

THE MOBRL (BRAZILIAN LITERACY MOVEMENT) IN THE MUNICIPALITY  
OF LONDRINA (1970–1983)

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*EL MOBRL (MOVIMIENTO BRASILEÑO DE ALFABETIZACIÓN) EN EL  
MUNICIPIO DE LONDRINA (1970–1983)*



Tainã Aparecida Teixeira da SILVA  
e-mail: taina.teixeira@uel.br



Tony HONORATO  
e-mail: tonyhonoratu@gmail.com



Carolina MARTIN  
e-mail: caromartin@uol.com.br

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**ABSTRACT:** The focus of this article lies in the analysis of the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL) in the context of the municipality of Londrina during the period from 1970 to 1983. This national program for the literacy of youth and adults was implemented during the Civil-Military Dictatorship period, which spanned from 1967 to 1985. Thus, the objective is to analyze the implementation and development of MOBRAL in Londrina (1970-1983), aiming to understand how it was organized in different municipal spaces. The methodological procedures are based on bibliographic research and documentary analysis of legislation and sources available at the Londrina School Museum (MEL), the latter of which delimited the temporal scope. The results reveal that municipalities were the main protagonists of MOBRAL. In Londrina, on the one hand, it is undeniable that many people were given an opportunity for schooling; on the other hand, there were obstacles in organization, planning, human and didactic resources, financing, and infrastructure, especially in peripheral and rural areas.

**KEYWORDS:** Youth and Adult Education. Mobral. Municipality of Londrina.

**RESUMO:** *O foco deste artigo reside na análise do Movimento Brasileiro de Alfabetização (MOBRAL) no contexto do município de Londrina durante o período de 1970 a 1983. Esse programa nacional de alfabetização de jovens e adultos foi implementado durante o período da Ditadura Civil-Militar, que abrangeu os anos de 1967 a 1985. Assim, o objetivo está em analisar a implantação e desenvolvimento do Mobral em Londrina (1970-1983), com o intuito de compreender como foi organizado nos diferentes espaços municipais. Os procedimentos metodológicos se baseiam em pesquisa bibliográfica e análise documental de legislações e fontes disponíveis no Museu Escolar de Londrina (MEL), estas últimas, por sua vez, delimitaram o recorte temporal. Os resultados revelam que os municípios foram os grandes protagonistas do Mobral. Em Londrina, por um lado, é inegável que foi dada uma oportunidade de escolarização a muitas pessoas, por outro lado, houve obstáculos na organização, planejamento, recursos humanos e didáticos, financiamento e infraestrutura, principalmente nas periferias e áreas rurais.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Educação de Jovens e Adultos. Mobral. Município de Londrina.*

**RESUMEN:** *El objeto de este artículo es el Mobral (Movimiento Brasileño de Alfabetización) en el municipio de Londrina, de 1970 a 1983. Esta política nacional de alfabetización de jóvenes y adultos fue implementada por la Dictadura Cívico Militar, entre 1967 y 1985. Así, el El objetivo es analizar la implementación y desarrollo del Mobral en Londrina (1970-1983), con el objetivo de comprender cómo se organizó en diferentes espacios municipales. Los procedimientos metodológicos se basan en la investigación bibliográfica y el análisis documental de la legislación y de las fuentes disponibles en el Museu Escolar de Londrina (MEL), este último, a su vez, delimitó el marco temporal. Los resultados revelan que los municipios fueron los principales protagonistas de Mobral. En Londrina, por un lado, es innegable que muchas personas tuvieron la oportunidad de estudiar, por otro lado, hubo obstáculos en la organización, planificación, recursos humanos y docentes, financiamiento e infraestructura, especialmente en las afueras y en las zonas rurales.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos. Mobral. Municipio de Londrina.*

## Introduction

The central theme of this article is the MOBRAL (Brazilian Literacy Movement) in the municipality of Londrina, located in the northern state of Paraná, from 1970 to 1983. MOBRAL was a literacy and adult education program that emerged in Brazil in 1967 during the period of the Civil-Military Dictatorship. Its primary mission was to tackle the alarming rate of illiteracy plaguing the country by providing millions of Brazilians access to primary education.

Thus, the scope of the research is the analysis of the implementation and development of MOBRAL in Londrina (1970-1983), aiming to understand how it was organized in different municipal, urban, and rural spaces. The temporal scope covers the period in which documents on this educational policy were found in the Londrina School Museum (MEL). The methodological procedures are based on documentary analysis and bibliographical research, from Luca's historical perspective (2021), which suggests that by examining the past, we can better understand human constructs critically, enabling us to grasp social formation, political structures, ideologies, and other essential aspects of education history.

The historical documents used as sources are located in the Londrina School Museum (MEL) collection, which encompasses pedagogical documentation preserved over at least five decades by the bodies responsible for education in Londrina. There is a diversity of document typologies: letters, circulars, class diaries, visit reports, photographs, and projects, among others. This research relied on this plurality of sources to focus on the MOBRAL theme.

It is assumed that the history of education in Brazil is a multifaceted and complex field, where different periods and educational programs, such as MOBRAL, played varied roles. Thus, this article will first address an overview of MOBRAL in the country, followed by a discussion of its particularities in Londrina.

## MOBRAL – Brazilian Literacy Movement

With the Civil-Military Coup, which began in 1964 and lasted until 1985, many educational projects were limited or prohibited, such as the methodologies and proposals of Paulo Freire, for not aligning with the prevailing ideologies, while new actions emerged as a tool for homogenizing values and thoughts, in a context of dissemination of the guidelines of the military government, which did not allow divergence of opinions (Haddad; Di Pierro, 1987, 2000).

In this scenario, one of the educational actions of the military was the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL), created by Law No. 5,379, of December 15, 1967, and instituted by Decree No. 62,455, of March 22, 1968, as the MOBRAL Foundation, which would be under the Ministry of Education and Culture and would have administrative and financial autonomy. Its funding came from state-owned companies, private entities, proceeds from sports lotteries, and income tax. The proposal was to eradicate illiteracy in 10 years and focused on the age group from 15 to 35 years old. This educational program was abolished by Decree No. 91,980, of November 25, 1985 (Brasil, 1967, 1968, 1985).

The focus was on learning reading, writing, and arithmetic, with the aim of enabling students to integrate into society after completion, and improving the quality of life of this segment of the population. The methodological issue focused on mass solutions and rationalization of means, which did not consider the regional and individual particularities of the students. The model raised criticisms from many educators, among them Paulo Freire (1994), who considered MOBRAL as a strategy to weaken the discourse and practice of popular education, for not addressing the critical understanding of the world. As Hilsdorf (2003) and Paiva (1987) state, Popular Education and Adult Education should be understood as processes of collective knowledge construction, which value experience and active student participation.

In the implementation process, three government levels were involved: central administration, state coordination, and municipal commission. Agreements were made with municipal commissions to provide teaching materials, technical guidance, and resources for the payment of literacy educators. Municipalities were required to mobilize volunteers, illiterate individuals, and literacy educators, and provide spaces for classes in the evening, such as schools, churches, unions, and temples, with a duration of five months for functional literacy and an additional 12 months of integrated education. This model compromised the effectiveness of the actions, due to disparities among the different regions of the country, mainly problems with the infrastructure of the spaces for classes and trained human resources (Di Pierro, 1992).

In Londrina, within the political and social context of the time, MOBRAL highlighted the complexities of the educational and social issues in the region, allowing us to understand, within a confined space, some of the challenges faced in the attempt to eradicate illiteracy in Brazil.

## MOBRAL in Londrina (1970-1983)

Londrina is located in the northern region of the state of Paraná, colonized between the years 1920 and 1930, mainly by European and Asian immigrants and private companies, which purchased land from the state government. It was founded in 1930 and elevated to a municipality by State Decree No. 2,519, dated December 3, 1934 (Arias Neto, 2008). Initially, due to its large territorial extension, the economy was based on agriculture, mainly coffee farming. In the 1950s, an urbanization process and population increase began, which experienced further growth in the following decades, gradually promoting rural exodus and new economic niches such as industry, services, and commerce. In the 1970s and 1980s, this gradual change in the municipality's profile culminated in social, infrastructure, and educational problems (Cainelli, 1994; Capelo, 2013).

Regarding the implementation of MOBRAL in the municipality, sources from the School Museum of Londrina (MEL) reveal records spanning the period between 1970 and 1983. These records include documents from the years 1973 and 1974 related to the financing and initiatives for implementing MOBRAL, as well as 102 Visit Reports prepared to supervise and monitor activities in schools and the progress of MOBRAL actions during the mentioned period. Also examined are the profiles of MOBRAL teachers in 1973 and aspects of their knowledge and teaching practices in 1973. It is important to note that while these documents do not capture all MOBRAL-related actions in Londrina, they provide clues that allow for an overview of what occurred.

Regarding the issue of the relationship between MOBRAL and the Brazilian public administration, Castro (1974, p. 3, our translation) highlights that "[...] it is an organization that decentralizes many of its activities and decisions, while maintaining an excellent communication system with all its branches throughout the country", as at the time it was "[...] the only nationwide organization that maintains a personnel network reaching virtually all Brazilian municipalities". This intragovernmental relationship and the actions for which municipalities were responsible can be glimpsed in the description of the documents presented below.

At the MEL, there are documents dated 1973 that reveal aspects of the relationship between different levels of government and the financing of MOBRAL. A circular dated January 24 issued by the Executive Secretary of the MOBRAL Foundation, addressed to mayors, informs about a favorable opinion from the Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) and a

minister of state regarding the allocation of resources from the Municipal Participation Fund (FPM) to Education for Adolescents and Adults (literacy and integrated education), provided that the executive branch continued to prioritize primary education.

In the same year, a cooperation agreement was established between the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL) and the Municipal Government of Londrina (PR), mediated by the State Coordinator of MOBRAL. It aimed at implementing the Integrated Education program, equivalent to the first four grades of primary education, for those who dropped out of school or did not have adequate schooling, characterized by suppletion and accelerated dynamics. It was projected to serve two thousand students and would have a duration of two years, with the possibility of termination by mutual agreement or failure to fulfill obligations. However, it left the commitment made by both parties ambiguous, without providing specific details.

In light of these agreements, the municipal executive held a meeting of the Municipal MOBRAL Commission on February 5, 1973. Letters were sent to radio and television stations and newspapers to garner community support, enabling the collection of financial contributions from individuals and companies. Subsequently, to meet pedagogical needs, three meetings and a two-day training session were held.

The Visit Reports were kept and organized by the Department of Education and Social Assistance of Londrina (DEPAS), sorted into folders in alphabetical order with the names of teachers, personal and professional documents, photos, registration forms, dropout and performance records, course history, and evaluations. The visits were supervised by professionals from the department. Between 1970 and 1983, they contain relevant information about actions related to MOBRAL, including examinations, infrastructure, organization of the environment, actions and behavior of students and teachers, number of students, subjects taught, extracurricular courses and lectures, school events and parties, topics covered, and teaching methodologies.

It was possible to identify aspects directly related to teachers, such as punctuality in examinations, classroom presentation, organization and cleanliness of the environment, requests for administration-related books, updating of attendance lists, justification for delays in some subjects, correction of students' notebooks, monitoring of bathroom breaks, economical use of school supplies, classroom dynamics, and encouragement of student behavioral attitudes. Regarding students, care for their notebooks was observed.

As an extracurricular activity, I completed a course by the National Service of Commerce (SENAC) on human relations and tractor driving, as well as lectures on the importance of attendance, punctuality, and participation in work activities. The organization of events and other cultural activities such as the June Festival, Independence Week, Folklore Festival, Movie Day, puppet theater, reading of chronicles, and visits to the Municipal Library were actions linked to the MOBRAL Cultural program, which, according to Melo, Montalvão Neto, and Santana (2022), aimed to arouse students' interest in studies and reduce dropout rates.

It is considered noteworthy to observe the problems and challenges encountered in MOBRAL in Londrina. In the year 1970, there is a report indicating that classes had a large number of students, which made the teacher's work difficult. In a report dated September 1974, activities such as film screenings and theater were identified, along with 110 visits to MOBRAL service stations. In 1977, parents who had nowhere to leave their children during class hours reported difficulties. In the following year, 1978, problems related to the financial hardship of some students emerged, such as those who could not afford school supplies, along with requests from teachers and students for police patrols or a security guard. Throughout this period, complaints were registered regarding infrastructure, especially concerning the lack of lighting, given that most classes took place at night.

This set of documents formed by the Visit Reports corroborates what Martins and Guerra (2018) emphasize about the MOBRAL guidelines, which prioritized technical and instrumental aspects and paid little attention to pedagogical issues. They highlight that "It draws attention to a large number of indicators focused on extensive rationalization of work and the formation of a technical body, responsible for the full and perfect functioning of the institution" (p. 62, our translation), which is what DEPAS supervisors in Londrina were doing, according to the descriptions from the sources.

The profile of MOBRAL teachers in Londrina in 1973 differed according to location, with significant disparities between rural and urban areas. The level of education of the teachers and the differences within the municipal territory can be observed in Table 1. It is noted that in urban areas, all teachers had at least completed primary education, with the highest rates being for incomplete average education (59.38%) and completed normal education (15.60%). On the other hand, in rural areas, there were no teachers who completed normal or higher education, and the majority had only completed primary education (47.62%).

**Table 1** - Level of education of MOBRAL teachers in Londrina (1973)

Education Level	Urban	Rural
Incomplete Primary	0%	4,76%
Completed Primary	0%	47,62%
Incomplete 1st Cycle	9,38%	4,76%
Completed 1st Cycle	3,13%	19,05%
Incomplete 2nd Cycle	0%	4,76%
Completed 2nd Cycle	3,13%	4,76%
Incomplete Normal	59,38%	14,29%
Completed Normal	15,60%	0%
Incomplete Higher	9,38%	0%

Source: MEL Collection, List of Operational Posts, MOBRAL. Londrina, 1973. Authors' elaboration.

The data also reveal other characteristics of the total of 53 teachers registered in 1973, 32 (60.38%) were teachers from urban areas, while 11 (39.62%) worked in rural areas. Regarding gender, in urban areas, 93.75% of the teachers were female, while only 6.25% were male, and in rural areas, 71.43% of the teachers were female and 28.57% were male. However, the gratification value was established at Cr\$ 100.00 (one hundred cruzeiros) for all teachers, regardless of their level of education or location of work. Considering that the minimum wage in April 1973 was Cr\$ 268.80 (two hundred and sixty-eight cruzeiros and eighty centavos), and that with the adjustment in May of the same year it was raised to Cr\$ 312.00 (three hundred and twelve cruzeiros), this means that in April the teacher's salary was approximately 168.80% below the minimum wage, and in May it was 212% below.

In addition to teachers, MOBRAL had monitors, who were also students and provided additional support to their colleagues. However, in the sources, only a few cards with personal information were found, such as: the location of the post, date of the start of classes, student's name, date of birth, gender, marital status, address, neighborhood, profession, workplace, other service that they may perform, number of children, how many children study, how many children work, religion, and space for any observations.

When comparing this profile of MOBRAL teachers in Londrina, especially in rural areas, with the general guidelines of this public policy, it is evident that the teachers would hardly have the capacity to meet the goals. The discourse of the MOBRAL Foundation (Brazil, 1978) was that the literacy teacher should adopt the Integrated Education Program (PEI), which



consisted of: being open to dialogue and discussing everyday issues to value the students' life reality; using the syllabic method, starting from generating words; encouraging students to feel capable of learning and communicating; valuing group work; and introducing new technologies in classes.

It is worth noting that in the sources consulted, no form of training was found that would allow achieving these objectives. As pointed out by Corrêa (1979), a member of the MOBRAL Foundation in the federal government, there was a guidance script for the literacy teacher, in a simple and accessible language, which was considered the main means of training, as it presented the theorization of adult education and the objectives to be followed.

The MOBRAL Foundation provided teachers with a "Teacher's Manual," according to the areas to be worked on: mathematics, communication and expression, social integration, physical and biological sciences, and education for work. These manuals contained the objectives that the teacher should achieve with their students in the classroom (Brazil, 1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1978). The comparison between the Teacher's Manuals and the Course Plan imposed on MOBRAL teachers in Londrina, presented below, demonstrates that there is coherence and adequacy between them. This demonstrates that in this regard, this public policy was being implemented in accordance with national general guidelines.

Among the documents at the MEL, there is a Course Plan, with the observation that it was still incomplete, covering seven themes, with fourteen topics each: a) Information for Professional Training; b) Mathematics; c) Mother Tongue; d) Social Studies; e) Moral and Civic Education; f) Physical and Biological Sciences; g) Hygiene and Health. The theme "Information for Professional Training" focuses on the job market and discusses the structure of a home, the importance of medicine, industrial processes, monetary circulation, and agriculture. "Mathematics" deals with basic concepts such as arithmetic, geometry, algebra, and fundamental operations, presenting these concepts in a simplified manner, to be complemented by supplementary material. The theme "Mother Tongue" addresses the Portuguese language, such as phonetics, reading aloud, word formation, writing, dictation, consonants, phrases, syllables, singular and plural, feminine and masculine, all contextualized in everyday situations.

"Social Studies" covers a range of topics related to the development of humanity in the sciences, health, environment, and communication. The theme "Moral and Civic Education" explores subjects related to ethics and moral values, such as the importance of family, rights, duties, and religion. This theme has a strong influence on the values in force at the time, discussing the national industry, aviation history, cooperation among ants, personal hygiene,

obtaining financial resources, the 'Hora do Brasil,' 'Projeto Minerva,' homeland, and community.

The theme "Physical and Biological Sciences" presents efficiency in productive processes, mental and physical hygiene, different types of diseases, vaccination, money, health, and nutrition. Lastly, "Hygiene and Health" addresses the importance of healthy personal and household habits, such as wearing shoes, air and water, food purification, and diseases derived from pollution and insects. The course plan guided the teacher on the sequence of teaching, but specific materials were not mentioned in the documents; there was also a mention of what should be worked on in the 'reinforcement exercises' of mathematics and Portuguese language subjects.

MOBRAL also offered "Artistic Education" classes once a week, in a classroom dedicated to this purpose; the works included handicrafts, painting, flowers, picture frames, dolls, and creating ashtrays from cans, hangers, mechanical pencils, towels, and keys. These classes were supported and sponsored by local companies. Another action in the art field was an initiative of the First National Meeting of Amateur and University Theater Directors, held at the State University of Londrina (UEL), which requested support from the National Coordination of the Brazilian Literacy Movement in April 1973 for the implementation of Amateur and University Theater in MOBRAL; however, there is no information about the outcome.

### **Final considerations**

This survey of documentation available in the collection of the School Museum of Londrina (MEL), between 1970 and 1983, regarding the implementation and development of MOBRAL in the municipality, allows us to understand the history of educational policies and individuals, in the process of evolving events, as is the case with combating illiteracy, which remains a problem in the 21st century.

Although it was a federally funded educational program, practically all responsibility for its implementation, and consequently for its success or failure, fell on municipal governments. The lack of clear guidance on the allocation of municipal resources resulted, in many cases, in waste or insufficient funds to meet the educational needs of young people and adults. It is considered that any educational process, regardless of the target audience or stage of education, requires, at a minimum, a focus on aspects of teacher training and qualification,

as well as infrastructure. In the specific case of Londrina, in the state of Paraná, it is observed that the municipality struggled to deal with such issues while maintaining its education network and meeting other state and federal demands.

The documents used in this research reveal that a series of achievements and challenges marked the implementation of MOBRAL in Londrina. On the one hand, the program offered an opportunity for many people who were illiterate and somewhat excluded from society, both in urban and rural areas. Even though it was not implemented under ideal ideological and didactic conditions, MOBRAL drew attention to the issue and mobilized volunteers, companies, and individuals to provide financial and logistical support.

On the other hand, there were obstacles in organization, planning, human and didactic resources, financing, and infrastructure. The main bottlenecks were in peripheral and rural areas, where the population had difficulty attending classes, either due to personal problems or infrastructure issues, such as lack of electricity, since teaching was in the evening. The documents found about practices and knowledge corroborate the criticisms that the materials and topics were outdated, extremely simplistic, with thematic fragmentation, and a noticeable lack of focus on practical skills.

The contribution of this article to the history of education lies in highlighting the protagonism of municipalities, a federated entity often overlooked in public policy research, to the detriment of state and federal governments, as pointed out by Gonçalves Neto, Carvalho (2015), and Souza (2015). Regarding MOBRAL, as emphasized by Souza (2016):

The Municipal Commissions are the basic units of action of MOBRAL. They allowed for the decentralization and radiation of actions. The success of the work developed by these commissions was directly linked to their ability to stimulate the community to participate in MOBRAL programs, mobilize resources - human, material, and financial - and use them appropriately and creatively. In accordance with these parameters, they were supervised and held accountable by the state oversight (Souza, 2016, p. 79, our translation).

As highlighted earlier, this research is based on documents from the MEL collection, which allowed for glimpsing some of MOBRAL's actions in Londrina. It is considered that to establish a comprehensive framework, future research comparing and contrasting with other sources is necessary. From the same perspective, further investigations would be required to understand how the municipalities in the state of Paraná dealt with the complexities of MOBRAL, as the literature review revealed few studies in this regard.

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## About the Authors

### Tainã Aparecida Teixeira da SILVA

State University of Londrina (UEL), Londrina – PR – Brazil. Graduated in Pedagogy from the University of Londrina. Member of the Civilizing Processes Research Group - GPROC/CNPq. Researcher at the School Museum of Londrina.

### Tony HONORATO

State University of Londrina (UEL), Londrina – PR – Brazil. Doctoral degree in Education. Professor at the Department of Education and the Graduate Program in Education at the University of Londrina. Productivity Scholarship in Research - PQ/CNPq.

### Carolina MARTIN

State University of Londrina (UEL), Londrina – PR – Brazil. Doctoral degree in Education. Postdoctoral fellow sponsored by CNPq in the Graduate Program in Education at the University of Londrina.

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