

## PSYCHOANALYSIS AND LITERACY: A NEW LOOK

### Psicanálise e alfabetização: um novo olhar

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The intent of this opinion paper is to present the reader with a series of considerations upon the work of Dunker, CIL named: "Transit and Literacy: subject constitution and entrance in the alphabetic discourse", which was presented in a scientific event about the process of learning to read and write. Among the several aspects discussed in the text, we shall focus on that which, at this point, has most of our attention: the notion of letter elaborated by the psychoanalytic field.

The author's paper is based on the hypothesis that literacy is a process that is more specific than merely learning how to read and write. Therefore, the process that is called "literacy" may be understood as the entrance in a discourse, defined by Lacan and Foucault as:

- a) Laws of coercion that establish effects of power, authority or sanction;
- b) A logical order or need that make a discourse able to be reproduced and transmitted, according to reasons of cohesion and coherence; and
- c) Devices for individualization or production of classes or groups. For example: those who know how to read, the illiterate, functional illiterates, or, a discourse that contains inclusion and exclusion rules.

The author's thought is that the child reads and writes much before he/she formally learns how to read and write. He articulates concepts that support his hypothesis, defending that in order for the child to enter the alphabetic discourse, he/she needs, at first, to go through a process of denying the first incidence of the letter. But what letter is the author telling us about?

Psychoanalysis has a concept of letter that is a bit different than the one in Education and Linguistics. There is the idea of a primary literacy

(primary incidence of the letter) even before the child begins to speak. This primary literacy would be the child's first writing, a writing that is related to psychic instead of graphic traces. The letters that this author considers to think about the child's entrance into the alphabetic discourse are not the letters of the alphabet. Therefore, the letter is held as the marks inscribed in each subject's psychic device, and that are related to what each one listens to from the beginning of his or her life.

In addition to the points above, the author states that entrance into the alphabetic discourse is not only a process of constructing words and sentences and significant groups such as phonemes and letters, but is also a new state in the subject's constitution. He makes a brief note about the subject's constitution, which further designs the study. He explains this notion making a contrast with two characteristic operations of Developmental Psychology: construction and formation. The first is defined as a "process of accumulation and rebalance of concepts and experiences and the other as a group of contradictions that are resolved periodically in solutions that contain the process which gave them cause"<sup>1</sup> (Dunker CIL, 2011 p. 2). He says that, in constitution, the focus should be on the process and not on what is gained or accumulated, or in the solution and creation of new problems. The question that arises is: "What did we lose to get this far?" He concludes that the letter is exactly what the child loses in order to enter language since, in order for a person to become a subject, so that someone is able to speak, much before literacy is conceived, the experience of primary literacy must be deeply 'buried'. Through this 'burial', the notion of significant will be allowed to arise. This notion is extremely important to Psychoanalysis, and no less important to Psychology and Speech and Language Therapy. Still on this subject, it should be noted that Lacan thought about the significant through Saussure's Linguistics<sup>2</sup> (1997), only inverting the position of the elements of the founding algorithm, in order to identify the superiority of the significant over the meaning. Therefore, the conception of letter may be approached from the psychoanalytic significant.

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According to Guimarães<sup>3</sup> (2007), Lacan<sup>4</sup> conceived the letter as that which supports the significant – being referred to the symbolic instance.

Taking the letter as marks that are inscribed in each subject's psychic device, and that these marks are listened to by each person since birth is the theory of Lacan-based Psychoanalysis and with which we agree. When the letter is 'translated' or interpreted, it presents itself as a significant through the spoken or written discourses.

We understand that the notion of letter refers to each of our histories. If we consider that the process of passage from primary to secondary literacy produces symptoms, there is a difference between taking the symptoms produced by children during the process where they are learning to read and write as objective data and taking them according to the reasoning we have presented above. We understand that the notion of letter refers to the historicity of each of us. The symptom would represent discursive material that regards issues from that individual's life. What we mean is that supposed "learning problems" that are treated as "disorders" and go around in classrooms, should be thought about in a different light. Through Dunker's perspectives, it is possible to see the child's "fumbles" during the period when they are learning to read and write as a process where a subject and his history are implied. This statement even allows the teacher to take a new position when faced with the difficulties in dealing with learning issues, thus allowing for new intervention strategies for the child.

We feel that Psychoanalysis may contribute to this theme and it is known that many studies about this Science have been and continue to be

conducted. However, we question how these studies reach teachers responsible for the reading and writing acquisition process. Do they have access to these studies? Even though this paper has been presented in a conference where elementary school teachers were present, we still question how far their understanding and subsequent reflection about their practices and how they look at their students were able to reach. Should there be further contact between practice and this theory of the subject, Psychoanalysis? We suggest so, and analyze that this manuscript may be one more way of continuing this discussion, for the hypothesis of the existence of a literacy before the process of reading and writing acquisition represents an advance for studies in this subject.

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