

DOSSIER

Literacy and Curriculum: between the establishment of meanings and the experiments that create fissures and make other ways of life possible

Literacy and culture: for other possibilities of meaning in the processes of learning to read and write

Alfabetização e cultura: por possibilidades outras de significação dos processos de aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, we propose thinking about teaching how to read and write as culture (Bhabha, 2007), in dialogue with the theoretical references we have used to think about the curriculum (Lopes; Macedo, 2011) and the functioning of teaching how to read and write policies that we read as curricular texts. In this sense, we present a reflection that focuses on the tensions over the process of learning to read and write in the arrangements of recent education policies, which mobilize the discussion about learning how to read and write in childhood. To this end, we delve into the reading of policies that deal with the teaching how to read and write as discursive productions, understanding that they produce meanings and significations in the curriculum. Our methodological choices are based on problematizing the idea of a single answer, adequate at a national level. What does it mean to think of a single curriculum for teaching how to read and write? The attempt to establish a single meaning for teaching how to read and write underpins the production of the most recent policies, which bring with them a compensatory and salvationist character, reducing other possibilities for the meaning of reading and writing processes beyond what is currently being proposed. Therefore, our intention in this essay is to discuss teaching how to read and write as culture/enunciation, in order to problematize aspects that involve the attempt to establish meanings for what is meant by being someone who knows how to read and write in recent policies, pointing out that establishing a single national policy for teaching/learning how to read and write is impossible.

Keywords: Teaching/learning how to read and write. Curriculum. Discursive. Culture. Enunciation.

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RESUMO

Propomos, neste ensaio, pensar a alfabetização como cultura (Bhabha, 2007), em diálogo com os referenciais teóricos que temos nos apropriado para pensar o currículo (Lopes; Macedo, 2011) e o funcionamento das políticas de alfabetização que lemos como textos curriculares. Nesse sentido, apresentamos uma reflexão que focaliza as tensões sobre o processo de aprendizagem da leitura e da escrita nos arranjos das políticas educacionais recentes, que mobilizam a discussão acerca da alfabetização na infância. Para tanto, enveredamos na leitura de políticas para a alfabetização como produções discursivas, entendendo que estas produzem sentidos e significações no currículo. Nossas escolhas metodológicas se fazem acerca da problematização da ideia de resposta única, adequada no âmbito nacional. O que significa pensar um currículo único da alfabetização? A tentativa de fixação de um único sentido para a alfabetização baliza a produção das políticas mais recentes que trazem consigo um caráter compensatório e salvacionista, reduzindo possibilidades outras de significação dos processos de leitura e escrita para além do que vem sendo proposto atualmente. Nossa intenção, portanto, neste ensaio, é discutir a alfabetização como cultura/enunciação, para, então, problematizar aspectos que envolvem a tentativa de fixar sentidos para o que se entende por estar alfabetizado nas políticas recentes, pontuando que a fixação em torno de uma alfabetização nacional que se pretende única é impossível.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização. Currículo. Discursivo. Cultura. Enunciação.

Tug of War



Cabo de guerra [Tug of war], Ivan Cruz (s.d.)

The dispute over the meaning surrounding the theme of teaching and learning how to read and write is not new, and here we are once again, discussing the attempt to affirm the effectiveness of methods and modes of teaching and learning reading and writing. In recent years, we have followed education policies aimed at teaching how to read and write that are justified by the attempt to establish meanings and conceptions about what is understood and expected for teaching reading and writing. Just like a child's game – tug of war – a test of strength is put at every moment when we see a theme that is not exhausted – and we do not even have the intention of doing so here –

even though it is imbued with so many meanings challenged by methods and methodologies which aim to respond to educational and social demands. In this sense, understanding that this tug of war constitutes discursive movements that – differently from child’s play – do not move solely on two opposing sides in dispute, measuring their strengths. It is possible to consider that different interests influence conceptions and values in different directions of this struggle of forces. So, even though at times the plotted force sets a certain trend, the game does not nullify itself.

However, in this tug of war, there are those who have the power to classify who is qualified or not, who is capable or not of doing a certain task or, in the case of this study, using the writing system. In this case, whether through the *Sistema Brasileiro de Avaliação* (SAEB) [Brazilian Assessment System], or through other social means, the indicators used continue producing data and highlighting the deficiency in teaching children, young people and adults how to read and write in Brazil, as discursive movements that publicize the insufficiency of actions and the failure of efforts to “[...] teach all children how to read and write, at most, by the end of the 3rd (third) grade of Elementary School” (Brasil, 2012, p. 7, our translation). Learning how to read and write as an (unquestionable) right, an urgent task, justified by considering it the basis of the entire educational process, is taken as a principle to begin the “[...] outline of curricular specificities for the initial cycle from the 1st to the 3rd grade of Elementary School [...]” (Brasil, 2012, p. 7, our translation).

According to data published on the Brazilian Government Portal: *PNE em Movimento* [National Educational Plan in Movement], 22.2% of students have insufficient proficiency in reading level 1, and 34.5% have insufficient proficiency in writing, levels 1, 2, 3 (Brasil, 2023c). The *Indicador de Analfabetismo Funcional* (INAF) [Functional Illiteracy Indicator], which has been monitoring the situation of the population of young people and adults since 2001, presented in the 2018 Report that three in every ten Brazilians had “[...] difficulty in using reading and writing, as well as mathematical operations, in everyday situations, such as recognizing information on a poster or brochure [...]” (Lima; Catelli Júnior, 2018, p. 8). Research data has been published by the media denouncing and at the same time reinforcing the failure of public schools to teach Brazilian children, young people and adults how to read and write. Our focus in this discussion, however, has been on monitoring policies aimed at teaching children how to read and write.

The discourse on Brazilian failure to teach children how to read and write is configured in different instances, and in general, it places public schools, children from lower-income backgrounds and black and mixed-race children, at the focus of producing such results. According to data released by the Federal Government, in 2021, “[...] 2.8 million children completed the 2nd grade of Elementary School” (Brasil, 2023b, our translation). These are the data contained in the *Alfabetiza Brasil* survey, carried out by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) that subsidized the construction of the current *Compromisso Nacional Criança Alfabetizada* (CNCA) [Literate Child National Commitment] policy (Brasil, 2023a). The document also presents as an argument that 56.4% of students were considered non-literate based on their performance in SAEB in 2012.

In February 2022, headlines in major newspapers featured news such as: “Number of children who have not learned to read and write reaches 2.4 million and increases by more than 65% during the pandemic, says NGO” (Santos, 2022, s./p, our translation). This piece of news also indicates that

in 2021 47.7% of black children aged 6 to 7 were not literate, a rate that is around 35.1% in the case of white children.

In the flow of this discussion, civil society entities express opinions, provoking resolute actions, as described in the news published by *Agência Brasil* (Nascimento, 2023), when presenting the statements made by the representative of *Todos pela Educação*¹ [All for Education] who defended the implementation of public education policies so that learning and equal opportunities are guaranteed for children and young people, also marking the conception that aligns learning how to read and write as a skill that needs to be acquired at the right age. “Gontijo also warns that learning how to read and write is a basic skill, and that if the child is not adequately literate at the right age, will have difficulties throughout school life” (Nascimento, 2023, our translation).

Throughout our research trajectories, we have developed readings of curricular policies. Distrust of discourses on teaching how to read and write at the “right age” mobilized our research (Axer, 2018; Axer; Dias; Drummond, 2021; Dias, 2019; Drummond, 2019) around the Goal 5 promise of the National Education Policy (Brasil, 2014) in the analysis and monitoring of actions of the *Pacto Nacional pela Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PNAIC)* [National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age], in which the movements and meanings produced with regard to learning time and rights in the period from 2012 to 2019 were discussed.

Continuing with these studies, we developed our reflections based on the policies reading – *Política Nacional de Alfabetização (PNA)* [National Literacy Policy] (Brasil, 2019a), now revoked, and, currently, paying attention to the movement to implement the *CNCA* (Brasil, 2023b). Therefore, our intention in this text is to discuss literacy based on the theoretical references that we have invested in our research, which means thinking about it as culture/enunciation – and then problematize aspects that involve the attempt to establish meanings for what is understood as being literate in recent policies on teaching how to read and write.

In this essay, we outline as a theoretical-methodological path the discussion that understands curriculum as a cultural production. Thus, our reading of the documents is carried out assuming that official documents are produced by discourses that articulate conceptions and values, sometimes contradictory in arrangements that they give strength to the production of curricula, mobilizing other meanings. Government policies, in this way of thinking, constitute texts that articulate other policies, involving interests of different natures, never free from ideological values. In this sense, we work from the perspective that they can be read as curricular policies, as they give meaning in the context of educational institutions, even if their objective is defined in other ways. In our research we have considered the links that constitute the production context that made the arrangements possible, which call into question different meanings involving curricular policies. The intention is not to consider such policies as competing or complementary, but as policies that are produced in the most recent scenario and that carry marks of the space-time in which they are produced.

The reading proposed here covers mainly, but not only, policies defined by perspectives that are part of the political game, marked by party-political discourses that mobilize modes of production and directions, different from the point of view of their propagation but which, at the same time,

¹ A civil society organization, non-governmental.

they use common justification criteria in their arguments: childhood illiteracy; promises to solve “problems”; and the solution that centralizes training actions in the Ministry of Education. Listing such points of approximation of policies does not constitute an understanding that reduces the discussion, nor a homogenizing understanding of the literacy agenda nor absolute opposition. The intention has been to look more closely at curricular policies in order to identify the movements that design the political articulations that mark conceptions and ways in which policies are constituted, as well as differentiating them.

We highlight that the attempt to solve problems is a demarcation of what remains to be disputed as “being literate” and, in turn, creates tensions that make it possible to discuss ways in which teaching/learning how to read and write has been understood and how that impacts and articulates with policies in question. It is possible to think of an approximation to compensatory perspectives to problematize salvationist discourses, whose responses to problems are linked to the way in which the role of the school is understood. To Mortatti (2009, p. 93, our translation), “[...] school was then consolidated as an institutionalized place for preparing new generations, promising access for everyone to literate culture, through learning to read and write”. According to the author, the situation of the strategic problem of teaching how to read and write requires responses that mobilize “[...] public administrators, education legislators, intellectuals from different areas of knowledge, educators, teachers and generating fierce discussions around the initial teaching of reading and writing” (Mortatti, 2009, p. 93, our translation). Historically, the duel of methods, as referred to by Cagliari (2007) or the quarrel of methods, as problematized by Mortatti (2009), allocate the answer to the problem of many Brazilian children not becoming literate to the methods of teaching and learning writing and reading.

We agree with Mortatti (2009, p. 95) that teaching and learning how to read and write in Brazil constitutes a “[...] complex movement, marked by the discursive recurrence of change, indicative of the constant tension between continuities and ruptures, within disputes for the hegemony of political and educational projects of a sense of the modern for teaching and learning how to read and write”. In this sense, starting from a discursive gaze at the teaching how to read and write process and a post-structural perspective of curriculum, we assume policies as unfinished and moving texts, where the relationship with signification is open and supports unexpected meanings in relationships with reading and writing.

When dealing with policies such as *PNAIC*, *PNA* and *CNCA*, we propose to draw attention to the idea of an educational crisis to be overcome and sustained – in curricular documents – through statistical data. Macedo (2014) states that it is not a question of denying such data, but the author highlights the need to discuss the meanings that this quantification takes in education policies, when expressing the desire to change the “current reality” in which the crisis in quality is identified.

Curriculum and culture: necessary approaches

At this point, we highlight that to continue the discussions in this text, it is necessary to point out the theoretical terrain in which we find ourselves, from which we are able to think and operate, as researchers in the field of curriculum and literacy teachers, other possibilities of meaning

of the learning how to read and write processes. Starting from the post-structural perspective of the theoretical field of curriculum, we defend the understanding of curriculum as a process of meaning production. We displace the idea of rational, rigid knowledge and distrust certainties in an attempt to also see it as culture, in movement and not static in a given knowledge.

When we opt for this theoretical line of interpretation of the curriculum as culture, we point out that this cultural perspective is not seen as a source of conflict between different cultures, which hierarchizes them in the search for a better or more adequate culture than another, but they are practices in which difference is produced. “[...] it is not possible to contemplate cultures, whether from an epistemological perspective or from a moral point of view, just as it is not possible to select them to be part of the curriculum. Curriculum is itself a hybrid, in which cultures negotiate with-the-difference” (Macedo, 2006, p. 105, our translation). This means understanding and operating with curriculum not as a culture of a repertoire of specific and delimited meanings to be shared among peers, but culture as a place of enunciation. Thus, drawing from Bhabha (2007), we approach culture as an act of enunciation.

It is only when we understand that all cultural claims and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation that we begin to understand why the hierarchical claims to originality or “purity” inherent in cultures are untenable, even before we turn to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity (Bhabha, 2007, p. 67, our translation).

According to the author, culture is the practice of meaning, it is the act of enunciation itself; in this sense, there is no fixation of meanings from an original culture – instead there are productions of unexpected meanings, which at each moment are (re)appropriated, (re)signified and produced again, in a task that repeats without repeating. In this way, there are no previously established meanings, but rather traces, unfinished hybrids that are replaced at all times based on the relationships and actions of language that occur at the moment of enunciation. It will be from there that we have challenged ourselves to think about the concept of teaching how to read and write. According to Bhabha (2007, p. 67, our translation), “[...] cultural knowledge is generally revealed as a code, integrated, open and expanding”. The time of the utterance is not the same time as the enunciation, as the act of signification has a limit within it, since “[...] meaning is constructed from one side to the other of the dividing line that separates and differentiates signifier and signified” (Bhabha, 1996, p. 36, our translation). Therefore, no culture is complete in itself, no culture is in its fullness. To the author, these disjunctive temporalities that constitute enunciation and cultural production occur in what he calls the third space of enunciation. This is the very place of culture – a place of negotiation, contact and interaction between individuals – not understood by the materiality of a determined space, but of a discursive location, therefore unstable. This third space allows other positions to emerge, generating something different and unrecognizable, as it is another area of representation and negotiation of meaning.

Starting from this idea of culture as an enunciation to look at curriculum has helped us understand it not only as something standardized, the only one through which values, beliefs, contents, subjects and attitudes are reproduced, but as a component that produces meanings that permeate school, inside or outside of it. We problematize the centralization and structuring of a

fixed, unique curriculum that is intended to be national. In this sense, it is interesting to highlight that interpreting curriculum as culture does not mean that there is no dispute in the search for regulations, evidence, or intentions that are proposed to control via policies, for example. After all, we are still in a tug of war. The search for the standard remains and is continually reestablished, since this action constitutes the curricular production itself. In the many attempts of signification control that dispute meaning for what is called literacy, in each policy or political moment, there is the enunciation of ways of doing and living this process that do not disappear from one moment to another, from one government to another, from one revocation to another.

With this approach, we bet on the existing ambivalence in relationships and controlling attempts through curricula and policies, acknowledging the limits and impossibilities of them occurring completely. The attempt at dominance and the search for signification are constituents of policies, but they are not absolute. Realizing that they are bankrupt in themselves is, in our view, an important contribution that the cultural interpretation of curriculum brings us, and we rely on it.

With the understanding of curriculum as culture, we invest in the gaze and problematization of the disputes that revolve around teaching how to read and write. It is a field of dispute, in a discursive context that crosses understandings about it. And not just in a war of forces in which only one side emerges victorious, but other forces, crossed, that are present in the same dispute, on the same cable and that although they pull to one side at a given moment, they also pull to another by the gaps that produces itself. Therefore, curriculum understood based on the points raised does nothing other than movement. It is experience, event, unpredictability. And this movement of continuous and uninterrupted signification brings us closer to multiple and contextual productions and moves us away from the idea of curriculum as just a standardization.

Curriculum read as culture is constituted by enunciation and the existence of gaps in the act of meaning (Bhabha, 2007). This prevents any intended closure from being fully achieved. The control attempt brings with it gaps that signal the incompleteness of the subjects, the ambivalence of language and the impossibility of an absolute winner in the tug of war.

Teaching and learning how to read and write: enunciative cultural production

If the curriculum is read here as culture, how do we read the process of teaching how to read and write? If there is no definition of a culture, would there be a possibility of combining a national policy of teaching how to read and write? In our research we have advocated this process as a space-time of uninterrupted production of meanings, of significations that move and enable the understanding of the world through language. Learning how to read and write is a complex and delicate process that, in our view, cannot be unified or universalized. It is subjective.

It is a discursive process of interpretation and authorship (Goulart; Santos, 2017), which dialogues with the reading of the world (Freire, 2003) around it. Thus, we start from the interpretation of this learning process as a current in the flow of language in a broad relationship with the many and unexpected ways of reading and writing in the world.

When talking about discursive process of teaching how to read and write, we want to focus, like Smolka (2017), on language. In agreement with the author, we noticed dispersion and breadth of understanding of this discourse. The authors bring the discursive dimension from Bakhtin (1929), with the defense of language as a process determined by social life. To the author, the context, the marking of time and space are conditions for the production of enunciation; the production of meaning always responds to this social context. In this understanding, we are proposing to think about our defense of a discursive process from another perspective.

Dialogues with Bakhtin (1929) have strongly contributed to our understanding of important aspects of discursive processes, but with Bhabha (2007) we are invited to think further.

The “beyond” is not a new horizon, nor an abandonment of the past... Beginnings and ends may be the sustaining myths of the years in the middle of the century, but in this *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit in which space and time intersect to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion (Bhabha, 2007, p. 19).

Our interest is not to look at language based on its structural, technical and systematic system only, but mainly on its use as a social interaction and constituent of the subject itself. From a perspective that it is the production of meaning that structures contexts, even if this structure is moving and decentered, which displaces, in this thinking, the understanding that the context, the marking of time and spaces are conditions for the production of enunciation. We come closer to the bet that language constitutes the social as a flow, thus moving us away from any possibility of thinking about totalization through the curriculum, for example.

When operating with language focusing on its interaction, enunciation becomes indispensable. With Smolka (2012) we had been thinking that dialogue is the foundation of language, in order to base our practices with children’s reading and writing processes. With Bhabha (2007), we understand that enunciation is characteristic of language, a single act that is not repeated and makes absolute signification impossible, since it is continuous. Enunciation as language is a process of signification without an *a priori*, it is the instance of participation and production of discourse – it is the discursive practice, as Bakhtin (1929) would call it.

In this thinking, we have asked ourselves: What is the contribution of the discussion of post-structural and post-colonial studies to think about the process of teaching how to read and write? What shifts are produced in meaning when we assume this process as cultural production, in this theoretical configuration? Without abandoning the contributions of Bakhtin’s discussions, starting from Bhabha’s readings of the author, we propose to think about possible dialogues, but also which points allow us to infer other ways of thinking about teaching how to read and write and the relationships with reading and writing.

A first highlight is the concept of enunciation itself. While enunciation for Bakhtin (1929) is an act of response, a production of meaning marked by the relationship between the self and the other – saying something to someone in a certain historical-social space, Bhabha sees enunciation as ambivalence experienced by a decentered subject in which the difference is fundamental in the language process, considering the production of meaning that is never transparent. Bhabha, thus,

draws attention to the ambivalence of language by exploring the differences between the times of utterance and enunciation. It is a disjunctive, disconnected time, which is the discursive condition, already announced here.

Enunciation introduces a break in the performative present of cultural identification, a break between the traditional requirement and the denial of the certainties of new demands, in an ambivalent relationship that problematizes fixed positions. This disjunction produced in the act of enunciation is the mark of the difference that, according to Bhabha, changes the position of the enunciation and which provides us with a powerful connotation to the understanding of the discursive process of learning how to read and write. Enunciation as a manifestation without prior constraints in relation to reading and writing. The production of meaning then requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a third, non-physical space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot, in itself, have conscience. What this unconscious relationship introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation (Bhabha, 2007, p. 66).

We then return to our relation between curriculum and culture. When understanding and operating with curriculum as cultural production, it is not possible to think about teaching how to read and write differently. We reaffirm, in dialogue with the field of study of this process, that it is not enough to think only about the apprehension of language codes. At the same time, understanding the simple combination of the meanings of literacy and the process of teaching how to read and write does not respond to the daily demands of the reading and writing meanings of different subjects at school.

Thus, it requires attention not to reduce reading and writing experiences to cold, raw letters, as well as the literacy perspective, it does not help to discuss aspects of the written code in the social context. Reading and writing means movements of *inscription* in the world, production of meanings, negotiation with aspects of culture. It constitutes a movement of appropriation of written culture and literate society while creating fissures and differentiations at the same time. Therefore, we have no other path than to look at the process of teaching how to read and write also as a culture. Not only cultural skills required in a social context, but also as enunciation of words in the world.

We can therefore think that it is in learning how to read and write, the process of relating to the literate world, that the subject of the world we know emerges. Teaching and learning how to read and write is enunciation, which does not necessarily take place only in the physical space of the school or materialized in the curriculum, but in the symbolic and unpredictable social relationships. Enunciation that guarantees *“that the meaning and symbols of culture may not be fixed”*, being read and reintroduced in another way continuously and disjunctively. This process is, therefore, indeterminate, moving, symbolic and discursive.

It is by focusing on this (dis)connection between the times of what is uttered that we defend the teaching how to read and write with a discursive and cultural perspective. We understand this discursive process as a game of signification without limits, always translational and ambivalent, marked by difference. We therefore invest in an enunciative process of teaching how to read and write that points to the many relationships between letters, words, texts and coding itself. The enunciative process that we defend deals with ways of producing meaning with writing, ways of

saying and being in the world. In this way, the written form of language is one possibility, among many, of sharing one's saying with others and be self-constituted based on it.

In this sense, we bet on the perspective of enunciation as a step beyond, or in another direction, in the discussions we had been carrying out based on Smolka (2012, 2017), as we highlight an uncatalogued process of teaching how to read and write, previously decided in conflict with a perception delimited by the discursive and political constraints through which it is crossed. This containment of the meanings in dispute for this process, in some way, in many ways, produces a discourse of "not fully able to read and write at the end of the second grade" for example – a concern that appears in the policies we will talk about later.

Therefore, we have invested in defending and positioning ourselves regarding teaching how to read and write, understanding it as cultural production. We believe that such defense allows us to insert ourselves into a context of production of what this process is. It also allows us to mark a political, formative positioning that also enters into the game of forces, in the tug of war that we do not believe has just two sides, but that constantly fight for meanings for teaching and learning how to read and write that we see crossing curricular policies.

When reading the proposed policies, we do so with suspicion of the meanings they carry. As they advocate responses to the social problems imposed by the literate society, we question: Which meanings of literacy are legitimized in the *PNA* and *CNCA* curricular policies? Who are these policies aimed at?

Centralization as (im)possibility

We start this section by inserting ourselves into the discursive game with the intention of also assuming research as a point of tension in the tug of war, which, as we have already pointed out, is not being understood here in a polarized way. We insert ourselves this way, as another point of provocation that also disputes meanings. And it is the understanding of curriculum and teaching/learning how to read and write as a cultural enunciation that allows us to distrust the promises of an absolute solution in resolving problems in the field of literacy, which are guided by the need to define a "single path" or even a "single way to teach and learn" how to read and write nationwide.

We chose, in the discussion proposed here, to look at the attempt to solve problems, as an important demarcation in the dispute of what it is to "know how to read and write", which, in turn, tensions and punctures how the ways in which "being literate" is understood, deployed and negotiated with the policies in question. In this sense, we point out here the aspect that articulates, to a certain extent, the ideas we intend to defend. We thus begin with regard to the national mark of teaching how to read and write from a centralizing perspective, in order to problematize the (im)possibilities of defining an absolute solution through an attempt to establish a single meaning of teaching how to read and write.

We then start from the point that, it is an increasingly incident characteristic of centralization of policies that define, through the Ministry of Education, training actions, criteria and definition of ways of teaching how to read and write. Although this is often observed as a peaceful point in the

policy movement, we want to resume this aspect, since this mark aligned policies such as *PNAIC*, *PNA* and *CNCA*, which we have been researching, considering, mainly, that such a perspective is incompatible with how we understand curriculum and the process of teaching and learning how to read and write. The national definition of the processes seems to uniformly address the situation of the failure of the pedagogical work of teaching children how to read and write. The answer – a national solution – in this sense, comes in the indication of the directions by the Ministry of Education. The “collaboration regime”, indicated by the “voluntary” adherence of municipalities to government programs, is postulated by the same indicators, criteria and processes, in greater or lesser complexity, and treats city halls and their departments as second-order collaborators.

With *PNAIC* we had a teacher training program that was based on adhesion, the largest program in terms of participation ever developed by the Ministry of Education, which included a federative pact between the municipal, state and federal spheres. To give visibility to this comprehensive dimension of the *PNAIC*, we bring some general data released by the Department of Basic Education of the Ministry of Education. In 2012, the year *PNAIC* began, there were 317,000 literacy teachers, 15,000 study advisors, 5,420 municipalities, 38 public universities in the 26 states and the Federal District being part of the *PNAIC*.

The path in *PNA*, however, involved aspects that aligned with the logic of centrality with the reduction to the ways in which work should be developed, including the definition of the return to the phonic approach as a response and centrality in planning from a traditional perspective (Ayer; Dias; Drummond, 2021).

In Article 11 of the *PNA* it is pointed out that the “[...] collaboration of federative entities in the National Literacy Policy will be through voluntary adherence, in the form to be defined in specific instruments of the respective programs and actions of the Ministry of Education and its linked entities” (Brasil, 2019a, n./p, our translation). And in the *CNCA* the promise is

that the promotion of the Collaboration Regime between the Union, States and Municipalities sheds light on an important concept to move forward as a nation: the leading role of states and municipalities in building solutions to face problems relating to the children’s literacy process (Tome, 2023, n./p)

This is a robust collaboration regime, using the expression as stated in the *CNCA* booklet. The highlights presented regarding a collaborative perspective between the instances that we perceive in the latest policies are not intended to homogenize them, much less because we understand that the meanings and values at stake are the same, but our attempt is to point out that some aspects configure a certain way that maintains centralizing policy processes. Policies that involve training, which aim to improve the quality of education and which bring the discourse of guaranteeing the right to reading and writing linked to a national goal of a full learning process and the reduction of the country’s high illiteracy rates. Pact, policy and commitment to an entire country.

The double game that brings together questions that match the centralization of initiatives and responses to problems also carries differences. Choices that need to be considered, when disputing and defending an idea of teaching how to read and write. In this sense, once again we rely on Bhabha’s (2007) argument that such choices occur in the third space, where temporality is

disjunctive and ambivalence is inevitable. This means that there is constantly negotiation amidst power flows that make it impossible to decide for this or that at the end of a power struggle, as it is not merely a binary choice between two sides of the wire, but rather a complex decision that desires both this and that. “It is around the ‘and’ – conjunction of infinite repetition that the ambivalence of civil authority circulates as a ‘colonial’ signifier, which is less than one and double” (Bhabha, 2007, p. 145).

The centralizing logic carries a homogenizing sense of unique responses to problems, as we have already pointed out. The paradox that is established as an (im)possibility that doubles between gambling and guaranteeing. As a gamble, there are no guarantees that can be defined *a priori*, which infers the contradiction inherent to the policy as a claim for rights. It is ambivalent. This is so as any attempt at universalization is exclusionary.

Recognizing ambivalence does not mean defending a lack of political action, on the contrary, it expands the policy and highlights the complexity of this action. According to Bhabha (2007), it is a relationship that is always spatially split, which makes present something that is absent and temporally postponed. So there is a time that is always somewhere else. However, despite this understanding and defense of the discursive breadth that occurs in a disconnected time, it is necessary to recognize that in any textual production there are constraints, in the fields of language and policy, as is the case of the meanings of learning how to read and write process in dispute and which end up functioning as momentary fixation mechanisms that aim to dictate ages, learning times and commitments to full literacy process.

One possibility to also understand this issue is to start from what Lopes (2015) presents in the notion of “curriculum without foundations”, in this case, what the author advocates is not to think of a school without content or provisional agreements, but the statement made points to the unpredictability of the discursive game, which is permeated by relationships within and outside the school environment, and any attempt to control meanings is a gamble destined to fail. In this sense, more than criticizing government initiatives, our intention is to expand the possibilities of thinking about alternatives for dealing with the situations presented. We understand that any attempt at a solution is the opening of new confrontations, which requires investing in other ways of understanding what is being understood as a problem, as well as inventing other possibilities for acting on situations presented in the educational context.

We once again resume our defense of the curriculum as culture, as stated at the beginning of this text, and bring the notion of it as an untranslatable text that is being meant and interpreted in different ways by the social practices that conceive it. We thus highlight the articulation of demands, powers and differences. This articulation of different meanings around what is intended to be produced as a process of learning how to read and write through the national curriculum demonstrates the complexity of the policy, as it is constituted amidst diffuse relations of power, structures and agencies. In this way, the policy here starts to be studied as a process, an attempt at signification and fixing meanings in each of the contexts in which occurs.

Lopes and Macedo (2011, p. 2) interpret politics “[...] as contingent disputes for power to hegemonize certain significations”, which links it to the conception of culture as a practice of signification that we are approaching. According to the authors, when talking about policy, we are

talking about “[...] simultaneously political and cultural struggles in which the possibility of signifying the world and producing the curriculum in schools is disputed”.

Considering the dialogue between the conception of policy and the notion of curriculum as a cultural practice to be fundamental, we understand that curriculum policies involve not only the production of documents but also the circulation of their meanings. It is interesting to think about the moment in which curriculum policy was produced, its discourses and the articulation of meanings and demands throughout the entire process of producing this curriculum. A production that requires decision making.

Thus, we arrive at the unfolding of the initial question, which calls for discussion regarding the weaknesses of the attempt to fix the meanings of the process of teaching how to read and write, an articulation that allows us to think through the (im)possibilities of a promise that is constituted by the attempt to fix the practices and stereotypes of the subjects. In this way, we allow ourselves to inquire about the policies: Who are these policies intended for? Who are the teachers who will be trained by these policies? From which schools? From which education networks? Will there be contingency effects on policy actions? What literacy do they defend? Who are the children who will be cared for by them? What are the paths for them to be able to read and write? We do not intend to answer these questions in this text. We understand that all attempts to answer these questions fix subjects in certain discursive stereotypes, mark places that in this double movement produce meanings and it is, at this point, that policies perhaps fail.

At *PNAIC*, for example, this centrality took on very peculiar contours given the participation of different universities in the development of their productions. What is possible to observe as interferences and digressions of the policy, announces the possibilities of production of different contexts and situations in which the policy was experienced (Axer, 2018; Drummond, 2019). What can be understood as a “failure” of the policy can, at the same time, be understood as a space for production and creation of the subjects.

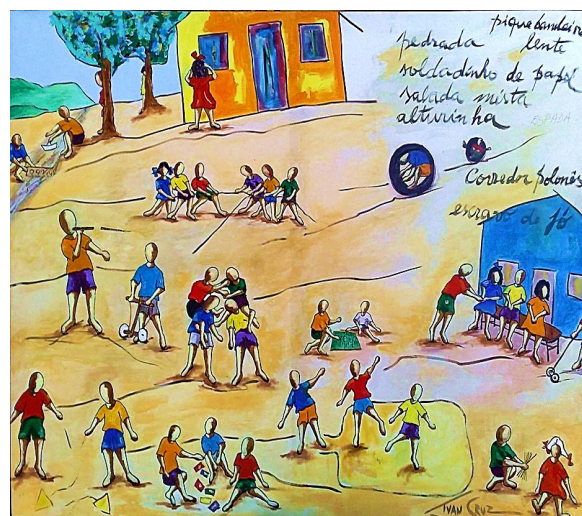
Working with the definition of curriculum and the process of learning how to read and write as a cultural practice therefore has direct implications for the subject’s agency in this production. It is an agency that we do not identify simply as a narrative of an event or continuity of a tradition, but rather as a constant negotiation of meaning, which does not express a failure of the ties of a past that was not essentialized, “but an in-between time – a contingent moment– in the signification of closure” (Bhabha, 2007, p. 255).

This perception of agency arises based on the inauguration of a discourse in which the relationship between theory and practice is part of a “joint predication” (Bhabha, 2007, p. 256), that is, both are parts of the same training process; one constitutes the other. In this way, closure is carried out in the contingent moment of repetition, which, according to the author, is a superposition without equivalence. Agency, then, is not located in a specific space or in a specific action, but it takes place at all times in the third space, in the act of negotiation, which, to the author, is the soul of the policy (Bhabha, 1996, p. 39). “I therefore think that political negotiation is a very important issue, and hybridization refers precisely to the fact of a new situation, a new alliance that is being formulated”.

Based on the negotiation inherent to language, a “final discursive closure” is not possible (Bhabha, 2007, p. 58); this is not closed *a priori*. It is this lack and the ambivalence constituting the act of enunciating that make agency possible. Acting in curricular production, viewing it as a cultural practice, brings a perception of it not only as a practice or simply a written document, but mainly as a space for production resulting from discourse.

The policies, as they attempt to uniquely resolve problems of different orders, invisibilize specific alternatives – which nonetheless still exist. From the data we collected, we highlight the attempt to solve a problem – illiteracy. In this context, the presence of a centralizing, national perspective that promotes the idea of a single curriculum, single subject, single process of teaching/learning how to read and write gains strength and mobilizes policies that are presented and aligned discursively based on negotiations that move the tug of war. The need for control creates in itself a path that constitutes the definition of metrics that cannot be touched upon when we think about the complexity of language. Given the theoretical framework presented and developed in this essay, which highlights our defense of teaching/learning how to read and write process as a culture, in addition to not paralyzing the dispute, it also does not declare itself the winner in this war of forces.

In defense of various games: dispute and movement



Várias brincadeiras [Various games], Ivaz Cruz (s.d.)

To finalize our remarks in this essay, we once again engage with the work of Ivan Cruz. The plastic artist, with vibrant colors and simple lines, reminds us that childhood is not made up of just one game, just as a policy is not made up of just one dispute and a game does not have just two sides. It is necessary to remember the multiplicity of negotiations, subjects, policies and pedagogical knowledge that make up a defense in favor of a national process of learning how to read and write.

Without us having a winning side, after all the tug of war is just one of many games, we return to the defenses made at the beginning of this text. We interpret each and every education policy as a curricular policy, since it is constituted by an attempt to direct meanings based on countless productions that take into account pedagogical knowledge that is called into question in order to solve a problem: illiteracy.

We propose a look at policies from a post-structural perspective in the field of curriculum, by understanding that in the face of the entire arena of disputes in which they are produced and are placed at all times, as well as their character of an attempt to fix a given meaning, it is possible to see that such discussions constitute a complex network of curriculum, policies, discourses, demands, interests, articulations and disputes in favor of a full process of teaching/learning how to read and write.

Understanding curriculum as articulation and enunciation, closures are necessary, however, these are seen as provisional and do not end the process of political dispute and signification. The fact that there are provisional closures implies the recognition of the impossibility of a precise and absolute definition. However, when the document is established based on the notion that there are unique paths that are valid for everyone, a notion of totality is reiterated, which results in an erasure of differences.

In this sense, anchoring ourselves in this perspective does not mean denying a structure, but rather understanding that this is an “unstructured structure”, formed by provisional agreements, and that the failure to establish a specific foundation for a curricular policy does not imply the absence of theories, decision making, discussions or at least an organization. It highlights the understanding of the curriculum as discursive production. Thus, when we conceive literacy as a practice of signification of the world, in which unpredictable meanings are constrained and (re) signified in a task that repeats without repeating, we do not believe that the idea of trying to achieve unity – of methods, methodologies and ways to understand and comprehend the learning of how to read and write – which permeates the most recent policies is possible.

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