

# Student reports on academic literacy: an analysis aligned with the perspective of New Literacy Studies

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**ABSTRACT.** Situated in the area of Education, and focusing the academic literacy this work aligns to the epistemological assumptions sanctioned by the New Literacy Studies, which conceive literacy as a phenomenon that occurs in the social practices of writing, influenced by the beliefs, values and culture of the individual or social groups in which they belong. The objective was to analyze the relationship the students of a public university establish with writing in order to know some of the reasons that lead professors to say the students of the institution 'write very badly', by observing the Discourses (Gee, 1998, 2004, 2005, 2015) reflected in the statements of the students interviews. The methodological instrument for collecting data used were semi-structured interviews in which students could recall their reading stories from childhood to the present day. It would enable the researcher to know what these students think about their writing practices in the academic context, as well as whether the university seeks to guide them to produce the texts that circulate in that context. The data revealed that students have difficulties in carrying out the writing activities demanded in the academy, that doesn't seem to have a real concern to expose the students to the privileged texts in that context, what may be interpreted as a lack of an effective literacy planning promotion in all areas of knowledge.

**Keywords:** academic literacy; reading stories; social discourses.

## Relatos discentes sobre o letramento acadêmico: uma análise alinhada à perspectiva dos Novos Estudos do Letramento

**RESUMO.** Este trabalho se insere na área de Educação, com foco em letramento acadêmico e se alinha aos pressupostos epistemológicos sancionados pelos Novos Estudos do Letramento, que o concebem como fenômeno que se dá nas práticas sociais da escrita, influenciadas pelas crenças, valores e cultura do indivíduo ou grupos sociais em que se inserem. O objetivo maior deste artigo foi analisar, da perspectiva discursiva de Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015), um dos precursores dos Novos Estudos do Letramento, a relação que discentes do Bacharelado Interdisciplinar em Ciência e Tecnologia, de uma universidade federal do sul de Minas Gerais entretecem com a escrita. A intenção maior foi a de se conhecer alguns dos motivos que levam muitos docentes desse curso a afirmar que os graduandos dessa instituição, de modo geral, 'escrevem muito mal'. Os dados foram coletados nas declarações de dois discentes, em que se analisou essa relação a partir dos Discursos ali refletidos. Um dos instrumentos metodológicos utilizados para a geração dos dados foi a entrevista semiestruturada (Gil, 2008), em que se solicitou aos graduandos que rememorasse suas histórias de leitura desde a infância até as histórias atuais, pois propiciariam ao pesquisador compreender melhor a relação que estabelecem com as práticas de escrita valorizadas no contexto acadêmico. Seria deves importante também, se observar se a universidade procura orientá-los a produzir os textos que ali circulam. Os dados revelam que os alunos têm dificuldades em executar as atividades escriturais demandadas pela academia e que esta, por sua vez, não tem um olhar atento no sentido de expor esses alunos aos textos aí valorizados, o que pode ser interpretado como sendo falta de um plano geral de promoção de letramento em todas as áreas de conhecimento de seu alunado.

**Palavras-chave:** letramento acadêmico; histórias de leitura; discursos sociais.

## Informes de estudiantes sobre literacidad académica: un análisis alineado con la perspectiva de los Nuevos Estudios de Literacidad

**RESUMEN.** Este trabajo se enmarca en el área de Educación, enfocándose en la literacidad académica y está en línea con los supuestos epistemológicos sancionados por los Nuevos Estudios de Literacidad, que lo

conciben como un fenómeno que se da en las prácticas sociales de la escritura, influenciado por creencias, valores Y cultura individual o grupos sociales a los que pertenecen. El principal objetivo de este artículo fue analizar, desde la perspectiva discursiva de Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015), uno de los precursores de los Nuevos Estudios de Literacidad, la relación que los estudiantes de la Licenciatura Interdisciplinaria en Ciencia y Tecnología, desde un Universidad Federal del Sur de Minas Gerais se entrelazan con la escritura. La intención principal fue conocer algunas de las razones que llevan a muchos profesores de este curso a afirmar que los egresados de esta institución, en general, ‘escriben muy mal’. Los datos fueron recogidos en las declaraciones de dos estudiantes, en los que se analizó esta relación a partir de los discursos allí reflejados. Uno de los instrumentos metodológicos que se utilizaron para generar los datos fue la entrevista semiestructurada (Gil, 2008), en la que se pedía a los estudiantes que recordaran su lectura de historias desde la infancia hasta historias actuales, ya que permitirían al investigador comprender mejor la relación que establecen con las prácticas de escritura valoradas en el contexto académico. Sería muy importante, también, ver si la universidad busca orientarlos para producir los textos que allí circulan. Los datos revelan que los estudiantes tienen dificultades para realizar las actividades de actividades de escritura que demanda la academia y que, a su vez, no tiene una mirada cercana en el sentido de exponer a estos estudiantes a los textos sancionados por ella, lo que se puede interpretar como la falta de un plan general para promover la literacidad en todas as áreas del conocimiento de sus estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** literacidad académica; lectura de cuentos; discursos sociales.

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## Introduction

University student writing has been the subject of broad academic discussions and has become a field of interest for researchers, especially with regard to the literacy practices to which these students are exposed in universities.

Such interest is justified by the belief that students who enter university should already master the writing and reading practices required in this context, as they have already spent at least twelve years at school. However, this assumption does not hold when teachers are faced with reality in the classroom (Fiad, 2011).

The emergence of a research in this area was born from the desire of scholars that tried to elucidate the possible reasons for the recurrent gap between the writing skills required by the academy, and the result of the written productions presented by students. This was pointed out by Lea and Street (1998), Street (1984, 2003, 2013, 2014), Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015) and Komesu and Fischer (2014). The studies that address these issues derive from theoretical-methodological concepts aligned to the New Literacy Studies. This movement was formed by researchers who considered the social perspective in studies of the acquisition of writing the great watershed in the debates on literacy programs as (Lea & Street, 1998; Street, 1984, 2003, 2013, 2014; Gee, 1998, 2004, 2005, 2015; Barton & Hamilton, 2004; Komesu & Fischer, 2014).

In the wake of this new perspective, some researchers in Brazil have also dedicated themselves to research in the area of Education and Applied Linguistics (Kleiman, 1995; Terzi, 2003; Fiad, 2011, 2015, 2017; Tôrres, 2007, 2009 and Marinho, 2010), in which they advocate the conception of literacy as a phenomenon that goes beyond the technical acquisition of writing. In other words, they conceive it as a phenomenon that occurs in social practices, with transcultural variables such as time, discourse and space. From this perspective, we consider that the relationship between subject, reading and writing comprises both the cognitive component and the social component, which indicates a renunciation of the idea that to be considered a literate subject; it is enough to possess only the technical skills of reading and writing. In this current epistemological line, literacy is conceived as a phenomenon of an essentially social nature.

When approaching writing in the academic sphere, we consider, a priori, that the university is the privileged space for acquiring knowledge and, therefore, to qualify in this space, the subject needs to develop new ways of thinking and acting in relation to writing reading that takes place there. It must be considered, however, that privileged texts at the university are, as a rule, unknown to students, since in the formative cycles prior to Higher Education, undergraduates were not exposed to texts valued in this educational sphere, nor to the originality of practices of literacy sanctioned there.

By being inserted in the socio-historical and cultural reality of the university, the student is exposed to new writing practices, typical of the academic universe and that may be unknown to them, such as “[...] ‘rewriting’, ‘dealing with controversial issues’, ‘discuss’, ‘have a critical spirit’, ‘work as a team’[...]”, as asserted

by Fiad (2011, p. 365, author's emphasis). We must then consider this new context requires the newcomers knowledge to approach the written text, considering they are the specific required literacy practices to the demands of academic writing, such as the preparation of reports from various areas, reviews of articles and book chapters, summaries for presentation of work and events at scientific dissemination and the proper works of academic courses ending.

However, if on the one hand the student is asked to be involved in the university's new writing practices, the university, in turn, must make them aware of how the texts published there are constructed. In addition, in this proposition, it is necessary to consider the conceptions of writing that this student already has internalized and that are familiar to them, in addition to being also necessary to take into account that these conceptions, in turn, is always constructed under their beliefs and values about writing.

In our view, when proposing the written expression of the undergraduate student, we should consider the literacy histories that he brings to the university because they signal the language practices in which he socialized in his formative process. This aspect should be seriously observed, as the students' conceptions of literacy will always be permeated by their stories of reading and writing experienced throughout their lives, as highlighted by Tôrres (2009) and which will certainly influence their particular ways of approaching writing, especially prestigious practices at the university, as asserted by Barton (1998), Barton & Hamilton, (2004).

In his *Social Theory of Literacy*, Barton (1998) asserts that every literacy event has a history, whether at the cultural or personal level, and understands literacy as a historically situated phenomenon, which changes over time.

The scholar also mentions that the reading constitutes our current literacy histories constitutes and writing practices with which we have been familiarized throughout life, that is, Barton (1998) understands that our literacy histories are created in the past and greatly influence our particular ways of relating to writing and reading practices in all literate social spheres. For the author:

Our private life histories contain many literacy events, from childhood to those constructed today. We change and as children and adults we are constantly learning new literacy. A literacy event has a social history. Current literacy practices are created by past practices (Barton, 1998, p. 35).

A primate element in New Literacy Studies, the notion of Discourse (with a capital D) coined by Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015), can be understood as the sum of a subject's identities that guide their particular ways of acting and speaking and, consequently, to write. The Discourse then becomes "[...] ways of being in the world, or forms of life that integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, looks, body positions and clothes" (Gee, 2015, p. 27).

This epistemological bias aligns with the theories of Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015), when he assumes that our current literacy practices instantiate the Discourses that are manifested there. For the author, dependent that we are on the contexts in which we are inserted at the moment of communicative exchanges, we assume a different 'who' (who) for each social interaction, and that is reflected in our Discourse, revealing "[...] our ways of being in the world, our ways of life, being, therefore, social and historical products". It is through them that "[...] we identify ourselves and are accepted or rejected by the various groups that make up society" (Tôrres, 2009, p. 37).

Therefore, each individual is configured as a privileged locus of clashes and tangencies of Discourses, because each time the individual uses language, it becomes "[...] a meeting point of many and conflicting Discourses socially and historically defined" (Oliveira, 2011, p. 56). It is inferred, then, that the literacy practices instantiated in academic contexts are configured by these Discourses, allowing the emergence of new identities, which will be reflected in the students' linguistic-discursive options.

By proposing reflections on literacy, Gee (2005) asserts that literacy can be said to be the ability to read (and write), and since reading (and writing) is a transitive verb, it means that literacy has to do with being able to read something and that something will always be a text of a certain type. Following this reflection, the researcher adds that texts, whether of a different nature or with different functions, also require multiple and diverse prior knowledge. In this sense, they require multiple and diverse skills to be read meaningfully, which corroborates our understanding of that the university can promote students' literacy more effectively, helping them to develop writing skills that aligns the more the textual demands of the academic sphere.

Still according to Gee (2005), the phenomenon of literacy refers, certainly, to the multiple abilities of reading (and writing) texts of certain types in certain ways or at certain levels. Concluding his reasoning, he poses a challenging question regarding literacy studies at the university: how does an individual come to show the ability to read a certain type of text, defined by a certain way?

In order to answer this question, researchers aligned with the sociocultural approach to literacy, such as Heath (1983), Teale and Sulzby (1986) and Cazden (1992), argue that all literature in the area of literacy acquisition and development makes it clear that the way of reading a certain type of text is only acquired fluently, as a native speaker would read, by some learner who is a member of a social practice, and who undoubtedly shares the ways of being, thinking and acting of that social group that has attitudes and values about them and therefore interact with them in one way and not another.

Therefore, it should be noted that the writing practices of social groups, among which universities are included, go beyond knowledge of the written code per se, as these practices affect the “[...] ‘voice’ or ‘identity’ (who) of people ‘to speak, write, think, act, value and live that way’” (Gee, 2005, p. 42, emphasis added).

These reflections are in line with the conception of literacy defended by Terzi (2003), when he theorizes that literacy is the individual's relationship with writing, a relationship that encompasses knowledge, appreciation, culture and the beliefs and values that affect it. (Terzi *apud* Tôrres, 2009).

In this context, this work, part of a master's research developed within the scope of a bachelor's degree in science and technology, at a federal university located in the south of Minas Gerais, aimed to analyze the relationship that students intertwine with writing, reflected in the Discourses that permeate the answers given to an interview conducted by the researcher. The course is the first training cycle that takes its students to a second training cycle in the field of engineering. We hoped, to a certain extent, to understand some of the possible reasons that lead professors at this institution to state that ‘our students have a lot of difficulty writing’, as observed in a previous survey carried out by this researcher, when she was in the process of elaborating her question and research hypothesis. The research project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the University under number CAAE 11610019.1.0000.5142.

By observing the relationship of undergraduates with writing, in which their strengths and weaknesses would be seen in having to express themselves in writing, we could also observe whether the university was concerned with teaching them to read and write certain types of text, “[...] in certain ways [...]” and “[...] at certain levels [...]”, as Gee (2005, p. 41) theorizes.

Considering the pedagogical proposal of the course that's contained in the 12<sup>th</sup>. Resolution (Poços de Caldas, 2016), and that is about the competences, abilities and attitudes that should compose the profile of the graduate of the course, we bring in one of its assumptions “[...] to master communication and writing techniques to elaborate syntheses, summaries, reports, articles and other theoretical elaborations specific to the area [...]” (Poços de Caldas, 2016, p. 23). That what was also in our interest to observe whether this item was being duly fulfilled, as we consider it very important for the training of that student.

In other words, we wanted to know whether the writing practices to which undergraduates of this bachelor's degree course are exposed contribute to the formation of individuals capable of communicating orally or in writing, aiming to meet literate practices both inside and outside the academic sphere. .

## **Walking the methodological path**

To carry out our objective, we used as a methodological resource the students' speeches, obtained through interviews, an instrument that would provide the opportunity to relate the feelings expressed in the interviews with Gee's Discourses theory (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015), detailing the relationship that students of the course establish with reading and writing. We considered their conceptions of writing prior to entering the university and current ones, that is, those that are exposed in the academic space.

We wished that students would reveal what they think about the writing practices that are developed and demanded by the academy, what are their greatest difficulties, the influence of teachers throughout the course, as well as a remembrance of some events and literacy practices that marked his life since childhood. It was also intended to understand the interviewees' relationship with the university's written materials and whether these are reflected in the social uses of reading and writing in academia.

The research from which the data used in this article originated was characterized as a qualitative, observational research with an ethnographic profile, (Street, 2003; Gil, 2008; André, 2008; Flick, 2009; Hua, 2016; Mattos & Castro, 2011). Ethnographic research characterizes by its focus on the educational process itself, but which makes use of techniques used in ethnography, such as participant observation, interviews and document analysis. It is up to the researcher to play the main role in data collection and analysis, allowing him to review actions and guidelines during the research (André, 2008).

In this type of research, “[...] the researcher and ethnographer inserts himself more in the field, formulates

new questions and acquires new understandings [...]" (Fiad, 2017, p. 92). It is a passive research of adjustments throughout the insertion in the field and that allows the researcher to "[...] describe the situation, understand it, and reveal its multiple meanings, leaving it to the reader to decide whether or not the interpretations can be generalized" (André, 2008, p. 38).

Street (2003) asserts that ethnographic research contributes towards the use of fieldwork methods "[...] sensitive to ways of discovering and observing the uses and meanings of literacy practices, according to the points of view of the local populations [...]" (Street, 2003, p. 1). The intention is to understand the phenomenon as it really happens instead of validating the success or failure of a specific practice.

Despite the duration of the ethnographic research and the duration of the ethnographic profile research being different, the depth of conduction and the research instruments are the same. It is used "[...] semi-structured interviews with the staff and students, participant observation of group sessions and attention to samples of student writing, written feedback on student work, and handouts on 'written' writing" (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 3).

The main object of the research carried out was the academic literacy developed in the Interdisciplinary Bachelor of Science and Technology - BICT, a semester course offered by a federal university in the south of Minas Gerais, in which data collection and fieldwork were carried out during the second half of 2019.

The purpose of the research was to understand the relationship that professors and students established with writing by observing sanctioned literacy practices and events, trying to relate these practices to the theory of Academic Literacies by Lea and Street (1998) and Komesu and Fischer (2014). The purpose also aimed to find out which was the collaboration of these practices for the formation of academic literacy of these individuals. To this end, the researcher carried out participant observations in the classroom, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students and collection of written material for analysis.

This article focuses on the analysis of semi-structured interviews with the two students participating in the research, who were asked to recall their reading stories from childhood to the present day. For Lima, Almeida, and Lima (1999, p. 133), the interview favors the acquisition of references through private conversation, which shows "[...] structural conditions, system of values, norms and symbols and transmits, through of a spokesperson, representations of certain groups". The selection of the two students was organic, since the entire class was invited to participate in the research. Only two students applied, who then became our research subjects.

These interviews would allow us to carry out the recollections according to the dynamics established by the researcher-interviewee relationship. About this fluid aspect, Gil (2008, p. 117) states that this type of instrument is guided by the "[...] list of points of interest that the interviewer explores throughout his course". For Lima et al. (1999), in the semi-structured interview, there is the possibility for the interviewee to discuss his experiences, based on the theme proposed by the researcher, but having the freedom to use free and spontaneous responses, valuing the interviewer's performance.

To this end, it was prepared a script of subjects to be addressed in the interview, with topics on remembering the importance of reading and writing in the lives of students, with an indication of who encouraged reading at home, reading and writing in spaces schooled through high school. Other objects as the existence of a library in the student's path and the frequency of use of this space, the possible existence of a teacher who encourages reading and writing in all school spaces, the importance of reading for the chosen career and the impact of the discipline of Communication and Expression in the engineering curriculum was also considered. At last, the possible reading and writing difficulties at the university, the difference between High School and the university in relation to writing, the influence of teachers throughout the course, the personal perspective on writing practices and the role of the university in promoting student literacy.

The interview, of a semi-structured nature and carried out with two students of the course, made it possible, based on the feedback from the interviewees, to take different directions for each one, which resulted in a different number of questions produced throughout the interviews. For respondent A1, 8 questions were asked and for respondent A2, 13 questions, even though they remained within the theme and objective of the research.

After recording and transcribing the interviews, the collected data were analyzed, in the light of Gee's Discourse theory (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015), in which it was intended to establish links between the interviewees' literacy recollections and observations of the relationships established with writing. Their perceptions about the literacy valued in the academy, in addition to the possible consequences on their reading and writing practices developed in this context.

## Disjunctions and conflicts about writing at the university: recollections of the A1 student

The first interviewee was student A1, who began his recollections about reading and writing throughout his formative journey, stating, quite clearly, that he gave great importance to reading and writing since he was a child, and that his grandfather always liked it very much. He greatly encouraged A1, and was an example of a reader in the family. He also states that “[...] he read a lot in high school, because he studied at a private school and the teacher gave him a lot of reading books”. In the question he was asked to reveal his impressions about the value of writing at the university, and the importance of reading in the role of an engineer, the response was obtained that “[...] reading is very important, because the engineer has to know how to demonstrate in the report, for example, what it found as a result [...]. If you don't know how to explain it in detail [...] I think this is important in communication”. We observed from these answers that the interviewer values counts a lot in his daily writing practices.

Regarding his relationship with writing and reading in High School, the interviewee states that he had no difficulties in studying his Mother Tongue, and when asked about how he perceives the relationship of his colleagues with the university's writing practices, he replies that he observes that “[...] people have a lot of difficulty [...]”. About his own performance, he states that he “[...] tends to give more detailed answers, when the work requires textual production, while his colleagues ‘usually give short answers [...]’, as happens in Groundwater, a mandatory subject in Environmental Engineering.

When asked: if there was any teacher who influenced him to improve his academic writing throughout the course, the answer was that:

Thinking like this, I do not think there's any figure. The professor who teaches this subject, groundwater, is the one who emphasizes the writing issue a lot, he likes a complete answer. There are some who like more elaborated answers, but they encourage more technical reading, such as reading articles (Student A1).

His revelations lead us to reflect about the role of this course in relation to the appreciation of writing in this academic context. It seems to us that there is no guidance from teachers on the form of the text they want to be written, in line with the role they play within of the literate practices of the university. Although it is observed that the A1 student considers that writing is important for the engineer, we observed in his answer he was not much encouraged to produce texts that are more appropriate to the context, and “[the answer becomes satisfactory, as can be inferred from his statement: ‘At college I miss academic writing a little]’. It is understood that the interviewee's relationship with writing remains the same as when he was in high school, that is, the writing practices to which he is being exposed at the university do not require knowledge of more elaborate writing, which meets the required standards in higher education

However the answer given by the A1 interviewee, and that refers to the penultimate question of the interview: “After that time spent at the university, in contact with the types of written texts privileged therein, do you feel prepared to write the academic text?” caused us strangeness, because we had understood that the student did not have difficulties with reading and writing in the university context. However, his statements contradict the initial idea. In his words, when commenting on a situation experienced with colleagues “We even ‘were’ talking in the PRT group, that to make reports, articles in general, people don't know, right? I felt a lot of difficulty, yes, at the beginning of college, a greater incentive to, perhaps, have a subject about it” (Student A1). On this aspect, we refer to Fiad (2011), when he states that the assumption that the freshman masters the literacy practices required at the university is not sustainable, as this is not the reality with which professors are faced.

A1's statements also corroborate some of the reflections made by Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015). First, the evidence that he assumes different *whos* for different situations: when he addresses the researcher from the place of a good student in high school, diligent with his reading activities, he always manifests himself positively when asked about the relationship he establishes with writing. However, when he positions himself as a university student, he places himself alongside his colleagues and assumes that he also finds it difficult to write in these contexts, that is, he assumes another *who*, the collective, and confesses his fragility when asked to produce different textual genres at the University.

We inferred from the Discourses expressed in the student's speech that this fragility may have roots in the lack of a greater and more expressive exposure to the texts that circulate in the university, which reflects the little contact of the students with the writing practices that model the texts that must be produced there. The

notion he has of what it is expected of a text is still embedded in the experiences he lived in High School, since, according to him, there was no incentive to approach the texts that are required in the academic sphere.

We also share Gee's theories (2005) when he affirms that the learner can only be charged for a writing practice if he has been exposed to it. That is, we are only able to read or write a text of a certain way if we are apprentices of this practice in institutions, such as the university, which are, in the first instance, exponential literacy agencies.

## **The estrangement to the literate practices of the academy: the recollections of the A2 student**

The second interviewee, henceforth called A2, begins his responses to the interview items by stating that his first contact with reading happened fortuitously. In his childhood recollections, he remembers that his mother would take him to the library in the small town where he lived, in the late afternoon, more for lack of things to do than for interest in reading itself. Following his memories, when asked about his reading activity in school spaces, the student remembers having a teacher in the first year of primary school that always read to the children and that they had to report on what they read. He also remembers that there was no library at school.

When asked if he had a teacher in high school who encouraged him to read, the student replied that: "there was a teacher that encouraged the students a lot, that she was a very good Portuguese teacher and that he liked to listen to the stories that the teacher told". This statement suggests that he was exposed to literacy events and practices that probably enabled him to develop a taste for reading and writing.

However, when asked to talk about his reaction, when he learned that the engineering course had a mandatory subject dedicated to teaching Communication and Expression, the student replied:

Wow, I found it very boring! Because I always had a lot of problems with Portuguese. I always had a lot of doubts. When I entered the BCT I thought: I won't have Portuguese! I will not need it! However, I was completely wrong. Because when I got here, I missed writing, not just for the reports (Student A2).

Contrary to our expectations, we observed that the student starts his answer with an emphatic negative, saying that he found it very bad to know that he would have a Portuguese class. In addition, the student reveals that he always had a lot of difficulty in this subject, many doubts, even thinking that he did not expect to have this discipline in his course. However, soon afterwards he confesses that he was completely wrong, even missing writing, that is, he missed knowing how to properly write reports and other academic texts.

We also noticed, in the responses of respondent A2, the same thing that happened with respondent A1 with regard to the assumption of different *whos*, according to different *whats*. That is: when he is weaving childhood memories, in which he finds himself in another temporal context, he sees himself as a reader even though he was not much encouraged to do so as a child, as his trips to the library in the small town where he lived were only for late afternoon walks, with no intention of interaction between reading and reader. It was considered, at the beginning, that he had at least a reasonable relationship with writing and reading at levels of education prior to university, however, his speech reveals another conception about the importance of knowing how to write at university:

I thought we were going to have contact with math subjects, this more applied part of engineering. Then I think this is one of the biggest flaws we have in BCT. We think that life is very busy with calculations and all these things, but I think we need to know how to write here too, but it is because of the information it brings us. It is very important (Student A2).

We understood that there is in his speech a privileged 'locus' of clashes and tangents of Discourses, as Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015) theorizes, as it can be seen that, although the student stated that he did not like to know that would have Portuguese classes, soon afterwards he states that "[...] it is necessary to know how to write in the university sphere, because this is very important". We observed that he invests himself with another identity, assuming here that of a subject aware of the need to better understand the uses and constructions of the Portuguese language.

In a very special way, the assertions of the A2 student drew our attention due to the emphasis he gave in affirming the need he felt to study more Portuguese, as can be seen in his statement: "[...] in my head all the ideas come, but I can't work things out, so I can't pass on the information the way the teacher asks, that's my biggest difficulty" (Student A2).

It is understood that there is here what Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015) vehemently argues, which is the issue of Discourses and the values and beliefs that underlie them. In other words: the student has the necessary

knowledge to respond to what professors ask for, but does not know how to structure them in a specific text genre that meets that academic demand. At that moment, there is, with primacy, the assumption that one only knows a certain writing and reading practice if the subject is a learner of that practice, which means that no one writes a text if it was not exposed to the student.

From this perspective, we inferred that the fact that the student does not fulfill certain requirements requested by the university, such as the best writing to meet the teaching requests, is not a 'deficiency' of the student. The cause of it is that in the years prior to the university and today where he is studying a Bachelor of Science and Technology, he was not exposed to this learning. Continuing with his answers, the student states that he has improved his literacy level a lot, but that this was due to his own effort to read course completion papers already presented and to always look for new readings within his area of study.

From the responses of interviewee A2 we concluded that his relationship with writing and reading was a more pleasurable process in the basic cycle, but more difficult in High School, what was reflected in Higher Education, when he had to deal with the difficulties he encounters to produce texts in the academic sphere. This is a very difficult task for him.

## Conclusion

The New Literacy Studies bring to light a new perspective of analysis of social relations in which reading and writing are mediating elements, and introduce in these studies another level of analysis with regard to the concept of literacy. In this perspective, the definition of literacy is surpassed only as a mere acquisition of the writing and reading technique and starts to be conceived as an essentially social phenomenon.

It is inferred, therefore, that literacy has an individual cognitive and a social component, as it considers the influence of culture, beliefs, appreciation and knowledge of writing, which leads us to understand that literacy is the relationship that the individual establishes with writing. In this relation we must consider that there are many socio-historical factors that affect the particular ways of approaching writing, as theorized by Terzi (2003).

A fundamental aspect among the epistemological contributions sanctioned by New Literacy Studies is the concept of Discourse. For Gee (1998, 2004, 2005, 2015) the Discourse goes beyond the conversation, the spoken language itself, as it configures an activity that involves values and ways of thinking of the subjects. Thus, Discourse only has meaning within and through the practices of a given group, when it is contextualized, engaged in a particular activity, where its aspects are reflections of the society in which it is being used (Gee, 1998, 2004, 2005, 2015).

For the theorist, an individual can make use of several identities (*who*) as these identities are demanded. These '*whos*' are socially situated identities that contain the characteristics of the subject that the moment and place require.

In the speeches of the students interviewed, observed through the retelling of their reading and writing stories, we can see that several '*whos*' of a single subject were unveiled, which sometimes overlap, sometimes are shown independently, as the interview continues. When asked to talk about his initiation into writing in his family, the same student reveals that his mother took him to the city library as a form of distraction. And when asked to talk about the importance of writing at school, he states that he had a good relationship with the theme, but when he is asked to talk about writing at the university, he says that he found it 'boring' to have a discipline focused on communication and expression.

The relationship that respondents establish with writing at the university says a lot about the '*who*' that they internalize in this context. The answers indicated that they identify a different way of relating to writing and a different requirement than what they used to do in instances prior to Higher Education, as it is a new identity situated in a different social context.

Some paradoxical conceptions were observed in the recollections of the interviewed students: if, on the one hand, they affirm that they had no problems with writing and reading in High School, on the other hand, they affirm that 'people have a lot of difficulty', a social group in which, certainly he includes himself as one of its members.

In a very special way, we observed that few are the professors who encourage reading in this course, as revealed by the recollections of the A1 student, when he stated that he did not remember any professor who effectively influenced him to improve his writing. We can see this in his words: "Thinking like this [...] I think there is no figure [...]". In an initial a priori assessment, this statement leads us to believe that there is very little or almost no incentive to reading and writing in this course at this university.



The revelation of one of the students impacted us, when he stated that: “[...] in college I miss academic writing a bit”. These statements lead us to reflect on the role that the university is playing in promoting the literacy of its students. In the specific case of BICT, despite having a compulsory subject in the course's pedagogical project entirely dedicated to work in communication and expression, the students' perception, inferred through their testimonies, that, as a whole, it is not enough to meet the university's scriptural demands, with regard to writing and reading the diverse and different textual genres that circulate there.

In our understanding, the discipline offered, although important, does not meet the desires of the students in relation to their literacy. We understood they feel a lack of greater commitment on the part of the other professors, as well as on the part of the institution itself, in the sense of proposing a plan to promote students' literacy that covers other professors and other areas of knowledge of the course. Student A1, when asked about any teacher who influenced him to improve his academic writing, responded there was not any teacher who did this, except a single teacher who liked “a more complete answer” to his questions.

Our point of view is that the course should work more on writing issues with its students in a way that surrounds all their areas of knowledge. This would reveal to us, in the first instance that it aligns with the assumptions of the curricula of the Interdisciplinary Bachelors, and aligns with to the premises listed among the objectives for the profile of the graduate, in which there is an emphasis on the ability to communicate and argue competently.

One cannot fail to point out that the social role of the university is to train people able to face the increasingly competitive professional world, in which the written expression of candidates is greatly valued. However, as a rule, what has been observed is that the university still needs to take a closer look at these issues, as the institution's non-commitment to prestigious literate practices can be an impediment to its graduates having access to the world of work, already so scarce in Brazil.

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