

**Literacy, Discourse and the Production of Social Senses: Dimensions and Guidelines for Research and for Teaching Writing / Alfabetização, discurso e produção de sentidos sociais: dimensões e balizas para a pesquisa e para o ensino da escrita**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper presents data from a recently finished research that outlines dimensions and guidelines for what has been named discursive perspective on literacy. Principles of the theory of enunciation (Bakhtin's Circle) and studies that analyze the relationships between subject and language as well as the role of discursive interactions in the teaching and learning processes, organize the theoretical and methodological basis of the study. We analyzed reports written by five literacy teachers for 18 months. Two theoretical-methodological dimensions of analysis were employed, the discursive and the evidential. We focus on the ways the pedagogical practice is developed in the classroom, seeking for indexes to describe the discursive situation from which they were collected, and to analyze and interpret them. The aim of the research was to understand how to construct literacy methodologies in which working with children's lives in written culture overcomes the traditional work focused on the writing system.

**KEYWORDS:** Literacy; Discursive perspective; Evidential paradigm; Written culture; Bakhtin Circle

**RESUMO**

*Este texto apresenta parte de pesquisa recém-concluída, que delinea dimensões e balizas para o que vem sendo denominado perspectiva discursiva de alfabetização. Princípios da teoria da enunciação (Círculo de Bakhtin) e de estudos que analisam as relações entre sujeito e linguagem e o papel das interações discursivas nos processos de ensino e aprendizagem organizam a base teórico-metodológica do estudo, em que se analisam relatos escritos por cinco professoras alfabetizadoras durante 18 meses. Duas dimensões teórico-metodológicas de análise são trabalhadas: discursiva e indiciária. Mergulha-se nos modos como a prática pedagógica é movimentada em sala de aula, em busca de indícios para descrever a situação discursiva em que foram colhidos, analisá-los e interpretá-los. A pesquisa tem como horizonte compreender como podem ser concebidas metodologias de*

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*alfabetização em que o trabalho com a vida das crianças na cultura escrita se sobreponha ao trabalho tradicionalmente realizado com foco no sistema de escrita.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Alfabetização; Perspectiva discursiva; Paradigma indiciário; Cultura escrita; Círculo de Bakhtin*

## **Presentation of the Study**

The present work is part of the research project “Pedagogic Practices in the School Literacy Process: Knowledge and Dilemmas in Daily Actions,”<sup>1</sup> developed from 2015 to 2019<sup>2</sup> by the group Language, Culture and Educative Practices,<sup>3</sup> which underscores, in particular, theoretical-methodological guidelines in the field of literacy. The objectives of the study were: 1 - to develop dimensions and guidelines for what is called “discursive perspective on literacy”; 2 - to understand knowledge present in daily decision making in the teaching to read and write, as well as the difficulties and issues teachers face in the process; and 3 - to investigate how writing is approached with learners and which aspects and practices stand out therein.

The material for the study is composed of written reports on reading and writing teaching activities developed by five literacy teachers working in public schools (two county schools and three federal schools) that integrated the research group for 18 months. These teachers’ practices are considered outstanding by their peers due to the quality of their pedagogic acting, in which dialog stands out as an educative principle.

The teachers were first asked to organize weekly reports of the activities carried out in their classrooms. Because of difficulties in managing the time invested in the work with the pupils and in the research register, a proposal was presented for teachers to write monthly reports, in which they selected activities to describe and comment on their development.

Analyses of the ways in which the pedagogic practice is mobilized in the classroom by the literacy teachers as well as the reading and writing activities they propose, relied on the main axes suggested by Geraldi (1991): reading practices, oral and written text production practices and linguistic analysis practices.

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<sup>1</sup> In the original: “Práticas pedagógicas no processo escolar de alfabetização: conhecimentos e dilemas nas ações cotidianas.”

<sup>2</sup> The results of the research were published in Goulart, Garcia and Corais (2019), which is part of the research project CAAE: 0317368.4.0000.5243

<sup>3</sup> In the original: “Linguagem, cultura e práticas educativas.”

Understanding the factors that condition the dilemmas and issues faced by teachers in their daily pedagogic practices relied on the theoretical foundations of studies by Zabalza (1994, 2004). This dimension in the study, due to its specificity, is beyond the limits of the present paper.

The material written by the teachers proves to be representative of their practices, and underscores the quality related to the possibility of including distinct dimensions of the teaching process. We were based on an organization of principles and guidelines for reading and writing teaching proposal in which the learners' real life is the actual starting point. Based on Bakhtin, we understand that a pedagogic proposal such as this can only be effective if the children's discourse and their understanding of the world are listened to attentively and given responsive answer in the continuous processes of interlocution in the classroom.

The goal of the present paper is to emphasize the process of construction of the theoretical-methodological framework organized to reach the objectives here defined. Therefore, we established two coordinated dimensions: the first is based on principles of the theory of enunciation developed by authors in Bakhtin's Circle (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, BAKHTIN, 1986),<sup>4</sup> and on studies thematically close to literacy activities by Smolka (1988, 2017), Geraldi (1991, 2010) and Goulart (2014). Previous studies carried out by members of the research group also provided important contributions: Goulart (2011, 2013, 2017, 2019); Goulart et al. (2005); Goulart and Souza (2015); Medeiros (2006); Gonçalves (2012); Saints (2015); Mata (2017) and Corais (2018), among others. This first dimension, then, characterizes the study from a discursive point of view.

The second dimension has an indicial nature and is organized according to Ginzburg (1989), a matrix for methodological decisions regarding the indicial paradigm. But what are indexes? Indexes are traces, even infinitesimal ones, capable of revealing aspects of a deeper nature; according to Ginzburg (1989, p.177), if "the reality is opaque, there are privileged zones - signs, clues - that enable us to decipher it."<sup>5</sup> In a comparison of this matrix with aspects of Bakhtin's theory of enunciation, we revise some support points.

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<sup>4</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973; BAKHTIN, M. M. *The Problem of Speech Genres*. In: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.60-102.

<sup>5</sup> GINZBURG, C. *Myths, Emblems, Signals*. London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990.

The first revision led us to identify and to select parts of the study material as representative of what we consider singular, since in the ordinary meaning of *singular*, every fact is singular, and every material is singular. Whereas, in the discursive sense, all utterances are singular. The second revision relates to the concept of methodological rigor, which in this context cannot be conceived too rigorously, but as a flexible rigor, in which the intuition of researchers, in the observation of the singular and the idiosyncratic, reveals their capacity of organizing interesting explanations on aspects of reality.

During the research, we understand, based on Abaurre (1999), that upon identifying the peculiarity of a certain index, we can reach valuable conclusions, rich moments of abductive inferences. Abduction is a logical inference differing both from induction and deduction – the two classical inferential procedures, according to Peirce (1977). In the abductive process, indexes collect observations and perceptions to understand a certain phenomenon and to make conclusions.

Focusing on abductive reasoning from a Bakhtinian perspective, we argue that we may consider it highly dialogical, because it makes room for different interpretations and for invention, which allow errors (GOULART, 2014).

Based on the way Peirce conceives the *logical form* of inference, we may suppose that the *dialogical form* of the inference happens in the following way:

- 1) Some surprising situation  $F$  is observed.
- 2)  $F$  will be accepted if a certain hypothesis  $H$  is consistent. Why? Because the utterance of situation  $F$  that we deduce dialogues (in the Bakhtinian sense) with our principles and assumptions.
- 3) Hence, there are reasons to think that  $H$  is consistent. To become dialogical relations, logical relations need to be materialized by different voices in discourse, since dialogism is a principle of every discourse (BAKHTIN, 1990, pp.279-280).

The crucial step in abductive inferences from the *logical* point of view is the second of the three steps we present, based on truth conditions to accept the hypothesis. Nonetheless, from the *dialogical* point of view, we may think that the crucial step should also be the second, seen from the perspective of the materiality of the relations between  $F$  and  $H$ , considering that the concept of truth in Bakhtin's works connects with the conditions of production of utterances. There are no absolute truths in themselves. (GOULART, 2019, p.32).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In the original: “1) Alguma situação surpreendente  $F$  é observada. 2)  $F$  será aceita, se determinada hipótese  $H$  for consistente. Por quê? Porque o enunciado da situação  $F$  que depreendemos dialoga (no sentido bakhtiniano) com nossos fundamentos e pressupostos. 3) Então, há razão para se pensar que  $H$  seja consistente. Para se tornarem dialógicas, as relações lógicas precisam ser concretizadas por diferentes vozes no discurso, já que a orientação dialógica é um princípio de todo discurso (BAKHTIN, 1998, pp.88-89). O

Previous studies (GOULART, 2001, 2013, 2014, 2019; CORAIS, 2018) led us to constitute a set of assumptions (See Chart 1), on the basis of Bakhtin's theory of enunciation, to anchor what we have names *discursive perspective on literacy*. These assumptions are vital to recognize indexes of this conception of the literacy process and to prompt reflection on the following: Who proposes activities and what activities do they propose for children to learn to produce meaning in writing in the context of the world of social writing? What place do the learning subjects and their knowledge occupy in the activities? Which interventions and approaches are proposed in the teaching and learning to write? What does one teach in the process of literacy? What do children learn?

*Chart 1: Assumptions that guide the recognition of indexes of a discursive perspective on literacy*<sup>7</sup>

N.	EXPRESSIONS /KEY WORDS	ASSUMPTIONS THAT GUIDE THE SELECTION OF INDEXES
1	SUBJECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Learning subjects are concrete, historical, culturally and socially constituted.</li> <li>➤ The perspective of the child is also accepted in pedagogic practices, and not only that of the adult. This change of perspective has expanded the understanding of how the alphabetical principle and other writing-related knowledge come to be known and used by children. It also considers what they <i>know and can</i> do, rather than what they <i>cannot do or do not know how to do</i>.</li> <li>➤ Attention is given to who they are, and not to who they might or should be.</li> </ul>
2	LANGUAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A constitutive activity which is made and remade by subjects towards Others, i.e. in the ethical perspective of alterity (GOULART, 2001).</li> </ul>

passo crucial nas inferências abduativas, do ponto de vista lógico, é o segundo dos três aqui apontados, apoiando-se em condições de verdade para aceitar a hipótese. Do ponto de vista dialógico, entretanto, podemos considerar que o passo crucial seja também o segundo, mas visto do ponto de vista da concretude das relações entre F e H, lembrando que o conceito de verdade em Bakhtin se relaciona com as condições de produção dos enunciados. Não há verdades absolutas em si mesmas (GOULART, 2019, p.32).”

<sup>7</sup> Chart 1, “Assumptions that guide the selection of indexes” is found in Goulart (2019, pp.33-36), under the title “Assumptions / Hypotheses organizing the discursive perspective on literacy.” It was originally published in Goulart (2014, pp.157-175).

3	<i>ALPHABETICAL SYSTEM</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The alphabetical system is learned in an enunciative context, but this is not a frame for teaching. The so-called phonic aspect of writing cannot be taught in isolation from the other dimensions in the process of literacy.</li> <li>➤ Linguistic “consciousness” is not a precondition for reading and writing. This “consciousness,” in its different manifestations, is developed by means of significant activities, with texts, highlights and interventions by the teacher, and learners themselves.</li> <li>➤</li> </ul>
4	<i>GRAMMAR / LINGUISTIC VARIATION / LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The grammar of the language must be seen as a system open to a multiplicity of choices by the subjects – in the plural.</li> <li>➤ The internal aspects of structures and of the linguistic systems must be seen in dynamic and complex relation with the aspects that characterize them externally.</li> </ul>
5	<i>SPEECH GENRES</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In the dynamics of the classroom, children, feeling recognized as persons, assert themselves, speak their own words. They talk about what they know, indicate the speech genres they know, and open themselves to new appropriations.</li> </ul>
6	<i>PROCESSES OF LEARNING</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Processes that children experience to understand how writing is organized and materialized, both from the formal point of view and from its social-political dimension imply a great complexity of knowledge.</li> <li>➤ In the process of learning, children integrate imagination, reality, home, school, street, fear, courage to knowledge, circulating freely among knowledge, feelings, and sensations.</li> <li>➤ The challenge to creativity and to critical learning is fundamentally important.</li> </ul>
7	<i>RELATIONS OF TEACHING</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ It is important to recognize, from the very beginning, the citizens that children are and the knowledge they have.</li> <li>➤ The educational work must be contextualized in the realm of different languages / social knowledge; as well as in the realm of written culture, with its products and practices.</li> <li>➤ Gathering the dialogism pertaining to discourses produced in the classroom allows us to know children better and to open spaces so they can also know themselves and expand their own knowledge.</li> <li>➤ Classrooms need to be characterized by heuristic procedures in which teachers and children do not stop looking for the new forms of knowledge and new actions.</li> <li>➤ The focus of the pedagogic work is assisting the processes of learning and their productions, understanding what children know.</li> <li>➤ The processes of learning and teaching need wide dialogical and dialogized spaces, so that arguments of several types may rise, such as the inductive, of the symbolic kind, which is based on habits, without a constrictive relation between premise and conclusion, and characterized by repetition and identity; the deductive, of the indicial kind, in which the conclusion derives from</li> </ul>

		the premises; and the abductive, of the iconic kind, highly dialogical, implicating an wide space for invention and for errors.
8	<i>THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Children become readers and texts producers not only in verbal, oral and written, language, but also in other forms of expression, such as painting, visiting the works of great painters; sculpture; cinema; theater; music; dance, among others (GOULART, 2005).</li> <li>➤ Learning reading and writing from texts – and based on them –is reinforced by the possibility of children to dive into the meanings of what they read, and to invent new meanings for the texts they write, by means of heurist, activities as intellectual movements to deal with demands implicated by objective learning situations.</li> <li>➤ With good interventions by teachers and also by classmates, children acquire more knowledge and at the same time learn the functions of writing, distinguishing and manipulating the relation between sounds and letters, among other distinctions (GOULART <i>et al</i>, 2005).</li> </ul>
9	<i>THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To consider children as readers and producers of texts, from the perspective of what they already are and the potential they have.</li> <li>➤ To make children feel they can, that they should dare, take risks, so that they are recognized as capable and allow themselves to change places with teachers, speaking, exposing their knowledge, talking.</li> <li>➤ To move towards the others, to assert ourselves and to be recognized as educators committed to the ethical, human sense, of our profession.</li> <li>➤ To take on the role of teaching writing, of proposing questions, revisions, rewritings, of discussing limits and means for children’s productions.</li> <li>➤ To have no fear of strange writings which children very often produce or weird interpretations and readings they could propose. (GOULART, 2019, pp.33-36)</li> </ul>

The construction of the research material and the recognition of indexes on the assumptions that organize the study were constructed from the questions we formulated. The most important questions are those who help us to understand and to interpret the problem under investigation. Since 1997, we have worked with the indicial paradigm and, during the investigation process, we have been looking to expand our understanding of it (GINZBURG, 1989; ABAURRE, 1990; PACHECO, 1997; CHACON, 1998; CORRÊA, 2004; CAPISTRANO, 2007, among others).

The characterization of the index makes its recognition a part of the analytical procedure, assuming that every index and every fact, is already an interpretation, a way of building the relevance of reality (MINAYO, 2000). We focus on the ways pedagogic

practices of teachers are organized and mobilized in the classroom, in search of indexes. We aimed to understand and to describe the discursive situation in which these indexes are collected, to analyze these situations and to interpret them (BRAIT, 2006). The definition of bases and goals to guide the literacy process is relevant, but not to outline a common methodological framework. The point of this search relates to the conception of a literacy process that contributes to a more democratic society – hence, it is a political goal.

The search for indexes of methodological procedures in the discursive dimension of the literacy process allowed us to build a framework to analyze the teachers' reports. Based on the illuminating character of the singularity of indexes, the analysis is linked to the formulation of good explicative hypotheses and good interpretations of aspects of the reality studied. The study by Sobral and Giacomelli (2016) aligns with an analytical proposal by Brait (2006) and offers didactical indications for the conduction of Dialogical Discourse Analysis (ADD in Portuguese). ADD, according to those authors, involves describing the linguistic materiality and the characteristics of utterances; analyzing the relations established between language and enunciation; and interpreting the meanings that are generated when the materiality joins the enunciative act, considering the aims of the study. In the conduction of this process, through the description, analysis and of interpretation, we found indexes of the assumptions and parameters of the teachers' pedagogic action.

The general research material consisted of monthly reports written by five teachers for 18 months, as informed in the beginning of this article. We analyzed the reports from all of them, individually, and then as a set, based on the theory of enunciation and the assumptions previously presented to finally compare the indexes and the understandings prompted by the reports. The goal was not to harmonize, but to understand a perspective of literacy that considers the dynamic dialogical reality that constitutes the pedagogic practice of teaching-learning to write. The organization we outline was part of the process of preparing the theoretical-methodological framework according to the goals of the inquiry. Two dimensions were employed in coordination, namely, the discursive and the indicial, which constituted the grounds for Dialogical Discourse Analysis. We do acknowledge the need to further develop this stage.

In this article we illustrate how the research was conducted by selecting classroom situations from three out of the five literacy teachers reports upon which the research was



based. These situations point at indexes of an assumed discursive literacy perspective that agrees with ADD as presented before.

## 1 “Gee, How Lovely I Look!!!”<sup>8</sup>: Relations Between Subject and Language in Literacy

In teacher Gabriela’s first grade class, classes only started at the end of March of the then current year, unlike other schools in the Niterói school network (Niterói is a city in the state of Rio de Janeiro), which started classes in February. Located in a community marked by drug dealing, poverty, the disregard of public powers and violence, the city public school in which Gabriela works received seventy transferred students from other schools in the first months of classes, in 2016. According to the teacher, the late composition of the group is directly related to the issue of violence in the region. This is the reason for which learners frequently change schools, a factor that poses as a great dilemma.

In a class with 13 children, Gabriela spent the year (pre)occupied with knowing the children, learning their names, understanding their stories, meeting the people who drop them off at school and take them home, and how they fit into the children’s lives. She also identified learner’s interests and expectations, what they knew about writing, “to make them relate with classmates so that they learned to be respected and to have fun together” (Report from the teacher). The pedagogic action of the teacher shows that, for her, school as an institution implies relation, enunciation, exchange among subjects which is constituted through language. Gabriela action aims at promoting dialogue among children and their realities, strengthening the joint action of the group.

The work on literacy is organized inside this group and begins with the proper names of the children, affectionate words that identify them, singling them out. They create collectively the Panel of Names, make table badges, personalize the inside cover of their diaries and exercise books, set up an “attendance list,” write their names on the board and analyze their letters and syllables, carry out a survey and a “talk circle” to share the stories behind the choice of their names, in addition to playing games and several other activities.

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<sup>8</sup> In the original: “‘Nossa, como eu tô lindo!!!’ As there are passages in colloquial Portuguese as well as several kinds of ‘errors,’ we use here informal English terms and expressions but do not try to reproduce ‘errors’ in the target language, and only point out them.”

Gabriela prepares diversified writing activities entailing the names of the children, inserting the photos of each learner: an activity to write the name beside the photo of the colleague; to link photos to names, or the photo of a classmate to their initials, among others.

During the introduction of the Memory Game for the whole class, made with names of students and their photos taken by the teacher, Marcos (6<sup>th</sup> grade) exclaims: “*Gee, how lovely I look!!!.*” And gives all a beautiful smile!

Gabriela comments in her report: “It is very good to see a child capable of self-appreciation, unfortunately, I am very much used to children who judge themselves ugly and stupid, children with low self-esteem.”<sup>9</sup> In the activities she carries out, we observe the teacher’s constant movement of approaching and meeting the learners, of valuing them as persons. Gabriela recognizes that understanding them as concrete subjects, surrounded by their story and culture, gives meaning to her teaching and to the children’s learning.

Some readers may be wondering, in regard to the activity that engaged children in writing their first names, analyzing letters and syllables: is this analysis compatible with a proposal that takes discourse as an axis? We ponder that learning to write entails the analysis of the written sequence, and the question, for us, is who carries out the analysis. When Gabriela asked children to write their names to learn and to link the names to the corresponding photos, she is prompting them to analyze language. That does not prevent her from doing a different type of provocation, exploring out loud the sequence of letters of the names, or scanning the syllables of each child's name. The activity of observing written language with the teacher does not guarantee the children have an understanding of the writing system. It is necessary that they understand the organization of writing by themselves, establishing relations that are not always those which pedagogues, linguists and teachers know. These are not the same routes. By being allowed to reflect and to make mistakes without pain, children abductively make suppositions and approach more and more the conventions of writing, as we observe in Pacheco (1997 [now GOULART]).

The more comprehensive question a discursive approach of literacy faces is how to conceive the social-political meaning of the school and of writing. What matters in their approach is the relations established – between pupils and teachers and among members of the school community – for the organization of an ethics in which teaching relations

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<sup>9</sup> In the original: “Muito bom ver uma criança que se valoriza [...], infelizmente, estou muito mais acostumada com crianças que se acham feias e burras, crianças com baixa autoestima.”

recognize the persons that children already are and the knowledge that they have. This understanding underscores more dialogical modalities of practice, modalities that give children more opportunities to create, to reflect, to invent, before they manage “to give the right answer.”

Gabriela's work embodies an important discursive principle of literacy, whose organization implicates the relations between subjects and language: she affectionately understands that “to be attentive to who children are and not to whom they could or should be”<sup>10</sup> makes all difference in learning to read and write; it gives a political meaning to her practice.

## **2 “We Live all Together Because this Way the World Is Prettier!”<sup>11</sup> : Tongue and Language, the Distinct Ways of Presenting and Working Writing with Children**

We conceive literacy teaching as a process of discursive interaction which modifies the ways of internalizing human culture. By appropriating writing, children acquire new ways of being connected to the world, of making sense of it and apprehending it, advancing in the “cultural birth” to which Pino (2005) refers.

Arousing in children the desire to dive into the continuous stream of utterances which materializes in written texts demands considering them subjects in their lives realities as the starting point for the processes of teaching and learning to write.

As a matter of fact, in Natalia's group texts, writing and life are also intertwined in the daily life of a classroom with 20 children of different social origins, in a federal public school located in the central area of Rio de Janeiro capital city. By reading the book *Romeo and Juliet*, by Ruth Rocha,<sup>12</sup> the teacher starts to work with differences at the same time she teaches to read and write. She displays the cover of the book and when she says the title “Romeo and Juliet,” a child asks: “Is it going to speak about *pizza*?” The child reveals her knowledge of a type of Brazilian pizza whose ingredients are cheese and guava jelly, which

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<sup>10</sup> In the original: “atentar para quem as crianças são e não para quem elas poderiam ou deveriam ser.”

<sup>11</sup> In the original: “Vivemos todos misturados porque assim o mundo é mais bonito!”. In colloquial Portuguese, “misturados” in this sense imply that beings with varied characteristics live together.”

<sup>12</sup> *Romeu e Julieta* – Text by Ruth Rocha with illustrations by Mariana Massarani. São Paulo: Editora Salamandra. “A colorful kingdom and full of flowers, where things are separated by colors. Everything very lovely for being smelled and seen, but those who live there cannot even know themselves! Will the color of the wings of Romeo and Juliet separate even these children-butterfly?” (Available at: <http://www.ruthrocha.com.br/livro/romeu-e-julieta>. Accessed: April 04, 2018).

is named “Romeo and Juliet.” The teacher does not answer directly, rather, she shows the cover of the book to the children and asks them to answer. The children suppose that the story is about butterflies since there are two of them drawn in the cover.

Before she starts the reading, Natalia explains a very famous story by Shakespeare bearing the same title of the book about two young lovers who came from rival families. The children think, then, that the version of Ruth Rocha tells the same story, only using butterflies, and they still want to know if the little butterflies are lovers... The teacher explains that the book talks about children-butterfly and starts to read – the children are bewitched. They applaud fascinated and, during the conversation, they engage in valuable reflections involving the issue of diversity. They talk about racial discrimination and prejudice. The teacher reports:

I asked whether where we lived, ‘the flowerbeds’ were separated or whether all lived together. The children made associations to skin colors and said that we were living together. I asked about other characteristics that differentiate us, wanted to know if there were ‘flowerbeds’ separated for them... They asserted that no, and Maria Luísa <sup>13</sup> also finished saying that we live all together because this way the world is prettier! (Teacher Natalia’s Report, Sept. 2018).<sup>14</sup>

Exploring more of the theme of diversity, the children read with the teacher the book *Cora's hair*,<sup>15</sup> in which a girl named Cora is sad when she hears from a little girl friend that her hair is ugly and bad and that it would be good to put it in cold water, to straighten it out by combing and to wear a pretty headband. When she discovers the origin of her hair from Aunt Vilma, whose hair is like her own, Cora concludes that each person is pretty the way she is.

The reading allowed some children to say that they had already lived situations like that from the character. While reporting “We talked very much, I welcomed the claims, some children gave examples about how they would act and we discussed that people, because of

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<sup>13</sup> All children are identified by codenames they themselves have chosen.

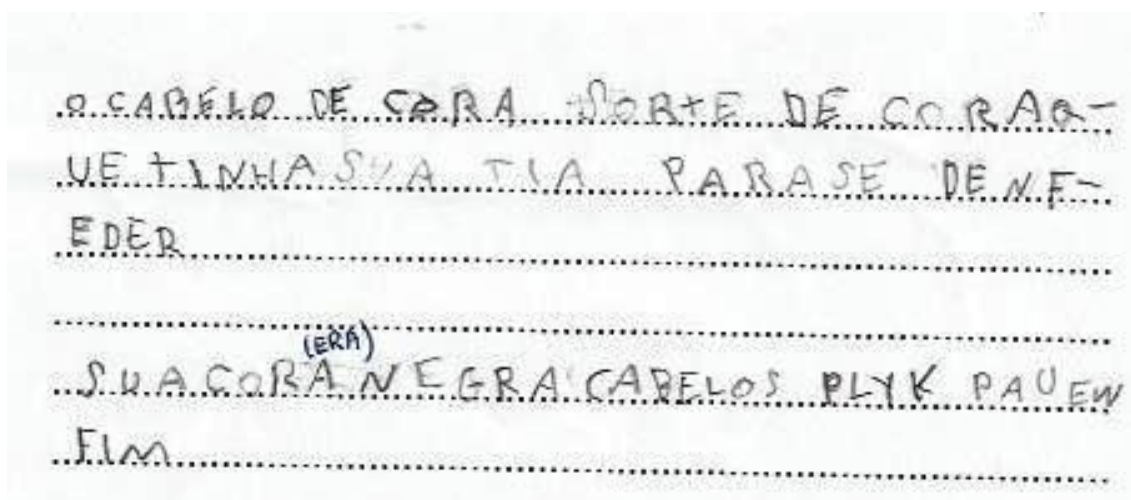
<sup>14</sup> In the original: “Perguntei se onde a gente vivia, ‘os canteiros’ eram separados ou se vivia tudo misturado. As crianças fizeram associações às cores de pele e disseram que vivíamos misturados. Perguntei sobre as outras características que nos diferenciavam, quis saber se existiam ‘canteiros’ separados para elas... Afirmaram que não e Maria Luísa ainda finalizou dizendo que vivemos todos misturados porque assim o mundo é mais bonito! (Relatório da professora Natalia, set. 2018).”

<sup>15</sup> *O cabelo de Cora*, by Ana Zarco Câmara, illustrations by Taline Schubach, Editora Pallas, 2013.

being different from one another, also act in different ways,”<sup>16</sup> Natalia takes the reality of children’s lives as the center of her school work, and leads them to understand texts as a universe of meanings at the same time she invites them to think about writing. After the reading and the conversation, Natalia begins a work of exploration of the rhymes of the verses of the book, emphasizing sound and graphic relations occurring in the text.

She proposes that the children write Cora's story. We present below the writing of two children, Emily and João Gabriel, both aged six.

#### Emily's text



(CORA’S HAIR LUCK CORA WHO HAD HER AUNT TO STAND UP FOR HERSELF / HER CORA [WAS] BLACK PLYK PAUEW HAIR /FIM).<sup>17</sup>

In the continuous process of talking-reading-writing, which prompts Natalia’s action of teaching literacy, the children are learning to write. Emily's text shows the singular, complex discursivity by making manifest her evaluative positions and presents much knowledge the girl developed about writing itself. Indexes connected to the understanding of the alphabetic principle, the segmentation of writing, the spatiality of writing on paper (she writes from top to bottom and from left to right), the recognition of the hyphen to separate syllables of words – Emily makes efforts to command a new language without fear, daring to invent herself. She describes Cora’s characteristics, as asked by the teacher, and takes the risk of writing that the girl had *black-power* hair, written PLYK PAUEW. The use of the

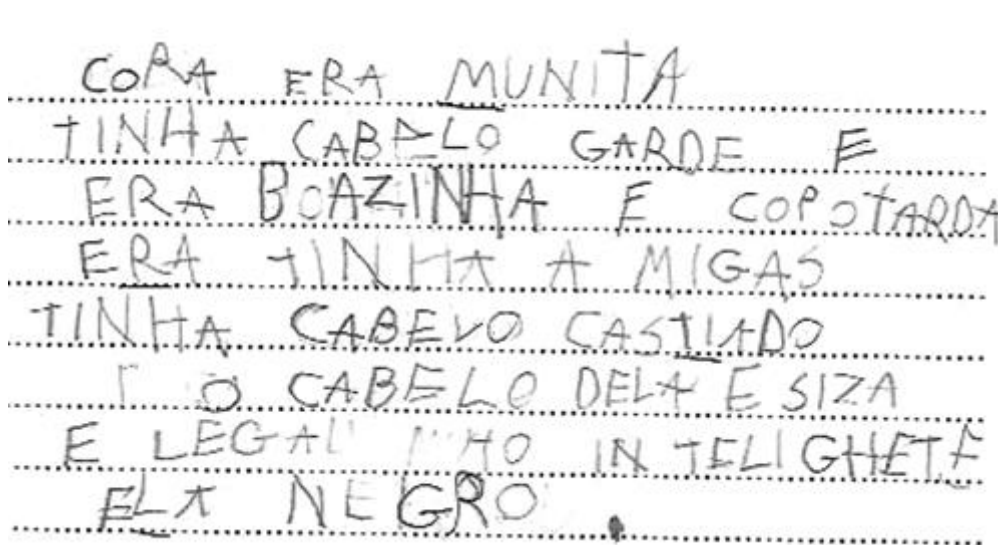
<sup>16</sup> In the original: “Conversamos muito, acolhi as reclamações, algumas crianças deram exemplos de como agiriam e nós discutimos que as pessoas, por serem diferentes, também agem de maneiras diferentes.”

<sup>17</sup> In the original: “(O CABELO DE CORA SORTE DE CORA QUE TINHA SUA TIA PARA SE DEFENDER [DENFEDER] / SUA CORA [ERA] NEGRA CABELOS PLYK PAUEW / FIM).”

letters YKW in writing the word seems to indicate that she recognizes she is before a foreign word. The girl uses the resources she has at hand to register the way she saw a girl named Cora. In writing “CORA [WAS] BLACK,” she seems to agglutinate the words “COR” and “ERA[WAS],” using the final R of the word CORA to write the verbal form ERA [WAS]. We may think that the outstanding presence of the name CORA in the text is the origin of such a construction.

But Emily goes farther. She does not register the story, as asked, rather, she resolutely expressed how she felt the discrimination lived by Cora, reflecting about the story: “LUCK CORA WHO HAD HER AUNT TO STAND UP FOR HERSELF (denfeder).” This is one of the assumptions of literacy in the discursive dimension: the challenge to creation, to the expression of feelings, knowledge, at the same time children develop their discourse, learning and perfecting writing.

#### *João Gabriel's Text*



(CORA WAS PRETTY / SHE HAD BIG HAIR AND WAS VERY GOOD AND WELL BEHAVED / SHE HAD FRIENDS / SHE HAD CURLY HAIR / AND HER HAIR IS GRAY AND COOL / VERY INTELLIGENT / SHE [WAS] BLACK).<sup>18</sup>

In João Gabriel's text, Natalia emphasizes some formal aspects of writing. When she notices that in the texts the majority of the children combined physical characteristics of the

<sup>18</sup> In the original: “(CORA ERA BONITA [MUNITA] / TINHA CABELO GRANDE [GARDE] E ERA BOAZINHA E COMPORTADA [COPOTARDA] / ELA [ERA] TINHA AMIGAS / TINHA CABELO CACHEADO [CASTIADO] / E O CABELO DELA É CINZA [SIZA] E LEGAL / MUITO INTELIGENTE [INTELIGHETE] / ERA NEGRO).”

character with her way of being, Natalia invites the group to collectively organize João’s text. She transcribes the text without the orthographic problems and after they realize two types of information, the children use different colors for each of them and re-structure the text, according to the following image<sup>19</sup>:

<p>CORA WAS PRETTY  SHE HAD BIG HAIR AND WAS  VERY GOOD AND WELL BEHAVED  SHE HAD FRIENDS  SHE HAD CURLY HAIR AND HER HAIR  WAS GRAY AND COOL  SHE WAS VERY INTELLIGENT / SHE  WAS BLACK</p>	<p>CORA WAS PRETTY  SHE HAD BIG HAIR AND IT WAS CURLY  HER HAIR WAS GRAY AND COOL  SHE WAS BLACK.  SHE WAS VERY GOOD AND WELL  BEHAVED.  SHE HAD FRIENDS AND WAS VERY  INTELLIGENT</p>
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In the following week, Natalia continues their discussion, asking them to write an informative text about the cat, animal observed in the science class. In this activity, she makes the children understand how writing organizes and materializes from the point of view of both its dialogical and formal dimensions, which entails a great complexity of knowledge.

The way Natalia presents writing to her pupils, in the context of social questions, children’s values and the interventions she carries out, and the proposals she organizes, collectively and individually invite them to learn writing discursively.

Children’s lives in the written culture prompted her literacy practice, which expands and makes ways for reflections on the language system. The teacher, then, stimulates the children to observe the characteristics of words, their composition by syllables and letters, structuring varied activities to work the literacy process.

To take the language system as a starting point to present and work on writing with the children takes the life of language out of the pedagogic scene, as it obliterates the subjects involved in this learning. We conceive writing as an enunciation act in which the alphabetical system is vital but is not able to account for socially referenced writing.

<sup>19</sup> In the original: ““CORA ERA BONITA / TINHA CABELO GRANDE E ERA / BOAZINHA E COMPORTADA / ELA TINHA AMIGAS / TINHA CABELO CACHEADO / E O CABELO DELA É CINZA E LEGAL / MUITO INTELIGENTE’ / ‘ERA NEGRA’”; CORA ERA BONITA / TINHA CABELO GRANDE E ERA / CACHEADO. O CABELO DELA ERA CINZA E LEGAL. / ELA ERA NEGRA. ELA ERA BOAZINHA E COMPORTADA. TINHA AMIGAS E / ERA MUITO INTELIGENTE’.”

### 3 “Aunt, are all the Words of the World Here?”<sup>20</sup>: The Meaning and the Sense of Words Belong to Discourse

Teacher’s Hebe first graders group is curious and cheerful. Most of her 19 pupils like to listen to stories and to participate in the activities she proposes. Hebe works in the same school as Natalia.

Pupils’ curiosity about the writing of words leads Hebe, the teacher, to organize varied activities to enhance their knowledge in a playful way. Previously, Gabriel triggered an interesting discussion in the group in regard to the final sound of his name: Why was his name not written with the letter O, since they all called him *Gabrieo*? Another learner, also called Gabriel, disagreed, saying that he was called *Gabrieu*, with a U sound, and his name should be written like that.

Attentive to the dialogical relations and to the enunciative positions of the children, the teacher prepares with the group a words list in which variations such as this latter may take place, and the children then discovered that there are “new sounds inside the words,” leading Berenice, a pupil, to conclude that “the words like to play pranks.”<sup>21</sup>

Encouraged by their discussion, Hebe starts a new activity with the group: the creation of dictionary entries for words chosen by the children, an activity which is part of the project *Chest of the Words* [*Baú das Palavras*], in which learners are invited to put in their chests words they would like to write in a conventional way (Picture 1).



Picture 1 – Chest of the Words by the group

Every week children add three words to their chest and on the weekend, they take home a blank etiquette to research a new word with their family, so that each chest is filled

<sup>20</sup> In the original: “‘Tia, aqui estão todas as palavras do mundo?’”

<sup>21</sup> In the original: “‘novos sons dentro das palavras’; ‘as palavras gostam de fazer pegadinhas’.”



out in a singular way. The words written at home are presented in the classroom, during the “little talk circle” and the group votes on a word to create an entry.

For the week we analyzed, the chosen word was “cinema” and the effort to say the meaning of the word elicited many opinions: “*A big place is which films are played*” (Marina); “*Where we can eat popcorn*” (Bruno) and “*It is a big place with many chairs and a big screen*” (Carlos Eduardo).<sup>22</sup>

The illustrated dictionary was then presented to the class and the definition of the word was read. This allowed the group to compare it with the information they brought for creating the entry, forming it the following way: “A cinema is a room with chairs and a big screen where people go to see movies and need to be silent.” They all were fascinated with the quantity of words contained in the dictionary and Léo asked “Aunt, are all the words of the world here?” (Teacher Hebe’s Report, May / 2018).<sup>23</sup>

After the reading of the entry created by the group, they began exploring new words with the same initial sound. A girl, Berenice mentioned that “cinema” is written with the letter “c,” but “silence” has an initial “s.” New words such as *sinal* [signal], *cinto* [belt], *Cíntia* and *sítio* [small farm] were discovered and registered by the children.

The presented activities show that, when they are taught to read and write, children learn, in addition to the spelling of words, new concepts with which they mediate their relations with the world. To learn what “cinema” is, develop its concept, to compare it with what the dictionary says and, finally, to compare their writing with another word of similar sound but different writing, has an important significance that does not manifest when a words list is presented so the children can see the difference of spelling “ce/ci” or “si/se” in the beginning of words.

The expressive coloring given to the word “cinema” comes from the children’s enunciations on the meaning of this word based on their lives. The word, when isolated from the utterance, has no expressiveness, being only a signal. It does not elicit any reaction or emotion. As Bakhtin says (1986, p.87), it is an illusion to think that words contain in their

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<sup>22</sup> In the original: “‘É um lugar grande que passa filme’ (Marina); ‘Lá podemos comer pipoca’ (Bruno) e ‘É um lugar grande que tem muitas cadeiras e um telão’ (Carlos Eduardo).”

<sup>23</sup> In the original: “Em seguida, foi apresentado à classe, o dicionário ilustrado e lida a definição da palavra. Isso permitiu que a turma comparasse com as informações que trouxeram para a criação do verbete, formando-o da seguinte maneira: ‘Cinema é uma sala, com cadeiras e telão, onde as pessoas vão ver filmes e precisam fazer silêncio.’ Todos ficaram fascinados com a quantidade de palavras presentes no dicionário e Léo perguntou ‘Tia, aqui estão todas as palavras do mundo?’ (Relatório da professora Hebe, maio/2018).”

meaning any expressiveness whatsoever. Even words such as ‘love’, ‘perfection’ and ‘justice’, which designate emotion or value, present a neuter signification, pertain to the language system and not to discourse. “They acquire their expressive coloring only in the utterance.”<sup>24</sup> The learners’ Chest of the Words does not bring “all the words of the world,” nor does it gather all the words that will be worked in the classroom, but it makes way for discovery, for understanding that writing needs to make sense for the children.

Our study shows that, in the interdiscursive process constituted in the classroom, the interventions, both by the teacher and the class colleagues, expand the ways children grasp linguistic information on how writing works, in the context of expanding their world knowledge. The organizing axis for the school’s approach to language, as considered by Geraldi (1991) – oral and written texts production, reading and linguistic analysis – are intertwined in the pedagogic process, as we observed. They show to be vital dimensions for organizing teaching-learning of writing. The Dialogical Discourse Analysis was oriented by the dialogical perspective of description, analysis, and understanding. It led us to reveal the materiality of the discourse constitutive of classrooms and their socially oriented senses. Utterances produced in the classroom interactions bring along the histories of their authors and are also connected with the actions present in the situations of production in which they are produced, linked to many factors. In the dialogical action, they all have opportunities to express themselves and broaden their reflections and understandings on life and language. It is not a class in which one talks generically to children; the class happens in the traversing of evaluative utterances of concrete persons responsively organized in the social horizon teaching-learning writing, in which changes of position are expected.

Finally, we point out the presence in the classrooms of the teachers, aspects that invite us to understand more deeply the complexity of the process of literacy and of research on the work with writing in the school. Way beyond the perspective of a linear chain of letters, syllables, words or phonemes, there is the perspective of a chain of senses, of social and individual interconnections, which enlarges the history of life of each one and of all, creating new histories, not only of learning, but also of life. Although all the aspects are interconnected, for the end of the study the aspects emphasized serve to sharpen the understanding of different ways of learning and teaching. A metag glance on this space of meeting of lives, knowledge and persons, maintaining the feet on the ground of the

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<sup>24</sup> In the original: “O colorido expressivo lhes vem unicamente do enunciado (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.87).”

classroom, makes to stand out what Smolka already emphasized in 1988: the interactive action and the place it has in daily teaching-learning.

The study also emphasizes that knowledge is built in many ways, and the words of the children both express it and at the same time make explicit ways for the gestation and generation of knowledge. The teachers, by their turn, receive the words, replying and nuancing them with new possibilities to think, to revise and to broaden knowledge. We emphasize the dialogy that stands out in the varied situations in which right or wrong have less importance than the ways to glance and to ask – and, because of them, to be disquiet.

Because of the whole complex set of factors we have shown, we work with a flexible rigor which gives us certain guarantees, but also does not prevent us from the concreteness of being that exists in each child, in each person – collectively and individually. It is thus, in this sense, an ethical rigor.

In the classroom, the conversations, the proposed activities, and the interventions are lived in the context of the social world, of the social world writing. The place the subjects and their knowledge have in the activities express this aspect. The questions that “attack” us at the end of each study are: What is taught when one teaches to read and write? What do children learn? They remain in the horizon.

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We declare that the authors had access to the *corpus* of the research, that they participated actively in the discussion of results and revised and approved the final version of the paper.

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