

Reading and writing manuals for elementary education: the case of Spain (1900-1905)¹

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Abstract

In this article, we examined two reading and writing manuals adopted in elementary schools in Spain in the years 1900 and 1905: *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* (New Reading Treaty) e *Rayas: novísimo método de la Lectura por la Escritura* (Stripes: newest method of reading by writing). The historical-documentary research was carried out at the Archivo General de la Administración in Alcalá de Henares, which holds most of the documentation relating to the 20th century. The objective of the study is to examine how the two manuals were structured from a material and content point of view with the aim of teaching reading and writing. On the one hand, we observed notions associated with the traditional method of teaching reading and writing. On the other hand, we observed changes arising from the New School movement, particularly regarding greater autonomy and creativity on the part of children. The theoretical approach is anchored in studies in the field of Cultural History (Chartier, 1998, 2010) and History of Education (Choppin, 2002, 2004; Escolano, 2016). The results achieved indicate that the manuals are devices that point methods used in the period for learning to read and write.

Keywords: Formal education. Manuals. Reading and writing learning. The first decade of the 20th century.

Manuais de leitura e de escrita para o ensino primário: o caso da Espanha (1900-1905)

Resumo

Neste artigo, examinam-se dois manuais de leitura e de escrita adotados nas escolas primárias da Espanha nos anos de 1900 e 1905: *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* e *Rayas: novísimo método de la Lectura por la Escritura*. A pesquisa histórico-documental foi realizada no Archivo General de la Administración em Alcalá de Henares que mantém a maioria da documentação relativa ao século

XX. O objetivo do estudo consiste em examinar como os dois manuais se estruturavam do ponto de vista material e de conteúdo com a finalidade de ensinar a ler e a escrever. Por um lado, observaram-se noções associadas ao método tradicional de se ensinar a ler e a escrever. Por outro, notaram-se mudanças oriundas do movimento da Escola Nova relativas, em especial, à autonomia e à criatividade mais amplas por parte das crianças. A abordagem teórica ancora-se em estudos no campo da História Cultural (Chartier, 1998, 2010) e da História da Educação (Choppin, 2002, 2004; Escolano, 2016). Os resultados alcançados indicam que os manuais são dispositivos que apontam métodos utilizados no período para a aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita. Palavras-chave: Educação formal. Manuais. Aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita. Primeira década do século XX.

Manuales de lectura y escritura para la educación primaria: el caso de España (1900-1905)

Resumen

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En este artículo, se examinan dos manuales de lectura y escritura adoptados en las escuelas primarias de España en los años 1900 y 1905: *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura y Rayas: novísimo método de la lectura por la Escritura*. La investigación histórica y documental se realizó en el Archivo General de la Administración en Alcalá de Henares, que conserva la mayor parte de la documentación relativa al siglo XX. El objetivo del estudio es examinar cómo se estructuraron los dos manuales desde el punto de vista material y de contenidos con el objetivo de enseñar a leer y escribir. Por un lado, se observaron nociones asociadas al método tradicional de enseñanza de la lectura y la escritura. Por otro lado, se notaron cambios derivados del movimiento Escola Nova, particularmente en lo que respecta a una mayor autonomía y creatividad por parte de los niños. El enfoque teórico está anclado en estudios en el campo de la Historia Cultural (Chartier, 1998, 2010) y de la Historia de la Educación (Choppin, 2002, 2004; Escolano, 2016). Los resultados alcanzados indican que los manuales son dispositivos que señalan métodos utilizados en el periodo para el aprendizaje de la lectura y de la escritura.

Palabras claves: Educación formal. Manuales. El aprendizaje de la lectura y de la escritura. La primera década del siglo XX.

Introduction

Studies on manualistics (Escolano, 2016) have expanded considerably among researchers in the field of the History of Education². With regard to the research centers dedicated to this branch of knowledge in Europe and Latin America, it is important to highlight, on the one hand, the pioneering efforts in Germany at the end of the Second World War, maintained today by the Georg-Eckert-Institut, and in Spain, from the successful experience of the Centro de Investigación Manuales Escolares (Manes) [School Manuals Research Center] and the Centro Internacional de la Cultura Escolar (CEINCE) [International Centre for School Culture]. On the other hand, it is worth noting the efforts made in Latin America, especially in Argentina, through the program of Historia Social de la Enseñanza de la lectura y la escrita en Argentina (HISTELEA) [Social History of the Teaching of Reading and Writing in Argentina], as well as in Brazil, in the experience of the school's manuals storage center, Banco de dados Livros Escolares Brasileiros (Livres) [Brazilian School Books Database], located at the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo (FEUSP).

Despite the difficulties of preservation, given that this material is doomed to be discarded after use, as Choppin (2002, 2004) warns, this teaching material, when well preserved, allows the researcher to observe evidence of teaching methods, as well as traces of school culture (Julia, 2001) relating to the period examined. Along these analytical lines, this study examines two school's manuals for teaching reading and writing for elementary school in Spain in the first decade of the 20th century. In order to carry out the examination, we consulted the Education fund, Public Instruction series, located at the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA) [General Archive of the Administration] in Alcalá de Henares.

The article is organized as follows: introduction; 1 - elementary school school's manuals in the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA): access to documentary sources; 2 - *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* (Alvaro y Miranzo, 1900) [A Very New Reading Treaty] and 3 - *Rayas: novísimo método de la Lectura por la Escritura* (Rodríguez Álvarez, 1905) [Strokes, a very new method of reading by writing], followed by some final considerations.

Elementary school manuals in the Archivo General de la Administración (AGA): access to documentary sources

4 The Archivo General de La Administración (AGA) is, of the eight Spanish national archives, the one that preserves the most recent historical memory, since its collections mainly refer to the 20th century and, especially, to its second half, although it also keeps a significant volume of collections relating to the second half of the 19th century. It is considered to be one of the most extensive State archives, as it preserves documentation on architecture, town planning, public works, education, culture, tourism, the economy, the treasury and justice, relating to contemporary Spanish society³. It periodically receives documents from the various bodies of the General Administration of the State, when they are no longer needed for daily management in the offices. Located in Puerta de Agudores, Alcalá de Henares, Spain, it receives researchers from different locations daily. The material to be examined is stored in numbered, well-preserved boxes, which must be requested for consultation in the morning. The digitization of sources is allowed up to a limit of sixty images per day. It is important to recognize that the organization adopted by the team responsible for the archive considerably favors access to the sources and has contributed to the collection of a significant mass of documents within the limits of this research.

With the aim of consulting and organizing the "school manuals for teaching reading and writing" series, we examined the fund 05, "Educación (Instrucción pública)" [Education (Public Instruction)], where we focused on selecting and examining the subseries: "Autorización de obras de textos, Expediente de libros declarados útiles para la 1ª enseñanza" (authorization of text works, file of books declared useful for 1st teaching), noting the following entries: book included, book missing, province, location, year and notes. In the specific files, the following entries were noted: title, year, author, publisher, place, favorable resolution, unfavorable resolution, favorable resolution with censored passages.

As we read in the documentation, the Council of Public Instruction – meeting in second convocation on April 28, 1906, with the presence of Mr. Labra, Mr. Santoyo, Mr. Govizard and Mr. Bejanorro – issued a favorable opinion on nine books, considering them useful to serve as texts in elementary schools and related to different disciplines: "1 - O Ortología clásica de

la Lengua Castellana (Classical Orthology of the Spanish Language); 2 - El Eléctrico, rapidísimo método de lectura (The Electric, a very fast reading method); 3 - El Consultor Aritmético (The Arithmetic Consultant); 4 - Silabario sistemático de la lengua castellana (Systematic syllabary of the Spanish language); 5 - El niño será electricista (The child will be an electrician); 6 - Lecciones prácticas de Contabilidad por partida doble (Practical Lessons in Double-Entry Bookkeeping); 7 - Mapas en relieve de América en general, de la América del Sur y de la provincia de Viscaya (Relief maps of America in general, of South America and of the province of Viscaya); 8 - Hojas sueltas de un Catecismo españolista (Loose Sheets of a Spanish Catechism); 9 - Rayas, novísimo método de la lectura por la escritura (Strokes, a very new method of reading by writing)". The school manual *Rayas, novísimo método de la Lectura por la Escritura* (1905) is therefore the ninth book to appear on the list of books considered useful by the Council of Public Instruction for use in elementary schools in 1906.

As for the *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* (A Very New Reading Treaty), its approval to circulate in elementary school during the period can be found in the *Gaceta de Madrid* newspaper, number 61, of March 2, 1906, in the section Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes (Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts), Royal Order of February 12, 1906, p. 16. Among 44 authorized titles, dealing with various disciplines, the *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura*, by D. Francisco Alvaro y Miranzo (1900), containing 32 pages, is recorded as the sixth title to be distributed to elementary school in the provinces.

From the analysis of both documents, it can be concluded that the two books were approved for circulation in elementary school in the provinces of Spain during the period and must have influenced pedagogical practices relating to the teaching of reading and writing.

However, requests for books to be approved follow a strict rule, as they were always addressed to the "Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes" (Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts)⁴ on an appropriate form. In addition to the request from the publisher or author, two volumes of the book to be published in first or further editions must be included. For example, the following text:

Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes
Subsecretaría

Negociado de 1º Enseñanza

Expediente incorriendo em virtude de instancia suscrita por D. Carlos Valentin Carretero, autor del libro titulado 'Legislatura Escolar de España', solicitando se declare útil para que pueda servir de texto en las Escuelas Normales.

Provincia de Cuenca, 1906. De jefe: Se propone para este expediente o informe del Consejo de Instrucción Pública: aprobado. (Expediente de libros declarados útiles para la 1ª enseñanza, 1906).⁵

For a better understanding of the nature of the books published in the period, aimed at the "*primera enseñanza*" (first teaching) in Spain, on learning to read and write in particular, we consulted the work indicated above, *Legislación Escolar de España* (Spanish School Legislation), by Valentin Carretero y Serrano, from 1905.

The first chapter, which deals with this level of education and school regulations, discusses the disciplines relating to "*primera enseñanza*" (first teaching), private or public, depending on the level of the schools, in which they take place: Christian Doctrine and Notions of Sacred History; Spanish Language (Reading, Writing and Grammar), Arithmetic, Geography and History, Rudiments of Law, Notions of Geometry, Notions of Physical, Chemical and Natural Sciences, Notions of Hygiene and Human Physiology, Drawing, Singing, Manual Work and Bodily Exercises. It should also be noted that each of the three grades in which this level of education was organized, of *párvulos*⁶, "*elemental y superior*" (elementary and higher education), included all the disciplines indicated, differing only in the breadth of the syllabus, the pedagogical nature and the duration of the proposed exercises. The extent and distribution of disciplines at each level of education are regulated by the legislation, such as articles 2, 3 and 4 of the Royal Decree of October 26, 1901⁷, not yet published at the time of circulation of this work.

In order to provide a better understanding of the methodology conveyed in reading school's manuals, the following topic examines the *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* (A Very Vew Reading Treaty), from 1900.

Novísimo Tratado de Lectura (1900)

As can be seen in the regulations, the teaching of reading and writing was based on the triangle of reading, writing and grammar, with only the level of difficulty varying in the three levels of education. It is not surprising, then, that the logic of the *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* for teaching reading was the same: graduated elements ranging from the simplest to the most complex register. At least two dimensions deserve attention: the material elements and the content of the work. Roger Chartier (1998; 2010), when operating with the concept he calls *reading protocols*, warns of methodological care when examining a work in a long-term approach. On the one hand, it is the result of the author's intervention, inserting content, paragraphs and titles. On the other, it results from the interference of the publisher and typographers in defining the cover and typefaces, among other devices. In other words, these are the *reading protocols*, elements that considerably interfere in the reader's appropriation of the text's meaning. They therefore have a marked influence on the production of meanings for what is read and how it is read. We can observe at the cover of the *Tratado* in the figure below.

Figure 1 – *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura*

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Source: *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* (1900).

On the cover, you can see the title, the author's name and the elements relating to the edition. It emphasizes the superlative idea of a new treaty ("novísimo"), written by an authority on the subject: D. Francisco Álvaro y Miranzo, a professor at the Teacher's School, i.e. an institution that trains "maestros" (teachers) for elementary education. This signature should be read as a mark of legitimacy for the *Tratado*, since it is written by a teacher who teaches other teachers. The attribution of the word "*tratado*" is also noteworthy. According to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy: "from the Latin tractātus; 2 - document in which it appears, 3 - writing or discourse on a given subject" (s/p) our translation). In both meanings, the book is given the status of a document and a discourse, something higher than a simple compilation of letters and loose words. The book was printed in Madrid by Imprenta de Hernando y Compañía (Hernando & Company Printing House), which was also responsible for other didactic works, according to the documentation.

This is followed by a short preface written by the author and addressed to special readers, "*á mis queridos compañeros*" (to my dear comrades), the teachers. Álvaro y Miranzo (1900) presents the *Novísimo Tratado* in this part, highlighting some keys to interpretation: in 32 pages, containing 30 lessons, the division of content must be taken into account, highlighting the sound of the letters of the Spanish alphabet, the recording of Roman and handwritten letters printed in the usual size (which presupposes some familiarity with writing skills), lowercase alphabet, simple syllables. The second part records the uppercase alphabet, inverted syllables and some words. The third part records mixed syllables, some words and short texts.

At the end of each lesson, exercises are recorded to ensure that learning is verified. Finally, the author states that he is satisfied if he has contributed to the difficult "art of reading".

The logic attributed to the didactic material, which assumes a gradation of content, from the simplest to the most complex, with regard to the teaching of reading, deserves some additional reflection, according to the treatise examined. In the first lessons, after training to recognize the letters of the alphabet, students would be able to associate sounds with isolated letters. Learning the Spanish alphabetic-orthographic system would be the condition for acquiring the skill of reading, since the skill of writing was not the subject of the *Tratado*. These letters would then make up simple syllables and words,

always segmented, with a view to visualizing syllables, a key element in word formation, according to these epistemological assumptions.

From the point of view of didactic procedures, it is inferred that isolated letters and syllables are read aloud, in addition to memorizing the associations established between letter and sound, a method which, in the history of literacy, has traditionally been called "spelling" (Soares, 2016; Viñao, 1994): starting from the smallest unit – the letter, the phoneme – until reach words. Subsequently, as planned for the third part of the *Tratado*, short sentences are recorded, with an emphasis on simple, alternating and mixed syllables, but always segmented, taking into account the memorized sounds of the letters.

In addition, in terms of methodology, the individualized method would be adopted, following the development of each student, which would require an excessive amount of time, both for teaching and for assessing learning. Throughout the lessons, reading was planned under the supervision of the teacher, with repetition and memorization procedures whenever necessary.

As far as the *editorial reading* protocols are concerned, there is the last page dedicated to advertising other works by the author, a very common editorial strategy for selling didactic works with a similar content. In addition, the place of sale and the price are noted: "La presente obra se halla de venta en la librería de Hernado y Cia, Arenal 11, en la de D. Antonio Perez, Bolsa 9, y en las demás de España, al precio de 1 peseta la docena." (The present work is on sale in the bookshop of Hernado y Cia, Arenal 11, in that of D. Antonio Perez, Bolsa 9, and in the others in Spain, at the price of 1 peseta per dozen.)

As Chartier (1998, 2010) warns, *editorial reading protocols* not only inform readers, but, above all, they can lead to reading and legitimize the authorship of the text. In this case, Álvaro y Miranzo, who was also the Director of the Colegio de San Julian, not only wrote a work for teaching reading, but was also accredited with writing works in the fields of law, statistics and tachygraphy. In order to make the treatise even more effective, there would be metallic posters in high relief and in various colors, recording the contents of the work for even more effective teaching procedures in the classroom. Orders could be submitted to Compañia Ibérica Mercantil e Industrial (Iberian Mercantile and Industrial Company), located in Alcalá de Henares, 138, as well as to the main bookstores in Spain. For other details requested by

suppliers, the author could be consulted: D. F. Álvaro y Miranzo, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 2 – Advertisement of works by the author of the *Novísimo Tratado*

La presente obra se halla de venta en la librería de Hernando y C.^{ta}, Arenal, 11, en la de D. Antonio Pérez, Bolsa, 9, y en las demás de España, al precio de **una** peseta la docena.

OBRAS DEL MISMO AUTOR

Pesetas.

Diccionario Legislativo y Estadístico de primera enseñanza , declarado de texto para las Escuelas públicas y Normales por Real orden de 4 de Mayo de 1896. Consta de 480 páginas en 4.º.....	5
Vademécum del Maestro , declarado de texto para las Escuelas públicas y Normales por Real orden de 11 de Febrero de 1897. Consta de 200 páginas en 4.º... ..	1
Taquigrafía Cíclica , en colaboración con D. Victoriano Rodríguez. Consta de 112 páginas en 4.º, con 80 cuadros de ejercicios silábicos. Aprobada de texto para las Escuelas públicas y Normales de Maestros.	0,75

EN PREPARACIÓN.—Como compendio del presente *TRATADO*, estamos haciendo una gran tirada de carteles metálicos de una sola pieza, de alto relieve y á varios colores, que miden 0,50 metros de alto por 0,33 de ancho.

Los pedidos pueden hacerse á la Compañía Ibérica Mercantil é Industrial, Alcála, 138, y á las principales librerías de España, y para los demás pormenores que deseen nuestros favorecedores, á su autor D. F. Álvaro y Miranzo, Director del Colegio de San Julián de esta Corte, Fuentes, 13.

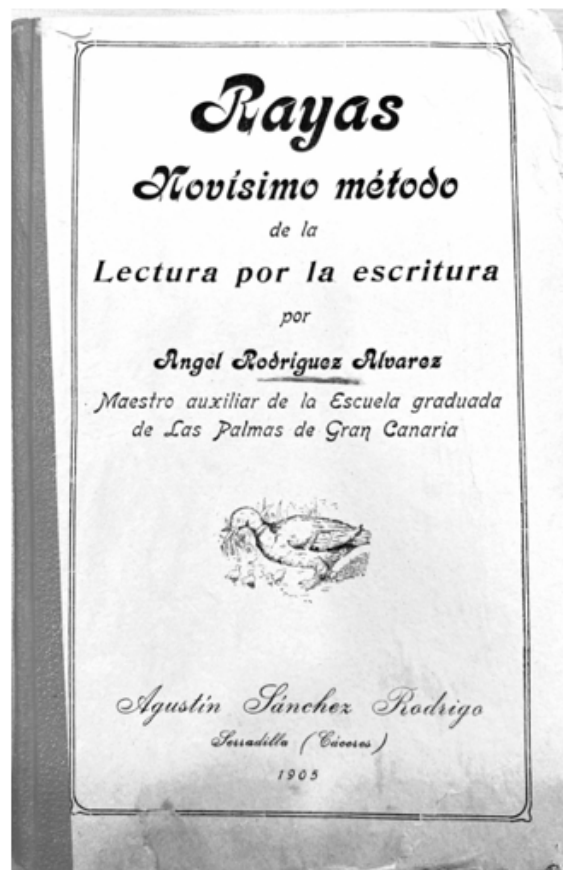
Source: Obras del mismo autor (1900) [Works by the same author].

Although the *Tratado* on reading was adopted in elementary schools in the Spanish provinces in 1905, a very new method of reading by writing was announced. This is the book *Rayas*, which is analyzed in the following topic.

Rayas: novísimo método de la Lectura por la Escritura (1905)

First of all, we should take a look at the cover of the book *Rayas: novísimo método de la Lectura por la Escritura* (Strokes, a very new method of reading by writing) because it is a *reading protocol* (Chartier, 1998, 2010) of a relevant editorial nature, with a view to understanding its subject matter and purposes, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 3 – Book cover *Rayas* (1905)



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Source: *Rayas Novísimo método de la lectura por la escritura* (1905).

Rayas is a manual whose primary premise is to combine reading and writing. It therefore differs from the presuppositions of the *Tratado* examined in

the previous topic in that it considers the acquisition of both skills throughout the learning process. On the cover, there are *reading protocols*, in the terms proposed by Chartier (1998, 2010), which can capture the reader's attention: *Rayas: um "novísimo método"* (a very new method), which emphasizes the superlative quality and authorship of an assistant professor at the Escuela Graduada de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Graduate School of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria): Angel Rodriguez Alvarez. By indicating the signature of a practicing teacher, it also expresses his practical knowledge of the disciplines required in the regulations that guided the programs of Spanish public and private elementary schools at the time: *Lengua Castellana (Lectura, Escritura, Gramática)* [Spanish Language (Reading, Writing, Grammar)] (Carretero y Serrano, 1905).

The book contains 144 lessons, without page numbers in the presentation of the content, with letters, words, syllables, texts and exercises accompanied by many pictures, such as the small picture seen on the illustrated cover. It was published and printed by Tipografía Serradillo (Serradillo Printing House), in Cáceres, in 1905.

12 According to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, the word "raya" derives from the Latin "radia", from the Latin "radius, rayo". The first meaning among the 14 mentioned draws attention to the title adopted in the manual: 1 - extended graphic line that is drawn over a surface (our translation). So, right from the title, the novelty of the method is underlined: reading, learning to write, in other words, acquiring the ability to trace letters proficiently.

In the final part of the book, Angel Rodriguez Alvarez points out why he chose the title based on what he considers to be an innovative method of learning to read through writing.

El presente libro lleva el título de 'Rayas' porque con él se enseña á los niños a trazar y combinar las rayas para formar las letras, á escribir palabras con las letras, á representar los pensamientos con las palabras, y á enterarse de lo que otros hayan escrito: esto es, á leer y á escribir, dos artes en que las rayas tienen importante papel (Rodriguez Alvarez, 1905, s/p, emphasis in original).⁸

The book also includes a lengthy preface, numbered in Roman numerals and containing 14 pages, addressed to teachers. On the one hand, it

addresses the theoretical assumptions of the "new method". On the other, teachers are instructed on how to use the book to get the most out of its syllabus.

However, it was not just a question of adopting the best teaching manual for learning to read and write. Furthermore, the debate on literacy methods in Spain during this period is justified by some data on the literate population. Although elementary education had been compulsory in Spain since 1838^o, in 1900, 56% of the population over the age of 10 could neither read nor write and half of all school-age children did not attend school (Sanchdrián-Blanco, 2022). The reasons for not attending school can be thought of from different angles: the urban and rural reality in terms of access to schooling, the living conditions of the population, as well as child labor. The historiography of child labor in Spain related to access to schooling indicates that most children of 10 or 11 years of age stopped attending primary school because few started schools at the right age or because their parents needed them to dedicate themselves to a trade to help with the household income. If we consider four or five years of schooling, in fact, they only went to school for four or five months. This condition applied to both boys and girls. Although the problem was the subject of concern, little progress was made in terms of solutions during the period examined here, as Gervasio Manrique (1935) and Vinão (1998) point out.

Despite the complex scenario of instruction in Spain, Rodriguez Alvarez (1905) organized an innovative manual, highlighting the following aspects: reading through writing; necessary and possible innovation; types of letters; order and distribution of the material; lessons and their contents; pictures; various types of knowledge; use of the method; saving time.

In terms of the process of acquiring reading through writing, the activities in the manual would offer advantages over other methods used to teach reading, above all, in relation to the traditional method, which required memorizing the sounds of letters recorded on "anachronistic posters". Another advantage of the "*novísimo*" method would be the action of the student, who, through the activity of writing, would become a major contributor to the general work of their education. This assumption is notably in line with the ideas of the New School Movement, which was spreading in Spain at the time, as Pozo Andrés (2009) points out. In addition, by acting, they would know the content better than just passively observing the discipline. Therefore, by writing, they would achieve a more solid knowledge of how reading worked. In this sense,

the relationship between sounds and signs, through which the former are represented, would be more perfect, above all because of the attention required in the double exercise: writing and correctly pronouncing the graphic notations.

A relevant aspect, according to Rodriguez Alvarez (1905), would be to perceive reading as "instrumental" knowledge, in other words, "complete instrumental knowledge", since it would require the student not only to read, but also to take notes and select fragments of the text, fundamental exercises throughout the learning process.

In this section, there is a warning about writing and handwriting. Reading should be taught through writing and not by merely imitating a given handwriting model. Such an oversight would completely distort the nature of the method advocated by the author.

With regard to the necessary and possible innovation, the author also warns that changes in terms of learning to read through writing were already common practice in other European countries, but very little used in the Spanish context. In his view, this was partly because many teachers lacked the opportunity to try out the method and were unsure about the reform's theoretical effectiveness. There was also a lack of books in Castilian that would accurately explain the new theoretical orientation.

Another argument aimed at convincing teachers who had not yet embraced the new method was that teaching reading as it was practiced in most elementary school in Spain was arid and painful for the child, especially as it dissociated reading and writing. By adopting reading through writing, teaching could be made more enjoyable and easier. Therefore, there was no reason to delay adopting the method described.

In the section on the types of printed Roman and handwritten letters, the method emphasized that the teacher should pay the utmost attention from the very first lesson. We can therefore see a different orientation from the *Tratado* examined in the previous topic, since Rodriguez Alvarez (1905) warned about the effectiveness of the use of letter types: they should be lowercase and printed manuscripts. The main idea was to avoid too much information for the child who was beginning the process of reading by writing – the two forms together (Roman and printed manuscript) could cause unnecessary misunderstandings. If it was deemed important, Roman letters would be introduced sparingly and at a later stage. However, while gradation was not avoided, starting with the

presentation of vowels, the emphasis at this point was not on memorizing the sound of the letters, but rather on their layout, as well as the way in which syllables and words were structured.

Along the same orientation, capital letters were introduced. Two fundamental principles regarding the method under analysis and teaching procedures stand out: not overloading the child with content that is difficult to understand and making them an active collaborator throughout the process.

Other elements recorded throughout the lessons are worth noting: 1 - the clear character of the letters, with a view to easy execution; 2 - the rigid form of the block letter, which would not replace the "natural and sensitive" design of the handwritten letter; 3 - the possibility of a handwritten letter by the child that follows their childish creativity, without having to follow a rigid model.

A general principle has not gone unnoticed either: meticulous, well-executed handwriting could be acquired in the later stages of learning. If the preliminary notions were appropriate, the children would be able to acquire any other type of handwriting along the way.

Regarding the distribution of the material and the importance of the engraving in the book, there are important aspects. The fact is that, when establishing an order in which to distribute the material – the difficulty of acquiring reading, the graphic difficulties of forming letters and the orthographic dimension – these spheres had to be combined in harmony. In other words, sometimes the emphasis could be on orthographic difficulties and sometimes on word formation. From this perspective, the method could seem excessively broad. However, the main concern was not to present too many difficulties in a single lesson. For example, different sounds or uses of the same letter could be introduced separately or even spaced apart. Once the letters had been recognized separately, it would be advisable to present them grouped together, with less risk of generating conflicts in learning to read through writing.

Regarding the pictures, special care should be taken. The pictures are not mere illustrations of the verbal texts. Most of them are elements inserted into the lessons to represent objects and give them meaning. In addition, they would serve as models for the children to decal and imitate, depending on their ability. Even in the early part of the work, the engravings would have another function: they could serve as elements for the children to decal and

imitate, exercising fine motor coordination which would later help in drawing the letters, giving them a certain lightness and exercising sensitivity.

Rodriguez Alvarez (1905) also considered grammatical knowledge and varied knowledge to be important throughout the process of learning to read through writing. In this respect, we can see a clear alignment with the assumptions recorded in the regulations in force, which guided the programs of Spanish public and private elementary schools at the time: *Lengua Castellana (Lectura, Escritura, Gramática)* (Carretero y Serrano, 1905) [Spanish Language (Reading, Writing, Grammar)]. The exercises inserted at the beginning of the lessons complied with this orientation. The use of sentences from the very first lessons served this purpose: to show how language works, moving as far away from abstraction as possible. Language has a type of functioning, with rules and this type of understanding was necessary, even if the educators respected the levels of difficulty, adopting some gradation of the discipline.

In addition, attention was paid to the conditions of opportunity perceived throughout the lessons, which were made up of varied content and varying degrees of difficulty. Culture was another very important element to consider. In the author's words:

[...] no se explican lo mismo algunas cosas á los niños de la costa que á los niños del interior, á los niños de la ciudad que á los del campo. Otro tanto décimos de los ejercicios de composición que deben practicarse desde que la enseñanza se encuentre un tanto avanzada (Rodriguez Alvarez, 1905, p. X).¹⁰

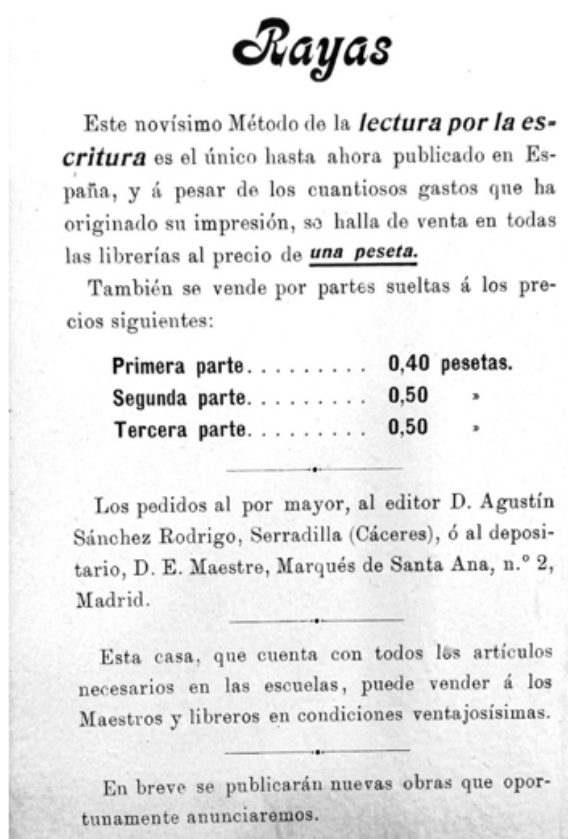
Proficient reading and more elaborate writing were more advanced objectives of the method. From Lesson 123 onwards, there are longer texts and more elaborate pictures, followed by mixed syllables, descriptions and examples of verb tenses (present, past and future). According to the assumptions outlined above, the aim was to demonstrate the structure and functionality of language. At this stage, therefore, structure and functionality were inserted into the work in terms of pointing to the greater complexity of the discipline.

From the point of view of written production, the letter genre is used as a model, through the elements that make it up: subject, date, recipient, greeting, sender. In terms of the content listed, near the end of the course, it is inferred that the child who has learned to read through writing has a broad

grasp of how the language works and some of its social uses, as the letter illustrates.

Finally, the fourth cover of the manual deserves attention. The *reading protocols of an editorial nature* (Chartier, 1998; 2010) should be observed regarding the appropriation of this type of manual intended to serve as a text in elementary school in the Spanish provinces throughout the period examined, as shown in the image below.

Figure 4



Source: Rayas (1905).

We read in the highlighted title, now summarized (*Rayas*), that the advantage is the easy to memorize. The manual, as well as being presented as a novelty, would be the "only one" published in Spain with the characteristics that define it: teaching reading through writing.

In addition to the qualities referred to in the content, it could be purchased for the modest price of 1 peseta, despite the expense of printing it. The commercial appeal is even more seductive, as the book is sold in three parts: the first for 0.40 pesetas, the second for 0.50 pesetas and the third for 0.50 pesetas.

Another way of guiding the reader to buy the book was to indicate the places where it was sold. To buy *Rayas*, the reader could go to the publisher D. Agustín Sánchez Rodrigo or to the depositary, D. E. Maestre, Marqués de Santa Ana street, no 2, Madrid. The purchase would always be guaranteed on advantageous terms: "Esta casa, que cuenta con todos los artículos necesarios en las escuelas, puede vender á los Maestros y libreros en condiciones ventajosísima".¹¹

Finally, the reader had to consider other works in preparation that would soon be announced: "En breve se publicarán nuevas obras que oportunamente anunciaremos"¹².

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Final considerations

We agree with Choppin (2002) about the ephemeral nature of school's manuals and the difficulty of preserving them after use. However, the access to this type of documentation at the Archivo General de La Administración (AGA) [General Archive of the Administration] in Alcalá de Henares – and the forms of preservation guaranteed there – is considerably good, favoring the study of documentary sources and the development of this research. In addition, the conservation of other historical documents at the Archivo – such as petitions from authors and publishers, the list of books considered approved by the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes (Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts) and the legislation of the period – made it possible to better handle and interpret the documentary sources selected for this study.

In the case of the two school manuals examined, it is important to emphasize some of the changes seen over the five-year period regarding the

production of teaching materials for the teaching of reading and writing in circulation in the elementary school of the Spanish provinces through *Novísimo Tratado de Lectura* (1900) and *Rayas: novísimo método de la Lectura por la Escritura* (1905).

Both were considered useful in their time and were distributed in Spanish elementary school. These were the epistemological factors about reading and writing that were possible at the time. Ultimately, they refer to the levels of teacher formation on the subject, access to available knowledge and the economic aspects of printing teaching materials to be circulated in elementary school, as well as the low levels of literacy among the educated population at the time, especially among children over 10 years old, as we have pointed out throughout this study (Sanchdrián-Blanco, 2022). The books examined make it also possible to perceive some inflection related to the pedagogical tradition of the 19th century. While there was an emphasis on learning to read using the traditional method of spelling, used in the *Tratado de Lectura*, there was also an indication of some changes, such as those highlighted in the *Rayas* manual, namely: learning to read through writing, the student's collaboration in the learning process, the inclusion of grammatical elements in the text and a certain complexity in the written texts. The changes observed refer in particular to the circulation of ideas disseminated from the New School movement (Pozo Andrés, 2009) and a greater rationalization of teaching methods and practices in the context of the knowledge produced in teacher's schools (Vinão, 1998).

To analyze cultural objects such as school's manuals, the theoretical production and legislation of the period were considered. However, another equally relevant instance would be the examination of the school reality or even the mode of appropriation of the content conveyed therein, which goes beyond the limits of this study.

Finally, the results achieved indicate the need for further research in the field of manualistics (Escolano, 2016), considering the various possible ways of getting to know the school culture of other historical moments through treatises, manuals, compendiums, as well as didactic procedures derived from a material that is both ephemeral and multifaceted, as school manuals have proven to be, especially those aimed at teaching and learning reading and writing skills throughout history.

Notes

1. Article derived from a research funded by the CapesPrint Internationalization Project, Writings of Self, Memory and the Teaching Profession, carried out at the University of Alcalá, Reading, Grupo de Investigación Lectura, Escritura y Alfabetización (LEA) [Writing and Literacy Research Group] and Seminário Interdisciplinar de Estudos sobre Cultura Escrita (SIECE) [Interdisciplinary Seminar of Studies on Written Culture], coordinated by Professor Antonio Castillo Gómez, as Senior Visiting Professor, from March to July 2023.
2. See, among other studies, those organized by Rocha and Somoza (2016) and Cigales and Rubio (2020), which indicate important inflections in the field.
3. Cf: Conde Villaverde, García Gómez, La Torre Merino, Martínez García (1995). The study provides a historical overview of the Archivo General de la Administración, relating it to other historical archives in Spain.
4. In 1900, the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes was created in Spain and a new phase of reforms in the field of education began (Cf. Vinão, 1998; 2004).
5. Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts. Undersecretariat. Department of Elementary Education. Dispatch submitted in response to a request from Carlos Valentin Carretero, author of the book entitled "Legislatura Escolar de España" (School Legislature of Spain), asking that it be declared useful so that it can be used as a reference text in teacher's colleges. Province of Cuenca, 1906. From the head of office: the report of the Council of Public Instruction proposed for this dispatch is: approved (our translation).
6. Párvulos: male and female name, short child, who has not yet reached school age, especially one who attends a preschool education center or class. Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary. Online access: 28 June. 2023 (our translation).
7. As a result of the implementation of this Decree a new curriculum for elementary education was established, which significantly expanded the previous regulations. It was also in the first third of the 20th century that the pedagogical ideas of the so-called New School Movement, hygienist ideas, scientific psych pedagogy and pedagogy spread in Spain. (Cf. Vinão, 1998; Pozo Andrés, 1987).
8. This work is called "Rayas" because it teaches children to trace and combine strokes to form letters, to write words with letters, to represent thoughts with words and to find out what others have written: in other words, to read and write, two arts in which strokes play an important role (our translation).
9. It was only in 1938 that the Regulations for public elementary schools were approved, which would partially break with previous practices and regulations belonging to the Old Regime. The Regulation implemented the legal bases of liberal reforms, which opened the possibility for the emergence of a new school and a new teacher formed in teacher's schools (Cf. Vinão, 1998).
10. Some things are not explained in the same way to children on the coast as they are to children of the countryside; to children in the city and to children in the countryside. Other tenths of composition exercises that should be practiced as soon as teaching is somewhat advanced (our translation).
11. This shop, which has all the items needed in schools, can sell them to teachers and booksellers on very advantageous terms" (our translation).
12. New works will be published soon, which we will announce in due course (our translation).

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