

# Literary reading practices and the contribution from PNAIC

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines theoretical and methodological choices employed by the Pacto Nacional pela Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PNAIC) [National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age] related to reading literary fiction texts, especially those in which the image is predominant element. Then, taking up referential action-research, it reports conclusions about impressions of reading fiction texts for images, for teachers participating in the PNAIC. Among the key findings are tangential character that gives the teaching of literature in the PNAIC. This trait seems worse when it is observed among the teachers participating in the survey read, a predominantly schooled way of reading, which moves away from the peculiar aesthetic texts, to understand them from external and prestigious values.

## KEYWORDS

PNAIC; teaching; reading; literary fiction by images.

## *PRÁTICAS DE LEITURA LITERÁRIA E A CONTRIBUIÇÃO DO PNAIC*

### RESUMO

Este artigo analisa opções teórico-metodológicas empregadas pelo Pacto Nacional de Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PNAIC) relacionadas à leitura de textos literários de ficção, sobretudo aqueles em que a imagem é elemento predominante. Em seguida, tomando-se referencial de pesquisa-ação, reportam-se resultados de levantamento de impressões de leitura de textos de ficção por imagens, por professores participantes do PNAIC. Entre as principais conclusões estão o caráter tangencial que se confere ao ensino da literatura na proposta didática do PNAIC. Esse traço parece agravado quando se observa, entre os professores participantes do levantamento de leitura, uma forma predominantemente escolarizada de ler, que se distancia da estética peculiar aos textos, para compreendê-los com base em valores externos, mas prestigiados socialmente.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

PNAIC; ensino; leitura; literatura de ficção por imagens.

## *APRÁCTICAS DE LA LECTURA LITERÁRIA Y LA PNAIC CONTRIBUCIÓN*

### RESUMEN

En este artículo se hace un análisis de las opciones teórico-metodológicos empleadas por el Pacto Nacional de Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PNAIC) relacionadas a la lectura de textos de ficción, en especial aquellos en los cuales la imagen es el elemento predominante. Luego, teniendo en cuenta la investigación- acción como referencia, se muestra resultados obtenidos de las impresiones de lecturas de ficción por imágenes, de los profesores participantes de dicho PNAIC. Entre las principales conclusiones están el carácter tangencial que se da a la enseñanza de la literatura en la propuesta del PNAIC. Este rasgo parece peor cuando se observa entre los profesores participantes del estudio, una manera de leer predominantemente aprendida en la escuela, que se aleja de la estética peculiar a los textos, para que se los comprenda a partir de valores externos, pero socialmente prestigiados.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

PNAIC; la enseñanza, la lectura; la literatura de ficción por imágenes.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper assesses the literary reading practices suggested by the Plano Nacional pela Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PNAIC) [National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age], one of the most comprehensive public initiatives for the continuing education of early elementary school teachers ever developed in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> It observes the reading of literary texts for children by early elementary school teachers who are studying in the this program. The objective of the study of the official proposals and of the teachers' impressions of their reading is to provide analytical data about the training of teachers to work with children's literature in school, particularly with image-based literature.

In 2013, the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age gave priority to the field of Portuguese language.<sup>2</sup> In relation to reading process, the teaching materials that were produced with approval of the Ministry of Education,<sup>3</sup> are highlighted by:

- a) an emphasis on the use of textual genres to approach the Portuguese language and other disciplines;
- b) a priority on literary texts, including fiction, poetry, and oral heritage, informational academic texts and "media-related" texts (Brasil, 2012a, p.9);
- c) as a consequence of the latter, projects and didactic sequences are emphasized that are mainly based on literary and informative works to address all of the subjects in the early elementary school curriculum.

However, even though this approach had a decisive role within PNAIC, it left aside decisive issues such as the reading of fiction, and fictional or informative

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1 According to official data, PNAIC had an estimated initial investment of R\$ 2.7 billion, encompassing 5,271 Brazilian municipalities, in 2012, and reaching teachers in 108 thousand schools in the country. See <[http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=18216](http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18216)>. Accessed on Jul 15, 2014.

2 In 2013, it was a 120-hour course that combined classroom and non-classroom activities, taught by professionals (educators) associated with or hired by institutes of higher education to supervisors and coordinators of state and municipal educational systems. Each educator was responsible for a group of up to 25 supervisors, in classroom activities. The latter, in turn, were responsible for bringing the content of the project to groups of 25 early elementary school teachers, located in the participating municipalities, in classroom activities as well. The local coordinators were responsible for organizing and supervising the actions at the municipal level. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), in 2013, 31 federal universities and seven state universities participated in the project. The numbers of participants were: 53 state coordinators, 5,424 municipal coordinators, 78 coordinators, 170 supervisors, and 645 educators from Institutes of Higher Education, 15,950 supervisors and 317,462 literacy teachers in municipal and state educational systems. The educators and supervisors received grants; the participating teachers got funding assistance for their costs during the project.

3 The complete set of learning materials is available at <<http://pacto.mec.gov.br>>. Accessed on May, 15, 2014.

texts based on images (although most of the books featured in the learning materials used images as one of their main codes of information). In attributing secondary importance to the characteristics of books and to literary reading, the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age ignored a historically neglected issue: the poor preparation of teachers to teach about literature. A variety of reasons justify the need for specific training in teaching image-based literature, with or without a verbal narrative, as affirmed by Poslaniec (2002), Faria (2004), Zanchetta (2014) and others. These reasons include:

1. The polysemy of meanings provided by images provides a variety of possible meanings to narrative or poetic text, based on a dialogue between readers experiences and the situations portrayed that they recognize in the work, and also from the dialogue among the images themselves. Once [the images are ] understood individually, when observed in a given order, they generate multiple and changing meanings, widening the ways of seeing a single object, scene, situation, or an entire story or poem;
2. The aesthetic refinement helps to combine in a single image various moments, spaces and movements, as well as different traits of one or more characters. This level of detail provided by pictorial information in literature is much more profound than that found in photography, comic books and video cartoons, which are necessarily shallow in terms of detail, since they must allow serial reproduction or a reading of moving images.
3. As a consequence of an aesthetic refinement, while comic books, television, and even many movies favor a horizontal or linear reading of stories based on images, literature stimulates vertical reading, to the degree that it invites readers to observe internal details, which are often secondary to the scene portrayed. Thus, the reading of literature helps to break with the predictability of the images found in comic books and on television. The possibilities of action of a little mouse, even as a secondary character of a literary plot, are infinitely stronger than the actions foreseen for a Sponge Bob, a television character whose traits must be reduced and standardized to be understood by broad publics and different cultures.
4. In works marked by the use of words and images, the possibilities of meaning are even broader. Unlike the serial illustrations found in comic books and on television, the images found in the best literary texts not only illustrate the verbal narrative, but also tell one or more stories that go beyond the story told through words, something that is hard to find in television cartoons, for example;
5. The various elements found in verbal texts and in the images that accompany them provide “spaces”, “blanks” and “gaps” that must be filled in by the reader. This exercise, specific to literary reading, is subjective, though deeply marked by the use of language – which in turn is a social activity, according to the socio-discursive definition by Schneuwly (2004) and Bronckart (1999), authors who are highly influential to the pedagogic proposals of National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age. Hence, the ac-

- tion of literary reading through images offers an opportunity for multiple literacies involving the written word, the image and the word/image dyad.
6. Even when present in informative works, with the function of merely illustrating the subjects conveyed by the written word, images tend to provide an enriched and provocative set of information, by means of dialogue with the verbal text, the vigor of the situations portrayed, the use of colors, the style of illustration. The image found in an informative book helps young readers not only to understand the written information, but also educates their eyes: What to look at first? What is the order of the elements of the image? What is important and what is secondary? What is the function of each element in the image's composition? These questions are part of the exercise of building an informative image, and are also important in the reading of images of a newspaper and a television newscast, for instance.
  7. Literary reading favors the exercise of alterity (Éscarpit; Vagné-Lebas, 1988). The reader not only decodes a story about others, but is inclined to experience it. Besides the many possibilities for relationships with characters and situations, from full admiration to a continuous questioning of the options found in the narrative (Jauss, 1974), readers of literary texts place themselves before less stereotyped characters and situations than those found in soap operas, cartoons and comic books;
  8. Metaphor and metonymy, according to La Borderie (1997), the two main elements that constitute the rhetoric of still images (in photography and literature), are also the main figurative elements found in television and the internet. The fluid aspect of the moving image, nevertheless, requires the reader to search for reductive filters, which stimulates the perception of metonymic aspects rather than metaphorical ones.

In terms of training teachers for literary reading, the more common profile found among teachers is perhaps that of the "schooled reader", as proposed by Batista (1998, p. 50-53), whose reading tends to have the following characteristics:

- a) use of a repertoire of approaches to texts that reproduce didactic and paradidactic practices focused on school experiences rather than on individual reading experiences;
- b) steering of reading towards syllabi, and less towards matters inherent to the literary text;
- c) a search for moral lessons and issues while overlooking aesthetic and reception issues;
- d) having a reading background strongly influenced by the school and academic canon, but also by the general media and by pedagogic publications.

These characteristics were identified in a study of the profile of Brazilian teachers, which found that they had a preference for reading pedagogic materials and specialized magazines rather than literary texts (UNESCO, 2004). Reproducing the habits of Brazilian society as a whole (INAF, 2009), the culture of Brazilian

teachers does not grant literary reading a leading role, since this practice is common only to one quarter of the teachers (UNESCO, 2004).

The support materials that guide the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age emphasize literary reading, but do not offer a methodology to promote the practice. The orientations concerning reading largely restrict the process of reading a literary text to a ludic plane, avoiding systematic handling of aesthetic challenges (Brasil, 2012d, p.17). This strategy is not restricted to the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age, but reflects a culture that is not very inured to books, and the incipient nature of educational policies aimed at educating readers. Projects of greater scope developed by the federal government, related to the formation of school libraries and to training of literary readers, are isolated and recent, such as the Programa Nacional Sala de Leitura [National Reading Room Program] (1984-1987), the Programa Nacional de Incentivo à Leitura (PROLER) [National Reading Incentive Program] (created in 1992 and still functioning), the Pró-Leitura [Pro-reading program] (1992-1996), the Programa Nacional Biblioteca do Professor [National Teacher's Library Program] (1994) and the Programa Nacional Biblioteca da Escola (PNBE) [National School Library Program].<sup>4</sup> In addition to the Pro-reading program, whose aim was to promote literary reading but had localized actions, the other projects were oriented towards the creation of school and community libraries.

The nearly continuous two-decade action by the National School Library Program, which was combined in 2014 with an acquisition process, of literary works for schools that participate in the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age, within the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD) [National Text Book Program]<sup>5</sup>, signals the universalization of access to literary works through school libraries, but the concern for the use of the collections has not yet materialized in the form of a well-defined policy for training reading mediators for this purpose (Paiva, 2012).

Considering this situation, this article presents the conclusions drawn from the survey of teacher's reading impressions, in activities conducted at a center of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age in São Paulo. An analysis was conducted of the impressions of supervisor's in the program of two image-only fictional narratives, to:

- a) observe aspects that reinforce the "schooled reader" culture;
- b) outline a set of reading procedures proper to this specific group, but that we believe to be representative of the broad group of teachers in general;

4 See <<http://portal.mec.gov.br/dmdocuments/pnbe.pdf>>. Accessed on Sept. 11, 2014.

5 The process called for the purchase of 15 million literature books to be distributed to each of the first three grades of the public educational system's Elementary Schools. (See <[http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=18754](http://portal.mec.gov.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18754)>. Accessed on May 28, 2014.

- c) highlight gaps in the proposals of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age, especially considering the teachers' reading experience;
- d) test a reading evaluation system based on diagnostic questions, and mainly on the proposal of strategies for working with literary texts in situations of continuing teacher education.

The field research was conducted in conjunction with the evaluation of the tools of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age for the following reasons. Firstly, because of the representativeness of the sample situation. André (2013) and other authors emphasize that one of the problems with the continued education of teachers in Brazil is precisely the generic characterization of the teachers that the training programs focus on. Moreover, these programs commonly lack effective accompaniment of the learning process and of the application of the subject matters. In this case, the teachers involved came from 70 municipalities ranging from 5,000 to more than 500,000 residents and from various regions of São Paulo state. They thus came from various environments, from those similar to the largest metropolises in the country to small towns in the poorest interior regions.

The teachers were selected to participate in the classroom activities under the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age program by educational administrators from each municipality. The participating teachers accepted responsibility for replicating the knowledge acquired in the program among active teachers in their educational systems. Thus, they combined not only the condition of teachers who read, but also teachers who could supervise other teachers to work with literary reading. The field study described in this essay did not encompass the classroom activities of these teachers with their students, but it did accompany the training of these supervisors in face-to-face meetings held in 2013. The integrated actions of increasing complexity that looked directly at the impressions of these teachers of their readings allowed sketching an overview of the procedures commonly used by teachers in literary reading.

A comprehensive chart was prepared, concerning the teachers' training in literary reading in an important state of the country. It can be argued that São Paulo has considerable financial resources, and a long history in teacher education, which makes it distinct from other Brazilian states. However, it can be deduced that the training problems found there are the same as those found elsewhere, although they may even be worse in states with fewer resources.

Secondly, the training situations such as those provided by the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age proved to be rare opportunities for dealing with literary texts, because the initial preparation of many Brazilian teachers does not include the study of literature. The curriculums at teacher college's do not address this subject. At language and literature programs that prepare teachers, with rare exceptions, children's literature may appear in isolated courses and topics, motivated more by the initiatives of individual professors than programmatic action. Moreover, when image-based children's literature and those in which the image is predominant are presented, they are still analyzed using factors such as depth, light,

color and others, which is closer to the approach used in schools of communication and art and design than in education or language and literature.

Although partial, a survey of master's degrees and doctoral dissertations published in Brazil between 2011 and 2012<sup>6</sup> suggests that the field is still little explored. Among 85 works published, those more directly concerned with literary studies look at the reading impressions of students or the characteristics of specific works. Only two studies addressed the characteristics of children's literature's based on images.<sup>7</sup> There were also no specific studies about the characteristics of reading of children's literature, whether or not it is based on images, by teachers in the initial series of fundamental education.

## METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

To analyze the proposals of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age about the teaching of literature, we sought to identify the conceptual orientations found in the didactic materials used in the program, and we systematized the activities undertaken with literary text described in books and workbooks for the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades.<sup>8</sup> We observed the concept of textual genre, found in the National Curriculum Guidelines (PCN) about Portuguese Language, and as used by authors that influenced the proposals of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age, mainly Bakhtin (1992) and Schnewly and Dolz (2004). The genres that we analyzed include narrative fiction for children and its variations: those in which verbal text is predominant; narratives in which there is a balance between verbal text and image; and fictive narratives built entirely on images. In this paper, we approach only those fictional texts composed of images.

The field research took place in a center of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age located in Assis (SP), during the encounters among educators and about 120 local supervisors and coordinators. Three activities were conducted as abridged steps of action research: diagnostic analysis immediately followed by interventions with proposals, considering the participants' impressions of the readings, to promote certain theoretical and practical concepts. The following steps were conducted:

1. At the first meeting there was a reading of the image-based text "O Pato" [The Duck], from the book *O Gato Viriato* [Viriato The Cat], by Roger

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6 See <<http://bancodeteses.capes.gov.br>>. Accessed on Aug 30, 2014.

7 They are: Maria Lucia Costa's "A narrativa visual em livros no Brasil: histórico e leituras analíticas" (Universidade da Região de Joinville, 2011), and Judithe Eva Dupont Lo's master's degree dissertation entitled "Educação literária pela mediação: estudo aplicado no primeiro ano do ensino fundamental" (Universidade de Caxias do Sul, 2011). In the former, specific texts are analyzed; in the latter, reading impressions of students.

8 On the whole, 24 workbooks were analyzed, while the field workbooks were disregarded, since they mostly reproduced the same subject matters found in the workbooks for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grades.



Mello (Ediouro, 1993). The narrative was presented on a widescreen TV. The supervisors were responsible for reproducing this narrative for the teachers with whom they were working in the classroom encounters in the municipalities, so that the teachers could respond to a brief questionnaire (which will be discussed below). That first set of activities served as a test event, for analyzing the conditions for exhibition and reception of an image-based literary work, presented to a large number of teachers, and also as a diagnostic phase, to observe the teachers' impressions of the reading.

2. At a second meeting, we commented to the coordinators and supervisors about the responses obtained from the group of voluntary teachers. (The responses from three classes of teachers from one small municipality were analyzed). The following traits were emphasized: a) the perception of the chain of events in a narrative; b) the profile of the characters; c) the perception of time; d) the perception of movement; e) the role of the images. With these aspects highlighted, the teacher/supervisors watched the narrative "O Pato" a second time. They then responded to a questionnaire, in writing, about: a) the chain of events in the narrative; b) the description of the characteristics of the narrative's main character; c) the passing of time in the story;
3. At a third meeting, the supervisors' responses to the questionnaire about "O Pato", were placed on a chart and considered in their more general aspects, were commented upon before the whole group of supervisors and coordinators, highlighting aspects that could be reevaluated by the readers, with the inclusion of deeper concepts about the narrative chain, constitution of the characters and the relations of time and movement in image-based narratives;
4. At the same encounter, the supervisors watched the narrative *Os pássaros* [The Birds], by Germano Zullo and Albertine (Editora 34, 2013), on a widescreen television. They then responded in writing and individually to a questionnaire about the narrative chain, the constitution of the characters, the main themes of the work and the role of color in the story;
5. At the final encounter, the responses of the supervisors about the narrative *Os pássaros* were commented upon, when the same concepts that were previously addressed could be reviewed once again.

The works chosen have common traits:

- 1) there is a very clear sequence of events leading to a surprising ending, which is resolved through concrete actions;
- 2) the main characters change during the narrative, with behavior that is a bit unusual;
- 3) in each case, one character teaches another how to fly and the consequences lead to a similar ending.

## READING STRATEGIES PROPOSED BY THE NATIONAL PACT FOR LITERACY AT THE PROPER AGE

Among the practices of working with the mother tongue adopted by the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age, a chief one concerns “literary text”, which is considered as a referential textual genre, based on which many of the didactic activities are organized. The aim here is not to discuss different trends in approaches to concepts about textual and discursive genres, only the concept of genre that is used in this program and its specific proposals for addressing children’s literature.

In keeping with the National Curriculum Guidelines and supported by Bakhtin (1992) and Schneuwly (2004), the orientations of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age considers language as a phenomenon materialized by texts<sup>9</sup>, molded and differentiated from each other by social usage, and identified by the notion of *genres*:

Genres are historically determined. Communicative intentions, as part of the conditions for the production of discourse, generate social uses that determine the genres that will shape the texts. That is why when a given text begins with “once upon a time”, nobody doubts it is a fairytale, because everybody knows the genre. When the phrase “Ladies and Gentlemen” is uttered, one expects to hear a public speech or the introduction to a show, because it is known that in these genres the text unequivocally has this initial formula. Likewise, it is possible to recognize other genres as letters, news reports, advertisements, poems etc. (Brasil, 1997, p. 27)

Thus, text is regarded in respect to its typological characteristics, including those that are linguistic (considering its grammatical, lexical and semantic traits, among others), communicative (concerning content, intentions and expectation of reception) and contextual (concerning its tie to one or more discursive domains, for example) (Marcuschi, 2008; Schneuwly; Dolz, 2004). According to the National Curriculum Guidelines, schools should emphasize written texts that have greater social prestige, which means most often emphasizing the so called “secondary genres” (Bakhtin, 1992), or genres whose enunciations are more autonomous in relation to immediate communicative situations (Schneuwly, 2004). The characteristics of image-based fiction, for example, as we will see below, not only help the author to produce a given work of this type, but also provide the reader a deeper understanding, and allow the work to survive even in a non-specific context of diffusion.

In the same vein, the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age considers fiction to be a priority when teaching reading, and its intrinsic characteristics should

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9 The concept of text is also not discussed. Nothing but the official documents’ point of view is presented.

be observed to provide teachers concrete evaluation tools. It is worth noting that “to appreciate and comprehend texts from the literary universe” is one of the “general rights of learning” in the field of Portuguese language, and the abilities to read literary and “nonverbal” texts are those that must be introduced since early schooling (Brasil, 2012e, p.30-31). But, although they are recurring in the learning materials and encouraged to be used continuously in classrooms, fictional and nonverbal literary texts (as well as all the other genres considered) are imprecisely presented:

Texts of literary fiction: these are texts focused on the narrative of facts and episodes of the imaginary world (unreal). Among them, we can highlight: short stories, legends, fables, chronicles, plays, novellas and folk tales.

[...]

Nonverbal texts: texts that do not employ verbal language, writing, and thus emphasize nonverbal language, such as image-only comic books, comic strips, paintings, sculptures and some traffic signs belong to this grouping (Brasil, 2012a, p.8-9).

Novels based on images or on the relation between images and verbal text are not featured among “fictional literary texts”, and image-based fictional narratives - although they are determinant for this age group and encouraged by various pedagogical proposals (Paiva, 2012) - are not mentioned among the nonverbal texts.

Contained in the projects and didactic sequences composed under the guidance of Schneuwly, Dolz and Noverraz (2004), the literary works used by the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age, regardless of their genre, are most often approached in four ways:

- a) *As pretext*: the narratives serve as starting points, stimuli or illustrations for treating syllabi related to various subjects . Thus, a classic work of contemporary Brazilian children´s literature such as Lygia Bojunga´s *A bolsa amarela (The Yellow Bag)* is proposed to exemplify the genre of the letter, in conjunction with activities that provide explanations about notes, pamphlets and other brief communication genres.
- b) *As factual information chest*: literary texts serve as information repositories that are combined with the teaching of various curricular contents, also in a pretextual fashion.
- c) *As a “chest of moral lessons”*: literary texts serve also as a kind of storage space for socially “authorized” experiences, of a moral nature, which can be used in classrooms as examples of good behavior.
- d) *As enjoyment*: this involves the proposal to read fiction texts, and other literary texts, without any evaluative purpose. This kind of activity stimulates the taste for reading and reading for pleasure, but, conversely, does not involve any systematized strategy.

Although a command of text is necessary to be able to conduct activities with these profiles, the teacher does not need to have a deep knowledge of the works themselves. Actions related to reading that should be encouraged by teachers, include: the anticipation of meanings or the preparation of the public for reading; the localization of explicit information; the realization of inferences; the establishment of logical connections and the understanding of the themes found in the text (Brasil, 2012e, p.31). All these actions can be accomplished considering only the linear and superficial plane of the narratives, without greater attention to specific aspects.

Located at the beginning of (as a pretext) or in parallel to (as a complement) the didactic sequences, the activities related to the literary texts are also superficial. Firstly, because they do not emphasize the specificities of the genres approached, considering the narratives as the theme for analysis and production of other textual genres, either oral or written. Secondly, by not emphasizing the need for the teacher to read the work to the students, or that the students themselves should read it, the opportunity is lost to observe the oral and visual dimensions of fictional and informative works, something found in the way the verbal text is constructed and in the configuration and arrangement of the images. To serve the ultimate purpose of the didactic sequences, which is textual production by the students themselves, the space for literary reading is reduced, which blurs the differences between high complexity texts, such as fiction and informative texts (“secondary texts”, according to Bakhtin), and commonplace genres, such as letters and notes (identified with Bakhtin’s notion of “primary texts”).

## READING IMPRESSIONS ABOUT VIRIATO THE CAT

In this topic, we observe the characteristics of reading of the narrative “O Pato” by the supervisors.<sup>10</sup> To do so, we first evaluate how the participants retold the story.<sup>11</sup> It was possible to notice at least three common approaches:

- a) impressions that present a summary and complete understanding of the characters and narrative events, which we will call *autonomous reading*;
- b) impressions with a predominance of narrative, with flexible descriptions of the most important actions and the juxtaposition of these actions to assemble the whole story, which we will call *narrative reading*;
- c) fragmented impressions, in which two or three remarkable moments were used, at times mistakenly described, and were sufficient for the reader to compose the path of the work, which we will call here *reading by frames*.

10 The following questions were presented to the readers: 1) Retell the story in the book in a summarized way; 2) What are the characteristics of Viriat the cat; 3) How long does it take for the narrative to take place? Justify your answer. 67 participants answered the questions.

11 We omitted a portion of the commentaries made by the teachers, to avoid revealing how the story ends.

Most of the supervisors (36 respondents or just over 50% of the group) conducted an autonomous reading, reproducing the narrative in its remarkable moments and adding character traits and more comprehensive judgements, linked to the events.

The story is about the encounter of Viriat, the Cat with a newborn duckling. The cat feels responsible for the duck, going beyond his instincts, he takes care of the duck and tries to teach it how to fly. After a few failed attempts, the duck is able to fly and [...]

A smaller group of supervisors (24 or 35% of the answers) summarized certain narrative events, describing the actions and placing them in sequence. Unlike the former responses, characterized by a summarization, analysis of the characters and a presentation of aspects relevant to the whole story, the responses in this second group constructed frames guided by the most pronounced actions, with some synthesis and localized details:

A cat jumps onto a group of ducks, and they are all scared and run away. The cat grabs an egg and lays down on it. The egg breaks and a little duck is born. The cat then goes for a stroll with its little duckling and wants to teach it how to fly, and makes a few attempts, to no avail. All the cats make fun of him because they think the cat's behavior is strange. Finally, the little duck learns how to fly and [...]

Finally, an even smaller group (7 or 10% of the group) retells the story also using a juxtaposition of specific actions, but with mistakes or only a partial understanding of the linear narrative, which is somewhat troubling, since it was a text that had been read and discussed before.

Once upon a time a duck was walking peacefully when a duck appeared. The little duck fell on the cat, where it falls asleep. The ducks flirt with each other and Viriat, the Cat watches them.

One one of its walks, Viriat, the cat falls down and when he wakes up he finds an egg [...]

The following question concerned the characteristics of Viriat, the cat. The bold cat jumped in the middle of the ducks and came across an egg. Instead of destroying it, or going away, he slept on top of the egg, which turned into a little duckling the next morning. Surprised, Viriat once more goes against his instincts and becomes friends with the duckling, defending it and teaching it how to fly, even though the other cats made fun of him. In terms of its characteristics<sup>12</sup>, the cat is persistent, careful, a good friend, supportive and loving according to most of

12 The respondents could ascribe as many characteristics to the characters as they thought appropriate.

the readers (44 responses); some add the cat's playful and tenacious qualities (4), its "adaptability" (2) and its "respect for differences" (2). The other answers are similar to the ones mentioned, though some emphasize the cat's other possible traits: its autonomy (2), neediness (1), virility and boldness (1).

In general, Viriat's worthwhile and positive characteristics are featured. Traits like autonomy, independence, stubbornness and pride, all applicable to the cat, though distant from the profile of a good-guy, are not mentioned. When considered in view of the retelling of the narrative, the bolder considerations about Viriat, the cat were made by participants who observed the story in a more complex fashion, highlighting elements beyond the text's surface. Those who solely reproduced moments of the narrative suggested a simplified perception of the character.

The story's evolution, in turn, is marked by actions that take place through very plain hints: Viriat sleeps on top of the egg (the drawing in the background suggests dusk) and in the following frame, when it wakes up, is already in front of a little duck (the background picture suggests it is dawn). However, although they are concrete, the references to time and movement create a non-linear group: although the duck's final action reveals a certain physical maturity, the character has the same traits from its birth until the end of the story. Even if the set of actions seem to take place in a few hours or days, the complexity of the behaviors imply a longer time.

This unique form of temporal references, in which time is at one point extended, and others compressed, is perplexing, which is indicated by the many answers left blank and the few answers provided. Only half the participants risked offering impressions on this theme. Those who did suggested a variety of aspects: the plot took place in "months or years", according to 15 respondents; in "a few days" (10 responses); during the time needed for the duck to be born and fly (8); over a day and a night (1). A common aspect of the responses concerns the adaptation of narrative time to the time of real life. The affectionate companionship between the cat and the duck, as well as the duck's learning how to fly, according to the readers, would take a long time, "months or years" or a "very long" time. Those who recall the drawings alone (the narrative is presented in six pages) indicated a quite brief trajectory ("a few days").

The answers were commented on in detail with the teachers, when we proposed to the group some aspects for analysis, which contained some elements not dealt with by the learning materials used in the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age. These instruments are described below and exemplified by Roger de Mello's narrative:

- a) *Observation of three moments of the narrative*, adapting the proposals by Larivaille (1974) and Eisner (2008):
  - 1) many fictional narratives have an initial moment of contextualization, when the characters are presented, in a specific situation, showing the reader a certain order of things. In Roger Mello's text, the introductory frame shows a group of ducks that sleep peacefully. The calm is interrupted in the very next frame, when a cat jumps on the ducks, scaring them away, and comes across an egg. Viriat, the cat, instead of going

after the ducks or playing with the egg, sleeps on top of it, making it hatch into a little duck. So far, apart from the cat's nap, actions are not very different from what a reader could expect.

- 2) From the beginning of the text or at a given moment, an event or a sequence of events undermines the initial order, creating a situation of disturbance, providing tension, conflict, bewilderment, surprise etc. In the case of Viriat, the cat, the rupture takes place when instead of the cat eating the duckling, or something like that, it adopts the duckling. From then on, the sequence of events always goes against common sense, with the cat becoming friends with, accomplice, trainer and defender of the duck.
  - 3) The third moment concerns a proposal for rebalancing, in which the ultimate solution contemplates both the initial situation as well as illogical events. In the case of this narrative, it is up to the little duck, until then a helpless learner, to surprise everyone, including the cat Viriat itself, with a spectacular action.
- b) *Observations of characteristics that can define the characters*: the more varied the characteristics, the more pathways and possibilities for interpretation are added to the narrative. In image-based texts, these characteristics can be noticed in the features and behavior of the characters throughout the story. In the case of "The Duck", besides the positive characteristics highlighted by the supervisors, there are also other aspects, like the complete independence of the cat in relation to the others. While he presents himself as an accomplice, he is also selfish, since he does not care a bit for his companions. Although he is docile, Viriat's physical complexion says otherwise: he has disturbingly huge eyes and mouth.
  - c) *Oppositions or contrasts*: the clash of characters or of conflicting situations is another aesthetic aspect that bestows unpredictability upon and widens the plot's universe of possibilities, and draws the reader's attention. The calm setting of the first scene is jolted by an agitated cat who instead of continuing to harass the ducks, lies down and sleeps. Then, in front of a little duck, instead of eating it, he takes it for a walk. Later, he tries to teach the duckling how to fly (following a "natural" evolutionary course, although Viriat the cat goes against many feline instincts). With each new frame, the reader must reconsider expectations about what the cat might do. The little duck, in turn, at first helpless, soon becomes bold and assured.
  - d) *Elements indicative of movement and time*: in general, it is the actions of the characters and the background that define movement and the passage of time in image-based narratives. In the case of "O Pato", night and day are well defined, to remind the reader that the cat stayed a long time on top of the egg. There are various details related to movement, but all suggest a change of one state to another, something that also implies temporal progress.
  - e) *Indicative elements of space*: Depicted in detail or presented only by indications, space can contribute decisively to the understanding of the narrative.

The adventure of Viriat the cat, for instance, takes place in the countryside, but close to human activity. But the setting is only outlined: the duck's location, a fence, the steps of a small staircase. In the last drawing, the countryside appears in a much more decisive fashion!

- f) *Other graphic elements*: here we have the colors and graphic design, for example. The opening scene of "O Pato" occupies an entire page and shows a peaceful scene. On the following pages more drawings are presented in a vertical order, which accelerates the narrative. They are always in a median plane, in which the entire body of the characters appear. Meanwhile, if the last image was presented in a single-page drawing the effect would be less spectacular. For this reason the image is placed on a double-page spread. This sequence of images with medium-range planes brings the characters together, and lends a steady rhythm to the actions. To boost the surprise effect, the final image breaks sharply with that rhythm. The drawings have no margins and seem to float over the pages, as if they were clouds or moments in a dream. Finally, color is another decisive element. The cat is only outlined and the duck is portrayed as a tiny figure. The color yellow is used to make the scenes more lively, bringing them close to the reader.

### READING IMPRESSIONS OF "OS PÁSSAROS" [THE BIRDS]<sup>13</sup>

Two questions were proposed to the teachers with the same purpose: to observe their reading impressions concerning the linear plot. About the first question, which required a retelling of the story, considering only the most important elements of the narrative, the analytical impressions that sought to provide greater meaning to the text as a whole (autonomous reading) increased from 50% to 70% of the 78 participants. It is important to mention that the syntheses presented are based less on personal opinions and more on aspects found in the narrative.

A man has as his mission to set several birds free. However, one of the birds didn't want to fly away. The man got worried and tried to help the bird, showing it how to do so. To thank him, the bird [...]

In regard to the second question (to suggest a summary of the story), the same group tried to summarize the narrative steps, with more or less details. At times these impressions contain opinionated judgments, though rooted in the narrative itself.

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13 The questionnaire presented was: 1) Retell the story, considering only the most important elements; 2) Suggest a summary for the story; 3) What are the main characteristics of the leading characters of the story? 4) What are the major themes of the narrative? 5) What is the role of color in the narrative? This activity was performed by 111 teachers in the course.



The number of impressions based on the chain of actions (narrative reading) decreased from 35% (the percentage in the reading of “O Pato”) to 15% (a total of 16 respondents). This group had more descriptive texts with fewer judgmental opinions:

A truck driver transported birds in order to release them at a given time. The birds flew away and only one stayed inside the truck. The driver taught it to fly and the bird took off to meet the group [...]

In relation to the suggestion of a summary, a characteristic of this group was to make a summary of the main events, presenting similar answers to those given when retelling the narrative.

Another 15% of the participants (17 answers) made mistakes or could not retell or summarize the story. Teachers in this group made comments scarcely related to the text and closer to their own convictions.

One day, a driver went to transport some rare birds. Then, the truck got a flat tire, the birds were clever and exploited the man’s carelessness when he opened the door. They all fled. But among the many birds, one of them could not or did not want to fly. The driver, noticing the bird was sad, decided to encourage it to seek its freedom. After a few tries, it flew off and happily bid farewell to the good man.

The story is about a truck driver whose little truck is filled with birds and, when he reaches a certain place, he releases the entire flock, but one of them refuses to go away. The amount of impressions with mistakes is significant, since we were dealing with a simple plot, based on few very concrete actions and which was presented twice to the teachers.

The use of two questions to assess the understanding of the plot revealed a clearer picture. The three previously outlined reading profiles came into view, with a predominance for autonomous reading. It is worrisome, however, that 15% of the supervisors barely displayed elementary understanding of the plot developments, a proportion that increased from the first to the second narrative.

The following question allowed multiple answers and concerned the characteristics of the narrative’s central character, a truck driver, who was responsible for releasing the birds into the wild. Like those about Viriat the cat, the readers responses emphasized positive traits. For the majority (in 116 responses), the driver is peaceful, attentive, affectionate, helpful, patient, supportive, a good companion, respectful, brave or persistent. A small group (15 responses) sees traits of loneliness in the character, perhaps because the driver is the only human in the story, and he is in a desert landscape. Few responses (less than 10) saw other traits, like idealism or an adventurous side to the driver. No answer explored the character’s background. Was the driver someone who stole the birds to release them or was he ordered to do so? Was it the first time he did this? Why does he transport the birds in such a sealed and dark space?

Edifying aspects are also highlighted when the question concerned the major themes (Multiple responses were permitted). One of the major issues of the plot,

freedom, is the one the readers remembered most (53 answers). Then, moral values are featured, like friendship, generosity, companionship, solidarity, gratitude, fidelity and persistence (49). A small group (8) also emphasized moral values, encouraged by the contemporary school, such as respect for animals, inclusion, equality, differences and environment preservation. The issue highlighted in the introduction of the book itself (the importance of details) is recalled only by 8 participants. Suggestions that embody elements of conflict (like regret and loneliness) or more noticeable contrasts (like the opposition between prison and freedom) were rarely featured.

The last question presented to the readers, related to the role of colors in the narrative, received more fragmented answers. In this book, the color orange used to represent the ground on which the actions take place prevailed throughout a good deal of the story, in a way that suggests concreteness, aridity and isolation. The blue sky, with discrete participation at the beginning of the story, gradually became stronger, until it was predominant. Together, the two colors, in addition to provoking more apparent contrasts, such as solidity and fluidity, prison and freedom, help the plot development, because they change when definitive actions take place. Most of the readers responses, however, highlight only isolated elements, like the colors of the birds, especially the only little black bird (a sign of difference). Only eight answers mentioned the opposition between blue (a symbol of freedom) and orange (as a synonym of prison, loneliness, sadness or lack of life).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although the discourse used in the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age emphasizes the importance of reading literary texts, the study of the images in these texts is ignored, which risks partial approaches, in which a great deal of information conveyed by the drawings is lost. Among the possible reasons for this are:

- 1) the belief that, in a society filled with images, the reading of texts presented through images and aimed at children is easy for teachers, and thus does not require any specific work;
- 2) the choice to deal with pragmatic issues related to writing, which diminishes the role of the images, by conceiving them as only pretext and illustration.

At any rate, the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age reproduces a scenario identified by Batista (1998) a decade ago: the teacher-readers focus the reading practice on curricular contents rather than the literary works themselves. What is emblematic of this inclination is the absence in the guidelines of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age of image-based fiction books, which are valued not only by other official programs, like the National School Library Program, but also by the publishing industry and by daily work in schools. Image-based fiction is a genre in which graphic relations are more complex and polysemic, which serve less for dealing with specific concepts, as seen earlier.

Conversely, the impressions of the teachers about the two image-based fictional narratives, surveyed in different moments and mediated by analyses that considered the teachers' answers themselves, reveal the need for specific training in reading this textual genre. A considerable number of teachers only arranged episodes to reconstruct the plot. At least 10% of the sample group presented partial or mistaken readings, a percentage that increased to 15% in the assessment on the second narrative, even after deliberate efforts to explain structural aspects of this genre. Characters are perceived in a sweetened manner. The readers systematically erased characteristics that are distant from an idealized, romantic and non-conflicting perspective. It is difficult to perceive strategies to locate the characters in a broader and less obvious context. Other graphic elements are not noticed or are noticed in a barely consistent way. This situation is also worrisome because the readers enrolled were chosen by their respective municipalities to present the pedagogical contents of the National Pact for Literacy at the Proper Age to other teachers in the municipal systems.

The tools used by the teachers to analyze the narratives are in part composed of rules that in the past emphasized behaviors valued by the school, which corroborates the proposition of Batista (1998) already commented upon. Regardless of the group of possible meanings conveyed by the work, there is an edifying bias from which teachers evaluate the texts, overlooking conflicts and uncertainties, possible blemishes and more complex details. When asked why Viriat the cat takes the little duck as its protégé, teachers mentioned "respecting differences". The attitude of the driver from *Os Passaros*, who insists upon making the little black bird fly, is considered by some readers as an example of "inclusion". These conclusions are not the rule and may, with some concession, be within the range of possible interpretations of the narratives, but they seem closer to values extraneous to the work.

The tools of analysis used in the study, in turn, though introductory, showed some applicability. The three profiles of approach to the plot, which we named *autonomous reading* (which displayed a complete understanding of the text), *narrative reading* (which indicated an understanding based on description and on a linking of the text's concrete actions) and *reading by frames* (an understanding that was based on certain elements of the text, which often results in an understanding distant from the narrative's propositions), did not mean to label readers. They are considered to be a starting point for evaluating the public profile of the teachers' reading: their command of the linear structure of the narrative, as well as other expressive resources used in text through images, because it is up to them, as mediators, to give life to the text when developing the practice of literary reading among children.

The need for specific training also appears to be confirmed by the fact that, considering the aesthetic differences between the first and the second reading experiences (based on the impressions by the teachers themselves), more consistent answers were found, mainly in terms of understanding the plot. It is possible that the teachers had simply understood the proposal better, but, in any case, their impressions were clearer and they were able to better accompany the suggestions made by the literary work in question.

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*Received September 17, 2014*

*Approved March 21, 2016*