# Reading and writing: a right of all people

# Ler e escrever: um direito de todos

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## ABSTRACT

For many decades, innumerable failures and high dropout rates – especially during the reading and writing learning process – have been pointed to as some of the main problems of elementary education. Even after several educational system changes, the literacy learning process still maintains a high rate of students who fail to learn how to read and write, and thus remains a prominent concern for the educational system. This issue becomes even more critical in light of the fact that despite new legislation, a contingency of students reach the fourth grade without having at the very least begun the process of written language comprehension, which is to reach the alphabetic hypothesis, in which the student is able to read and write graphically what he thinks and speaks. It is the comprehension of the alphabetic basis logic that provides a platform for understanding this process, so that the same can be developed with quality. The objective of this paper is to reflect on how educators act in relation to this population that is already behind in their reading and writing learning, as they are fourth-grade students who need a different educational program in order to continue their learning. The data and analysis are from a broader study and serve to clear up the relationship between professional practice and the efficacy of the transmission of knowledge related to reading and writing: a right of all people.

**Index Terms:** literacy, reading, writing, mediation, education system.

## RESUMO

Há muitas décadas as inúmeras reprovações e a evasão escolar, ocorridas em especial no momento de aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita, têm sido uma temática apontada como uns dos mais graves problemas do ensino fundamental. O processo de alfabetização, que mesmo com as mudanças ocorridas no sistema de ensino, ainda mantém um alto índice de alunos que não aprendem a ler e escrever, continua a ser uma preocupação para o sistema escolar. Mais crucial torna-se o problema, pois, diante da nova legislação, um contingente de alunos chegam à quarta série do ensino fundamental sem pelo menos ter iniciado um processo de compreensão da linguagem escrita, que é ter alcançado a hipótese alfabética, na qual

consegue ler e escrever graficamente o que pensa e fala, pois é a compreensão da logicidade da base alfabética que dá um patamar de conhecimento desse processo, para que o mesmo possa ser desenvolvido com qualidade.O objetivo deste artigo é refletir como os docentes atuam com essa população que já vem com defasagem em sua aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita, porque são alunos que estão frequentando a 4a série do ensino fundamental e necessitam de uma proposta diferenciada de ensino, para que possam dar continuidade à sua aprendizagem.Os dados e a análise são de uma pesquisa mais ampla e servem para esclarecer a relação entre a realidade da prática profissional e a eficácia da transmissão do conhecimento relacionado à leitura e a escrita um direito de todos.

**Palavras-chave:** alfabetização, leitura, escrita, mediação, sistema de ensino.

## Introduction

One part of the population that enrolls in the education system exhibits great difficulty in keeping pace with the learning process, especially in the early grades, for the concern with meeting the growing demand that accompanied the process of the country's urbanization ignored the quality of basic education.

Difficulties with literacy in children from low-income families continue to grow as a serious problem in Brazilian education, since the first moment of education democratization and the expansion of educational opportunities. For more than forty years in our country, the dropout rate between first and second grades has reached more than fifty percent.

The rate of students having to repeat first grade (IBGE/INEP): 1956... 56.6%; 1987... 51%; 1988... 52%; 1989... 49%; 1990... 48%; 1991...48%; 1992... 48%; 1993... 49%; 1994... 46%; 1995... 46%; 1997... 35%; 1998...31%. In the last two years, some secretaries of education began to adopt the system of cycles, outlined in the new Law of Guidelines and Foundations for National Education, which already demonstrates a lower rate of students being held back. The cycles proposal represented (and

continues to represent) a concrete possibility of overcoming the injustice of "all or nothing" embedded in the serial system and, in a certain way, the organization of schooling into cycles is also an indirect way of combating evasion. As we know, retention is the great villain of dropping out, because it institutionally attests to a failure on the part of the student.

Today, the education system has already reformulated its proposal for the basic cycle and elementary education is now composed of two cycles: the first, which is first through fourth grade, and the second, which is fifth through eighth grade. As a result, we have a contingency of students who reach the fourth grade without being familiar with written language, or in other words, they do not understand what reading or writing means. As this is a matter relevant to student learning and consequently, to students' academic paths, this study focused on fourth grade students who struggle with learning how to read and write.

## Justification

Understanding the nature of written language, its functions and uses is indispensable in the literacy process, but what is commonly seen in classrooms and textbooks is a total lack of understanding of the subject. The literacy process involves many factors and the more aware the teacher is of how the process of learning acquisition happens, of children's emotional development, of how their social integration process evolves, the nature of the linguistic reality involved in the moment in which literacy learning is happening, the better equipped the teacher will be to lead the learning process in an agreeable and productive way.

A report by INPE (National Institute of Educational Studies and Research) about the status of education in Brazil until 2001 shows that 41% of students finish primary education (first through 8th grade). The study also reveals that 39% of those who were in primary school were older than the

standard age for their grade level. The data points out that 21.7% of students in primary school repeated a grade in 2000. The students who are able to complete primary education complete it in an average of 10.2 years; of those who begin high school, 26% do not finish. The distortion between grade level and age – pointed to by educators as a key problem – grows in high school: 53.3% of students are not at the standard age for their grade level. The problems highlighted in the report are the poor quality of public education and teachers, who are poorly paid, and the cost to families to support their children's education.

With all of this data, INEP (2000) reveals the scandalous funnel that the system reproduces that parallels the social distortions that have been aggravated over the last several years. In 2000, 35.7 million youth enrolled in elementary education throughout the country and from that total, only 8.4 million reached high school, which represents a dropout rate of 77%. Only 2.7 million reached higher education, a number that indicates a dropout rate of nearly 68%. Faced with these facts, we can raise questions regarding education policies and quality, as well as, probably, the implications of having difficulty with reading and writing, as the number of students who reach high school is insignificant, compared with the number of students who begin elementary education.

Another important study conducted by the Paulo Montenegro Institute and Educational Action, a non-profit, presented on December 13, 2001 the first data on the National Indicator of Functional Literacy. The data, the result of a study completed by Opinion IBOPE, reveal that 9% of the Brazilian population ages 15-64 is illiterate. Those who are literate are classified into three levels: 31% of the studied population were classified in level one (being able to extract explicit information in very short texts); 34% at level two (being able to find information that is not explicit in longer texts); 26% at level three (capable of reading longer texts, find more than one piece of information and make connections between various elements of

the texts). In order to conduct the study, IBOPE interviewed 2,000 people between the ages of 15 and 64 throughout all of Brazil and who were representative of all social classes.

Another interesting data point the study revealed is that 37% of Brazilians do not read anything at work and 41% of them do not write anything. The definition of illiteracy has undergone significant revisions over the past several decades. In 1958, UNESCO defined a literate person as someone capable of reading and writing a simple note. Twenty years later, UNESCO adopted the concept of functional illiteracy. A functional literate is any person capable of using reading and writing to face the demands of his or her social context, as well as use his or her abilities in order to keep learning and growing throughout the course of his or her life.

## 1 Theoretical Tenets of Learning Written Language

Above all, literacy is the learning of reading and writing; therefore, it is the most important moment in a person's academic development, just as the invention of written language marked one of the most important moments in the history of humanity. Through written records, accumulated knowledge can be transmitted to future generations.

According to Luiz Carlos Gagliari (1989, p. 106), the history of writing can be viewed in its entirety, without following a chronological line of evolution, specific to a certain system, and can be characterized by three distinct phases: the pictorial, the ideographical and the alphabetical.

The pictorial phase is characterized by writing in the form of drawings or pictograms that appeared in ancient inscriptions. Some examples are the songs of the "Ojibwa" people of North American and in Aztec writing. The pictograms are not associated with a sound, but rather the image of what they wish to represent. They consist of very simplified representations of the actual objects. Pictographical representation is made

of scores in wood and in stone monuments. These resources varied from culture to culture, following their development and growth.

Apart from the pictographical system, other precursors to writing are the features of mnemonic identification, such as the heraldic symbols and the symbols used by indigenous people to record time. At this stage, writing is characterized by the approximated correspondence between pictographical symbol and the image of an object, a person or a phrase. Such systems began in Asia in approximately 3,000 B.C. Some examples are Sumerian and Egyptian writing. As Gelb states (1982:38), cuneiform writing also appears in Mesopotamia, which uses conventional signs while often maintaining the figurative in its external features.

The ideographical phase is characterized by writing through special drawings known as ideograms. These drawings were, throughout their evolution, losing some of the most representative features of drawn figures and became a simple writing convention. The most important ideographical writings are those of the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the region of the Egeu Sea (Cretan) and the Chinese. New progress is made until the ideogram no longer evokes a phrase or an image of a word and becomes to be represented from the point of view of its semantic content.

According to Auzias and Ajuriaguerra (1986, p. 27), from the synthetic, writing becomes analytic. The alphabetical phase is characterized by the use of letters that had their origin in ideograms, but lost their ideographical value, taking on a new writing function: purely phonographic representation. The ideogram lost its pictorial value and became simply a phonetic representation. It was the Phoenician syllabary that the Greeks borrowed to create the foundation of their written language. What the Phoenicians did sporadically – that is, placing the vowel after the consonant – became the norm among the Greeks.

Thus occurred the transition from syllabic writing to alphabetic writing. The discovery of the alphabet occurred in the 10th century B.C.

After the discovery of this system, according to Gelb (1982, p. 56), no significant innovation occurred in the history of writing.

Although there are innumerous variations of the alphabet throughout the world, which represent formal external differences, all of them continue to use the same principles that the Greek writing system established. In reality, the invention of alphabetic writing is a "discovery," since when people began to use one symbol for each sound, they only consciously employed understanding of the phonological organization of their language. In regards to this matter, it is interesting to underscore what Vygotsky affirms (1984, p. 131) based on his work with children: in order to learn how to write, the child needs to make a basic discovery, which is that of being able to draw not only objects, but also speech.

Writing, regardless of what form, was always a way of representing the collective, religious, scientific, magical, political, artistic and cultural memory of a society. The objective of writing is reading, for it is through reading that the desired communication is effected. Reading is an extremely complex activity and it involves problems that are not only semantic but also cultural, ideological, philosophical and phonetic.

Reading is the fulfillment of the objective of writing; whoever writes does so in order to be read. The world of writing is complicated and chaotic in the graphic sense. Reading will operate precisely in this universe. Sometimes reading is a process of discovery, as is the search for scientific knowledge; however, it must be built individually, according to Cagliari:

> Reading is a profoundly individual activity and it is difficult for two people to interpret a text in exactly the same way, even if it is scientific. In contrast to writing – which is an activity of exteriorizing thought – reading is an activity of the assimilation of understanding, of interiorizing, of reflection. (CAGLIARI, 1989, p. 150)

Linguistic signs act through social conventionality. Writing acts through the conventionality of the graphical representation of signs and reading also possesses a conventionality guided not only by linguistic

elements, but also by the cultural, ideological and philosophical elements of the reader.

Every reading has an aspect of deciphering and decoding; these activities should maintain equilibrium between two aspects (signified/signifier). If not, there is a risk of destroying human language in that which it holds as a fundamental principle. The relationships between reading and writing shows us that the process is complex, including innumerable facets, which has generated and led to different methodological proposals, in accordance with their respective tenets.

In regards to the so-called "New School (*Escola Nova*)," its objectives and methods are the consequence of changes that occurred in society, which solicit from the academic structure new ways of teaching. The traditional methods are questioned, for they part from the tenet that a child is a man in miniature and the role of education is to transmit to each new generation – as if it were a "donation" – the accumulated knowledge of humanity. Concern with this problem is not new, nor exclusive to one country, according to various publications on the topic. As a consequence, investigations about the topic are accentuated, which constitute the base for new methodological reforms.

## 2 A New Paradigm: Psychogenesis of Written Language

The 1980s in Brazil and Latin America were witness to a growing interest in the topic of literacy. The constitution, the deepening of the debates, the theoretical reflection and discussion about the topic were, in large part, driven by the rapid diffusion of the ideas of Emilia Ferreiro.

Emilia Ferreiro is Argentinian by birth and a psychologist by profession. In analyzing Argentina's education reality, failure in the early school years reaches, in a perverse fashion, only the most marginalized sectors of the population. Notwithstanding, for other marginalized social

segments, the rates of failure reach alarming levels, constituting a true social problem.

In studying the psychological genesis of the comprehension of written language in children, Ferreiro (1986, p. 9) unveiled the "black-box" of this learning, demonstrating how the existing processes are in the subjects of this acquisition. This is because, until an empirical proposal of this kind was made, the topic of learning to write was considered merely a technical one dependent upon teaching methods.

For Ferreiro, children interpret the instruction they receive, transforming the conventional writing of adults. Thus so, children produce different and strange writings. These transformations described by Ferreiro are brilliant examples of the schema of Piagetian assimilations. The teacher teaches, for example, the word GATO,[1] and some students write GO, or AO or GT. What Ferreiro unveils is the reason behind these transformations and the logic employed by the child, or the psychological processes that produce such behaviors. The writing produced is the result of an application of schema of assimilation of the object of learning (writing), forms used by the subject to interpret and understand the object.

This constituted a new way of looking at children's writing that was very different from that of the long academic tradition that educated us. The systematic, regular and recurrent errors call the attention of the researcher and lead her to ask herself if they were not indicators of a certain form of understanding written language.

Leaving, then, the tenet that children acquire understanding of written language because, in interacting with this object, children apply successively more complex schema to it, recurrent of their cognitive development, the unfolding that follows is the establishment of different moments of acquisition, articulated in levels, phases or periods. These

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[1] *Gato* is the Portuguese word for *cat*.

follow each other in increasing degrees of complexity and approximation of conventional writing.

> ...We attempt to show that learning how to read, understood as a matter relating to nature, the function and value of the cultural object that is writing, begins much before the school imagines it to, passing through unsuspecting paths. That apart from the methods, the manuals, the didactic resources, there exists a subject that seeks the acquisition of knowledge, which proposes problems and attempts to solve them, according to its own methodology. We insist on what follows: at hand we have a subject that seeks to acquire knowledge and not simply a subject ready to acquire a particular technique or skill. It is a subject that the psychology of reading and writing forgot…(FERREIRO; TEBEROSKY, 1985, p. 11)

In entering the grade level in which begins the systematic learning of the letters, the child already holds a great linguistic competency. In the flawed action of the school, two diversions begin: the first deals with the acquisition of writing as if it were identical to the appropriation of speech and the second is that the model of learning oral language, which the majority of literacy methods reproduces, is sustained by an already surpassed knowledge. This knowledge, prior to the work of Chomsky, is thus synthesized by Emilia Ferreiro:

> ...the classic progression that consists in beginning with the vowels, followed by combining labial consonants with vowels, and from there reaching the formation of first words by doubling these syllables, and when dealing with sentences, beginning with simple declarations, is a series that reproduces well the series of oral language acquisition, as it is presented from "the outside" (that is, seen from the perspective of observable conduct and not from the process that engages this observable conduct). Implicitly, it was deemed necessary to pass through these same phases when learning written language, as if this learning were a learning of speech. (FERREIRO; TEBEROSKY, 1985, p. 24)

As a consequence, when the model of acquisition of oral language is utilized for written language, the criteria of "speaking well" or having "good articulation" is considered important for learning how to write. To relearn how to produce sounds of speech as a necessary condition to write is based on two false presumptions. The first is that a child, at the age of six or

seven, is not capable of distinguishing phonemes in her native language – a hypothesis negated by the penchant children of this age group exhibit towards verbal games. The second fallacy is the conception of writing as a way of transcribing speech. No writing, examined through the relationships it maintains with the oral code, achieves the phonetic transcription of oral language.

In truth, Ferreiro bases her argument on the tenet that language acts as a representation, the inverse of being merely a graphic transcription of spoken sounds. The verbal world, including speech and writing, is, at the same time, a system with internal relations between both codes (speech and writing), in which there does not exist a strict correspondence between them. In addition, writing is also a system that relates itself to what is real.

The written behavior of a student is not the mere result of what the teacher teaches. There exists a process of constructing that understanding, which does not always coincide with what is being taught. How can one observe these processes of construction?

Tests and the traditional forms of measuring student learning, known as "readiness tests," could not be used. Their objectives are very different, as they seek to evaluate the students' capacities related to perception and motility. Reproducing letters onto a blank page is also part of the task of writing, but this is not its most important aspect.

What remains is the fundamental question: comprehending the nature of writing and its organization. If writing represents part of spoken language, it does so through a convention that is socially arbitrated. From an intellectual standpoint, this is an important obstacle to be overcome and it is not an easy task. No characteristic of writing is similar to the represented object. Letters, which for a beginner are merely strokes on a piece of paper, symbolize sounds of speech and comprehending this content implies the capacity to establish symbolic relationships with things, that is, relationships that are mediated by an object that substitutes or represents them.

There is also another obstacle to overcome: comprehending in what form the organization of writing occurs. In order to observe the hypotheses that developed in response to this obstacle, it would be necessary to verify spontaneous behavior in children's graphic records.

The assignments included writing one's own name and that of a friend or a family member; writing of common words when first learning literacy; the contrast in situations between drawing and writing; and the writing of other words that are unfamiliar to the child. Why ask children to write something that they have not yet learned? Ferreiro justifies this exercise for the reason that spontaneous writing, produced before systematic writing, brings to light the clearest indicators of childhood explorations for comprehending the nature of the process.

> When a child writes in the way that she believes a certain set of words could or should be written, she is offering us a highly valuable document that needs to be interpreted in order to be evaluated… (FERREIRO, 1987, p. 16)

When given the opportunity, children tend to doodle, to use pencil and paper. These first written works have never been adequately considered, as they are seen as merely unimportant doodles or scribbles. However, if we begin with the Piagetian theory, we know that children make active explorations through objects of study. Therefore, in Emilia Ferreiro's theory, in the beginning, the child learns by elaborating a series of hypotheses about the construction of writing, through not only external experiences, but also internal ones, based on criteria determined by their own logic.

For Ferreiro, the child passes through "levels" of learning, or in other words, there is a series of modes of representation that precede the alphabetic representation of language and which occur in a certain order: first, various modes of representations, foreign to any search for correspondence between the sonorous guidelines of an emission and writing; later, modes of syllabic representation (with or without

conventional sonorous value); and modes of syllabic-alphabetic representation that proceed regularly from the appearance of the writing governed by alphabetic principals. In accordance with the theory, every child passes through phases until he is literate.

The conceptual linguistic levels are: Pre-Syllabic, Syllabic, Syllabic-Alphabetic and Alphabetic. Each of these levels has specific characteristics that should be accompanied by the teacher, so that he can bring challenging activities to the classroom, making it so the student is able to advance in his hypotheses and reach the alphabetic level, in which the student is able to graphically read and write what he thinks and says, possessing comprehension of the logicality of the alphabetic base, familiarity with the conventional sonorous value of all or the majority of the letters, and being able to distinguish between letters, syllables, words and sentences. Even if the student does not always write correctly, the challenge becomes then, to walk the line of conventionality, in the direction of orthographic and grammatical corrections. Faced with these new tenets, it becomes necessary to rethink the manner of teaching reading and writing, particularly for the students who were unable to learn using other methodologies. (This is all the more crucial and relevant due to the fact that the population analyzed for this study is already in fourth grade).

## 3 Some Data from the Study

Starting with the idea that learning to read and write is characterized by a psychic motive that always includes relationships between individuals, it is necessary to postulate interpersonal relationships. In order to do so, the interaction of the subject with the world, which happens through mediation done by other subjects, as well as the verification of the construction of reading and writing comprehension are fundamental factors for the comprehension, in the most specific way, of

which are the significant aspects of the psychic movement of reading and writing and what are their implications.

The universe of this study, conducted in 2004, involves fourth grade students who are in the alphabetic base of written language and who may or may not be at the age compatible with their grade level. The sample was selected in accordance with the characteristics of the theme in question and analyzed in two different moments: the first, only the analysis of the students' type of writing was done; in the second, a more complete analysis was carried out, including the following data: student records, parental complaints, teacher complaints and student complaints.

The study was carried out in the Osasco Municipality. Student participants were in first grade in 2003: 188 classes with 6,835 students and 171 fourth-grade classes with 6,428 students. We already note a dropout rate of 5.95%.

The study targeted fourth-grade students who demonstrated difficulty in learning written language. A study of fourth-grade students at school A produced the following results:

| Fourth grade | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total # of Students | 31 | 31 | 30 | 33 | 36 | 36 | 35 | 30 | 29 | 25 |

The total number of fourth-grade students was 316. Students who had been held back and did not understand written language corresponded with 17% of the population of school A (54 students). Classes I and J are acceleration (remedial) classes, designed for students who do not know how to read and write.

Twenty students (random sample) from these two classes were selected for exploring writing.

The second school, which will be referred to as school B, had seven fourth-grade classes totaling 210 students. Students who had been

held back and did not understand written language corresponded with 22.9% (48 students).

| Fourth grade | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 34 | 33 | 31 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 210 |
| Students Held | 03 | 0 | 05 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 16 | 48 |

Given this data, we can observe the relevant number of students who are behind in their learning, particularly in regards to reading and writing and consequently in the other school subjects. We contacted the teachers from these classes and two of them participated in the study, through a recorded interview, which brought us important data so that we could understand the students' and the teachers' situation. In this article, it will not be possible to include the full interview; some key segments have been selected instead. The following questions were posed: 1) I would like you to speak about your professional career 2) When you received your teaching credential and entered the classroom, did the school explain how this class was formed and what an accelerated class was? 3) When you arrived, what did you do in regards to literacy? 4) Do these students go through many teachers? 5) When the school forms this class, what is the desired outcome? 6) Is the school trying to verify whether it can really accelerate this process? Does the school take into consideration the difficulty students have? 7) Do they conduct a process of selection to know who will take part in the acceleration class? and 8) Should the literacy process and other matters that are part of this process be done differently?

The teachers responded to the questions with ease, demonstrating the anxiety they felt in facing a complex reality that they did not know how to manage. They had good intentions, but this was not sufficient, as accompaniment and a clear and defined pedagogical orientation were needed for a specific clientele. In some of the selected segments, we can observe these issues. According to what we can verify from the teachers'

testimony, they feel quite abandoned, without direction or preparation for navigating this reality.

*T1 – ...shortly thereafter I obtained my teaching credential in Osasco, where I am working at the L.P.L. school, which is to the west on the outskirts of Osasco, and where I was assigned an acceleration class that corresponds with the fourth grade. When I entered the classroom, I felt very, very isolated, anxious, alone, because it was a class of students who were 11, 12 and 13 years old, they were students I had never taught before, they lived in the slum next to the school and you could tell that they were students who were completely jaded, the school itself did not believe in them. I didn't have support in how to administer, I didn't have support on how to coordinate, I didn't have a [professional development] class to be working with them, I went with courage and with what I had already seen in college, that's what helped me a lot in regards to literacy, as the majority [of the students] were not literate. Me and my friend, who also was assigned an acceleration class, we began developing a project together in relation to the content of the test, of the evaluation; it was thus that we began to prepare ourselves, to get to know each other and the students. It was immensely difficult, it wasn't easy, I felt totally isolated, anxious, but the desire to succeed was so strong that we fought hard, so much so that when we arrived, I grabbed my students' workbooks, the only exercises were repetitive exercises, which wasn't something to help a student progress, it was simply to pass the time. We saw that the students were completely isolated in that classroom, that I was the fourth teacher [they had had] that school year, so, first I had to conquer the affective part of the students, to talk with them. I noticed in my parent meeting that they had a jaded affective part, totally renegade. I began to talk and in noticing what they had inside them, which were the problems, which were the afflictions, anxieties, disinterests, the desire that they had in life, was a challenge but I continued working with them. I believe that now that it was done, the*

*evaluation, I gave them everything, a good portion I was able to do with them, but a lot was left behind, it was a three-month job it was very little time. When I was assigned the class and how I left it, it was great progress, it was a challenge, but I believe that in the end the result was positive.*

**I.** – When you received your teaching credential and entered the classroom, did the school explain how this class was formed and what an accelerated class was?

***T1*** *– No, they didn't explain at all. So much so that I was talking, I…I was curious, I was talking to the other teachers, because I had students who were advanced, who were at another literacy level, they did not need to be in acceleration, they could be in a normal fourth grade class and they were there mixed with the others and they didn't know anything, anything at all. Thus, in a HTPC[2] meeting, in talking with another teacher, I had been there since June, I…it was then that the credentialing exams began, and I talked about how the classes were formed and she said that they were thrown together, some were thrown over there, others thrown over here, there was no selection process, a serious effort to put the students in the right class, so, because of this, I found the selection of my class to be totally heterogeneous and I felt anxious because I didn't know what certain students were doing there. And it was then that I saw that it was a completely jaded class, because no effort was made with organization, planning, that's how the acceleration class was formed, but it was because I was curious, nobody told me…*

***T2*** *– …I also saw this acceleration with R., who says that I am very experienced, my acceleration was completely different, they were 12 to 14 year old students…but they already stole, already used drugs, girls were already prostituting themselves and really some of them did not know how*

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[2] HTPC stands for *Horários de Trabalho Pedagógico Coletivos*, or "Collective Pedagogical Work Hours," which are weekly meetings for teachers and other school administrators to engage in discussions on pedagogical matters. They are a combination of a staff meeting and professional development.

*to read or write…but there were also problems that R. mentioned, of those who know [how to read and write], and who had never seen problems in their lives because the teachers only gave them math exercises, I picked up a notebook, in a single day there were more than 50 math exercises to complete……Why only more, more, more? They didn't know why they had to do math, it was from there that I began to give them problems…and for the student who said he had never done a problem, was the time I sat down with him, with U., and asked: Why are you in acceleration? Why are you about to turn 14 and you're finishing fourth grade now? What happened to you? He was a student capable of being in the 7th grade. He had drive, he had desire. He was messing around with the others, and what happened was he had to be in another classroom, to get into the mess and aggressiveness with the others, because it was that which he had, if he didn't go in, he got punished…because I came from the north my mom didn't let me study and I started school when I was 10, so I went straight into first grade; 11, 12; then at the age of 14, he went to the acceleration class and the fifth grade, I had a lot of students in the same situation, it's just that we couldn't do anything about it, I had one student who I got the school record for…I was shocked, she was held back…she is going to adult education, she is going to be 15, she even passed and no one noticed that she had never studied and they threw her into an adult ed class, she didn't have any academic record, so, she didn't know the letters, there was no way, there was no way she could know, so from there I began to separate the class, I even mentioned this to R…I teach classes in three schools, I went back to (Sesi), I prepare three lessons for the same class, some students don't accept it…they say it's a preschool lesson, so from there I used a mimeographed paper, as there was no way to divide the blackboard, I went to work with magazines…with cutouts, where there was very little text, I was able to see what they really knew, now I had some students who learned how to recognize certain letters, but there wasn't time to learn the alphabet, teach what a vowel was,*

*the sound…I had some students who I didn't have time to help…because despite everything they lacked a lot, the absence of their parents is really big, they lacked a lot, it's because of their age…they're losing interest, it becomes difficult. So why should I pay attention? Why should I let the others learn? So they disrupt the class…according to the other teachers, I was able to control the class a little, I was able to calm them down a little…some of them bring some things, I received a compliment from a student that really caught my attention, from two…they were awful in their behavior, they even talked about the robberies they had done…-you know, teacher if all who have entered here had done what you did…and he gave the names of the students…I think that they would already be reading and writing from the beginning, it's too bad that there's not enough time…you see, what I heard from those two students struck me and it was really an effort I made with my students there in first grade in another school, I did reinforcement classes, what is a newspaper and what is a magazine, it's not worth it to give something else to help them recognize letters, some learn how to write their name, but there were some that there wasn't enough time for…it was really little time…*

*T1 – …I collected my students' workbooks and I noticed that there was nothing inside them…it wasn't something to help the student progress, it was busy work…those students were completely isolated in the classroom…*

When T1 makes this declaration, the teacher demonstrates the importance of content. But it must be meaningful to the students, developed with purpose, maintaining the students' motivation. Keeping in mind the interactionist perspective, the idea of mediation is present, and the result of human development is the result of the activity of work.

To become a "human" being, a child must "reconstruct" within herself (not simply reproduce) what is already acquired by her species. This supposes processes of social interaction and inter-communication that only

are possible through systems of mediation that are highly complex and socially produced.

We can verify that the teachers interviewed raise issues that are important for learning in general, demonstrating that it is necessary for the teacher to know her student, to know what knowledge the student already has, as the student brings knowledge that should be taken into consideration by the school, so that it can develop what is important in the process of learning written language. The teachers also perceive how important it is to salvage student individuality in the context of the classroom. Examples from their testimony: T1 – "…because they felt rejected and headed towards aggression…how many times did they put students in my class who didn't know…" T2 – "…it is a very big responsibility to be taken seriously…the teacher has to be very aware of how what she is doing will affect the rest of their lives…"

The teachers, in relation to the work they developed, point to important issues, such as the differentiated assignments that should be done in these classes, as well as the necessity of a differentiated proposal on literacy, since the traditional ones have already not proved sufficient for students to learn. Despite this, they are still unable to work with new proposals as, in their accounts, they demonstrate that they are directed, sometimes, towards traditional instruction, and then to matters that involve the problem of the students, unable to develop an adequate proposal of instruction for these students.

## Some Considerations

In literate societies such as ours, communication through writing is present in essentially all quotidian situations: in street signs and bus stops, billboards, advertisements, stores, the packaging of products we use,

informational pamphlets, television, movies, books, newspapers and magazines.

The child, particularly the urban child, does not coexist with all of this without interacting with written language. The child observes, thinks, asks questions, formulates hypotheses, experiments and draws her own conclusions. Because of this, it is not possible to see the learning of reading and writing as a fixed moment isolated from the life of the subject, a simple action over the student, disconnected from her reality.

And thus, our student will be submitted to exercises, which do not taken into account her experiences prior to beginning school, the internal process that made it possible for her to first learn things, and the pleasure that should be part of every assignment, especially in the act of learning. It is true that an inadmissible number of students are failing in what should be the primordial function of the school, which is to develop readers. Many do not even reach becoming "decipherers." This occurs not because they are deficient, inferior or less intelligent, but because their quotidian reality does not include the experiences that make it possible for the other group to achieve the desired success.

Language mastery is closely related to full social participation, as it is through this that humans communicate, have access to information, express and defend their viewpoints, share their vision of their world and reproduce knowledge. Thus, an educational project committed to social and cultural democratization attributes to the school the function and the responsibility to guarantee all of its students access to linguistic knowledge for the exercise of citizenship, an inalienable right of all.

To learn how to read and write, it is necessary to think about writing, think about what writing represents and how it graphically represents language. For this, it is necessary to understand the elaboration of thought of the person who learns; understand, for example, how children's thoughts

work when they are learning how to read and write, what leads students to reconstruct the linguistic code.

Vygotsky and his followers analyze language as a set of symbols with a historical and social nature and emphasize the importance of information and linguistic interaction for the construction of knowledge. From the investigations of these researchers, the educator has the capacity to clearly perceive the process of learning appropriation by the student, or in other words, how learning happens, and to mediate the construction of this knowledge, when the student effectively needs a pedagogical intervention.

When the teacher knows the concepts that the student develops in regards to written language, the teacher can become a mediator, proposing activities and questions that lead the student to "de-structure thought," that is, doubt his ideas, put into conflict his certainties about written symbols and comparing and reflecting, elaborate a new linguistic hypothesis. Thus, through conflict, assimilation and accommodation, the educator reaches the alphabetic hypothesis and after, step by step, searches for orthographic and grammatical conventionality.

The process of instruction-learning for literacy should be organized in a way such that reading and writing are developed through an intermediary of real, natural, meaningful and experienced language, particularly for the students who took part in this study, for, if they had at least reached the alphabetic level, they would already have overcome the conceptual obstacles for the comprehension of writing. What these students would have achieved would not mean overcoming all problems, as there would still be the matter of legibility of the writing produced. But ample content would already have been mastered.

With the data obtained in this study, we can confirm that there is a necessity to rethink the teaching of reading and writing, principally for students who find themselves in this situation, for the same already possess a committal to their learning, that reverberates in their family, emotional and

even academic relationships. Another important issue is the necessity of the school to revisit the process of learning how to read and write, how it is being handled, as well as choose teachers that are capable of acting in this process, and particularly in the classes formed for students who are behind in their learning, who should be offered a differentiated learning program. In these classes, the teachers should also be differentiated in order to support the students in their learning. The system of learning should guarantee to teachers who will work in these classes adequate pedagogical orientation and specific support, as they will need to act in a diversified manner.

This study demonstrates that the learning of reading and writing is still a crucial problem in the education system, as there is a large number of students who are enrolled in school and frequently do not understand how this process works and have trouble learning how to read and write. The study also points to the difficulty found by the school in working with these students and the issues that involve the teachers' behavior in their day-to-day work, especially those who teach accelerated classes. These teachers should receive a differentiated program, with specific pedagogical support, as they serve a clientele that carries a history of failure in their learning. It is important to emphasize that these students, in the majority of cases, are capable students, who merely need an opportunity to develop meaningful learning, which is a right of all: to read and to write.

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