An Approach to Images in a Literacy Textbook: Perspectives on Visual Literacy / *Abordagem da imagem em um livro didático voltado para a alfabetização: perspectivas de letramento visual*

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ABSTRACT

Considering the multitude of languages and the fact that beginning literacy is a key literacy practice in children's education, we aim at identifying how images are approached in a textbook used in the first grade of elementary school and accredited by Brazil's National Textbook Program (PNLD, 2010). We also seek to discuss the extent to which the analyzed sample provides a comprehensive and critical reading of visual texts. The analysis was done based on interpretive epistemology, the sociocultural approach to literacy, and visual language syntax, which can contribute positively to the analysis of visual discourse. We concluded that the image in the sample is presented from sociocultural approaches, that the reading activities foster visual literacy, and that teachers' support plays a significant role in adopting approaches to reading and in conducting reading activities per se.

KEYWORDS: Beginning Literacy; Visual Literacy; Textbook; Image; Reading Activities

RESUMO

Em vista da grande multiplicidade de linguagens e considerando que a alfabetização é uma importante prática de letramento na constituição da criança, este artigo tem o objetivo de identificar o tipo de abordagem dado à imagem em um livro didático do 1º ano (EF), aprovado pelo PNLD (2010). O intuito é discutir em que medida a amostra analisada favorece uma leitura compreensiva e crítica do texto imagético. Para tanto, as ponderações foram realizadas por meio de uma epistemologia interpretativa, à luz da teoria dos letramentos sob uma perspectiva sociocultural e, também, a partir da sintaxe da linguagem visual, que pode trazer uma contribuição positiva às análises discursivas visuais. A pesquisa indica que a imagem é proposta a partir de perspectivas socioculturais; que as atividades de leitura favorecem ao letramento visual e que a condução do professor pode fazer diferença nas abordagens e leituras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Alfabetização; Letramento visual; Livro didático; Imagem; Atividades de leitura

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Introduction

This paper reports part of a larger work (AMARAL, 2012) whose main objective was to identify how images are approached in reading activities in the textbook *Português: Linguagens – Letramento e Alfabetização – 1o. Ano* (*Portuguese: Languages and Literacy – 1st Grade*), by Cereja and Magalhães (2010), targeted to first grade students of Elementary School and accredited by Brazil's National Program of Textbooks – PNLD (2010). The idea arose due to the plural perspectives of literacy, which characterize the textbook as the "main mediation tool in the teaching-learning process"[1] (TAGLIANI, 2009, p.46) and defend a multisemiotic work, with and from texts.

When considering the macro characteristics of the aforementioned master's thesis, we believe that, in the teaching-learning process, it is impossible to detach writing and reading practices from society's needs in order to contextualize linguistic relations, which are established with their situated meanings (GEE, 2001). In this direction, the multitude of languages to which individuals are daily exposed, through countless discursive genres (BAKHTIN, 2007 [1952-1953/1979]), cause concerns about how the multisemiotic literacies (ROJO, 2009) are approached during the beginning literacy period. We highlight here that these literacies are understood as groups of sociocultural practices, characterized by different institutional relations of power and identity, which involve different languages and semioses and not verbal language alone.

The reflection upon this stage derives from the reason that beginning literacy is characterized as one of the first moments of the child's exposure to the literacies which are linked directly to school institutions and/or others, comprised of specialized and institutionalized knowledge. Specifically, if literacies and languages are multiple, it would be adequate to reflect upon how (and if) this work is done at school, how (and if) textbooks approach issues related to these literacies and, finally, upon the possible implications of these aspects in relation to child's literacy practices (STREET, 2003).

Simões (2009) explains that, from an early age, individuals read the world in which they live, assigning meaning to diverse codes. In this sense, children who are not in school yet already read the different languages that surround them, in different social

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[1] Text in Portuguese: "principal instrumento mediador do processo de ensino-aprendizagem".

spheres (BAKHTIN, 2007[1952-1953/1979]), even if in very particular ways. Nevertheless, this cannot (or should not) result in the tendency of thinking that image reading is implicitly developed, "because we believe that the meanings produced by images are 'transparent'"[2] (NASCIMENTO, BEZERRA & HEBERLE, 2011, p.532).

Moreover, it is essential to introduce multisemiotic literacies in school practices. Consequently, illustrated texts need to enter children's consciousness from clear criteria. It is required to see that these texts can be used for reading comprehension activities, which go beyond the artistic and aesthetic field, because, according to Nascimento, Bezerra and Heberle (2011), they are ruled by principles and regularities as well.

Considering this scenario, the scope of this paper is to show part of a study, from a sample, identifying the approach of one of the images from the analyzed textbook and pointing to what extent the reading activities stimulate a comprehensive and critical reading of the illustrated text. In order to do that, we carried out a qualitative research (BAUER & GASKELL, 2000) whose analysis is done based on an interpretative epistemology (SOARES, 2006).

The theoretical approach is mainly focused on (1) sociocultural perspectives to literacies (GEE, 2001; STREET, 2003; FISCHER, 2007), and on (2) the visual syntax, which is based on the possibility of a visual literacy[3] (DONDIS, 1973). Hence, we expect to contribute to the discussions around this theme and, consequently, to the teaching-learning process, especially to what occurs in the beginning literacy period, an important literacy practice for the child's constitution.

This paper is organized into five sections. The first two sections present theoretical perspectives to literacies and the visual language syntax. The third one describes the method used to analyze the data. The fourth section reports the analysis of the textbook image. Finally, the last sections present the final remarks and the references of this study.

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[2] Text in Portuguese: "por acreditarmos que os sentidos produzidos por imagens sejam 'transparentes'".
[3] For Dondis (2007), *functional literacy* means more than knowing how to decode, including the knowledge of comprehending. In this sense, *visual functional literacy* is knowing how to decode and comprehend illustrated texts, attributing senses to them, taking into account the social practices which they emerge from, that is to say, *functional literacy* for Dondis (2007) is understood in this research as *literacy*. So, here the expression *visual functional literacy* is equivalent to *visual literacy*.

1 Multisemiotic Literacies, the Beginning Literacy Student, the Textbook and the School: Plausible Relations

It is undeniable that, in the last years, the world has undergone many changes, mainly regarding the issue of the way information reaches individuals through new technologies, which implies the existence of a plurality of languages. This diversity of semioses for text production characterizes multisemiotic literacies, which are presented through printed texts which "combine languages in a hypertextual way"[4] (ROJO, 2010, p.27-28), expressing this multitude of sources and languages. Therefore, it is convenient to reflect that "the literacy phenomenon exceeds the world of writing as it is understood by the institutions which are in charge of formally introducing individuals to the world of writing"[5] (KLEIMAN, 2008, p.20).

In this article, we want to highlight the beginning literacy period, in which the "acquisition process of the written code, of reading and writing skills" takes place[6] (SOARES, 2008, p.15). In this sense, beginning literacy represents an important literacy practice in the school context. As to students, we can observe that children usually start school at the age of six, which, according to Stolf and Heining (2011), is a fact that raises questions about (1) the objectives for the first grade, (2) the object of teaching and learning as far as language is concerned, and (3) the methodologies to be adopted, respecting the writing culture in which the child is.

As to textbooks, although this new scenario for the Elementary School is based on a routine in which literacy practices are even more focused on multiple languages, the printed textbook is still the teacher's main support in the teaching-learning process (TAGLIANI, 2009). According to Bunzen, (2011), "we thus need a linguistic approach that is not based on structures or on mental processes, but on language games and discursive shifts"[7] (2011, p.105) that are appropriate "to understand the multiple literacy scenarios."[8] (2011, p.105). Therefore, from these statements, the author leaves some clues as to the role and the uses of the textbooks that circulate in schools.

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[4] Text in Portuguese: "a combinar linguagens de maneira hipertextual".
[5] Text in Portuguese: "o fenômeno do letramento, então, extrapola o mundo da escrita tal qual é concebido pelas instituições que se encarregam de introduzir formalmente os sujeitos no mundo da escrita".
[6] Text in Portuguese: "processo de aquisição do código escrito, das habilidades de leitura e escrita."
[7] Text in Portuguese: "necessitamos, então, de um olhar linguístico que não se volte para as estruturas ou para os processos mentais, mas para os jogos de linguagem e movimentos discursivos".
[8] Text in Portuguese: "compreender as múltiplas cenas de letramento.".

At the same time, it is necessary to take ideologies into account when one is engaged in any kind of social activity, which includes schools. Due to the fact that the social subjects are ideologically constituted (STREET, 2003), it is natural that thoughts and convictions permeate relations in society, regardless of the place where they are established. About this issue, for example, it is convenient to remember that "children and adolescents live with images of the visual culture of everyday life and, naturally, take these references to school since they reflect upon aspects of their sociocultural contexts and the age they live in"[9] (RODRIGUES, 2009, p.65-65).

In accordance to this thought, Kleiman (2008) states that teachers cannot (or should not) disregard the fact, for example, that the media that involve a variety of illustrated signs are part of students' everyday life in a greater or lesser degree. This highlights visual language, pointing to the need of providing students with reading activities and image comprehension (beyond aesthetics) at school, thus taking into account students' practices.

Rojo (2009, p.107) mentions that one of the main objectives of schools is to encourage students to participate in different social practices. Therefore, it is not possible "to ignore or to delete the literacies of local cultures from their agents (teachers, students, the school community)"[10]. Considering the current context, it is necessary to rethink school syllabi (BUNZEN, 2011) and, consequently, to develop didactic-pedagogical actions that support them, without disregarding the use of textbooks.

2 Visual Literacies: a Possibility through the Visual Language Syntax

In agreement with Paes de Barros and Costa (2012, p.44), we believe that it is necessary to have the teaching and learning of reading texts aimed at a visual literacy which "considers the development of the ability to attribute meaning to images in the

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[9] Text in Portuguese: "crianças e adolescentes convivem com imagens da cultura visual em seu cotidiano e, naturalmente, levam estas referências para a escola, pois refletem aspectos dos seus contextos socioculturais e da época em que vivem.".
[10] Text in Portuguese: "ignorar ou apagar os letramentos das culturas locais de seus agentes (professores, alunos, comunidade escolar)".

historical context in which they were created and circulate"[11]. In this sense, however, even if one works with the idea of multiple meanings, the reading of illustrated texts will be circumscribed, somehow, to semantic limitation, which contributes to the teaching of how "to see"[12].

Furthermore, similarly to the teaching of writing and reading (decoding and understanding), it is feasible to teach how "to see." This represents "the need to take a new view of the function of not only the process [of seeing], but also the visualizer in society" (DONDIS, 1973, p.2). In this context, the act of teaching how "to see" is not a synonym to embracing a concept from which students' skills are developed mechanically. Moreover, we need to consider that "the use of a visual approach to leaning through the media is without rigor and purpose" (DONDIS, 1973, p.10).

In this sense, the use of a visual approach characterized only as teaching resource (presentation of slides and movies, for example) may mean misusing this communication means for more meaningful purposes and may represent a probable lack of criteria in relation to visual literacy. The opportunity to provide students with ways of dealing "with what can be seen"[13] (LEBEDEFF, 2010, p.18) and how what is seen can be understood is lost. This explains the need for a teaching approach that also considers visual literacies, using specific references.

In this perspective, Dondis[14] (1973) conceptualizes the visual language syntax, presented in the book *A Primer of Visual Literacy*. The author seeks to elucidate the need to pay more attention to visual communication at school so that everyone can produce and read – "see" illustrated texts with more fluency. Because of that, it is by thinking of an alternative approach for the insertion of visual literacy perspectives at school in an interdisciplinary way that it is possible to use the source of visual language syntax, seeking to build up a bridge between this theoretical approach and the linguistic sphere.

Additionally, to be considered fluent in visual literacies, it is not enough for individuals to identify (or to decode) images, but to ensure they comprehend them in a

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[11] Text in Portuguese: "considere o desenvolvimento das capacidades de atribuir significados às imagens em função dos contextos históricos em que estas foram criadas e circulam".

[12] The expression "to see", in quotes, as well as its variations, is used in this work meaning decoding and comprehending images, that is to say, reading images, effectively.

[13] Text in Portuguese: "com o que pode ser visto".

[14] We have chosen to use Dondis's work only, for we believe that the different elements that support the analyses proposed in the book are in accordance with the objective of this article.

constructive way. First, it would be convenient to say that the visual process displays "individual components" (DONDIS, 1973, p.15), that is, specific *elements* aside from individual experiences brought at the moment of image reading. These *elements*[15] are the beginning of any visual composition, since, from them, it is possible to create the representation of any object.

Besides that, added to the *techniques of visual communication*[16], these elements become even more efficient for the composition. Hence, if one knows these elements and techniques, the action of building meanings becomes a possibility. Moreover, it is more meaningful to read and comprehend consciously; in other words, to establish visual syntactic criteria helps one "to see." The author claims that the knowledge of these techniques promotes the perception of the subject in order to make a more "discerning audience for any visual statement" (DONDIS, 1973, p.17).

In this sense, visual communication also has linguistic "rules" (or techniques) and syntactic units (or elements). What happens is that when we "see" an illustrated composition, we first understand the whole that is presented to us; however, the image is already there, in all its complexity. Only later do we pay attention to details and discover deeper meanings, which can/should even be linked to an extra-compositional, more social dimension.

This means that it is possible to conceive and observe a visual composition through distinct ways. Thus, visual communication can be expressed and received at different levels: *representational*, *abstract,* and *symbolic.* According to Dondis (1973), the representational level relates to what "we see and recognize from environment and experience" (1973, p.67), regardless of the details, of the way the object is represented or even of the employed technique.

Hence, the reading of an illustrated text that does not go beyond the representational level will be the one which identifies only those aspects linked to reality, that is, the categories that allow us to identify or to establish direct relations between the representation and the represented object. However, if the reader goes

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[15] According to Dondis (1973), the elements are: *dot, line, shape, direction, tone, color, texture, dimension, scale*, and *movement.*
[16] According to Dondis (1973): *balance*; *stress*; *leveling, sharpening and ambiguity*; *preference for the lower left angle*; *attraction and grouping*; *positive* and *negative*.

beyond that, other ideas can be captured, ranging from a more abstract to a more symbolic nature.

The abstract level of observation, in general, happens when, "seeing" a certain illustrated text, the observer manages to grasp more extensive meanings, which go beyond what is represented. "Abstraction, visually, is simplification toward a more intense and distilled meaning" (DONDIS, 1973, p.74). A very effective way to understand how the abstract level works is to think that every text intends to convey a message, be it verbal, visual, or verbal-visual.

In an illustrated text, the messages captured by the observer, besides what is directly represented, enable the reading of this visual composition in more abstract terms. Consequently, verbal texts allow the reading of implicit meanings and, in illustrated texts, it is possible to "see" other implicit meanings. As to the other levels, the abstract level is quite variable, which is natural and in accordance with the experiences of those who see. It is important to explain that no matter how much the understanding of any message may vary, it is normally in a broad semantic field of possibilities which are limited.

Another interesting issue is that, although abstraction needs to "have no relationship to actual symbol-making" (DONDIS, 1973, p.74), many meanings, attributed to a visual composition, at the abstract level, are created due to the knowledge the reader-observer has of universally established symbols. This is what Dondis (2007) calls "abstraction toward symbolism" (1973, p.72). Unlike pure abstraction, "The abstraction toward symbolism requires ultimate simplicity, the reduction of visual detail to the irreducible minimum" (DONDIS, 1973, p.72).

The simpler the symbol, the more effective it is shown; however, this effectiveness depends on the knowledge of the observer of the visual message, which sets the character of the symbol as a socially determined visual message. Therefore, the understanding of an illustrated text composed of symbols requires them to be distinguished by observers, which is not difficult to think of since in our society there are countless symbols that, many times, determine our communication. Just like the techniques and the elements of visual communication, the levels of expression must also be viewed on a *continuum* although they may be analyzed separately. Methodologically, "the *representational* visual information is the most effective level to utilize in the

strong, direct reporting of the visual details of the environment, both natural and made" (DONDIS, 1973, p.82, emphasis in original), and it "may well be one of the major factors in an increasing interest in the second level of visual information, the *abstract*" (2007, p. 103, emphasis in original). In addition, the symbolic level "can reinforce message and meaning of visual communication many ways" (DONDIS, 1973, p.83).

3 Method

The study was a documental analysis of a qualitative nature (BAUER & GASKELL, 2000), in which reflections were made through an interpretative epistemology (SOARES, 2006). The first step, after having the theme and the objectives defined, was to find a book designed for the 1st grade of Elementary School, accredited by PLND (2010). Naturally, the first documental source chosen was the Textbook Guide of PNLD (2010) itself, which brings explanatory reviews on all the accredited books.

From these reviews, we selected the work of Cereja and Magalhães (2010) *Português: Linguagens - Alfabetização e Letramento*, volume 1 (whose target public is 1st grade students of Elementary School), code 15894COL31. The textbook has 259 pages (including detachable cards for games) and is composed of four units: The Play Will Start, Me, My Land, My People, Painting the Town Red, and A Sea of Stories. Each one comprises three chapters, all of which have reading activities, reflection, and textual production. In particular, the first chapters of each unit have a section called Image Reading, which contributes to a positive view of the book and, consequently, to its being chosen as the research object.

Next, we carried out the analysis of the images based on the *Visual Language Syntax Theory* (DONDIS, 1973), present in the section Image Reading, which favored the creation of categories to analyze the illustrated texts and the activities related to them. In this study, the constitutive social situation of images characterizes the dialogical approach to language by VOLOŠINOV, V. N (1986 [1929]), which supports the analysis, although it is also based on other authors.

The categories for the images were determined as follows: *Image-compositional text* (images that are the textual composition itself or that help to compose a verbal-

visual text in a fundamental way with a great deal of informational); *Image-illustrative text* (images illustrating the content of a verbal text in order to facilitate understanding, in which both image and verbal text act in a complementary informational nature); and *Image-decorative text* (images that only decorate the pages and/or the verbal texts, presenting little information and not offering great possibilities in terms of meaningful reading).

For the activities, the following categories were determined: *Illustrated text reading activities*, which favor the reflection upon the image, providing not just the decoding, that is, the mere observation of the image, but also its comprehension. Specifically, they lead to the symbolic or abstract comprehension level of the illustrated text (DONDIS, 1973). *Illustrated text decoding activities* direct the reader's look only to superficial observation – or image decoding. Specifically, they lead to the comprehension of the illustrated text at the representational level (DONDIS, 1973). *Illustrated texts non-reading activities* do not relate directly to the illustrated text or do not use the image as an excuse to develop other subjects, being totally, or largely, decontextualized from the image's subject matter.

Image analysis was performed in order to highlight the peculiarities that were relevant to characterize the approaches given to the illustrated texts and the visual literacy perspectives of the textbook. For a more general view on the textbook's proposal, a quantitative analysis of the data was done, based on the number of illustrated texts and activities analyzed, according to the established categories. This reflection upon the data showed a tendency of the textbook for not using images only as an aesthetic medium, giving priority to the illustrated texts that are rich in information and reading possibilities. As to the activities, most of them contribute to the development of a comprehensive and critical reading of the images.

We will here report the illustrated-text analysis of the Image Reading section of the first chapter (Vem brincar comigo! – Come play with me!) of the first unit of the book (Vai começar a brincadeira! – The play will start!). To illustrate the analysis, we will present at least one technique and one element of the visual language syntax and the way they compose image reading. Moreover, we will also show possibilities of reading through the representational, abstract, and symbolic levels before we get to image categorization.

About the reading activities, we will show one example of each category, illustrating how it contributes (or not) to image comprehension, which results in the analysis of three (Activities 1, 3 and 4) out of the four activities related to the image presented. The analysis of the images and of the reading activities predicted the contextualization of the material and aimed at relating them to the sociocultural perspective of literacies.

4 The Image under Analysis

Based on the titles of the chapter and the unit of the selected image, we can say that the expressed ideas seem to consider certain social practices of childhood. Departing from the assumption that: a) the child is making her first contact with the school; b) the child, before this contact, lived in the world of toys and plays; c) the child is possibly making her first contact with the textbook, and d) the teacher has used the textbook since the first meeting of the school year, it is necessary that the textbook consider the context from which the beginning literacy student comes and, consequently, show that it understands the process of beginning literacy in a sociocultural perspective (GEE, 2001; STREET, 2003, FISCHER, 2007).

In addition, the didactic material seems to consider some of the child's actual daily practices and makes use of a context which refers to these situated and socially determined practices (GEE, 2001). Possibly, the invitation made by the titles of the unit and the chapter (Vai começar a brincadeira! – The play will start!; Vem brincar comigo! – Come play with me! respectively), in order to encourage interaction with the readers, ensures a good start to the child, who will not feel deprived of so many novelties.

After these considerations, when observing the image that "opens" the chapter in question in the Image Reading section (Figure 1), we can see that the illustrated text is in line with the notion of *play* because we can see a girl playing with a dog, pretending to be the doctor who takes care of the patient. Various techniques and elements can help the child better do this reading.
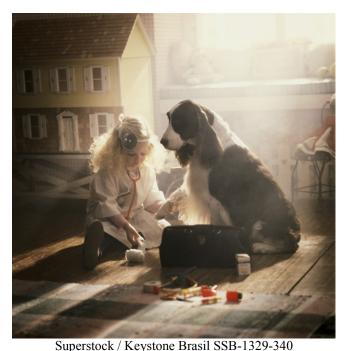
Superstock / Keystone Brasil SSB-1329-340
Figure 1: Illustrated text of the section Image Reading, Unit 1, Chapter 1

As we point to the *techniques* of visual syntax, we can notice the preference for the *lower left angle* (DONDIS, 1973), since the set of shadows directs the look first to the girl and the dog, leaving the other elements in the second plane of observation. The position of the girl – to the left, the direction to which the eye always turns the attention first – motivates an immediate identification of the student (in the beginning literacy level) with the girl. This is an opportunity to work the analogical process with the child, that is, "I am also a child," "I also have a dog," "I can also have a dog," "I would like to have a dog," which contextualizes the practice.

Another *compositional technique* that can be taken into account for the reading practice is the *attraction and grouping* technique (DONDIS, 1973).The former relates to the way the key points of the illustrated text are organized so as to attract or not the child's look. The girl and the dog, the main characters of the illustrated text, are placed together, promoting the feeling of attraction. This proximity, a reflection of the attracting and grouping techniques, favors the idea of partnership between the little girl and the dog.

Regarding the *elements of visual composition*, the analysis also points to the idea of harmony. One example is the use of *colors*; it is worth calling attention to the color of the girl's outfit – it seems to be a white lab coat, which, in this case, symbolizes

health. It is worth emphasizing that this symbolic notion about color invites reading also at a symbolic level (DONDIS, 1973). In this plane of observation, the knowledge about what is socially conventional is needed as well as the activation of other previous information that depends on the practices from which the student comes. Therefore, in these cases, the teacher needs to intermediate the process.

Revisiting the items that refer to health, other artifacts of the composition (toy stethoscope, gauze bandage, medical tape) confirm this hypothesis and contribute to the attribution of meaning to the image. This also shows the importance of observing an image accurately, paying attention to the techniques used to compose it as well as the way elements interact with each other, revealing meanings beyond the representational level (DONDIS, 1973).

Reflecting upon the *image comprehension levels* (DONDIS, 1973), at a first level, that is, the *representational* level, the items are arranged in an iconic way: the girl, the dog, the dollhouse. Starting from the *symbolic* level, some items emerge, such as the medical bag, the stethoscope, the gauze bandage, the medicine box. By observing the techniques and elements of visual composition, we can compose observation levels in order to reach *abstraction*, that is, to infer that the illustrated text in question reports an everyday life event of a child who is in her room, playing to be the doctor of her dog.

If the student reaches that level – the abstraction level – he or she will be, therefore, "seeing" (decoding and understanding) the image and, if that illustrated text represents the children's daily routine, we have a meaningful reading practice (GEE, 2001), which considers the practices of plays, characterizing the process of beginning literacy as a social and culturally determined practice (GEE, 2001; STREET, 2003; FISCHER, 2007). Apart from that, we can note that the techniques and elements, separately analyzed, but within a *continuum*, lead to the visual language syntax (DONDIS, 1973).

The analysis presented herein can be used by teachers didactically in order to contextualize images in accordance to the reality of their little students, reinforcing image reading as a meaningful experience (GEE, 2001). Directed questions, which consider the techniques and elements, can be a first step towards visual beginning literacy as they combine the illustrated text information with the students' reality. This,

therefore, leads to the observation of the activities related to the illustrated text, which, because of its informational level, is categorized as an *illustrated-compositional text*.

Then, according to the textbook, the first question of the activities is "What name would you give this picture? Please write it down." This first activity is valid as it provides a relation between, at least, the decoding and the observation of the illustrated text. We say "at least" because it is necessary that the student observe the illustrated text in order to offer it a coherent name – and each student can give a different name –, which should consider the situation depicted there, at least at the representational level (DONDIS, 1973) – a girl playing with a dog.

Hence, considering question number 1 as it is presented, we can categorize it as an *illustrated text decoding activity* since it motivates reading at the representational level (DONDIS, 1973), in which the relation between object and object's representation is more obvious and direct. We also emphasize the importance of contextualizing this activity (which could become effective in oral activities) in order to guide reading beyond the representational level so that the child does not have to name the illustrated text just for the sake of naming it.

Activities 3 and 4 have a different configuration, the latter being the consequence of the former. Specifically, question number three states that "many things can be turned into a toy, don't you think? What may they become: a bed sheet? Two pan lids? A chayote? A shoe box?" Revisiting the illustrated text (Figure 1) and the analysis, we can notice that the girl plays doctor-patient game and that there are elements that make us come to this conclusion, such as the stethoscope and the gauze bandage that she is about to tie around the dog's paw, for example.

In this sense, it is worth thinking about the reflective path used to get to the answer to Activity 3 since in illustrated texts the objects used by the child to play with the dog do not seem to be real toys. The gauze bandage, the medicine box, the briefcase and the doctor lab coat seem to be "real" and, indeed, the girl in the picture turned them into objects of the play. Thus, according to the direction given, the student will have to first notice this fact in the illustrated text to only later list possibilities of playing with the elements offered by the question (bed sheets, pan lids, chayote, and shoe box).

This activity can therefore be classified *as illustrated text reading*, providing image comprehension levels between the abstract and the symbolic (DONDIS, 1973),

depending on which knowledge has been activated. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that the activity allows the student to exceed the thematic field of the illustrated text in order to relate it to other possibilities of playing and incorporating students' practices. As a result, children are lead to think about their own practices, and this demonstrates the concern of the textbook in considering the reality of the readers by making a situated and meaningful reading activity (GEE, 2001).

Regarding Activity 4, as previously mentioned, it ends up being a consequence of Activity 3, since it asks the student to "draw one of the plays that you imagined [on the previous activity]," offering a small frame in which the drawing should be done. Afterwards, it asks student to "write the name of the play." To classify Activity 4, it is taken into account that, although it is linked to Activity 3, which, in turn, leads to the symbolic and abstraction levels, the way the command is performed restricts Question 4 to an *illustrated text non-reading activity*, for the image is used as an excuse to the exercise, that is, it is no longer the focus but the means to perform the activity.

It is noteworthy that the act of drawing a play and then naming it, without a clear and well defined objective, is a means of disregarding that there are techniques and visual elements (DONDIS, 1973) that can be used as subsidy to the intention of those who draw it. Logically, it would not be necessary to expose the theory explicitly, but didactically. In this sense, it would be possible, for example, to request a drawing that shows not only the imagined plays, but the student playing with a friend, or with his/her pet in his/her room. Moreover, the request could be improved by the use of colors to create, according to students' opinion, a cheerful drawing, aiming at taking advantage of the readings and better doing them.

Final Remarks

As it was possible to observe, the illustrated text analyzed here was categorized as *compositive*. This categorization, together with the fact that this image is presented in a section named Image Reading, makes it possible to consider that the textbook, based on the analyzed image, favors an imagery approach with meaningful informational content and is rich in terms of reading possibilities. More specifically, if well explored,

the *illustrated-compositive text*, be it the only or the main source of information, can reinforce numerous notions to the child.

Regarding some of these notions, we can highlight: the understanding that images are also texts and, therefore, are also readable; the notion of authorship, from the understanding that, similarly to verbal texts, the illustrated texts are created from objectives, or from a given perspective; the idea of reading as a process between the reader and the author as different meaning possibilities may arise, considering that the text, more than materiality, is also a historical moment – be it the author's or the reader's; the awareness that to compose an illustrated text the author makes use of subsidies – techniques, elements, and levels of visual comprehension – in order to convey his/her ideas and to create, for example, different sensations in the reader.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the awareness of these subsidies does not need to occur explicitly. However, the regularity of the illustrated text reading practices created to observe these data can contribute to the construction of the child's notions of literacy, making the beginning literacy a sociocultural meaningful process (GEE, 2001).

Furthermore, we could also notice that the image was approached mainly to anticipate plural literacy perspectives since a multisemiotic work derived from reading activities is recommended. Still regarding these plural perspectives, we can also observe that the illustrated text analyzed is within a thematic scope, which is somehow related to the child's universe. That means that it concerns the everyday life of the little student. The theme of play also makes the reading practice situated and meaningful (GEE, 2001).

In this sense, the analyzed activities favor a comprehensive and critical reading of these texts, supported by the understanding that *illustrated text reading activities* lead to *abstract* and/or *symbolic* levels of image comprehension, and that the *illustrated text decoding activities* lead to a *representational level*. The analyzed activities show that illustrated texts are not used for decoration, but they can/should be seen as carriers of significant semantic load.

The activities propose a reflection on the composition of illustrated texts, on the perception that the images are built from different elements and techniques. In this sense, then, the analyzed activities favor a critical and, consequently, comprehensive

reading of the images. However, we highlight that, as it was noticed in the analysis, this preference also depends largely on how the beginning literacy teacher leads the process of image decoding and comprehension. In this regard, a note from the PNLD (2010) guide is revisited, which clarifies that teachers are sovereign in deciding what role the textbook will play in their educational planning.

From this perspective, for beginning literacy teachers to succeed in their mediations, it is required that they rely on didactic approaches and specific theories of visual literacy in order to prioritize a teaching-learning process which is based on clearly defined criteria. In this sense, we can understand that the Visual Language Syntax is one among other theoretical possibilities that are capable of contributing to Applied Linguistics in terms of teacher education in the area of language use – in this case, beginning literacy - and of the work with language practices involving various readings.

Although linguistic studies about images are consistent, we believe that it is still necessary to continue this kind of research, mainly in order to establish specific criteria and methodologies for illustrated texts which can be helpful to teachers. Furthermore, we consider that beginning literacy deserves special attention in this sense, considering that children already have implicit knowledge about image reading when they enter school and that this knowledge can help them in the acquisition of the written code. Moreover, being aware of this knowledge can contribute to the perspectives of literacy which go beyond the written text and are fluent in multiple literacy practices.

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