

Appropriation of school literacy practices by youth and adult education students

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the various different ways that youth and adult students appropriate literacy practices, usually built on school approaches for reading and writing. We focus our study on a group of youth and adult education students of elementary school level in a public school in a large urban center. Empirical material was produced in the classroom environment. We selected an event to analyze the positions assumed discursively by the students in reading and writing activities. The results showed that students, as subjects of culture and knowledge, mobilize their understanding of the written language in order to give meanings to school literacy practices. Thus, the comprehension of their understandings help us notice the importance of the socio-cultural dimensions of the teaching of writing and reading. Additionally, it also helps to rebuild the teaching situations based on dialogue with the student learning process itself.

KEYWORDS

literacy; appropriation of practices, youth and adult education.

APROPRIAÇÃO DE PRÁTICAS DE LETRAMENTO ESCOLARES POR ESTUDANTES DA EDUCAÇÃO DE JOVENS E ADULTOS

RESUMO

Este artigo visa contribuir com o debate a respeito dos modos como jovens e adultos estudantes da educação básica se apropriam das práticas de letramento que se constituem na abordagem escolar da leitura e da escrita. Focalizando um episódio extraído do material empírico produzido no acompanhamento de uma turma de educação de jovens e adultos em curso no ensino fundamental de uma escola pública de um grande centro urbano, analisamos os posicionamentos assumidos discursivamente pelos alunos, nas atividades de leitura e de escrita das quais participavam na sala de aula. Essa análise indica que os estudantes, como sujeitos de cultura e de conhecimento, mobilizam seus saberes relacionados aos usos da língua escrita para significar as práticas letradas escolares. A compreensão desses saberes nos auxilia a perceber a dimensão sociocultural das situações de ensino da leitura e da escrita e a necessidade de elas serem construídas baseadas no diálogo com os processos de aprender dos educandos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

letramento; apropriação de práticas; educação de jovens e adultos.

LA APROPIACIÓN DE LAS PRÁCTICAS DE LITERACIA ESCOLARES POR LOS ESTUDIANTES DE LA EDUCACIÓN DE JÓVENES Y ADULTOS

RESUMEN

Este artículo contribuye al debate sobre las formas como estudiantes jóvenes y adultos del nivel básico se apropian de prácticas de literacia que se constituyen en los procesos de enseñanza e de aprendizaje escolares. Focalizando un episodio extraído del material empírico producido durante el acompañamiento de una clase de educación fundamental del programa de la educación de jóvenes y adultos de una escuela pública en un gran centro urbano, analizamos los posicionamientos asumidos por los alumnos en las actividades de lectura y escrita de las que habían participado en sala de aula. Este análisis indica que los estudiantes –como sujetos de cultura y conocimiento– utilizan sus saberes relacionados a los usos del idioma escrito para significar las prácticas letradas escolares. La comprensión de dichos saberes nos auxilia a percibir la dimensión sociocultural de las situaciones de enseñanza de la lectura y la escrita y la necesidad de que sean construidas a partir de un diálogo con los procesos de aprendizaje de los educandos.

PALABRAS CLAVE

literacia; apropiación de prácticas; educación de jóvenes y adultos.

Research on Youth and Adult Education (EJA) indicates that the analysis of positions adopted by students in school situations involving the teaching and learning of reading and writing helps to understand the meanings attributed to literacy practices taught in schools (Faria, 2007; Fonseca, 2009; Kalman, 2009; Kleiman, 1995; Lúcio, 2007; Oliveira, 2001; Ribeiro, 1999). These studies suggest that the learning of literacy practices is not restricted to a set of neutral skills and that this process is permeated by socially-constructed values. In this sense, they question belief in the existence of a single manner of signifying school learning — generally, that foreseen by the didactic intention of the pedagogical proposal — and highlight the need to better understand the multiplicity of methods of acquiring knowledge that emerge in daily classroom experience.

To contribute to the proposal of educational actions based on dialog with (and respect for) the social practices of the students involved, the research that supports this article sought to analyze how youth and adult education students appropriate school reading and writing practices. These practices were revealed in teacher–student discussions in a class, corresponding to an intermediary stage of fundamental education, in a public school that offers youth and adult courses in the evening.

To conduct the analysis presented, we use concepts about practices of literacy and appropriation. These theoretical constructs helped us to reflect on the students' positions toward reading and writing practices forged in a school context, considering the sociocultural dimension of these practices. The effort to identify values, strategies, and knowledge involved in the appropriation of literacy practices is inspired by the intention to focus on the students as subjects of knowledge and culture in the spaces of human communication forged in the school context.

THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES

The theoretical principles that support this work were based on the confrontation between the analytical possibilities of the empirical material produced and studies in the field of literacy and youth and adult education. In this exercise, the concept of literacy practices proved to be fundamental to the analysis of how students give meaning to school reading and writing activities.

The adoption of this concept, from the perspective we have chosen, has, as one of its historic determinants the need to study the reading and writing phenomenon going beyond the analysis of people's individual capacities in relation to this use (Rojo, 2009). Instead of assessing the participants' level of proficiency in relation to certain literacy skills, this theoretical construct seeks to understand how reading and writing are used in their sociocultural dimension, marked by contextual contingencies and power relationships. Considering that we are trying to understand how students participate in social practices — in this case, school activities — which involve the use of written language, we use the concept of literacy practices as being plural, and socially and culturally determined practices in which the specific meanings they have for a social group depend on the contexts and institutions in which they are forged (Kleiman, 1995). This concept of literacy practices implies an

underlying understanding of language as a social phenomenon, which materializes in verbal interaction in a given communicative situation, an understanding that is inspired in Bakhtin's (1996) studies.

The analytical perspective adopted is one of those identified by Street (1984) as an "ideological model of literacy", as opposed to the approaches which adopt an "autonomous literacy model". According to Street, the autonomous model postulates a single type of use of reading and writing as universal, not considering the context of its production. Among the problems presented by this theoretical framework is the dichotomy established between orality and writing and the consideration of a direct link between the acquisition of writing and the development of abstract and logical thinking. According to that model, while writing is characterized as being planned, formal, and autonomous in relation to the social situation and its references, oral expression is defined as being linked to the communicative context due to its informal and less planned character (Kleiman, 1995).

On the other hand, studies guided by the "ideological model" consider that the relationships between the two modalities of language usage (oral and written) depend on the social context in which they are established. Furthermore, these studies argue that the consequences of the use of writing (which the autonomous model considers universal truths, and, usually beneficial), would rather arise from a type of literacy (school literacy), which favors work with written text, regardless of particular social contexts, and values not only knowledge but also its verbal expression (Oliveira, 2001).

Given the nature and principles of this study, the concept of literacy practices restricted to the mobilization of a set of skills to meet the demands presented by different social situations would not be suited to the analytical exercise we propose. This perspective of the concept of literacy practice tends to link the acquisition of those skills directly to positive consequences, such as "cognitive and economic development, social mobility, professional progress, and citizenship" (Soares, 2006, p. 75). In addition, the concept of literacy practices, when considered as skills, obscures

the ways in which writing is used to measure the suitability of an individual's communication (whether standard or deviant), the particular roles associated to those who claim the right to set the standard and judge the deviants, and the ways in which writers appropriate the standard forms to persuasively communicate a message (Marcuschi, 2001, p. 40)

Considering this, we understand that literacy practices are generated by wider social processes that can "strengthen or question values, traditions, and types of distribution of power present in social contexts" (Soares, 2006, p. 75).

In the field of youth and adult education, the concept of literacy practices has enabled us to reflect on the knowledge, values, and skills involved in defining reading and writing practices experienced by young people and adults with little schooling. Studies like that conducted by Marinho (1992), Ribeiro (1999), Galvão (2002), and Kalman (2004) emphasize that these individuals, when they decide to begin or return to school, have already established, even if they are illiterate, ways of

relating to the social demands of reading and writing, learned in various instances of their cultural life.

Kalman (*idem*), for example, when investigating the use of written language in non-school contexts among women with limited or no schooling in Mexico City, identifies and analyzes various local literacy practices, which are mainly marked by a close relationship between speaking and writing. According to the author's study, writing found on "public thoroughfares" (e.g., billboards, posters, signs, etc.) for example, enter the speech of residents and is commented on and practiced by members of the community. In church, although the congregation receives leaflets that guide them through the ceremony, speech is the main means of appropriation of the religious doctrine. In relation to reading letters, for many in the community, access to the content is made possible through the mediation of another reader (*idem*). For the author, research on non-school communicative situations, which involve the use of reading and writing, allows us to "get to know the material and social conditions that favor access to the population's written culture" (*idem*, p. 12) and to know the uses of reading and writing of a social group.

When Marinho (1992) reflects on the social function of writing for people from the lower and working classes, the author identifies various reading practices, both related to communicative and informative functions, like the learning and pedagogization of everyday life. According to the author, the understanding of the meaning attributed by individuals to reading and writing requires the analysis of various social spaces — the universes of work, religion, or home, for example — where literacy practices are forged, since these determine both the contents and the functions of reading and writing. The author's study particularly questions the existence of a static and predetermined meaning of a text and indicates the need to study the social conditions of the use of writing, which is given by the "types of text, types of literature, printing resources, which are part of institutions and social groups" (*idem*, p. 21).

On the other hand, Ribeiro's (1999) research of reading and writing practices among São Paulo residents analyzes the intensity and type of use that people with different literacy skills say they make of reading and writing. According to the author, individuals with low and medium-low literacy¹ participate in literacy practices that include reading — the Bible and poetry, for example — in which the written text represents a starting point to evoke other experiences. The people in this group resort to orality when they need to get information and or learn something new. The author stresses that these social practices enable individuals to build knowledge, values, and skills, which may be different from the practices favored and conducted at school. Generally, school tasks emphasize analysis of the text itself, which is

1 According to the author, the low literacy level corresponds to the people whose reading and writing practices also restrict them exclusively in the professional field, limiting them to a simple register. The main instrument of communication and learning is speech. The learning methods are based on observation and experimentation. In the low medium level, there is a greater demand on the capacity for communication, particularly oral.

conceived as a primary source of learning and information, the identification of information contained in the text *corpus*, and reflection on the content presented, without necessarily establishing a relationship with the individuals' life experiences.

These studies help us, by analyzing the positions of some youth and adult education students' when reading or writing, recognizing them as subjects of cultures and knowledge. This is important, to both qualify the development of analyses about the impacts of schooling in relation to the literacy practices of those subjects, and to support research dedicated to understanding the strategies used by those students to appropriate the school reading and writing practices they experience. (Fonseca, 2001; Pereira, 2002; Ribeiro, 1999)

In our intention to analyze how youth and adult education students appropriate school reading and writing practices, we have also mobilized the concept of appropriation according to Bakhtin (1996), Smolka (2000), and Kalman's (2009) theoretical perspective. These authors begin from the common premise that, if on one hand the relationships in which individuals are involved are important for explaining their way of being, relating, and knowing, on the other hand, these individuals play an active role in the processes of understanding their world. In that sense, reading and writing practices are seen as social activities; furthermore, research into the ways individuals appropriate them considers the particular characteristics of context of use, the purposes of the users, the expected effects, the position of the reader in relation to other readers, the ideas and meanings that guide the participation of each one, and the concepts people have about themselves (*idem*).

We consider, like Smolka (2000), that appropriation is the subject's active response to social interaction, and not a mechanical reproduction. This concept of appropriation is decisive for the perspective from which we consider learning and understanding. We share the idea, defended by Bakhtin (1996), that learning implies the appropriation of discourse, a process in which individuals convert other people's words into their own, opposing the speaker's words with a counter-word:

understanding another person's utterance means being guided in relation to it, finding one's suitable place in the corresponding context. Each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we make correspond to a series of our own words, creating a replica. (*idem*, p. 127)

In the author's article "The (im)proper and (im)pertinent in the appropriation of social practices", Smolka (2000) draws attention to the fact that the idea of *appropriation* she works with is not restricted to the assessment of the individual's performance, considering what is thought to be appropriate or pertinent in a particular social situation. On the contrary, the term appropriation is related to "people's different ways of participating in social practices, different possibilities for the production of meaning" (*idem*, p.13). Hence, by analyzing the way that youth and adult education students appropriate school literacy practices, we consider that "making it your own, making it yours, does not always mean and does not always coincide with making it suitable for social expectations" (*idem, ibidem*). Therefore, we will not examine here how the appropriation by youth and adult education

programs of school literacy practices leads them to exhibit expected and socially valued behaviors. We will focus on the ways these subjects appropriate these practices, by analyzing these forms of appropriation in terms of what they reveal about the relationship of these people with written culture, their expectations toward schooling and its demands, criticisms, desires, and proposals for pedagogic action.

PRODUCTION OF THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The interaction we will analyze in this manuscript was extracted from the empirical material produced in research conducted in a public school, selected as the field of study because its pedagogic project sought to provide youth and adult students opportunities to have significant reading and writing experiences. We believed, therefore, that an institution with this profile would create in the teaching and learning process greater possibilities for students to define their positions and, consequently, the relationships they build with the school literacy practices they experienced.

We selected an intermediary level fundamental education class because we were interested in contemplating the school literacy practices experienced by students who already had some command of reading and writing technology and would be invited to conduct activities that addressed more complex skills for participating in socially valued literacy practices.

The nature of the research question led us to adopt a qualitative study. According to André (2000, p. 19), this approach allows us to "understand the meanings that the people and groups studied confer to particular actions and events". As a result of this theoretical-methodological option, we used participant observation as our main research technique.

For one academic semester, we spent every evening in the classroom, participating in the dynamics of the activities, making detailed recordings in a field journal of observations about that dynamic, the dialogs between the students and the teacher, and even when the students asked for the researchers help to perform their activities. In addition, we made audio recordings of the classes we attended. Throughout this work, we made an effort to "integrate the observed subject's culture and to 'see' the 'world' through their perspective" (Vianna, 2003, p. 26). By listening to the tapes and reading the field journals, we created narratives of teaching and learning situations involving reading and writing practices, in which students engaged in discourse. In this article, we present an analysis based on the reflections arising from the interactions from one of the classes we attended.

THE CASE OF A PUBLIC PRESENTATION: SPEAKING AND WRITING SKILLS IN YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION

In a pedagogic meeting, the teaching staff had planned to initiate work with a kit of fiction books² by holding an event in which, apart from symbolically receiving the books, the students from each class would present two of them to the other students in the school. The teachers understood that these encounters would allow students to share experiences related to reading literature.

On the evening of April 27, the lesson was divided in two. In the first period, the students participated in a discussion led by the teacher about the significance of the kit of 10 fiction books and the possibilities offered by this type of literacy practice. The teacher also introduced the books and explained some of the characteristics of the two literary works they would present during the event, scheduled for the period after the break. As the discussion continued, the ideas raised were systematically arranged in a table:

Table 1: The Literature kit.

The importance of the Kit	Contos de Artur Azevedo	20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
To develop a taste for reading.	They are short narratives.	It is a classic.
To improve writing.	They talk about things that happen in people's daily life.	It is a novel in chapters.
To improve reading comprehension.	Stories that were read and criticized by Machado de Assis.	It has many adventures and devices that did not exist at the time.
Reading is good; it broadens the horizons.	The author had his own style.	We can study science, submarines, ocean zones. [Remark 1]

Source: Field Journal.
Prepared by the Class Teacher.

Next, the teacher told them that the data collection would support the production of an oral text, whose purpose would be to present the works, *Contos de Arthur Azevedo* [Stories by Artur Azevedo] and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, to the other classes in the school.

Teacher: *So everyone, this is just to help the person to not get lost. But the person does not have to read it... No reading at all, right... It's really tiresome, isn't it? You don't have to read it. It's speaking, that's all. It's like... just prepare your own little personal text. It's just [inaudible], right? Just for inspiration. So class,? Who is going to talk up there?*

Santiago³: *Have Emerson speak, Teacher. He's good at speaking.*

Teacher: *Emerson!*

2 In the same year, the Municipal Education Secretariat had sent a literature kit containing 10 works of fiction to each youth and adult education student.
3 The students gave permission for their real names to be used.

Emerson: *Why does it have to be me?*

Santiago: *You speak very well.*

Emerson: *No...I'm not going to speak.*

Female student: *Me neither.*

Teacher: *Come on, people. You, Clarice.*

Clarice: *No, not me, Márcia. Ask the younger girls. If it was something rehearsed, or planned, I'd do it.*

Emílio: *Last year, I spoke, but we rehearsed. But saying stuff without preparing... It's hard... The others will laugh at us.*

Teacher: *Silvia, and you?*

Silvia: *If we could practice for a week, that'd be fine, we could go there and talk. But not like this, no way.*

In this interaction, the teacher warned them that the chart produced by the class would only be used as a guide to the oral and public presentation: "So, class, this is just to help the person not get lost, but you don't have to read it... no reading, at all...". So, from this outline ("it's just to inspire you") each student would have to "prepare your own little text", not to be read, ("You don't have to read it") its to be spoken ("It's speaking, that's all"). Thus, the students were asked to mobilize their competence to prepare texts, which, according to Ribeiro and Fonseca (2009, p. 39), corresponds to the capacity to create, from textual elements, the text itself. Although this task involves personal responses, they should always be "based on elements of the text or the given context" (*idem*).

After explains the instructions, the teacher asks the students who wants to present the books at the event: "So, what about over there, guys? Who's going to talk up there?". Faced with the invitation, Santiago realizes that, in this situation, it would not be possible to use common language and suggests that Emerson should be asked to perform the task, because, in his judgment, Emerson would be better at organizing his speech well. "Have Emerson speak, teacher. He's *good at speaking*". Emerson, however, declines immediately: "No...I'm not going to speak, no". Clarice also refuses the challenge and indicates that the use of language in this interaction requires planning and says: "If it was something rehearsed, or planned, I'd do it". Emílio backs his colleague's position and adds that the proposed task would be evaluated, and the expected performance may not be produced — since there was not enough time to prepare properly — and this could lead to humiliation: "But saying stuff without preparing..., It's hard... The others will laugh at us". Silvia also indicates the decisive and indispensable role of preparation by "practicing" so that she could conduct the proposed task properly: "If we could practice for a week, that would be fine, we could go there and talk. But not like this, no way".

By proposing that they prepare an oral presentation based on systemized writing, the teacher indicates that the language activity in question requires the production of a text which, although its materiality is oral, it does not share the same characteristics as other oral genres of everyday practices that allow us to produce them spontaneously and informally: "So everyone, this is just to help you to not get lost [...] And from this here... to prepare your own short text". In this sense, the textual genre requested — "oral presentation" — is closely linked with writing and resorts to it to be prepared. Furthermore, the preparation of texts in the school context is associated with evaluation practices, in which this product — the "short text" — is analyzed in terms of structure, thematic content, and lexical suitability.

The teacher's instruction concerning the presentation seems to make the students perceive that the suggested language activity requires familiarity with a content, structure, and style (Bakhtin, 1996), which comprise a genre that they were not yet familiar with. In fact, presenting literary works to a public school audience implies exercising an expository textual genre that requires, in addition to command of the content of the speech — since students should know what to say — intimacy with a particular textual structure and linguistic resources suitable to a public presentation.

According to Costa (2008, p. 97), oral presentation is characterized by "a discourse in which one develops a theme (referential content), by passing on information, describing it, or even explaining some content to an audience in a well-organized manner". Indeed, the students themselves, when presenting arguments for not doing the presentation ("If it was something rehearsed, or planned, I'd do it". "Tell Emerson to speak, teacher. He's good at speaking"), refer to the central characteristics of the textual genre of public speaking. Santiago and Silvia, for example, seem to understand that speaking in public is a more complex activity than daily conversation — an oral practice that generally requires little or no speech planning and in which individuals participate in a more automatic manner. The public speaking genre involves, in addition to selecting suitable linguistic resources ("You speak very well"), the previous preparation of the content and general structure of the text: "If it was something rehearsed, or planned, I'd do it". This recognition that oral language practice also requires planning, weakens the dichotomist interpretation of speech and writing, which considers the former to be intrinsically informal and involve little planning and the latter to always be well organized and the carrier of formal contents.

Rojo (2001), in his article "Letramento escolar, oralidade e escrita em sala de aula: diferentes modalidades ou gêneros do discurso?" [*School literacy, speaking and writing in the classroom: different modalities or genres of discourse?*] also questions the theoretical concept that characterizes the spoken word by the relationship of the speaker's involvement with the situation of production, as opposed to the written utterance, which is defined by the relationship of autonomy that is established by the writer with a given context and his world of references. By criticizing this model, the author uses Schneuwly's (1997) considerations to defend the need to focus the discussion on an enunciative perspective, in which the communicative context defines the relationship between oral and written expression:

A [single] oral does not exist; there are [several] orals; language activities realized orally; genres that are mainly orally practiced. Or language activities that combine speaking and writing. In fact, there is nothing in common between the performance of an orator and daily conversation. (Schneuwly, 1997 *apud* Rojo, 2001, p. 56)

To Schneuwly's (1997) considerations on the diversity of oral genres, Rojo (2001, p.56) adds an equivalent comment in relation to written genres:

It is clear that the same could be said of written genres: a personal letter and an application have nothing in common; nor do a dialog in a comedy sketch and a novel [...]. In each one, the themes, the compositional forms, the styles, and the relationship with speech are differentiated.

The questioning by these adult and youth education students in relation to their ability to be successful in this school practice could be interpreted as an attitude of refusal, resistance or deficiency. However, we could interpret this position as a type of appropriation of that practice. This is because we believe that there are various ways of making something one's own, which are not always "suitable or pertinent to others" (Smolka, 2000, p. 32). Therefore, in that first moment in the classroom, the students appropriated the activity, basing their reason for not doing it on the characteristics they recognize as belonging to that practice.

The first part of the class ends without the students deciding who will present the books. After the break, the event for giving out the kits begins; the students from other classes make their presentations, mostly refer their own personal experience with reading and not the importance of the works in the kit which they should be recommending. While observing her peer's speech, Clarice rewrites the table drawn up in class and, after a while, tells the teacher that she is willing to present the books. She begins her speech by reading a single item from the table: "For me, the kit serves to 'develop a taste for reading'". The rest of the speech was based on her personal reading experiences. She highlighted that, before going to school, she did not like "reading", and now she is learning that reading can bring benefits, like imagining other worlds and learning new things. She seems to perceive that there is a certain flexibility between the communicative situation established and the original proposal, allowing the use of another textual genre: the reporting of experiences and personal appreciation. Thus, her participation in the activity occurs through the elaboration of a textual genre that is certainly closer to her than the presentation of characteristics of works from a chart prepared by the class.

After the event, the researcher asked Clarice about the experience of the presentation, and she compared the feelings she attributes to speaking in church and those to speaking at school:

Researcher: *So, how did you feel about presenting something in the front of the classroom?*

Clarice: *I always speak in church, I even take the microphone. But, here, in front, the people make fun of you, no one pays attention.*

In this statement, Clarice distinguishes between public communication activities in church, a space where she is not afraid to "take the microphone", and those in school, a context where "being in front of people" and speaking in front of students and teachers is a greater challenge. In the school sphere, in addition to being required to exercise oral production of more complex texts — like the presentation — Clarice has the role of student, and, therefore is assessed by teachers and peers, risking "being made fun of" if she does not adequately conduct a particular literacy practice. In turn, in church, lay people who participate in religious acts use text genres that are more familiar to them, like a "practice — a short preachment or a short expository or argumentative comment from the gospels (...) conducted in a more familiar or colloquial manner than a sermon or homily" (Costa, 2008, p. 150) — or an *account* — an "oral narrative about an event or fact" (*idem*, p. 159). Furthermore, the relationships established are more symmetrical, and the participants in that context are willing to listen and respect the experience of the other. Thus, the image Clarice creates of herself, of others, and of the communicative situation of those two spaces of human communication — school and church — influences the way in which she defines the requirements and the characteristics of "speaking in public" in each one.

The teaching and learning process of the writing system that these interactions engender needs to be understood in a sociocultural dimension along with its technical aspects. Particularly when we are considering literacy events in the context of youth and adult education, it is necessary to explore the analytical possibilities arising from the consideration that the activities with textual genres in the classroom are cultural practices.

In this sense, the approach adopted in the episode analyzed here seeks to understand the ways in which students participate and appropriate school literacy practices in which they participate. The positions taken by these subjects in the interlocutory interplay established in the classroom indicate their efforts to shape their own discourse to the genre required by school activities. However, the strategies used by the students, to guarantee their inclusion in this sphere of human communication, are not the same and are not always the ones expected by the school activities. As unique individuals with different experiences, they bring different cultural models and concepts to the classroom, which also guide them in their decision making, when they strive to appropriate school literacy practices.

Thus, if, on the one hand, the students utterances allow reflecting on their social belonging, characterized by their condition as "non-children" and of being excluded from school (Oliveira, 2001), on the other hand, each individual is shaped in a particular way. Thus, the positions adopted by the students reinforce Oliveira's (*idem*) statement that it is necessary to consider that both the specific aspects arising from belonging to particular cultural groups, and the individual differences in relation to the ways that the individuals signify the situations they are faced with, will be decisive in the signification processes in school practices. Thus, by engag-

ing in learning situations involving reading and writing practices and by adopting their positions in relation to them, the youth and adult education students treat themselves as subjects of culture and learning.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the ways in which students create their own form of participating in social literacy practices forged in school contexts indicate that the interactions in youth and adult education classrooms are complex and raise questions which, we as educators, should pay attention to.

In fact, we observed that the learning of reading and writing practices is not restricted to their technical dimension. The reflection raised by this and other episodes selected from the empirical material suggests that the ways students give meaning to (and participate in) school practices are conditioned by the ways that they appropriate forms of using language that are, characteristic of these practices, which involve knowledge, values, and specific strategies.

This appropriation involves what Geraldi (1995, p. 19) calls an "active, and responsive comprehension process in which the presence of another's speech triggers a sort of "inevitability of the search for meanings". In the interactions analyzed here, we consider that "the other person's speech" in relation to which students position themselves, manifests itself in the interlocutory dimension of the communication process: it is found in the texts of the school activities and in the utterances produced by the students. It is also in the discourse that permeates those utterances and which convey "models of students and teachers, of school and didactic books" (Fonseca, 2001, p. 342), and of reading and writing practices, constructed, observed, valued, or disdained during their life journeys, in and out of school. In our study, we verified that in this discursive interplay, marked by diversity, that youth and adult education students, guided by "the inevitable search for senses", try to appropriate school literacy practices.

We hope that the discussions presented in this study will help in the planning, development, and assessment of our pedagogic practices, to consider the sociocultural character of those practices, impregnated with the values of a culture that emphasizes written forms of relating to knowledge. We believe that the fine-tuning of this understanding allows us to better accept the learning processes experienced by students who, as sociocultural subjects, construct ways of dealing with language, which either approximate or distance themselves from the ways schools use it. Therefore, we have the challenge of not only identifying the values, knowledge, and strategies that shape the positions adopted by students but also to raise them for debate. We understand that this pedagogic standpoint is not only a strategy to help the learning processes; it is also a recognition of the contribution of this debate to the evaluation of school and non-school reading and writing practices and for the production of new practices in youth and adult education.

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