

The Concept of Literacy under Analysis: Towards a Discursive Perspective of Alphabetization / *O conceito de letramento em questão: por uma perspectiva discursiva da alfabetização*

*Cecília M. A. Goulart**

ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the political and pedagogical relations between the concepts of alphabetization and literacy, as they are studied in Brazil. The concept of literacy is examined in terms of a compensatory strategy and the process of alphabetization is understood as a discursive process. In Brazil, there has been a historical struggle to universalize both reading and writing learning knowledge in a socially meaningful way. Bakhtin's enunciation theory is a theoretical basis to examine alternative ways to discuss this question.

KEYWORDS: Literacy; Alphabetization; Discourse; Compensatory Strategy; Bakhtin

RESUMO

O objetivo do artigo é analisar relações político-pedagógicas entre os conceitos de alfabetização e de letramento. O conceito de letramento é considerado como uma estratégia de compensação, enquanto o processo de alfabetização é compreendido em perspectiva discursiva. O Brasil tem apresentado historicamente dificuldades para universalizar a aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita de maneira socialmente significativa. Na direção da formação do cidadão crítico, discutimos modos de funcionamento da escola, no movimento de aprender-ensinar, com base na teoria da enunciação de Bakhtin.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Letramento; Alfabetização; Discurso; Compensação; Bakhtin*

* Universidade Federal Fluminense – UFF, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; goulartcecilia@uol.com.br

Learning reading and writing has been considered a historical challenge for Brazilian society. Because of that, it has constituted a basic subject for many researches in the field of Education. Some data highlight that the action of teaching people how to read and to write in a meaningful way has been a challenge in Brazil. In 1890, the percentage of illiterate people reached 85% of the Brazilian population, and, in the passage from the 19th to the 20th century, the percentage had decreased to 75% (RAMOS, 2001, p.49). Those were disturbing data, which were slowly changed throughout the twentieth century (GOULART, 2010). The data of INAF¹ period 2011 – 2012, however indicate a change of reference – from illiterate people to a population functionally literate, and this changed from 61% in 2001 to 73% in 2011.

Some other data of INAF however indicate that one in every four Brazilian people knows how to read, write and calculate, and that 75% of the Brazilian population cannot understand even a simple text. Only 25% of adults have the ability of reading. That is a critical situation. The analyses of the results of INAF carried out by their authors suggest that insufficient levels of schooling have been brought out by the evaluations on a large scale of school performance, such as Prova Brasil,² and ENEM,³ which are done by MEC/INEP,⁴ and other establishments in the State and municipal levels. Only 62% of people who have a college degree, and 35% who have completed high school are classified in the higher level, which is to be fully literate.⁵ The analysis of results asserts that in both cases this is lower than that observed in the early 2000s. It also asserts that one in every four Brazilians, who attended or are still attending school from the sixth to the ninth year, is classified in a rudimentary level, without any progress achieved during that period.

¹ Indicator of Functional Illiteracy. It defines four levels of Literacy which are classified as: *Illiteracy* – corresponds to the conditions of those who cannot perform simple tasks that demand reading of words and sentences; *Rudimentary level*- corresponds to the ability of identifying explicit information in short and familiar texts (such as an advertisement or a short letter); *Basic level* – people can be considered functionally literate if they are able to read and understand texts of an average size. They can also identify information, even if it is necessary to perform small interferences; *full level* – people classified at this level are those whose skills do not impose restrictions to understand and to interpret texts in usual situations. They are able to read bigger texts, to analyze and relate its parts, to compare and evaluate information, to distinguish facts from opinions, and to make inferences and summaries.

² Test given by the Ministry of Education to evaluate children's performance at school.

³ Brazilian High School National Examination.

⁴ Ministry of Education/ National Institute of Pedagogical Studies, Brazil.

⁵ Full level.

The concept of literacy has emerged in the mid-1980s in an attempt to face the challenge outlined above, to make a profound study of theoretical foundations and the guidelines for the process of alphabetization. The concept gains prominence on the Brazilian educational scene in the 1990s. The studies of Soares (1998) and Kleiman (1995) are representative of that time, though they visualize the concept differently. The study of Soares is the one which has more influence on educational proposals and researches.⁶ To present it in a general way, we may say it is used to show a vital dimension of the process of alphabetization, which, as a rule, has been overshadowed: the social value of writing and the social uses and functions of this modality of language.

The concept of literacy has been used in some of our previous studies under different perspectives, and it has been considered mainly as a political horizon for the task of alphabetization (GOULART, 2001; 2003a; 2003b; GOULART et al., 2005; GOULART, 2006; 2007; 2010). However, the aim of this paper is to debate the pedagogical and political relevance of the concept of literacy focusing it as a compensatory strategy. From the point of view of research and pedagogical practice, the process of alphabetization is understood under a discursive perspective. In order to discuss the topic, we took into account researches on themes such as school failure and right to education. We also rely on studies of Bakhtin to reflect on the process of alphabetization- literacy, though the author does not deal with this topic.

1 The Notion of Literacy

The process of learning how to write is only meaningful if it implies inclusion of people within the context of writing, amplifying people's political insertion and social participation. We take into account the processes of schooling and alphabetization as Paulo Freire did – as a political act and a practice of freedom. Our country has faced many difficulties to accomplish the process of transforming the condition of citizenship of the Brazilian population as a whole.

Data on schooling failure and difficulties to learn unequivocally characterize the Brazilian society's history of failure in the attempt to teach Brazilian people how to read

⁶ We will not write about the differences between studies due to space limitations of this article.

and write (PATT0, 1990; MOYSÉS, 1998; MOYSÉS & COLLARES; 2011; COSTA, 1991; among many other works). Brandão (1979) published a collection of texts, which gives emphasis to the problems arising from school dropout from 1960 on. The collection focuses on different issues such as the work with language at school based on a sociolinguistics approach, compensatory education, in addition to the problem of school failure. In 1981, Brandão, Baeta and Coelho da Rocha organized a synthesis related to dropout rates and school failure, as well as inadequate school experiences, students being blamed for their failure, turnover and unpreparedness of teachers, insufficient school time, acknowledgement of the importance of nursery school, etc.

In 1991, Ribeiro examined the results of PNAD⁷ and some other data from 1980 in Brazil, and he stressed school repetition rate, almost 60% for the first grade, as well as a high rate of school dropout in rural and poor areas of the Northeastern part of the country. In these regions, the problems coming from starvation and poor health demand so many urgent solutions that education was not considered a priority.

In a 2011 article, Brandão talks about the right for education and about what she means by school citizenship, emphasizing that this citizenship includes mastery of written and spoken language, of the language of mathematics, basic knowledge of the disciplines established in the curriculum. According to the author, the majority of the Brazilian population did not meet such demands. The author criticizes the proposals of correction of flow because she believes they can generate new problems, since they can multiply the number of illiterate people at the end of fundamental school. Brandão also points out the problem of investments in compensatory strategies in different levels of schooling, as well as automatic promotion from one grade to another, education of young people and adults, correction of flow, policies of cycles, quota laws for underprivileged people who want to get into a University. She says all that happens whereas the quality of education is not taken into consideration. She also stresses that overvaluation of education as a condition to the project of school citizenship in the context of development and democratization of society is something noxious since “without means for health, sanitation, dwelling, employment, security etc., there is no possibility of quality Education for everybody” (BRANDÃO, 2011, p.12).⁸ We agree

⁷ PNAD - Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios /National Household Sample Survey.

⁸ Text in original: “sem condições de saúde, saneamento, moradia, trabalho, segurança etc., não há possibilidade de escolaridade de qualidade para todos.”

with Brandão, and understand that “Education is only one of social policies required for the construction of a true citizenship.”⁹ We notice that the term literacy was forged in Brazil in the context of compensatory actions, and in our opinion, it also constitutes a compensatory strategy. This evokes questions such as: to whom are the strategies compensatory? What do they compensate for?

There is a welfare policy, which aims to compensate people for the difficulties they have been through, and those that, due to the necessity of fighting for survival, could not attend school in the appropriate time. Social groups that present values and characteristics different from those groups for whom schools were historically designed have difficulties at school. The political aspect of the question continues to highlight a model of school that has taken the privileged groups as a reference, which means that the wealth of different social groups is disregarded. If we consider this aspect, we can say that the strategies should not be thought of as compensatory, for any person has the right to achieve social legitimation by means of a good public education. The idea of compensation makes people believe that there is a deficiency connected to social parameters, and not inequalities which do not consider underprivileged people. There is a risk of perpetuating what is considered a gap in school life.

There is a great difference between, on the one side, organizing educational policies considering the existence of gaps in school life and trying to compensate these gaps, something that has been criticized by Soares (1985), and, on the other, organizing policies which consider democratic parameters through which everyone has equal duties and equal rights, no matter where they come from. It is vital to understand the nature of differences, so that, for example, we do not conceive tangerine and passion fruit as being equal only because both are fruits, for they are not the same fruit.

Rocha’s thesis (2006), for example, highlights the performance of students who reach the 6th year of a public school without the expected reading and writing competence. Some students present great difficulties in the activities of reading and writing, especially those who come from families with no familiarity with the written culture. Most teachers associate students’ difficulties with problems in the process of alphabetization. Rocha believes that students with such difficulties think there is something wrong with them because they cannot reach what is expected, and because

⁹ Text in original: “a educação é apenas uma das políticas sociais necessárias à construção da verdadeira cidadania.”

they cannot reach the levels of their classmates. He believes the expropriation goes beyond mastery of writing and affects their subjectivity and their relationship with teachers and peers.

When the concept of literacy is taken as a parameter for the process of alphabetization, it may put a stigma on underprivileged classes who can do without the mastery of writing in personal and professional practices. In order to make explicit the social meaning of written language learning, the notion of literacy has created a dichotomy between form and meaning; technique and knowledge; individual and social; phoneme and language, among other elements. A strong evidence of that is the increasingly close association of the terms alphabetization and literacy, in which alphabetization appears as the first element and literacy as the second one. The association of the expressions to *literate alphabetizing* (SOARES, 1998) and to *alphabetize literating* (GOULART, 2010) gives the idea of *alphabetizing* as linked to learning the alphabetical system for writing and *literating* as linked to learning the social significance of the written language. That means to set aside the dimensions of teaching-learning. Both must be understood as a single process.

From the point of view of education, people began to understand how to work with the concept of literacy, that is, how to transform it in a subject matter. The term enters the school world -- where everything has to be transformed into measurable and transmissible subject matters -- and many times is deprived of its socially referenced cultural meaning. Does the existence of texts guarantee the process of *alphabetizing* with *literating*? If so, what kind of texts does this? Written by whom to whom? Which texts come first and to which texts are they linked? Which other texts are produced as counterwords along the historical flux of the discursive process?

The fear of making the elements considered the center of the process of alphabetization -- the analysis of words in linguistics units, such as syllables and phonemes/letters -- lose specificity appeared during the debate about the process of alphabetization and the meaning of literacy in context (SOARES, 2004). Maybe the power of conservation has prevented the appearance of possibilities of transformation in the theoretical and methodological basis of teaching and learning of writing at school. Strategies and teaching activities have been sanctioned through synthetic methods of alphabetization, which have never left the school environment. There has also been

enough space for old proposals. National groups connected to international institutions' policies¹⁰ assert that countries such as the USA, France and England had success in the process of alphabetization because they used mainly methods like the phonic one. This in fact conceals the dispute between more cultural and more structural ways for teaching written language in other countries, in addition to withholding information and disrespecting historical differences of political and social realities.

We may think about school as having its own internal logic, and we may think of it as having an external logic, elaborated in a historical and social way. The challenge is to define pedagogical principles which allow schools to be open to society and to the world with a critical view of the present, as Konder (1988, p.22) tells us to do.

Many times we say our students are not prepared to understand certain matters, but society has felt and been affected by the problem of social inequality, and a great amount of people cannot understand the reasons for that. In different ways and depths, our students are able to analyze what they watch and experience, as they show in their reports during classes. Daros's research (2014) with five- and six-year-old children, who were attending the first year of primary school, revealed the meaning children attribute to the teaching of written language. The researcher who was interviewing one of the children heard her saying, as she gave the researcher the drawing she had made: "this drawing is to be displayed in the book the teachers will read,¹¹ so the teachers will realize they should pay more attention to their students, so the students learn better" (p.90).¹² Another child told the researcher that her teacher asked her mother to go to school and she told the mother the child only wanted to play. In response to that, the student replied: "I am only a child!" (p.138).¹³ It seems that children can understand what teachers cannot. Another child who was talking to the researcher about the drawing she has made, says: "There should be a playground in my school like the one in the day care center I used to attend when I was little (...); that means all children need

¹⁰ This clamor was expressed by The Chamber of Deputies' report (BRAZIL, 2003).

¹¹ The author refers to Daros's dissertation.

¹² Text in original: "Ó, esse desenho é pra você colocar lá no livro que as professoras vão ler. É que elas vão saber que tem que prestar mais atenção nos alunos, daí eles aprendem melhor."

¹³ Text in original: "É que eu sou criança, né!"

to play, otherwise they are sad” (p.148)¹⁴ – reflections of a five-year-old child about the time *when she was little...*

In the process of alphabetization, we have been hostages of the conception of a school with only its own way of reasoning, which leads us to use a simplifying parameter, which historically characterizes the process: the relation between synthesis and analysis, in which smaller linguistics units (phoneme, letter, syllable), and bigger linguistics units (word, phrase, text) are organized in ranks, affecting teaching practices, and also the ways of evaluating students.

Sarita A. Moysés (1986) used the adjective *problematic* to deal with Brazilian process of alphabetization as an ensured strategy in a restricted access to writing, which is ensured by the abstraction of the activities of reading and writing “considered distinctly from the values of use” (p.84),¹⁵ and this is what still happens nowadays.

The disproportionate concern with didactization and measurement is a consequence of the so-called educational technicality, in which there is great estimation of the technical aspects of teaching. This approach has a strong presence in our school history, and sometimes it neglects social and cultural aspects. It arises from the idea that systematizing the learning process is something necessary in order to generate unidirectional instructions, only a right way to do things, to act, something which restrict the students’ possibilities of learning as well as living.

The social pragmatism, which characterizes the daily life of capitalist society, seems to be responsible for the emergence of the term literacy. It also makes the actions to be performed mere instruments for its implementation. Therefore, it is worrisome that so much literacy modalities (scientific, literary, mathematical, and a few others) have been so vividly present in the scene of educational proposals. The notion of pedagogical practices in which students, teachers and knowledge are the propelling factors of the teaching-learning process must prevail over methods and instructions. Human processes present mechanical regularities side by side with unforeseen creations, uncertainties, in addition to the fact that the different kinds of knowledge and their modes of organization, like written language, are not school’s but culture matters.

¹⁴ Text in original: “Na minha escola devia ter parquinho igual o da creche que eu ia quando era pequena (...) é que toda criança precisa brincar senão fica triste”.

¹⁵ Text in original: “consideradas distintamente de seus valores de uso.”

2 Ways to Learn, Ways to Teach: Alphabetization as a Discursive Practice

From the research we conducted by investigating ten children of four to five years of age in a university day care center (GOULART et al., 2005), we observe how written language has traversed their lives. Many other heterogeneous aspects stood out: The knowledge of the aspects for organization of writing itself, the evaluation of their reading skills and writing productions, the social meaning of the objects, and attitudes related to using this modality of language. In the very moment of their articulation both language and life were hybridizing and becoming competent to reflect on writing features, taking language units as an object, and showing knowledge of different social languages and integrating genres of literate culture discourses.

The educational work of this day care center was not deliberately aimed at teaching children to read and write. Writing, however, steeped long and thoroughly in social life in many ways, sometimes standing out by showing one face, in others, another face, and still more faces along the way. Thus, we can understand that dismantling the social face of the concept of alphabetization, focused on cultural practices of reading and writing, would be taking apart form and content.

The practice of the teacher evidenced marks of deliberated pedagogical actions to draw attention to and stimulate reflection of the children on certain topics and their unfolding, characteristic of the world of writing. The action planning included wide spaces for the leverage of unexpected situations, events, and for the expression in several ways. Children's participation was instigated and, in this movement, the knowledge of a variety of areas emerged and was worked out. Themes that entered into the educational space were treated without simplifications, be they of the syntactic-discursive organization of utterances, vocabulary, or even content downsizing.

The dynamics of discursive oral practices and the crossing of aspects for production and social functioning of writing favored the expansion of knowledge and the inclusion of children in the literate world. The work was developed by placing a child in the core of the teaching and learning process. In the development of pedagogical actions, we observe a multitude of objects, gestures and attitudes that characterize people and literate environments, which were not detached from their original contexts.

It was noted that children, who were four, five years old, had many and varied experiences with written language together with their families and at the day care center. The knowledge of the children about the writing world was acquired, in general, by means of the oral world, including reflections and questions about letters to form words, the highlighting of the rhymes, comments on similarities and differences between language units in words and texts. They showed that with these actions they were building critical analysis regarding spoken and written material. An important point is that the work done on a day care center contributed to mitigate the effects of social differences observed in families.

The fact of writing occupying the social-politic space in a scathing way highlights the life of the subjects, applying and assigning them a value, although many times these subjects do not realize this, i.e. writing crosses social life, our private lives in a multitude of ways, by marking them through graphic records, mixed with images and numbers, in Arts, Law, and in Politics, among many other areas, and also through material elements and textualities of discourses (GOULART, 2010), in which the word translates as genres and social languages, and also through tangles of other non-linguistic social signs. Then how to conceive an alphabetizing work that does not misinterpret the sense of the language of writing? Has the entry of the term literacy in the scenario expressed the facets highlighted?

The school and especially the ongoing processes of alphabetization and language work within schools are important spaces to experience the ideological transformation that is clearly “such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.346).¹⁶ They are important spaces to entangle and condense our biographical and biological factors connected to the quotidian ideology with complex systems of knowledge (GOULART, 2013, p.73).

The discursive dimension of writing-learning processes includes relations with life experiences of the subjects, and their values. It is not enough to provide a context for the work units, be they letters, words, syllables, and texts in the case of written language. There are proposals for teaching writing practices, in which the notion of

¹⁶ BAKHTIN, M. The Discourse in the Novel. In: _____. *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist and Transl. from Russian by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. (Slavic series, n.1).

literacy is considered from the perspective of literate social practices, though such practices are not homogeneous and consensual. The starting point are socially legitimized texts, but the language is crafted like a weightless element, with priority for language analysis forwarded by the teacher, subordinating the knowledge and possibilities for children analysis, and children themselves to the study of characteristics of the linguistic system.

Vološinov (1973)¹⁷ states in his work about the relationship between language, discourse, and utterance:

[...] A word extracted from context, written down in an exercise book, and then memorized together with its Russian translation undergoes signalization, so to speak. It becomes a particular hard-and-fast thing, and the factor of recognition intensifies in the process of understanding it. To put it briefly, under a sound and sensible method of practical instruction, a form should be assimilated not in its relation to the abstract system of the language, i.e., as a self-identical form, but in the concrete structure of utterance, i.e., as a mutable and pliable sign (p.69, footnote).

It is the movement of the linguistic form that features a sign, and not its identity as a sign, as an element of language. According to the author, language as a system of forms takes some distance from the living reality of language and its social functions. Language is not received ready to be used; people have to penetrate into the stream of verbal communication: “[...] Individuals do not receive a ready-made language at all, rather, they enter upon the stream of verbal communication; indeed only in this stream does their consciousness first begin to operate” (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.81).

Zandwais (2011), based on Bakhtin, also contributes to rethink work with written language at school, when she says that the words,

While mere properties of lexical repertoire, they deceive, because they are not sufficient to 'incarnate' the meanings. Exclusively through them, we can let escape the events to which they refer, the historical memory to that reference (p.9).¹⁸

¹⁷ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Transl. Ladislav Matejka and I.R.Titunik. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

¹⁸ Text in original: “enquanto meras propriedades do repertório lexical, iludem, porquanto não são condição suficiente para ‘corporificar’ os sentidos. Exclusivamente por meio delas, podemos deixar escapar os acontecimentos a que remetem, a memória histórica a que fazem referência.”

Zandwais refers to a crucial point by criticizing proposals for alphabetization and literacy, in which words and other linguistic units, in addition to the use of the units themselves are laid bare of their socio-political values – functioning as part of a technical gear to be seized, separating form from content. The words are there and make sense within compositional constructions, and it is required that syntax keep interdependence relations with social-historical conditions that pervade the means of production from the different discursive practices, continues the author, based on Vološinov (1973, p.170).¹⁹ Zandwais highlights that we must observe and analyze the existing gap between the stylistic variant of the language anchored in grammatical schemes of the language and the organic operation that characterizes the social practices of everyday life of societies and the ways they produce themselves as a discourse. This is the question to be taken into account when designing and planning the work with verbal language in school, since the early years of elementary school and even in early childhood education.

Formal, systematic thought about language that prioritizes the linguistic reflection of a formal-systematic character, as present in most methods of literacy work, insisting on the scansion of minimum units of language, fragmenting it, is incompatible with a historical and vivid understanding of language (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.78).²⁰ As the author indicates, “History of language, then, amounts to the history of separated linguistic forms (phonetic, morphological, or other) that undergo development despite the system as a whole and apart from concrete utterances” (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.79).²¹

In pedagogical works that we have examined, including the day care center, we observe that children at very early ages are able to analyze language, relating the knowledge they have with their articulation with those who already have, keeping sense active (PACHECO, 1992; 1997; GOULART, 2011, among others).

The discursive, social character of practices stands out when we bring out the “other” of the school processes - children, students, not such as the other side of the coin, but as an encounter and conflict of knowledge: lively, thinking, challenging.

¹⁹ See footnote 17.

²⁰ See footnote 17.

²¹ See footnote 17.

Conclusion

In order to constitute new prospects of work it is essential to transform the agenda of alphabetization studies and practices: from learning how to read and write, which involves prescription, precision and determination, to read and write for learning (ROCKWELL, 1985, p.87), linking them to precariousness and heterogeneity of processes, cultures, senses, as Bakhtin points out. Such perspective opposes to proposals for “pragmatic alphabetism,” as Britto named (2008, p.55), a kind of alphabetization “that allows a person to read and write about so many things and operate with numbers in order to act properly in accordance with protocols and procedures for production and consumption.”²²

We understand, based on readings from Bakhtin, that broadening the insertion in the world comes from the expansion of communication of everyday life, in the process of access to higher spheres of knowledge, done by going beyond biological and biographical factors. The processes of alphabetization and self-alphabetizing cannot lose the bond of belonging to these spheres.

The issue of the (im)pertinence of the concept of literacy relates to the participation of the subjects in the upper spheres of enunciation, extrapolating the trivial participation in reading and writing social practices. This participation must involve a sense of freedom and autonomy that would allow subjects to achieve their subsequent integration and deepening in social life, making them more creative and free to continually reinvent genres and social languages. A greater understanding and use of genres, according to Bakhtin, can take subjects beyond the discovery of creative potentials, wherever possible and necessary, and allow them to carry out a free speech project (1986, p.80).²³

We do not question here, and we say it emphatically, the relevance of learning written language to expand the participation of subjects in social activities. What is questioned is the non inclusion of other perspectives of knowledge relevant to the education of critical citizens. The proposal of reading the world expanded by reading

²² Text in original: “que permite à pessoa ler e escrever umas tantas coisas e operar com números, de modo a agir apropriadamente em função dos protocolos e procedimentos de produção e consumo.”

²³ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Transl. Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

the word, by Paulo Freire, is related to what is constructed here. We do not agree with the idea of conceiving the notion of literacy as the same as Freire's proposal of world reading. The concept of literacy has been linked to reading and writing social practices; world reading goes well beyond these practices, both in nature and character, especially considering philosophical bias that it involves.

The biological-biographical factor plays a crucial role in the behavioral ideology, "but its importance diminishes as the utterance penetrates more deeply into an ideological system" (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.93).²⁴ That seems to approach Freire's world reading. It connects to the understanding of the human dimension, universal, and creator of the subject, taking them as members of the community and inserting them in history as producers of knowledge and culture. This premise also set apart the concept of literacy, too busy with the role and sense the writing culture has on society. According to Bakhtin, the world changes radically with the emergence of consciousness. By entering into ideological systems of knowledge, the subjects, the objects, and things are made aware; they cease to exist in themselves and for themselves, and begin to exist for the other, as reflected in the consciousness of the other, creating a radical change of enrichment and transformation. This entry rearranges our inner speech, legitimized knowledge, ancient, historically formed and stabilized from our social groups of reference based on our constitution.

In a previous article (GOULART, 2003a), agreeing with Soares (2004), the author indicated that a pair alphabetization-literacy would not be a required, but a circumstantial proposal. We understood and still understand that the term alphabetization involves social and linguistic facets. The term literacy has been postulated in the expectation of making clear this dual perspective. The expansion of Bakhtin's theory study, research, colleagues' articles reading, and activities with teachers have made us review this position, as we express here. This dichotomy may serve, once again, to empty the contents of the term alphabetization in its political, historically placed sense. Moreover, it may also serve to perpetuate the differences of knowledge that popular social groups take to school as shortcomings, which entail difficulties that need to be compensated for.

²⁴ See footnote 17.

The alphabetization process involves fundamental knowledge of the schooling process, linked to the social value of reading and writing, and to expand the subjects' insertion in the vast world of writing. It involves other aspects and knowledge: New forms of existence and political participation, linked to the understanding of multiple social and discursive genres and languages and to the possibility of transformation of these languages and genres, as well as creating new ones.

It is up to us, then, to keep asking: What is the subject matter in the process of alphabetization? The alphabetical system? Written language? Written speech? Is it reading and writing's social practices? Is it the transformation of the subject by means of writing? Learning writing needs to make sense in our lives, a sense of transformation and social-political renewal. The debate is still open.

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Translated by Adail Sobral – adail.sobral@gmail.com

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