



# Literacy Practices of Children's Mothers in Early Childhood Education

## Práticas de Letramento de Mães de Crianças de Educação Infantil

## Las Prácticas de "Letramiento" de las Madres de Niños de Jardín de Infantes

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### **Abstract**

Purpose: to analyze and to understand the similarities and differences in literacy practices of children's mothers in Early Childhood Education in both public and private schools, as well as the importance of the mother's role in her child's reading/writing. Method: We conducted a semi-structured interview about the literacy practices of five mothers of kids in early childhood education in public schools and five mothers of kids in early childhood education in private schools, and their approach to reading/writing. All data collected were categorized using Content Analysis, and the data obtained from public and private schools were compared. Results: Based on this analysis, it was found that all mothers interviewed place a high value on reading/writing, and are willing to encourage their children to practice these skills. On the other hand, some respondents mentioned the lack of reading and writing incentives and placed responsibility for these practices on the school, which supposedly acts as a catalyst in raising children's interest in such practices. Conclusion: it is noteworthy that all interviewees recognized the importance of reading and writing to people's lives, and considered them essential to the literate world, as well as a factor that influences social mobility and that plays an important role in social relations. The results can be used as indicators for new research projects and may be useful in providing assistance in Speech Language Pathology and Audiology to educational institutions.

**Keywords:** *Speech Language Pathology and Audiology; early childhood education; mothers; reading; language.*

### **Resumo**

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*Objetivo: analisar e compreender semelhanças e diferenças de práticas de letramento de mães de crianças de Educação Infantil de escola pública e privada, bem como a importância do papel da mãe no contato do filho com a leitura/escrita. Método: Utilizou-se entrevista semi-dirigida sobre práticas de letramento de cinco mães de crianças de Educação Infantil de uma escola pública e cinco de Educação Infantil de uma escola privada e a sua relação com a leitura/escrita. Os dados coletados foram categorizados por meio da Análise de Conteúdo e, comparados entre a escola pública e privada. Resultados: A partir da categorização e comparação do conteúdo foram constatadas semelhanças e diferenças entre as mães entrevistadas da escola pública e privada. Destaca-se a similaridade entre todas as mães entrevistadas ao valorizarem a leitura/escrita e ao exporem a vontade de incentivar tais práticas aos seus filhos, porém se diferem quando algumas mães mencionam a ausência do incentivo à leitura/escrita, além de atribuírem a responsabilidade à escola, tendo-a como agente transformador e favorecedor do interesse das crianças por essas práticas. Conclusão: Pondera-se, que todas as entrevistadas reconheceram a importância da leitura e escrita para a vida, considerando-as fundamentais para a existência no mundo letrado, assim como um fator de ascensão social, e de grande valor para as relações sociais. Os resultados podem servir de indicadores para novos estudos e de apoio à propostas de assessoria fonoaudiológica à instituições educacionais de Educação Infantil.*

**Palavras-chave:** Fonoaudiologia; educação infantil; mães; leitura; linguagem

### Resumen

*Objetivo: analizar y comprender semejanzas y diferencias de prácticas de alfabetización/letramento de madres de niños de educación infantil de la escuela pública y privada, así como la importancia del papel de la madre en el contacto del niño con la lectura/escritura. Método: Se usó la entrevista semi dirigida sobre las prácticas de alfabetización/letramento de cinco madres de escuela pública y cinco de escuela privada y su relación con la lectura/escritura. Los datos recogidos se clasificaron mediante el Análisis de Contenido y se compararon entre las escuelas públicas y privadas. Resultados: A partir de la categorización y comparación de contenido fueron encontrados entre las madres entrevistadas de las escuelas pública y privada similitudes y diferencias de contenido. Existe la similitud entre todas las madres entrevistadas para valorar la lectura/escritura y exponer el deseo de fomentar este tipo de práctica a sus hijos, pero difieren cuando algunas madres mencionan ausencia en el fomento de la lectura/escritura, y designan responsabilidad a la escuela, tomándola como un agente transformador de los intereses de los niños por estas prácticas. Conclusión: Se considera, que todas las entrevistadas reconocieron la importancia de la lectura y escritura para la vida, considerándolas fundamentales para la existencia en el mundo letrado, así como un factor de ascensión social, y de gran valor para las relaciones sociales. Los resultados pueden servir de indicadores para nuevos proyectos de pesquisa y de asesoría fonoaudiológica a las instituciones educacionales.*

**Palabras clave:** Fonoaudiología; crianza del niño; madres; lectura; lenguaje

### Introduction

When using the literacy concept, we need to think about the social process of using the written language and its multiple variations, which, over the years, have progressed due to scientific research in Education, Applied Linguistics and Speech Therapy.

Letramento (Literacy) is a current concept in Brazil, having been recently researched by authors who are indisputable specialists in the subject<sup>1-5</sup>. However, one has to point out the pioneering studies of Paulo Freire<sup>6-8</sup>, who had already worked on the concept of Alfabetização (Learning to Read and Write) as a life-changing social practice, even

though his body of work did not include the term letramento as it is understood and used today.

On the concept of *letramento*, it's worth explaining that:

As it was impossible to expand the word alfabetização so that it meant not only the acquisition of the alphabetic system, but also the acquisition of the social and cultural uses of that system, it became necessary to “invent” the word letramento<sup>5:7</sup>

Accordingly, it is difficult to conceptualize the term literacy; we may explain it, but it is no simple task to adequately define the term.

As such, Tfounidefines literacy as a social practice:

*(...) (We must) see it associoc-historical process that studies, at once, both those who learn how to read and write with varying degrees of success and those who are illiterate. The social practices of writing within society are the more effective the higher an individual's degree of literacy, and, in order to allow for these degrees, Tfouni developed the proposal of a continuum, an imaginary line along which the differentdiscursivestances available in a literate society would be positioned.*<sup>3:176</sup>

Literacy does not refer solely to reading and writing in isolation, but also to the capacity, ability and social function involving one person (individual sphere) and a society (collective sphere). Learning to read and write does not ensure that an individual is literate. This assertion becomes clear when one researches into functional literacy. According to the Functional Literacy Indicator INAF9, it is possible to notice improvements in the population's levels of literacy. These improvements correspond to the increase in access to education, but are still short of the desirable level.

In Brazil, specialists in Applied Linguistics and Education have raised similar questions, related to the issue of the implications and conflicts associated to acquisition of reading and writing in social groups, from the vantage point of literacy studies, which idealize the practices of using writing as being essentially plural. Thus, different social groups possess different types of literacy, and writing has as many qualitative results for individuals as are the probabilities and roles the former adopts for the latter in motivated social sets. Literacy is understood as the framework for discursive practices, as several different ways to use language and ascribe meaning to speech – “influenced by the written language of literate groups – as writing.”<sup>10:182</sup>

For Kleimanand Vóvio:

“Such discursive practices are closely connected to the identities of the people who perform them; changing these practices results in identity changes, because it corresponds to transformations in interaction manners and action models.”<sup>10:182</sup>

Literacy, therefore, is a continuous process, constituted by the way a person relates to writing, as each day new literacy practices are added to that person's life, contributing to the construction of his or her learning.

For Freire<sup>6-8</sup>, the process of learning how to read and write as an adult is freeing as it allows the learner to acquire a critical conscience. It is important to add that the act of reading and the process of becoming literate as an adult is, essentially, a political act, an act of knowledge, as it develops in the reader and learner a critical conscience of the world and of his or her reality; reading recreates senses, and awakens the reader to a critical, mature thought<sup>7</sup>.

Freire<sup>7:24</sup>made reference to his own initial experiences with reading and writing when he mentioned his own learning process at home, in the city of Recife, with branches and twigs, the significant moments of the “reading of the world” and the reading of the “*palavra mundo*” (“worldword”).It is clear that there is a great deal in common between the concepts of literacy and learning to read and write, as the latter is not just a merely mechanical process, but allows the learner the possibility to become a part of society in a formative, revolutionary manner.

Santos and Ifaapproached the definition of critical literacy, namely:

“It is grounded on the social criticism theory, on Paulo Freire's studies, and, more recently, on the poststructuralist theories, and is associated with the idea of “empowerment” of the individual, so that he or she may, through language, act in the different social practices, so as to position him- or herself as a critical individual and effect changes if he or she so wishes”.<sup>10:5</sup>

It bears emphasizing the new reality of education: the Ministry of Education determined that the

former last year of Preschool Education become compulsory as the 1st year of Elementary School, increasing the duration of the Elementary School to nine years. The documents that offer the general guidelines from the Preschool and Elementary Education Department justify the nine years of duration of the Elementary School<sup>11</sup>:

According to the National Education Plan (PNE), the legal ruling (Law 10,172/2001, target 2 of Elementary School) of progressively implementing the nine-year Elementary School by including six- and seven-year old children, has two objectives: offering greater learning opportunities during the obligatory education period, and ensuring that, by entering the education system earlier, children would achieve a higher level of schooling<sup>11:14</sup>.

The manner by which literacy practices are offered to children is considered extremely important. The relationship established in the daily family activities that involve reading and writing allows children to associate pleasure with the literacy practices, and awakens in them the will to search more and more new opportunities to read and write: diaries, songs, and letters, among others. As such, reading and writing are essential to enable children to meet their social demands, adding another means of communication between individuals that goes beyond the oral one.

Appreciating reading stories is a valuable strategy to develop a taste for reading and for acquiring reading and writing skills. Listening to a story read from a book is a way in which to acquire new knowledge. Several different genres of books used by adults in their interaction with children must be considered. As we could observe during this research, all interviewees used informative texts, which were read in search of knowledge – magazines and newspapers. These written materials were offered to preschoolers (who were undergoing a process of acquisition of general knowledge and communications skills). It is believed that, by identifying each genre's objective, the "small reader" recognizes the specific manner in which to read and write in each genre. According to Soares (2009, p. 9)<sup>5</sup>:

*Likewise, literacy acquisition activities involving writing may*

*and should be constantly present in preschool. Opportunities arise at all times to record something as support to memory, to dictate to an adult a letter the child wants to send to someone, or to put together a poster about some work the child did. Anyway, there are countless situations that may be exploited so that children realize the role of writing for various purposes and use it in social interaction practices. .*

Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev<sup>12</sup> believe that writing must have a meaning for children, and may be incorporated as a task both necessary and relevant in their lives. Accordingly, literacy practices may help children enter the world of knowledge of reading and writing, by realizing that reading and writing are not acquired at school only, but may also be acquired at an earlier stage, in the child's own home. We must consider the pleasure the child derives from discovering how much that empowers him or her as a subject of his or her own knowledge.

We should not take away from the child that which constitutes his or her reality and fill him or her with new knowledge and new realities. Sometimes, that drives the child away from school itself and from literacy practices. For that, the adult needs to rescue the meaning of writing, allowing the child to be the agent of building his or her own subjectivity and learning, believing, along with Paulo Freire<sup>8:63</sup>, that "nobody educates anybody, nobody educates themselves, men educate each other, mediated by the world".

It is known that autonomy does not happen overnight, but takes time to be constructed, but "if education can't do everything, it certainly can do something fundamental"<sup>6</sup>. We must include literacy practices in the learner's existence, as they will bring about changes in the learner's social, political and personal practices. Thus, it is believed that the child's initial journey along literacy practices begins in the first social institution to which the child belongs, namely the family, and more precisely between mother and child. However, this journey continues when the child enters school. It is necessary to rescue what was achieved, and, if very little was built by the child's first relationship with his or her parents, school, and more particularly the

educator, may give new meaning to reading and writing practices.

We may add to that the relevance of studies that point towards the issue of family relationships, a locus in which literacy practices take place. Thus, we should consider the findings of a research conducted by Brazet al<sup>13</sup>, which focused on the parental and marital relationships of middle class families for understanding the development and social adjustment of children, and on describing the quality of these relationships. A questionnaire was prepared and responded to by the mothers about social and demographic aspects, family structure and way of life, in addition to a semi structured interview conducted with both parents separately, which included questions about marital satisfaction, conflict, coalition, values and beliefs about marriage and child upbringing and their influences on the parent-child interaction. The findings indicated that a good marital relationship helps the sharing of education practices between husbands and wives and promotes the development of feelings of safety in their children. The data were discussed in terms of the mutual influences between marital and parental relationships, taking into account the similarities and differences between middle class and low-income class families<sup>13</sup>.

The survey *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil* (2012)<sup>14</sup> (Portraits of Reading in Brazil), in its third edition, is considered the most comprehensive study on the Brazilian behavior towards reading. In addition to analyzing indicators that allow guiding programs and projects of social inclusion for the Brazilian population, it identifies factors that encourage people to read and promote widespread access to books. Published on Instituto Pró-Livro, the survey *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil* is a very important tool for assessing the current public policies aimed at education and reading. The survey findings discuss the positive points as well as those that still need attention, and served as a basis for the present study, as they represent a unique opportunity to reflect on what each of us is doing and can do for reading in Brazil, whether at home, at school, etc.

As important as citing research as relevant as the above-mentioned *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil* is to mention the data collected from the most recent demographic census of the Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE<sup>15</sup>), which enable

governments to make medium- and long-term plans for the country in order to improve the quality of life, income, housing and all other aspects that permeate a citizen's life.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the literacy practices conducted by mothers of preschoolers who attend public and private schools, pointing to and seeking to understand the similarities and differences between these two realities, as well as the presence and the importance of the mother's role to foster literacy practices.

## Materials and methods

The research was approved in accordance with the guidelines and rules regulating researches involving human beings, from the National Health Council, Resolution 196/96 (Ministry of Health, 2013) under opinion 208/07. It is a quantitative/qualitative research whose data were collected in a public school and in a private school, on the west side of the city of São Paulo.

We interviewed 10 mothers of preschoolers, five of whom attending the public school, and the other five attending the private school. The criteria for including the mothers in the research were that they had a child enrolled in preschool, and were willing to participate in the study. The mothers were approached by the researchers when they were picking their children up from school. Once they agreed to participate in the research, the objectives and procedures were explained to them, after which they signed the informed consent form and received a copy of it.

A semi-structured interview was adopted for collecting data. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the mothers' consent. A questionnaire was prepared for collecting the data based on a bibliographic review<sup>16,17</sup>. Aiming at constructing a profile of the population researched, the questionnaire included the questions in Appendix 1.

After carefully reading and re-reading the transcribed interview, the responses were analyzed and categorized according to Bardin<sup>18</sup>. The categories found were:

- 1 –Family composition and age of interviewees;
- 2 –Occupation and level of schooling;
- 3 –Reading habit;

- 4 –Writing habit;
- 5 –Use of reading and writing at work;
- 6 –Reading and writing materials at home (genres);
- 7 –Habit of telling stories to their children, the types of stories told and how often the mothers tell them;
- 8 –Value attached to reading and writing and how much contact the child had with them;
- 9 –Child's interest in reading and writing;
- 10 –Ways of encouraging reading and writing.

Once the categories were defined, the researchers cross-referenced the data found at the public and the private schools. The aim was to better understand the similarities and differences between the interviewees' literacy practices, and how these practices influenced their children's literacy acquisition.

## Results

The analysis of the interview transcriptions allowed us to gather more information, with the aim of organizing these transcriptions into analytical tables to allow greater visibility to the contents without losing the full discourse. The analysis and the cross-referencing of data showed:

**Category I – Family composition and age of interviewees-** We assumed that the relationships established in the daily lives of the families, the family composition, the age and gender of its members, and the literacy practices adopted may indicate different types of reading and writing, due to the different interests. The interviewees whose children attended the public school were aged between 20 and 50 years old, whereas the mothers whose children attended the private school were aged between 21 and 37 years old, averaging 30.8 years old.

As to the family composition, the data gathered showed that at the public school most of the mothers were married and living with their spouses – four of the interviewees. Only one of the five interviewees lived with her mother, brother and son.

At the private school, on the other hand, the family composition of interviewees was different. Out of the five mothers, only one was married and lived with her husband. Four were single mothers;

one of them lived only with her children, whereas the other three lived with their mothers, brothers and children.

While the interviewees of the public school tended to attach greater value to constituting a family and having quality of life as essential aspects of a marriage, the private school interviewees tended to attach most value to being in a relationship, showing they were more open to new trends associated with the concepts of family and marriage<sup>13</sup>.

**Category II – Occupation and level of schooling-** occupations varied across all the interviewees from the public school: one mother was a preschool teacher; one was a production assistant; one was an administrative assistant; one was a domestic worker; and one was a school lunch lady.

At the private school, three interviewees were preschool teachers, one was a housekeeping assistant and one was an intern and a student attending the senior year of Interior Design.

The common point found in this category was the fact that all interviewees were working under a formal employment relationship; this finding reflects the new trends of modern society, as in Brazil 38% of labor is composed of women, according to data from the 2010 Census published by the IBGE.

The data collected about the public school mothers' level of schooling were: university degree (two); high school degree (two); unfinished elementary school (one). At the private school: university degree (three); attending university (one); unfinished elementary school (one).

At the private school, most of the interviewees had a university degree. However, the only interviewee who had not finished elementary school stood out from the average profile of that school's population, for, as mentioned previously, her child attended that school due to the mother's employment relationship with the school (she was a housekeeping assistant there). According to the data collected, the three interviewees who had a university degree were teachers who had graduated in Pedagogy, and one of these also had a second degree in Psychology.

It bears pointing out that at the public school, the mother who had not finished elementary school had literacy practices that consisted of reading children's books to their children, writing notes and

supermarket lists, in addition to reading the newspaper and the bible and doing crossword puzzles.

At the end of last decade, the studies on Literacy in the field of Applied Linguistics focused on the quality of the uses of reading and writing within unschooled communities, seeking to understand how they interacted within urban groups which are highly technologically developed and permeated by writing. Thus several types of social work were approached, focusing on the literacy practices of specific communities that did not know how to read and write<sup>11:183</sup>.

**Category III – Reading habit**– the interviews showed that at the public school four interviewees had the habit of reading; two of them said they read every day and another two read every month, and only one said she did not have this habit.

At the private school, four interviewees said they read often. Two of them daily and one monthly, usually at home and at work. One interviewee said she did not like to read, and rarely read books, even though she believed she read daily at work.

We could see similarities in the interviewees' reading habit, as both the public and the private school mothers adopted literacy practices. Nowadays it is impossible to be a part of a literate society without having any access to reading and writing, because very rarely do people have zero literacy in this type of society.

Soares calls attention to the importance of children familiarizing themselves with the materiality of the text, and the habit of reading is a way the mother, or whoever plays that role, may allow the child to have this contact. Reading stories allows the child to:

Get to know the book or magazine, discover that the marks on the page – sequences of letters – hide meanings, that the texts are “for reading”, and not the illustrations, that the pages are turned from the right to the left, that the texts are read from the left to the right and from the top to the bottom, that books have an author, an illustrator, an editor, a cover, a spine... On the other hand, reading stories is an activity that enriches the child's vocabulary and enables the development of such skills as written text comprehension,

inferencing, making assessments and establishing relations between facts. These skills will be subsequently transferred to independent reading, when the child is apt to do it.<sup>4:8</sup>.

Reading stories to children is essential as an activity and a strategic literacy resource during the entire course of Preschool Education. It is believed that, if conducted correctly, reading stories gives the child an early entry into the universe of writing.

The average of books read per inhabitant in Brazil is two complete books each year, in addition to two others read in part, and that includes the compulsory reading for school. Even though, according to the survey, the number of books read has increased, half the Brazilian population does not have the habit of reading, which is a higher number than the one found in the previous edition of the survey, published in 2008<sup>14</sup>.

**Category IV – Writing habit and genres** – that category showed the presence or lack of habit of writing. The questionnaire gave interviewees a few options of writing genres, such as: letters, notes, recipes, emails, stories, shopping lists, diaries, among others. The data evidenced that all the interviewees from both the public and the private schools had the habit of writing.

At the public school, the interviewees had the habit of writing in following genres: shopping lists and notes (four); emails, letters and recipes (three). One interviewee (preschool teacher) said she usually wrote notes for parents and stories. Another stated she had the habit of writing when doing puzzles.

At the private school, email writing was the most mentioned habit (four interviewees), followed by recipes and shopping lists (three), letters, notes, diaries, school diaries and stories (two), and one interviewee said she wrote as a hobby.

The common point among the interviewees from the two types of school was writing emails, which is justified by the technological revolution of the 20th century, with the creation of the internet, which has reached all social strata. Even the less privileged classes have had access to the internet, personal emails and the possibility of using internet cafés. Known as digital literacy, this advent is defined by researchers in the field as the way in which an individual uses digital technology,

and communication media, tools and networks to access, manage, incorporate and add ideas with the aim of generating a knowledgeable society<sup>19,20,21</sup>.

The question that follows is thus: what is the mother's relationship with reading and writing? The findings of the Survey about the Portraits of Reading in Brazil give a not very promising picture and indicate this relationship: 9% of the schooled population cannot read; 30% do not like to read; and 37% like it little. Only 25% of the participants interviewed claimed to like reading very much. This picture may be a mirror of what the present research found in this category<sup>14</sup>.

**Category V – Use of reading and writing at work** – this category was based on the assumption that, in literate societies, jobs and fields of work require increasingly literate work practices, some of which more refined and others, less so. The findings showed that four of the five interviewees from the public school had to read at work.

At the private school, four interviewees mentioned a high level of demand, and one said that her job did not require her to read. Two interviewees stated that they read pedagogical books to be updated; one said she used reading-related activities at work, and one did not establish a relation between reading and her work. It is worth mentioning that one interviewee was uncertain about the answer, as, after initially answering “no”, she reconsidered and said she wrote notes from telephone calls to her “boss”, as well as notes at home. One interviewee from the private school said she did not use writing at work, three said she did, and one believed she produced more graphic symbols rather than writing, as she worked as an architect.

At the private school, for some interviewees it was rather simple to define whether or not they used reading and writing at work and its role in their professional lives. However, at the public school, interviewees who worked as a domestic worker, a lunch lady, a production assistant and a housekeeping assistant had difficulties recognizing and legitimizing the practice of reading and writing at work. Maybe that was due to the fact that these professionals' daily activities required less refined writing practices; for instance, one interviewee who worked as a lunch lady wrote, every day, a table containing the dish of the day and the necessary ingredients for making it, as well as taking a weekly inventory of the school's pantry. This interviewee

only mentioned this writing practice when questioned by the researchers.

In an interview used by the researchers as reference, an economist used a statistic method to divide the social classes that places cut lines between groups that are the most homogeneous possible, and the most different possible from the other groups. Therefore, the population was divided into three groups: E/D, C, and B/A. Subsequently, the groups of the top and bottom were divided into further two groups, arriving at the five traditional classes: E, D, C, B e A. The economist mentioned that one of the greatest symbols of the rising of the “C” class, the middle class, is precisely the fact that most now work under a formal employment relationship, which symbolize that this part of this population can now “walk on their own two legs”. Another sign of that was the dramatic expansion of technical professional education, which still is, for most of the “C” class, a more feasible alternative than higher education. “The new middle class is hitting the ground running; they work, study at night, and get along just fine – and that shows a very hardworking side, not passive at all<sup>22</sup>”. This statement corroborates the findings of the present research that, at the public school, four out of the five interviewees usually read and wrote at work, pointing to a greater need to read and write at formal jobs.

**Category VI – Reading and writing materials at home (genres)** – showed what reading and writing materials the interviewees had in their homes. At the public school, all interviewees claimed to have reading materials; as to writing materials, three of the interviewees said they had those at home. The reading genres mentioned were: books, comic books, and magazines. The interviewees mentioned the following writing materials: coloring books, notebooks, books, comic books and computer materials.

At the private school, four interviewees said they had reading materials at home, and one denied it. The reading genres mentioned were: books, children's books and spiritualist books. The writing materials mentioned were: notebooks, boxes with writing tools for children to play with, coloring books, and comic books.

The findings in this category enable a simple but important detailing of the materials available in the daily lives of interviewees and their children,



which may somehow contribute to their contact with literacy practices.

The data collected showed to be similar to the findings of the survey *Portraits of Reading in Brazil*<sup>14</sup>. The reading and writing genres found in the survey were the following: magazines, newspapers, books, comic books, school texts, texts on the internet and work-related texts. However, when comparing the latest edition of the survey<sup>13</sup> to the previous one, we notice an increase from an average of 25 to 34 books per house. According to the survey, these indicators may allow for an extraordinary contribution to reflection. The search for more effective actions in the Education and Culture areas, in order to improve the indicators that measure reading and access to books by the population are essential to achieve better positions in Education actions.

**Category VII - Habit of telling stories to their children** (types of stories told and how often the mothers tell them) - focused on the mothers' habit of telling stories to their children, the types of stories told and how often they told them.

At the public school, three interviewees told stories to their children, and two didn't. The types of stories mentioned by the mothers were: personal stories, children's stories, fairy tales and comic books, and one interviewee also mentioned singing children's songs. As to how often the storytelling took place, the interviewees said they did it daily, sporadically, and two interviewees denied ever telling stories to their children.

At the private school, four interviewees claimed to have the habit of telling stories; one of them, in addition to reading stories, also made stories up. Only one denied telling stories.

The types of stories told were varied: bedtime stories, made up stories, children's stories, personal stories, and one interviewee said her child chose the theme. As to how often they told stories, they answered: daily, sporadically, when the child was taking too long to sleep, twice a week, and one interviewee denied ever telling stories to her children.

At the public school, only three interviewees told stories to their children. The genres coincided with those told by the private school mothers, as they mentioned children's books and fairy tales.

The difference between the two realities was that at the private school the interviewees made

up stories, whereas at the public school they read comic books, children's books and also told personal stories, which also happened at the public schools, but not as much.

**Category VIII – Value attached to reading and writing** – assessed the value the mothers attached to reading and writing in the lives of their children. At the public school, three interviewees valued reading and writing in the lives of their children, and the other two did not think it was important, as they believed the children were still young and would not understand it. At the private school, three interviewees found it very important; one said she understood how important it was, and the other one said that, even without support, her child showed interest in reading and writing.

The similarities found between the public and the private school mothers emphasize the value attached to reading and writing, as well as the importance of the children's contact with literacy practices. However, at the private school, the value attached to that contact was relevant, as four of the five interviewees stated it, versus three from the public school.

**Category IX – Child's interest in reading and writing** – at the public school, one interviewee reported her child's lack of interest in reading and writing due to the fact that he was still very young; only when the older sister offered him reading materials did he express any interest. The other four interviewees believed their children were interested in reading and writing.

At the private school, one interviewee said her child was not interested in reading and writing; another interviewee said her child had that habit; two claimed their children did not know how to read, and the last recognized her child's interest, which in her opinion was bigger than her own. Therefore, most interviewees considered that their children were interested in reading and writing.

The statements of the four interviewees from the public school and the also four mothers from the private school, that their children were interested in reading and writing, show these mothers' concern in recognizing their children's interests and their attention to the children's reaction when engaged in literacy practices.

On the other hand, the fact that the child is interested enables the expectation that the work done

at school may be a facilitator and be supplemented by this type of behavior.

**Category X – Ways of encouraging reading and writing**—assessed on how the mothers encouraged their children to read and write.

At the public school, four interviewees encouraged this contact, and one said she did not. This encouragement took place by means of buying books, having conversations about the subject, encouraging and allowing the contact with books, magazines, comic books and pamphlets.

At the private school, three interviewees encouraged the child's contact with reading and writing; two interviewees claimed not to. These mothers encouraged their children's contact with the letters by buying books, and the child chose what he or she wanted to read; offering books and boxes with materials for drawing and painting; telling stories to the children about when they were babies; offering DVDs, giving books as gifts; offering some written material to the children when they asked for it and letting them use it at their will; or the mother did not encourage the child, as she believed this task should be performed by the school.

The difference between the interviewees from the public school and those from the private school was very telling in this category, as it was at the public school that most interviewees encouraged their children's contact with reading and writing. That was due to the fact that reading and writing, as well as level of schooling, may improve an individual's social status. There was one relevant report from one of these mothers, who talked to her children about reading/writing and school, as she considered that reading, studying and learning could afford her children to have better opportunities and better jobs in the future.

At the private school, the number of mothers who encouraged their children's contact with reading and writing was smaller than at the public school. One of the interviewed mothers delegated to the school the role of encouraging reading, thus failing to assume her own fundamental role in awakening in her children the joy associated with that practice.

## Discussion

Diante da possibilidade de uma reflexão e avaliação Given the opportunity to reflect and evaluate the findings of the research as to the concerns presented both in the objectives and throughout the study, two questions stand out, namely:

1) What may be improved in regard both to the mothers' literacy practices and to the encouragement they can give to their children?

2) How to identify effective actions to foster reading?

The discussion about the similarities and differences between the literacy practices of mothers of preschool children enrolled in public and private schools is essential to the issue of literacy, which has been increasingly researched by the scientific community, with advances made in new trends and new possibilities to include subjects in this social practice. The present research brings up wide issues, which cannot be exhausted in this article, requiring a continuous and in-depth analysis, with close attention to the problems it involves.

In the less privileged socioeconomic and cultural realities, the current picture is still that of more restricted literacy practices. However, the data collected in this research interviews show that at least part of the population acknowledge that reading and writing may improve their social status and decrease the social stigma of illiteracy. In this sense, the higher the level of schooling, the more refined the literacy practices. This is evidenced by the fact that both the mothers of children enrolled in public schools and the mothers whose children attend private school, who had university degrees, adopted more refined reading and writing practices. In the present study, the fact that all interviewees discussed the importance of reading and writing for life in general and, specifically, for the inclusion of their children in the world, considering it as a tool for social rising and pointing out schooling as something that could generate more opportunities, is endorsed by a highly literate society, in which reading and writing are fundamental in social, work, man-man and man-world relationships<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding the ten categories researched, there are relevant aspects associated with the number of married women who lived with their husbands. At the public school, four interviewees lived with their husbands, whereas at the private school only one

mother was married and lived with her husband. Most of the interviewees from the private school relied on the financial support of their immediate families, and marriage was not essential to support their children. On the other hand, the mothers from the public school had a different reality: maintaining the marriage, with the consequent two sources of income, could be the only way to support the children, as mentioned previously<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, the data gathered indicate that the independence of the private school mothers regarding to relationships such as marriages may be connected to the support they receive from their families, as these nowadays tend to have more grandparents and grandchildren and have undergone changes in their organization, pointing toward a greater diversity in the types of families. Family arrangements have become less traditional, there are a larger number of consensual cohabitations, and there are more single mothers<sup>15</sup>. According to a comparative analysis of Census samples, during the period in between two editions of the Census (2000-2010) there was an overall improvement in the degree of schooling, especially regarding high school and university education among women. The reasons for this improvement may include a change in cultural values associated with women's role in Brazilian society, chiefly due to women's massive entry in the labor market<sup>15</sup>.

Regarding reading habits, the research findings show that the proportion was similar in both the private and the public schools, with four of the five interviewees in each school stating they read habitually, with varying frequencies. The reading genres were also similar, being associated with women's interests, such as, for instance, recipes, a genre associated with the performance of their roles as housewives. Also, in their roles as mothers, the participants searched for information in medicine instruction leaflets.

At the public school, all interviewees had the habit of writing, versus four at the private school. The most common writing genres in both realities were: shopping lists, notes and letters – again associated with women's interests.

It bears pointing out the school's role in awakening children's interest in reading and writing. One of the interviewees from the public school and one from the private school stated their beliefs that school should be responsible for sparking in the children an interest in reading and writing. The

other interviewees assigned that responsibility to parents and pointed out the importance of the latter in encouraging their children to read and write. Therefore, when analyzing the parents' influence in their children's development and their reading and writing skills, the researcher finds him/herself faced with the inheritances that get passed on from generation to generation, evidencing the values these generations assume for their existence. According to the study reviewed, "literacy does not depend exclusively on schooling, but also, and most of all, to participation in reading and writing practices, within scenarios and institutions where they acquire meaning<sup>24:67</sup>".

For authors who subscribe to Wallon's theory, "from the 3 to the 6 years of age, attachment to others is an unquenchable need for the child's person". Not only is the need for others huge, but the care given by others is fundamental<sup>23:206</sup>. The lack of this care may give rise to "long-lasting dissatisfaction attitudes that may leave, if not an irrevocable, at least a prolonged mark on the child's behavior in his or her relations with the surrounding environment<sup>24:210</sup>". The author points out, at that stage, a special attachment to people in the child's family, although he considers that, even when the child starts school and experiences a great number of social relationships, the child's dependence on others still lingers on at the beginning of the categorical stage, from ages 7 to 11/12.

Thus, considering that parents believe in the importance of reading and writing, they will consequently pass on this belief to their children, acting as their major supporters. The same happens with the selected categories regarding: the habit of storytelling, the value the mothers attach to reading and writing in the lives of their children, the child's manifested interest in reading and writing, and how the mother encourages her child to read and write. These categories all portrayed, in some way, how society values these aspects. Some mothers' belief that their children were too young to really appreciate reading and writing is grounded on the old-fashioned, but still alive, assumption that children could only begin their reading and writing learning process at the age of 7, when they start elementary school. At the time of the interviews, it was still common to think that before that age children were not yet mature enough for this learning<sup>5</sup>.

As an example, let us consider the mother of the child enrolled in the public school who

believed her child did not show interest in reading and writing for being too young. In that particular case, it was possible that all the child needed was a little more encouragement, as he did show interest whenever he saw his older sister with some reading and writing material. One hypothesis is that, for those mothers belonging to a lower sociocultural and economic class, the prevailing assumption is that there is a specific age at which a child should be interested in reading and writing, and that begins when the child starts going to school. In that sense, in order to educate readers, the educator must appreciate reading, based on the premise that reading is grounded on willingness and pleasure; listening to his or her mother read bedtime stories awakens in the child the interest in reading, by discovering the worlds, fantasies and dreams that emerge from those pages. That is the moment when that willingness and pleasure are born in the child. However, not every child has a mother who is interested in reading and passes on this willingness and pleasure by telling stories to her child. And those are precisely the first steps in the development of a reader<sup>2</sup>.

The findings of the latest survey about the Portraits of Reading in Brazil point that 64% of interviewees fully agreed with the statement that “Reading a lot may help a person ‘succeed in life’ and improve his or her socioeconomic status”, and that it is a “source of knowledge for life”, which confirms the importance attached to reading by all the interviewees, both from the public and from the private schools<sup>14</sup>.

Also according to the findings of the survey, they seem to point toward an environment where reading is not socially valued, and books do not have a guaranteed place. Regarding the families’ reading practices, in the homes of non-readers 55% had never seen their parents reading. This is extremely significant if we consider that the greater influence in the education of readers comes from the parents (especially the mothers). However, and also according to the survey, the fact that 23% of interviewees’ fathers did not have any schooling at all, 23% attended up to the 4th year of elementary school, and 15% had not completed elementary school; and that 26% of the mothers had no schooling, 22% attended up to the 4th year of elementary school, and 16% did not finish elementary school, makes it very difficult for the families to really appreciate the importance of reading<sup>14</sup>.

Nowadays, teaching reading and writing is no longer limited to the school, but has been encouraged and facilitated by families with more literate experiences, so that an increasing number of children is starting preschool already knowing how to read and write. If, on the one hand, those belonging to the more privileged classes read more, on the other hand the government has adopted policies that hope to reverse this scenario, such as the donation of books to public schools and libraries; however, these initiatives have proven insufficient to promote a significant change in these statistics<sup>14</sup>.

Regarding the issue of schools as agencies that encourage reading and writing, parents are mentioned as the first agents of their children’s discovery and interest in reading and writing, whereas the school also performs the role of facilitator of this process. It is known that school is the center of education of readers, through the teachers’ support and methods of encouragement; nevertheless, the survey Portraits of Reading in Brazil shows that mothers who read to their children greatly influence the children to become readers in the future. As readers leave school, the reading indicators drop dramatically<sup>14</sup>.

During the interviews, the mothers expressed feelings regarding reading and writing that ranged from emotion, hope, possibility of social improvement, impatience, pleasure, and discomfort, among others. Corroborating these findings<sup>24</sup>, the literature shows that emotional life is constituted from an intense awareness process<sup>23:263</sup>. At a very young age, children feel attracted to the people surrounding them, becoming aware of the smallest indications of other people’s availability. According to this theory, the infectious power of emotions refers to how these tend to propagate. Adults, when around children, are permanently exposed to an emotional infection, and vice-versa<sup>23:268</sup>.

## Conclusion

Assuming that children experience their first literacy practices at home with their families, the findings presented here have allowed us to conduct an assessment of the mothers’ behavior regarding their literacy practices by discussing their preferences and what motivates them to establish contact with reading and writing, as well as how all that influences their relationship with their children. Therefore, we expect that this study may give support to other researches and promote the debate

on the advances and deadlocks revealed by the findings, in addition to the possibility of improving the indicators that evidence the importance of mothers' participation in their children's contact with the world of reading and writing.

We believe that knowing the profile and behavior of these mothers is the right tool to identify effective initiatives aiming to educate and increase the number of future readers. When we consider literacy as something that goes beyond school practices, it is necessary to understand how the subjects' knowledge production processes work, and how they may help build a country of readers. However, in order to enable this perspective, people need to be given the necessary conditions to have access and awaken in them the interest in reading, simply because there is no point investing without captivating the reader. The data collected in this research demonstrated the importance of the mother's role in her child's relationship with reading and writing, and how the mother may, or may not, motivate and involve the child in this contact.

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## APPENDIX

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

• How is your family composed?

\_\_\_\_\_

• Who lives in your house? What does each of them do? (occupation)

\_\_\_\_\_

• How far did you go in school? How long ago did you stop studying? If you still study, what do you study?

\_\_\_\_\_

• Do you read / write for leisure?

\_\_\_\_\_

• Do you have the habit of reading and writing? In which situations do you usually read / write?

\_\_\_\_\_

• How often do you read / write? (Daily, weekly, monthly)

\_\_\_\_\_

• In which situations? (at home / at work / in your community / in church)

\_\_\_\_\_

• What do you usually read / write? ( newspapers / magazines / the Bible/ advertising pamphlets / medicine instructions / recipes / books / notes / comic books / internet )

\_\_\_\_\_

• Which of the following do you usually write?

Letters ( ) Shopping lists ( )

Notes ( ) Diary( )

Recipes ( ) Emails ( )

Stories ( ) Other ( )





What? \_\_\_\_\_

- Do you work? What do you do?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Does your work require you to read? If so, what do you usually do? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Does your work require you to write? If so, what do you usually do? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

- When at home, do you usually read or write? What? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Do you have reading or writing material at home? What? Who uses it?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Do you tell stories to your child?

Yes ( ) No ( )

- What type of stories do you tell?

( ) Personal stories

( ) Fairy tales

( ) Various children's stories

Give examples:

- How often do you tell stories to your children?

\_\_\_\_\_

- How important do you think it is for your child to have contact with reading and writing?

\_\_\_\_\_

- Do you think your child is interested in reading and writing, even if he or she still does not know how to read or write?

\_\_\_\_\_

- What do you do to encourage in your child the habit of reading and writing?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_