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## TEACHING PRACTICES IN THE LITERACY CYCLE: THE FOCUS ON NOTATIONAL ACTIVITIES

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**Abstract:** With the objective of studying pedagogical practices in classes from the 1st to the 3rd year of Elementary School, the research starts from the observation of six classes of the Literacy Cycle in a public school in the state of São Paulo in two moments (2015 and 2016) to carry out a survey of work proposals in teaching the Portuguese Language in different axes of approach: nature of activities and nature of demands made on students. The conclusions of the study point to the predominance of notational activities, in which the object and reason for writing prevail to the detriment of the definition of interlocutors.

**Keywords:** Literacy. Literacy cycle. Pedagogical practices.

## INTRODUCTION

This article is part of a study on written language teaching practices in a state public school in the interior of São Paulo, between the years 2015 and 2016 (ROSSI, 2018), which compiled data on six classes in the cycle of literacy.

Based on the assumption that language practices, especially writing, are essential for literacy, the investigation aimed to contribute to discussions about the nature of proposals for teaching written language, seeking to understand teaching trends.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

From an interactionist perspective of education and language discursive, what to teach, how, to whom and for what are important aspects that must guide the teaching process, supporting didactic decisions and, certainly, directing student learning.

If learning to write plays a fundamental role in the formation of the subject-author, it is essential that the school acts in a planned and systematized way so that the child finds possibilities to write and expand their linguistic

knowledge. However, in practice, as shown by some studies (GERALDI, 2001; COLELLO 2012, 2017), writing performance often reveals the disappearance of authorship throughout the school career. Hence the need to rethink language teaching practices. Expanding knowledge about them can be a powerful endorsement for the renewal of teaching and teacher training processes. In this regard, it is worth remembering the postulates of Micotti (2014) for whom classes and lessons directly affect: the activities of teachers and students, the interactions between them, the teaching emphases, the uses of teaching resources, assessments and attention to cognitive processes. These dimensions of pedagogical practice, not always evident to educators, constitute the focus of this research with the purpose of revealing teaching concepts and trends.

## METHODOLOGY

As a methodological resource, we chose a case study focusing on teaching practices in the literacy cycle (at the time, between the 1st and 3rd year) in a school in the São Paulo state network, pursuing four axes of investigation: nature of activities, nature of the demands made on students, linguistic nature of the proposals and interactional nature of the class's production dynamics.

The definition of these axes was guided by the principle postulated by Geraldi (2013) for textual production: work produced at school and not for school. This means that school must be a privileged space for students to write, produce meanings and constitute themselves as authors (as opposed to a space to perform written tasks).

Furthermore, axes were considered that met three fundamental requirements: textual production as an authorship practice, the adjustment in textualization to the written language - "the language-that-is-written"

(TEBEROSKY, 1992) - and the possibilities of analysis and reflection on the language.

In line with these principles, the axes for analyzing teaching proposals can be explained as follows:

### NATURE OF ACTIVITIES (ORAL, READING, WRITING OR MULTIPLE LANGUAGES)

Considering the studies that differentiate and, at the same time, relate orality and writing (BARTHES, 2004; TEBEROSKY, 1992), the PCNs (BRASIL, 1997) and, also, the dimensions of language (oral, written, kinesthetic, sonorous and iconic) mentioned by Colello (2004), it is understood that linguistic development is a broad process, which is why the school must integrate reading and writing, in addition to multiple languages, such as drawing, music, etc.

### NATURE OF DEMANDS (NOTATIONAL, DISCURSIVE OR NOTATIONAL/DISCURSIVE)

Understanding that language learning must simultaneously pay attention to the closed (notational) pole and the open (discursive) pole of the language, the axis focuses on classroom activities as possibilities for developing textuality – the “language-that-is-written” (TEBEROSKY, 1992).

For the purposes of the case study, we monitored, for a week and for a period of two years, six classes representing the literacy cycle: 1st, 2nd and 3rd years of 2015 and 2016. Names of teachers and other data from the institution were kept in secrecy.

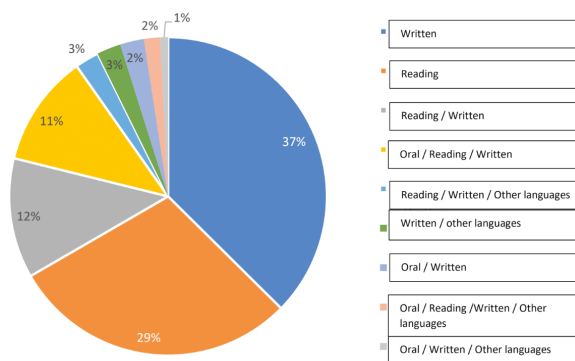
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and organization of the corpus of one hundred and twenty-three written language activities (sample of Portuguese language classes) can be summarized in the following table:

Based on this data, we began to consider the trends in the aforementioned research axes.

### NATURE OF ACTIVITIES

Graph 1 shows the percentage distribution of the aspects observed regarding the “nature of activities” in the observed classes:



G Graph 1 - Results relating to the nature of the activity – Literacy Cycle

Despite the guidelines that propose the integration of different dimensions of language, in the school studied, this combination was unbalanced, as teachers emphasized the written form of the language, which allows us to identify the following trends:

### PREVALENCE OF COPYING IN OPPOSITION TO THE POSSIBILITIES OF LINGUISTIC REFLECTION

This trend was observed in five of the six classes monitored. Of the forty-six activities, forty-one were related to copying activities. Considering this prevalence, it is worth asking: how efficient is copying as a teaching methodology?

Research axes	Quantities	%	
Nature of activities	Oral	0	0%
	Reading	36	29,3%
	Written	46	37,4%
	Oral / Written	3	2,4%
	Reading/Writing	15	12,2%
	Oral / Reading / Writing	14	11,3%
	Writing / Other languages	3	2,4%
	Reading / Writing / Other languages	3	2,4%
	Oral / Written / Other languages	1	0,8%
	Oral / Reading / Writing Other languages	2	1,6%
Nature of demands	Other languages	0	0%
	Notational	49	39,8%
	Discursive	30	24,4%
	Notational / Discursive	44	35,8%

Table 1 – Classification of activities in the Literacy Cycle

The negative answer is objectively assumed by the Literacy Teacher Training Program (PROFA, 2001, p. 272):

Copying teaches you how to write.  
Is not true. Copying has been considered a writing activity, frequently used in the early grades with the aim of teaching writing. Powers are attributed to it that it does not possess: no child learns to produce writing by copying. Copying is transcribing, it is not writing – writing is a way of expressing in writing, of representing in writing what you intend to say.

Endorsing the same reservations regarding copies justified by PROFA (cases of writing motivated by students' interests, cases in which the copy has a reason for being such as in culinary recipes, storytelling collectively composed), Chartier (s/d) makes a point of claim:

As a school exercise, copying is a classic activity that can be related to a mechanical and repetitive act of writing that keeps students busy, without an understanding of what they are copying, or it can be an intelligent act on the part of the learner.

In fact, some copy proposals observed in the different classes were related to the recording

of significant texts produced collectively, but this criterion did not represent the majority of copy requests.

### READING AS A PRACTICE CENTERED ON TEACHERS

Reading proposals used to occur at the beginning of classes and were, for the most part, centered on the teachers, with students in a more passive stance (expectants of written language).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that other reading practices were observed, such as going to the “Reading Room”, where students stayed, for fifty minutes a week, to read books, interact with their classmates when choosing books and listen to a reading, in the style of storytelling. In these situations, it was possible to observe that there was no systematic teaching of reading behaviors to students, which compromised the treatment of reading and writing as effective teaching objects.

It is worth noting that, in all classes, there was a collection of literary and non-literary books, such as general magazines and comic books. Teachers, for the most part, gave access to this collection when students finished

activities and could then “distract themselves” and “busy themselves” with reading, as if this activity were just a secondary alternative to the daily proposals.

### **PRIORITY FOR VERBAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE**

The articulation between different manifestations of language occurred in 33.4% of the proposals, with the most used combination being reading and writing (13%), which highlights the valorization of verbal language to the detriment of other possible ones.

Didactic proposals with the combination of orality and writing are interesting in the literacy process, as children who do not yet know how to spell words can, through oral speech, produce texts with the “language-that-is-written”.

No proposals were observed in which the teaching of written language was focused on the oral modality of the language, nor even on other dimensions of language (kinesthetic, sound and iconic). This data must be viewed with concern, as Colello (2012, pp. 195-196) highlights.

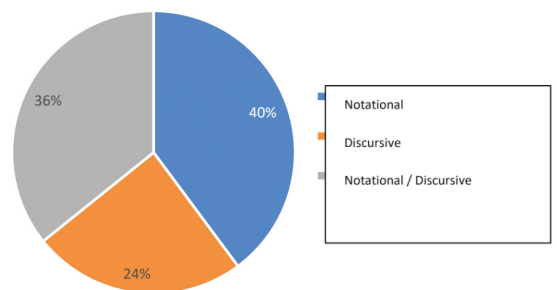
In our culture, individuals live, from a very early age, with an intense diversification of recording methods and the multifunctionality of graphic resources. Often, the information received goes beyond strictly alphabetical forms, and its decoding is part of a broader literacy process linked to culture and social practices. Understanding so many possibilities given by the relationship between systems is, without a doubt, a learning process that takes place through consideration of the differentiated and integrative components in the different communication purposes. Notational knowledge in its complexity evolves in the context of this diversity, parallel to the construction of knowledge and, often, despite the school. Obsessed with rapid literacy and the desire for spelling and

grammatical correction, many educators operate centered on a hierarchy of socially instituted values, privileging the isolated learning of the language to the detriment of stimulating the richness and breadth of possibilities of expression given by the intelligent combination of resources and systems (including writing itself).

The centralization of teaching on writing activities impoverishes the creation of repertoire on the part of students and, in a way, distances school practices from the real world, in which students are, at all times, interacting with different dimensions of language.

### **NATURE OF DEMAND**

The research axis “nature of demand” was guided by the principle of differentiated teaching, articulating notational and discursive aspects, which favors the understanding of written language and the insertion of the subject in the literate universe. Graph 2 shows the percentage distribution of the criteria observed in the observed classes:



Graph 2 - Results related to the nature of demand – Literacy Cycle

Data analysis allowed us to outline the following interdependent trends:

### **PREDOMINANCE OF THE NOTATIONAL ASPECT**

Didactic proposals of a notational nature made up the vast majority of the episodes observed. This trend (with the exception of the 3rd year of 2016, in which notational aspects were in balance with discursive aspects)

highlighted the teachers' preference for writing activities. Proposals focused on notation represented 40% of registered activities, indicating the time invested in activities with just one focus: system acquisition.

Despite the relevance of notational activities as a strategy for understanding the system (phonetic, orthographic or grammatical aspects), the balance between notation and discursivity cannot be neglected, under penalty of corrupting the dialogic nature of written language (GERALDI, 2006), which brings us to the next trend.

### TIMID INTEGRATION BETWEEN NOTATIONAL AND DISCURSIVE ASPECTS

The articulation between proposals that mobilized notational and discursive reflections represented only 36% of the episodes observed, which means 44 of the 123 proposed Portuguese language activities. The data seems particularly worrying because the articulation of notational and discursive dimensions is essential in textual productions, in particular, to promote, in the Literacy Cycle, writing for social, communicative and interlocutory purposes, that is, to guarantee the meaning of learning to written based on the "language-that-is-written".

It is necessary to bear in mind that the learning process takes place through participation in interactive processes, that is, only with linguistic practices [...] can we learn the language that makes us who we are [...]. Words are expressive resources available in the language, but it is the operations with these resources that produce the effective meaning of the speech. (GERALDI, 2009, p. 226-229)

### FRAGILITY OF DISCURSIVE APPEALS

Discursive activities were rarely carried out, reinforcing the tendency that, in the Literacy Cycle, the emphasis is on notational (mastery of the system, spelling and grammar), evidence of the false assumption that mastery of the system is a preliminary phase to the effective I use language in the social sphere (COLELLO, 2012). Even though the students were producing some texts, there were no discussions about them or reflections on the mechanisms of discursive construction. In other words, they were mechanical activities, treated as mere school activism.

In this regard, it is worth remembering that it is necessary to take the text as a possibility for the development of textuality (TEBEROSKY, 1992) and that the text must enter the classroom as a starting and ending point for the dialogical construction of saying: "the product of a discursive activity where someone says something to someone" (GERALDI, 2013, p. 67). Therefore, at school, discursive aspects must always be encouraged so that dialogical practice can occur from different forms of interaction, at different moments of production, with different purposes of achievement and, above all, through monitoring in the different stages of planning, thematic problematization, textualization, review, presentation, etc.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With a focus on teaching proposals and interventions, this research started from the hypothesis that, in the school context, there is a pedagogical oscillation in teaching proposals that can give rise to different practices with different implications for learning perspectives.

This pedagogical oscillation may indicate the great effort that is made in didactic transposition; an effort that, supported by continuing training initiatives, pedagogical

guidelines and suggestions for work strategies, highlights progress. In this sense, initiatives were observed to make classrooms a “literacy environment” (LERNER, 2002), to promote understanding of the system, to develop pedagogical projects and to expand students’ contact with literature. On the other hand, pedagogical oscillation also presents signs of didactic difficulties, fragility in the assimilation of concepts or guidelines, uncertainties about the progression of teaching, teaching hesitations and inadequacies in teaching practice. Subsidized by teaching conceptions or by the ingrained school culture, these problems affect work proposals, modes of intervention and interaction in the classroom, and, consequently, modes of learning.

By proving the hypothesis, the data collected showed that adequate didactic transposition (in the sense of training subject authors and interpreters) is still a challenge to

be achieved, a pressing focus that deserves to be rethought.

Although the school is a privileged space for the articulated practices of various dimensions of language, planning centered on reductionist practices shows that the classroom is often shy in the formation of the “linguistic subject”, that is, the capable individual. of moving between different forms of manifestation and expression.

Understanding the classroom as a favorable field for verbal interaction, language as a means and goal in the achievement of knowledge and teaching as an exercise of interaction and reflection for the achievement of knowledge (COLELLO, 2012, 2017, 2021; FERREIRO, 2009; GERALDI, 2013; ROCHA, VAL 2003; COELHO, 2009), it is possible to defend a school linked to social practices and in tune with the calls of the contemporary world.

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