldi as relevant representations for understanding the region.

When searching for a standard for producing rates, we were unable to do so at the beginning, since in each colony of RCI/RS, the records began in a specific period. However, the final cut-off used was the same as when the rates were intertwined, so that there would be a parameter. In the case of Caxias and Bento Gonçalves, they could only be consulted up to 1921¹⁴; the choice of collecting data up to 1935, in the places where it was possible, it was thought for use in a specific result, which was the production by decade of births. In the other results, all the locations were used with the cut-off year 1921.

Of those selected for measurement, two, Caxias and Nova Trento, belong to the former Colônia Fundos de Nova Palmira; Garibaldi, to the Conde d'Eu colony; Bento Gonçalves, to Dona Isabel; and, finally, Antônio Prado, who belongs to the colonies of the 2nd phase of settlement (from 1884) of the RCI/RS. With this geographic distribution, the analysis provides evidence of a large part of the RCI/RS with regard to the proposed theme. As for the procedures¹⁵, although the collection is in registry offices¹⁶, they are made available online through the FamilySearch¹⁷ website, thus, the entire construction occurred remotely. The civil marriages of the selected locations were verified one by one, by reading the information contained in the complete deed, and from them the information was compiled on the year of registration, sex, nationality, age, profession and whether or not the individual signed the document.

The production focused on counting (presence/absence) and not on analyzing the handwriting of signatures in the civil marriage records¹⁸, a choice made due to the substantial number of individuals, as well as to corroborate the initial idea of introducing the group's writing into the processes of written culture. Chart 2 exemplifies excerpts from the collection.

Chart 2 – Part of the information collection

Year	Sex	Nationality	Age	Profession	Signed/Did not sign
1904	Male	Italian	26	Farmer	Signed
1904	Female	Italian	24	Domestic	Did not sign
1904	Male	Italia-brasilian	18	Farmer	Signed
1904	Female	Italian-Brasilian	16	Domestic	Did not sign

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024), based on excerpts from the collection spreadsheet of Antônio Prado (RS) for 1904.

¹⁴ You can check this clipping on the familysearch.org website itself.

¹⁵ The methodology is based on similar work, carried out in “*Processo de escolarização de Antônio Prado – RS (1886-1920): culturas e sujeitos*”, and also published in the Journal *Educação em Questão* (Qualis A2), based on the article “A taxa de alfabetização de Antônio Prado, Rio Grande do Sul (1895-1920)”. Cf. Bernardi and Luchese, 2020.

¹⁶ Mainly due to it being carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic (2021).

¹⁷ All records are online and can be accessed through a free account at: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/263342?availability=Family%20History%20Library>.

¹⁸ Most European studies that use signatures as a basis do so using parish records (SILVA, 1986). In the case of RCI/RS, only a few locations include the signatures of spouses in these records, which prevents a sequential analysis. The regulation of mandatory civil registration and standardization have improved the use of signatures for studies such as this one.

The evidence was transcribed into a computer program for managing tables, separated by the five selected locations. At the end of the process, we obtained information about the sample groups of each one. It took seven months of collection, a mechanical and exhaustive task, to collect all the information proposed by RCI/RS. Sometimes, the records were in poor condition, and reading them, at times, was slow. Table 1 shows the quantitative result of the collection.

Table 1 - Amount of information for the production of the literacy rate

Locality	Individuals	Period
Antônio Prado	4.110	1895-1935
Bento Gonçalves	5.674	1889-1921
Caxias	5.682	1889-1921
Nova Trento	2.996	1896-1935
Garibaldi ¹⁹	2.453	1905-1935

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024), based on civil records collected to produce the rate (2023).

Information was gathered on 20,915 individuals, only Italian immigrants and their children, with any other nationality present in the records being discarded due to the research proposal, which is the basis of the study. Having presented this data, we will now discuss the organization and structuring of the evidence.

Moving the analysis of the evidence: the second stage in producing the rates

The initial stage of construction and organization in a spreadsheet was carried out, and in order for the data to be transformed into relevant information to the research, in each location we performed the following separation²⁰ and calculation: a) total number of Italians and Italian-Brazilians; b) number who signed, did not sign and percentage of each; c) how many men and women signed.

Information and percentages that allowed, for example, to obtain the average total percentage of signatories in each colony and to have an overview of the individuals' number. However, in order to reveal evidence, more steps were needed to filter the information, such as producing rates by decades of births, occupational levels, and an analysis of the women's rate.

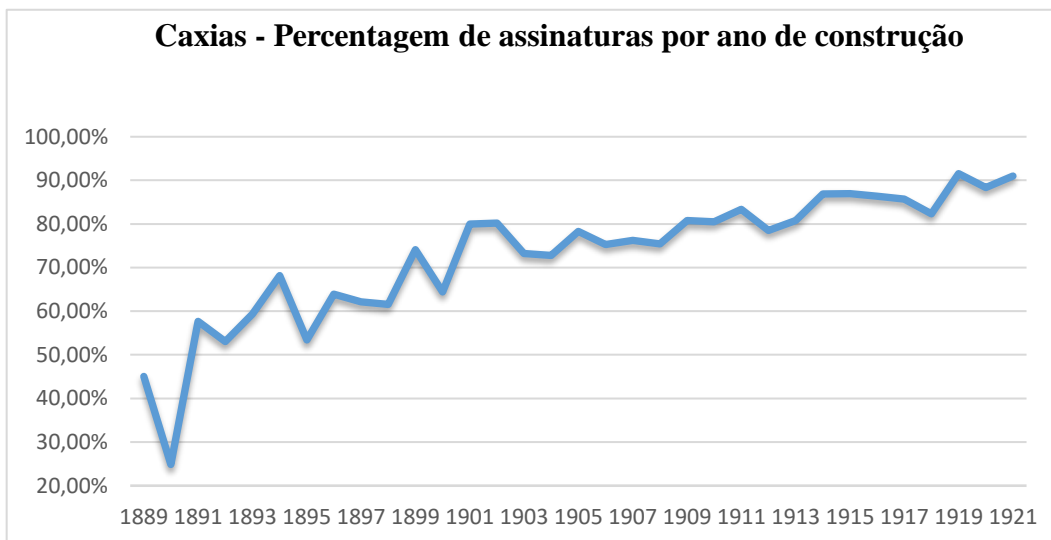
Regarding the production of the rate by decades of births, according to Bernardi (2020) and Bernardi and Luchese (2020), we realized if we made graphs by year of rates collection, they would not reflect some information and, therefore, we would need to produce graphs by decades of births. For example, if there were people getting married in 1900 at the age of 20 and, at the same time, others were 40, 50 years old, a graph by year of "data construction" would not show a literacy rate in chronological order of the subjects.

We wanted to highlight the two results that we would obtain and how different they would be, hence the mobilization by decades of births and not by "year of construction". We took the rate of Caxias as an example, so first we generated a graph by year of construction; and then we separated them by decade of birth, obtaining the results shown in Graph 1.

¹⁹ On May 27, 1909, a fire at the Garibaldi Registry Office resulted in the loss of part of the collection. Regarding marriage records, it is possible to identify that the oldest archived book begins in March 1905 and corresponds to book no. 4 of records.

²⁰ In the case of those who had records available for measurement up to 1935, we produced two results: one with this one, from 1935; and another up to the 1921 cut-off, so that the latter could be used for comparison when we wanted a parameter for discussion with other locations.

Graph 1 - Caxias records by year of construction



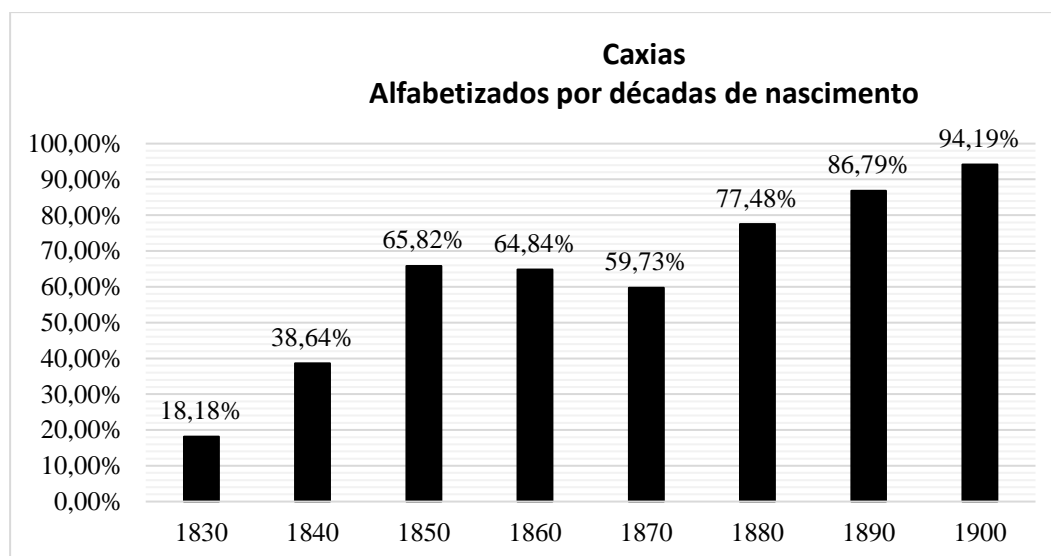
Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

Legend: Title: **Subscriptions Percentage by year of construction**

There has been an increase in the literacy rate over the years, however, adding an example such as the year 1890, the low rate could be a reflection of people born in 1870, as well as 1860 or 1850, who would have married in that year. So, what would the point of an exhibition by year of civil registration be, if we would be able to obtain complete information from a chronological perspective, since civil records include the age of each spouse?

If we were to also consider an analysis of records by year of construction, we could mistakenly analyze Graph 1, from Caxias, thinking that the rate increased, despite there being gradual declines. In line with this bias, we have the work of Magalhães (1994), who also organized the data by year of birth, a fact that reinforced the need to conduct a study that showed the chronology of the lives of the subjects investigated. In Graph 2, we show the results for Caxias by decade of births for comparison with Graph 1 and then explain the results methodologically.

Graph 2 – Caxias: literates by decade of birth



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Legend: Title: **Literate by decades of birth.**

This construction allows us to reach different conclusions. Once again, the choice of decade of births was made to group them into time periods. The graphs showed a gradual increase in the percentages, but Graph 2 allows us to look at older decades and think about the writing processes that occurred in Italy, during periods of migration, settlement, and the emergence of the RCI/RS colonies. After all, were classes set up? When did the literacy rate increase for those born and what were the reasons? These are questions that the results here allow us to question.

Having justified our choice to present the graphs by decade of births, we now explain the methodological path used to shape the evidence for this purpose. With the spreadsheets from each location investigated, a second copy was made to produce a “decade” spreadsheet. With the copy of each one, we added a column called “year of birth”, in which, using formulas, we reduced the year of registration and the declared date of birth. With the birth years, we organized the entire spreadsheet in order from the smallest to the largest, so that we would have the individuals and other information in chronological order.

At the end of this step, we noted each of the possible decades and, with that, the count was performed, also with formulas due to the large amount of data. Example: born in 1830, followed by the number who signed, the number who did not sign, the total number of signatures and the percentage of signatories. Conducted up to the last generation collected from each location, sometimes in 1900, and sometimes in 1910. The final production was a graph with the percentages according to each decade of births and each location. A denser work than the year of collection, however, it allows, as it had already explained, a unique analysis of each location. Due to the length, it is not possible to include all the final graphs, so we chose to condense the information in Table 2, so that the results are highlighted.

Table 2 – Literacy rate results in percentages

	Antônio Prado	Caxias	Garibaldi	Nova Trento	Bento Gonçalves
1830		18,18%			66,67%
1840	66,67%	38,64%		66,67%	58,33%
1850	58,62%	65,82%		28,57%	56,84%
1860	74,77%	59,73%	76,92%	56,10%	61,81%
1870	68,81%	77,48%	73,68%	57,10%	51,99%
1880	61,14%	86,79%	68,99%	68,51%	62,82%
1890	61,21%		76,63%	73,60%	73,42%
1900	81,98%		81,94%	88,36%	81,53%
1910	66,67%		93,10%	96,68%	

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

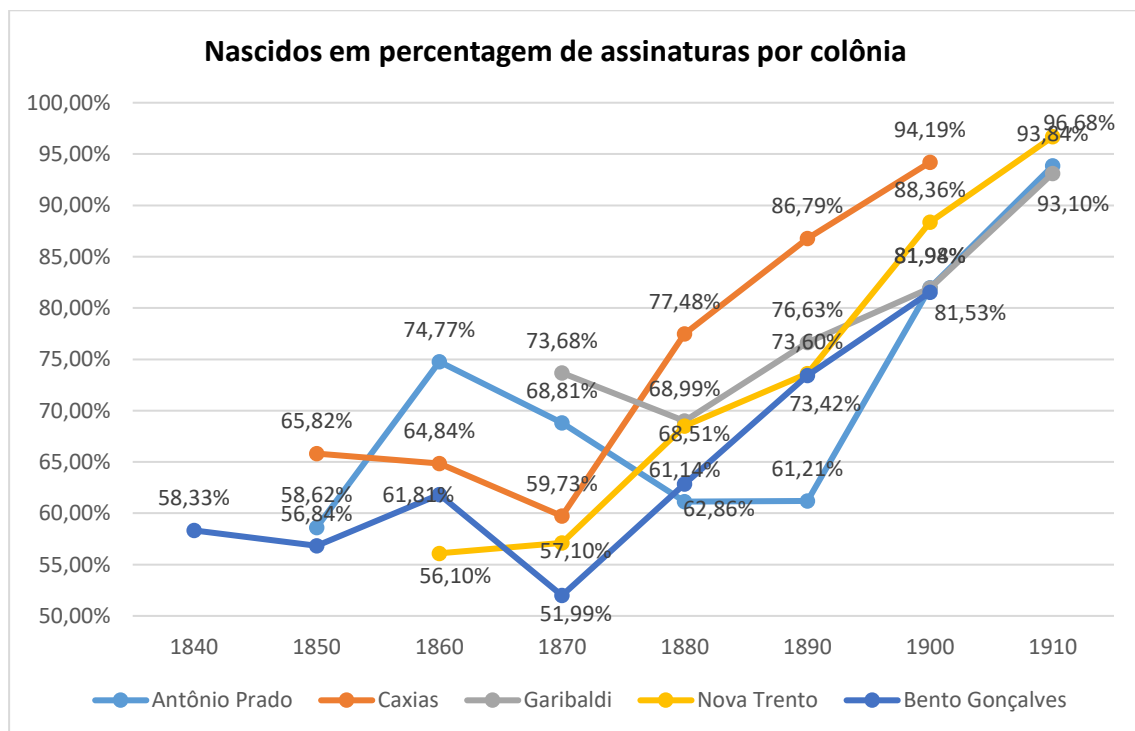
Unlike the other results of the civil registration rate, the production by decade of births comes from some specificities. Regarding the time frame, as explained, in the production by decade of births, we used the year 1921 as the final period for Caxias and Bento Gonçalves, and the year 1935²¹ for Antônio Prado, Nova Trento and Garibaldi. For the first two locations, this occurred due to the availability of access to the records, however, for the others it was a choice based on the following argument: if we kept the year 1921 for all locations, we would no longer collect data on individuals who were born after 1900. However, our time frame is 1920, there would be no reason to discard information on those born between 1900 and 1910, even if some locations had limitations. So, if we collected, for example, marriages up until 1930, based on an average age of 20 at marriage, we would have information about those born

²¹ The records were analyzed and gathered for the entire year, for example, in the case of 1935, from the first marriage of the year, until the last of December of that year.

up to 1910. Extending it to 1935, we would obtain information on those born up to 1915, a fact that makes it possible to think about the education of a group of children up to the mid-1920s, since someone born between 1910-1915 would be introduced to schooling, approximately, in 1920; while if we collected up to 1940, we would be beyond the scope proposed here.

In Caxias and Bento Gonçalves, we obtained the decades of births up to the end of 1890 and mid-1900, since they married until 1921. In the other locations, the decades of births extend to 1900 and 1910, which are the majority of marriages from 1921 to 1935. Despite the differences in the result with the increase of more individuals from 1900 and those born in 1910, when possible, our final proposal, after constructing each location's graph, was to produce a result that interconnects all the locations investigated, as shown in Graph 3.

Graph 3 – Result of births by decade and percentages by colon



Source: Prepared by the authors (2023)

Legend: Title: Births as a percentage of signatures per colony.

As can be seen from the results of the interconnected locations, the graph allows for discussion and comparison among them, both in terms of percentage and the use of this information to assist with other sources in understanding the education processes in RCI/RS. This is an initial step that allows for the continuation of the investigation.

Regarding the path to producing the levels of professions, based on the civil marriage records researched, we were inspired by Justino Magalhães' (1994) scale of socio-professional functions. We justified the work to understand comprehensively the relations between professions and literacy. In a way, this scale makes it possible to visualize a structure of professional categories and understand the dimension of the activities that the subjects investigated carried out in that context, and the economic and cultural exchanges that would be involved in this.

The methodological path intersects with the collection of signatures in civil records, given that one of the columns of the spreadsheets used to construct the data was used to fill in the individuals' professions. For the level of professions, the time frame corresponds to the beginning of civil registration in each of the locations, and the end is the end of

December 1921. The possibility of relating the world of work to literacy rates is a relevant point of the investigation.

At some times, generally in the early years of civil registration in some colonies, the profession is not listed, so when it was not specified, the information for this measurement was discarded. After obtaining all the information from each colony, a table was created, using the same spreadsheets used to collect data from the location, with the following columns: professions, level, number of people who signed, total number of individuals and percentage.

In the first column, we filled in all the professions that were declared by each of the individuals. In the second collection of the table, with regard to level, we tried to follow the idea of Magalhães (1994). When creating the levels, the separation occurred by, namely, level 4: professions that require specific training: doctors, lawyers; level 3: traders, property owners, public employees; Level 2: carpenter, shoemaker, sawyer, blacksmith, tanner, barber; Level 1: farmers/farmers, domestic workers.

The planning was carried out considering: Level 1 – professions that do not necessarily require reading and writing skills to perform their duties; Level 2 – manual and physical work; Level 3 – professions that require a certain amount of reading and writing skills to perform their duties; Level 4 – professions that require study and that would use reading and writing skills in their daily lives, and would be filled out by literate individuals. With the scale produced, column 2 was filled out according to the level that each profession fell into.

For column 3, we separated the number of people in the profession who signed the register and then, for column 4, we filled out how many people in the profession there were in the information collected, obtaining, in column 5, the total percentage of signatures for each profession. This production occurred separately in each of the colonies and was analyzed so that the level of profession was maintained in all. For your information, if they were combined, we would obtain information related to 84 professions²². In the end, the percentages of each profession were grouped into levels and the average was calculated according to the level of each colony, obtaining the result for the final construction, which includes the information of all the colonies analyzed, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Levels by the profession that signed

Location	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4 ²³
Caxias	76,36%	93,42%	99,73%	100%
Bento Gonçalves	73,90%	97,81%	99,47%	100%
Antônio Prado	81,70%	97,04%	99,25%	100%
Nova Trento	62,94 %	96,15 %	98,91%	100%
Garibaldi	83,38%	99,44%	97,80%	100%

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

The results show how much professions are related to the percentage of subscribers, with those with the lowest percentage of subscribers also being those that do not, in theory, require writing practices for their daily work. This information, when linked to other sources, allows for a detailed discussion of these issues.

Another important aspect that can be explored is the issue of sex²⁴. In the context of the investigation, the difference perceived in the movement of documents was significant. Men

²² The professions that were present in all locations were: farmer, tailor, carpenter, tanner, domestic worker, blacksmith, tinsmith, farmer, merchant, goldsmith, bricklayer, teacher, shoemaker and saddler.

²³ The sample group at level 4 is smaller in number of individuals; most immigrants and their children are at level 1 or 2.

²⁴ The use of the term “sex” comes from the source itself; we do not enter into the discussion of gender.

signed with a very frequent frequency, to the detriment of women. The evidence of the percentages invites us to think, contextualize and discuss the marks of time. The construction and procedures for the separation by gender began after completing the construction of the literacy rate and the separation of the initial evidence. We were attentive due to the work of Bernardi (2020) and Bernardi and Luchese (2020), when looking at women's education, since measuring by marriage has the advantage of allowing this analysis (CIPOLLA, 2012). In these works, we found that there was a disparity in relation to the percentage of women and men. When the construction was finished, we reflected on the separation by sex to see what the data would indicate to us.

In this sense, Perrot (2005) showed the importance of statistics when it comes to women's history, explaining that “another example of opacity, more contemporary: the statistics. They are mostly asexual [...]” (PERROT, 2005, p. 11). In fact, most of the time, women are not included in the census, and the numbers refer to measurements produced with information from men and/or that would “reflect” society, but which, in fact, do not include them, since they come from sources only from men.

For the procedures, with the discrimination of sex, from the comparison of the column, whether the individual signed or not, we were able to generate the total percentages of signatures in each location. Afterwards, we produced Table 4, in which we present each of the locations and the percentages for the group of men and women.

Table 4 - Differences in signatures between the sexes (up to 1921): literate

Location	Male	Female
Caxias	80,29%	67,25%
Nova Trento	76,81%	60,86%
Antônio Prado	73,99%	52,46%
Garibaldi	74,26%	50,00%
Bento Gonçalves	80,85%	66,59%

Source: Prepared by the authors (2023).

The result shows that there is a greater margin of male subscribers, corresponding to a difference of 10 to 20%. This data makes it possible to think about information about women and writing practices, in addition to analyzing the context, society, execution of activities and access to schooling, or not, evidence that can also compose relevant information for thinking about the schooling process. Producing meaning to the evidence prepared with and from the analysis of civil marriage records is powerful, to the extent that, according to Albuquerque Júnior (2019, p. 92), “meaning is produced in the encounter between the message, the information, the data recorded in the body of the document and the concepts, notions, ways of thinking, perceiving, judging, notions and preconceptions brought by the reader” and by the historian in the composition of their narrative.

Final considerations

This study presented the methodological report of the production of literacy rates based on signatures obtained from civil registries in the localities of Antônio Prado, Caxias, Garibaldi, Nova Trento and Bento Gonçalves, belonging to the Italian Colonial Region of Rio Grande do Sul (RCI/RS), with the time frame from 1875 to 1920.

This study allowed us to describe the step-by-step production of literacy rates. To begin, we discussed how signatures were used outside of academia, then went on to the genealogy of research developed and theorists who support or question the use of this source, followed by the regulation of civil registries and then outlined the cuts, the choices made, the construction and the step-by-step

reading and analysis of the data from the documents. Afterwards, we reported on each production of evidence, such as the decades of birth, the levels of professions and the separation by sex.

In this study, we did not intend to analyze the data obtained, also because the detailed report of the methodological process of production and its analysis concerns another stage of the study, not related to this research. Each of the major themes (decades, professions and genders) allows for future discussion with other sources to understand the education of the sample group analyzed. Although these data continue to be indicators, they make up a relevant selection of sources that help in the analysis of the group and the period.

The possibility of using civil marriage records between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century represents a very important empirical set of documents for studies on the History of Education. The possibility of thinking of literacy rates as “macroscopic, composite cultural indicators that do not exactly measure either the diffusion of the ability to write, more restricted than the numbers indicate, or reading, which is more extensive”, as Chartier (1991, p. 114) found, is a fruitful path nonetheless. Cross-referencing evidence constructed with and from civil marriage records allows us to perform relevant analyses and cross-referencing, especially when combined with other sets of documents.

In historiographical work, this operation broadens investigative paths and allows us to try out some perspectives on little-explored gaps in terms of writing and the cultural practices that surround it. In this case, it is not an exaggeration to say that the historian's job is to “inform their life partners [...] that something has happened. But, above all, he is someone who touches them, mobilizes them, and takes them out of apathy through empathy with humans of all times. The historian is someone who gives and gives himself to/to the past” (ALBUQUERQUE JÚNIOR, 2019, p. 209), and thus invites us to think about today *with and from* yesterday.

By reflecting methodologically about the set of documents on civil marriage records, in a migratory context, between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, we hope that this contribution will be an invitation for other researchers to pay attention and explain in detail the paths taken in their documentary research, in addition to highlighting that there are many possibilities for mobilization regarding the use of signatures as evidence for the investigation of processes of education, literacy and the history of writing.

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