



## The constitution of teaching reading as an object of academic research in Brazil<sup>1</sup>

A constituição do ensino de leitura em objeto de pesquisas acadêmicas no Brasil

La constitución de la enseñanza de la lectura como objeto de investigación académica en Brasil

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### Abstract

In this article, results of research guided by the objective of understanding the interdiscursive processes that founded the constitution of reading as an object of scientific investigations are presented. Master's theses developed in graduate programs in Brazil in the 1980s of the 20th century were analyzed and the formation of themes, conceptual bases and argumentative strategies were characterized. The results show that the identification of a crisis in reading supported propositions on the necessary changes in reading education in basic school, for which academic investigations would contribute with the production of theoretical and methodological subsidies that could transform the pedagogical practices and guarantee the emancipatory teaching of critical readers.

**Keywords:** Reading. Scientific research. Portuguese language teaching.

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## Resumo

Neste artigo são apresentados resultados de pesquisa orientada pelo objetivo de compreender os processos interdiscursivos que fundamentaram a formação de temas, bases conceituais e estratégias argumentativas para a constituição do ensino da leitura na escola básica em objeto de investigações científicas. Foram analisadas dissertações de mestrado desenvolvidas na década de 80 do século XX, em programas de pós-graduação no país. Os resultados mostram que a identificação da existência de uma *crise da leitura* referenciou a proposição de mudanças necessárias na educação leitora no ensino básico, para o que as pesquisas contribuiriam com a produção de subsídios teórico-metodológicos que transformassem as práticas pedagógicas e garantissem a formação emancipatória de leitores críticos.

**Palavras-chave:** Leitura. Pesquisa. Ensino.

## Resumen

En este artículo se presentan resultados de investigaciones guiadas por el objetivo de comprender los procesos interdiscursivos que fundaron la constitución de la lectura como objeto de investigaciones científicas. Se analizaron las tesis de maestría desarrolladas en programas de posgrado en Brasil en la década de 1980 del siglo XX y se caracterizó la formación de temas, bases conceptuales y estrategias argumentativas. Los resultados muestran que la identificación de una crisis en la lectura fue la base para proponer cambios en la formación de lectores en la escuela básica, para los cuales las investigaciones académicas contribuirían con la producción de subsidios teóricos y metodológicos que podrían transformar las prácticas pedagógicas y garantizar la educación emancipadora de lectores críticos.

**Palabras clave:** Lectura. Investigación científica. Enseñanza de la lengua portuguesa.

## Introduction

This paper presents the results of research carried out with the objective of understanding how the teaching of reading became the object of academic investigation in Brazil in the final decades of the 20th century, a period of increased access to public basic schooling, when the military regime repositioned basic school to respond to the country's economic development projects, and of curricular reconfigurations, with their effects on teaching and learning and on teacher training (SILVA & ARELARO, 1987).

The public basic school is considered then as a representative space of the Brazilian social formation, both for receiving the socio-economic-cultural heterogeneity of the population that moved from the countryside towards the cities at that historical moment (BEISIEGEL, 2013; FREITAS, 2014), as well as for making possible the formation of increasingly larger population contingents for the critical apprehension of reality, in order to produce instruments of political struggle - among them, the linguistic ones - aimed at the transformation of society towards a more just and egalitarian social order (GERALDI, 1984; LUFT, 1985; SOARES, 1986).

At the historical moment under observation, public policies were also implemented to expand and develop research at the graduate level in the country. The first experiences in this level of education took place in the 1930s, but its regulation only became effective in 1965, with the Opinion 977/65<sup>2</sup>, approved by the Federal Education Council. In its first phase of expansion, in the 1970s, the Post-Graduation had as its main formative public the Brazilian universities' teachers themselves, and was organized around three main objectives: "1) train competent teachers to meet the quantitative expansion of Higher Education; 2) stimulate the development of scientific research through the appropriate preparation of researchers; and 3) ensure the effective training of technicians and intellectual workers to meet the needs of national development in all sectors" (BRASIL, 1965).

In this period, the training of teachers in graduate programs, especially at the master's level, became a condition for updating the university's teaching staff. Thus, the programs received the task of improving teaching and research in higher education institutions through the improvement of their faculty members.

According to Schapochnik (2007), this moment represented one of the three<sup>3</sup> "decisive moments" in the history of reading in Brazil, because, from then on, a process of specialization of research on the subject would have been established, contributing to this process, besides the development of graduate programs, also the creation of funding agencies, which allowed the expansion of individual and collective academic research on reading and also on its teaching. Still on this context, Silva (1983) considered that there was

a true renaissance of the studies related to the reading problems of the Brazilian people. It is interesting to note that this research trend goes beyond the world of pseudo-concreteness of social facts (among them, reading) through the critique of idealism and the other "-isms" that impregnated science in the previous decade and through action directed

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<sup>2</sup> This opinion contributed to establish, for the first time, the basic institutional format of Brazilian post-graduation courses: by making a distinction between the master's degree and the doctorate, it established a relation of continuity, that is, the master's degree would be a prerequisite for the doctorate.

<sup>3</sup> Schapochnik (2007) describes three moments that he considers decisive for the history of reading. The first moment comprises a set of texts published between the 1940s and 1950s in which representations and reading practices are presented. The second moment corresponds to the 1970s, when specialized journals aimed at the university community and the dissemination of academic knowledge emerged. Finally, the third and last moment goes back to the 1980s and is marked by the consolidation of graduate programs implemented in the 1970s, after the university reform.

at the formation of readers and improvement of reading. It is also interesting to note that currently the concern around the problem of reading involves not only educators and psychologists, but also philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, librarians, linguists and producing good knowledge in the area of reading through interdisciplinary optics. (SILVA, 1983, p. 80).

According to the author, the quantitative and qualitative growth of studies on reading at that time seemed to have been the result of a set of factors, among which the "maturation" of master's and doctoral courses, from new approaches to the analysis of research objects; the creation of more relevant lines of research and the fight against the neutrality of scientific research; the new definitions of reading that presented the act of reading as an instrument of liberation and social transformation; and the proposition of theories that sought to overcome the empirical data, considered as superficial, with the perspective of expanding the explanatory possibilities and understanding of the phenomenon of reading.

All these factors, according to Silva (1983), were important to promote the improvement in the quality of diffusion and circulation of research results on the subject. Also contributing to this process were conferences and seminars that opened spaces for debate and mobilized specialists from different fields of knowledge to discuss issues related to theoretical and practical approaches to reading and its teaching.

Thus, the Congresso de Leitura - COLE (Reading Congress) brought as a theme for debate the censorship imposed on reading by the dictatorial regime and the need to point out new possibilities for the development of reading practices and the formation of readers. In the closing conference of this first Congress, Gadotti (1979) pointed out that

In my view, it would be necessary for this Reading Congress to become a Popular Reading Congress, which would defend the interests of postponed readers. It is not enough to know how to read if the vehicles for reading are inaccessible, financially and culturally, to the mass of the population. Reading is a social need, a social good, and therefore should be guaranteed by the State [...]. (GADOTTI, 1979, p. 45).

The productivity and relevance of the debates, reflections, and production of research results about the teaching of reading in this period are also evident when we look at the publications in books that became references for the theoretical and methodological proposals and for the practices of reading teaching in the country. They were published in the period: *O Ato de Ler: fundamentos filosóficos e psicológicos da leitura (The Act of Reading: philosophical and psychological foundations of Reading)*, by Ezequiel Theodoro da Silva, first edition in 1981 (SILVA, 1981); *A crise da leitura – as alternativas do professor (The crisis in reading - the teacher's alternatives)*, organized by Regina Zilberman, a work that had its first edition in 1982 (ZILBERMAN, 1982); *A Importância do Ato de Ler – três artigos que se completam (The Importance of Reading - three articles that complement each Other)*, by Paulo Freire, with the first edition in 1982 (FREIRE, 1982); *Leitura e Realidade Brasileira (Reading and Brazilian Reality)*, by Ezequiel Theodoro da Silva, first edition in 1983 (SILVA, 1983); chapters from *O texto na sala de aula (The text in the classroom)*, organized by João Wanderley Geraldi, first published in 1984 (GERALDI, 1984); and *O Aprendizado da Leitura (The Learning of Reading)*, by Mary Kato, with first edition in 1985 (KATO, 1985). Besides book publications, an important event for the expansion of debates and studies about the teaching of reading was

the publication of the Revista *Leitura: Teoria e Prática (Reading: Theory and Practice)*, which had its zero number published in 1983 (SILVA, SILVA & OLIVEIRA, 2017).

Considering, therefore, the context of the expansion of research at the graduate level, of the expansion of access to public basic education, and of the struggles for social-political-economic transformations in the country, master's dissertations defended in public and private institutions between 1983 and 1989 were analyzed in order to find out how reading and its teaching became the object of academic research in the country, in that context.

## 1. Theoretical and methodological foundation

The production and analysis of data, in the present work, were developed according to the French discourse perspective, based on concepts proposed by Maingueneau (1997; 2005) about the processes of constitution of discourses. According to the author, discourses are constituted in interdiscursive relations, based on processes of reciprocal delimitation.

The analyst, from his position, establishes clippings in the *discursive field* that presents itself to him. The discursive field is a set of discourses that constitute a restricted part of the *discursive universe*, a finite but incommensurable set of discourses existing in a given historical moment. In an identifiable discursive field, the analyst cuts out the *discursive space* to which he will dedicate himself, formed by the discourses in the process of reciprocal delimitation whose constitution process aims to know.

The discourses that are delimited in the same discursive space keep genetic relationship among themselves, considering that the utterances are constituted as responses to utterances that preceded them (BAKHTIN, 1997). In the process of reciprocal delimitation that is thus established, the discourses differentiate themselves (and thus define their identities) based on semantic rules that establish what can and cannot be said, i.e., the legitimate statements in a given discourse. Denied or refused utterances according to their semantic rules are negatively attributed to the discourse positioned in the role of competitor or adversary, of which simulacra are constructed, i.e: *they translate* their enunciations according to the rules of the discourse in agent position, which shows the incomprehension that is established between what is enunciated in one discourse and in another - a phenomenon that Maingueneau (2005) calls *interincomprehension*.

The hypothesis that guided the analysis of the data in the present work is that, in the case of reading, because there are already academic discourses about its teaching since the final moments of the nineteenth century (MEDEIROS, 2019), the research developed in the 1980s did not position themselves contrary to what has been negatively characterized as traditional teaching in the discourses of renewal of education in the country (Pietri, 2003), but positioned themselves so that the school tradition, in this case, was not represented as an opponent in relation to which to polemicize, but as a memory that should be redefined, in function of the historical context that was constituted at that moment, and based on theoretical-methodological resources more recently produced in academic research.

Data analysis was guided by the hypothesis, therefore, that the teaching of reading was constituted as an object of research based on polemics (MAINGUENEAU, 2005) established by academic discourse on reading teaching in relation to school practices for the training of readers existing at the historical moment of development of the research observed. In this discursive process, the finding that the teaching of reading in school had been degraded would highlight the need for renewal of theoretical and methodological resources, which would then be produced by researchers in the academy and offered to public basic school teachers, so that, by transforming teaching practices, the *crisis in reading* that had been established in the country could be changed.

### 1.1. The constitution of the *corpus* of analysis

The material for analysis is composed of Master's dissertations that responded to the scope established for the research: the teaching of reading at the levels of elementary school II, the former gymnasium, and high school, the former collegial. The level referring to elementary school I, the former primary school, is not included, because the studies on this period of schooling are more strongly linked to literacy processes than to the development of reading competences.

Based on bibliographic surveys in repositories such as the library of theses and dissertations of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel); on the websites of the libraries of Institutes and Colleges of Brazilian Higher Education Institutions; and based on information obtained in the very bibliographic references of the dissertations that were gradually inserted in the set of documents that composed the material of analysis, it was established a set composed of twelve master's degree dissertations defended between the years 1983 and 1989 in public and private universities in the country:

D1 – *Contribuição ao Ensino de Leitura (Contribution to the Teaching of Reading)*. Denise Grein dos Santos. Master in Education, Federal University of Paraná (UFPR), 1983.

D2 – *A Escolarização do Leitor: a didática da destruição da leitura (The Schooling of the Reader: the didactic destruction of Reading)*. Lílian Lopes Martins da Silva. Master in Education. State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), 1984.

D3 – *Leitura e Formulação de Textos Didáticos: investigação dos efeitos de coesão na compreensão de leitura (Reading and Formulating Teaching Texts: investigating the effects of cohesion on reading comprehension)*. Iuta Lerche Vieira Rocha. Master in Education. Federal University of Ceará (UFC), 1985

D4 – *Leitura e Consciência: princípios para uma leitura escolar pedagógica (Reading and Consciousness: principles for a pedagogical school reading)*. José Lourival Ferrazza. Master in Education. University of São Paulo (USP), 1986.

D5 – *Texto Literário e Contexto Didático: os (des)caminhos na formação do leitor (Literary Text and Didactic Context: the embezzlement in the formation of the reader)*. Emília Amaral. Master's in Linguistic Theory. State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), 1986.

D6 – *Em busca de fatores determinantes da Leitura Crítica (In search of determinants of Critical Reading)*. Maria Guadalupe de Castro. Master in Humanities: Portuguese Language. Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), 1987.

D7 – *A Leitura Compreensiva (Comprehensive Reading)*. Zélia Maria José Fernandes. Master in Humanities: Portuguese Language. Pontifical Catholic University (PUC-SP), 1987.

D8 – *Leitura, Literatura e Escola: subsídios para uma reflexão sobre a formação do gosto (Reading, Literature and School: subsidies for a reflection on the formation of taste)*. Maria do Rosário Mortatti Magnani. State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), 1987.

D9 – *O Ensino de Leitura como reflexo de Teorias Linguísticas de Leitura: uma crítica (Teaching Reading as a reflection of Linguistic Theories of Reading: a critique)*. Sandra Maria Penteadó Ferreira Castro. M.A. in Linguistics. State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), 1988.

D10 – *Proposta para o Ensino de Leitura (Proposal for Teaching Reading)*. Sueli Sant'Anna. Master in Humanities: Portuguese Language. Pontifical Catholic University (PUC-SP), 1988.

D11 – *Ensino de Leitura no 1º grau: uma proposta sob o enfoque argumentativo (Teaching Reading in 1st grade: a proposal under the argumentative approach)*.

Cacilda Tavares. Master in Humanities: Portuguese Language. Pontifical Catholic University (PUC-SP), 1988.

D12 – *Formação do Leitor: um projeto pedagógico para a sala de aula (Reader Education: a pedagogical project for the classroom)*. José Luís Pieroni Rodrigues. Master in Education. Pontifical Catholic University (PUC-SP), 1989.

The historical period observed in the research, when the first master's level investigations on reading in the country were produced, was delimited considering the publications that inaugurate, in the early 1980s, the discourses of theoretical and methodological renewal for the training of readers and the promotion of reading in the country, until the final moments of this decade, when, with the political opening, the discourses for social and economic transformation began to compete with discourses of neoliberal character, which rearranged the semantic bases in which academic, pedagogical and curricular propositions were produced in Brazil (FREITAS, 2004).

## 2. Data Analysis

The data analysis allowed observing a mode of discursive operation common to the dissertations as to the processes of constitution of their research objects: in them, it is evident an organization in which the characterization of a reading crisis is started, based on which the working conditions and teaching practices in public basic education are thematic, to which the proposals of reading teaching produced by the authors of the research are then addressed. These three constitutive elements of the research analyzed will be observed below.

### 2.1. Identifying a *reading crisis*

A recurring element in the documents that make up the corpus of analysis is the assertion that in basic schooling a mismatch is being produced between the teaching of reading and socially valued reading practices, which would lead thousands of people to cultural marginalization. In the dissertations analyzed, a causal relationship is established between reading performance and school failure, and between the reader's difficulties and failure at school:

The observation that **student's school failure** is closely linked to their **performance in reading** has been pointed out by numerous contemporary researchers and academics. (D3, 1985)<sup>4</sup>

**Failure in school** is mediated, in large part, by **difficulties in reading**. Such difficulties, in turn, also pass through the type of text proposed as reading material. (D 3, 1985)

**Reading at school is the axis of the educational process. We saw its relationship with school failure.** Outside the school walls, in an increasingly literate society, an efficient linguistic performance by the citizen is relevant, because every cultural activity is somehow and at some point in time affected by the written text. (D12, 1989)

As a cause of school failure, the teaching of reading would be, as a result, a social and political problem. In this sense, the school would be responsible for not promoting reading

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<sup>4</sup> The highlights in the transcribed passages at this point are marked in bold to highlight elements that sustain the data analysis process. The highlights originally present in the transcribed passages are marked in italics.

activities in a satisfactory or sufficient manner, which would be an impediment to carrying out reading teaching practices that would allow school learning of its socially valued characteristics:

In this **context**, reading was **practically excluded** by its own dismantling. There was little or nothing left for this field of mother tongue teaching: **improvised work** with half a dozen texts on which half a dozen questions were asked in the name of "interpretation" and "grammatical knowledge". Thus the school has reduced reading, like the other components of mother tongue teaching, to what we would call a '**school**' knowledge of the language, a **school task**, a **bureaucratic knowledge**, **unrelated to life outside school**. (D12, 1989)

In the passage above, it is possible to observe the consideration of a previous moment in which the teaching of reading was performed satisfactorily, only to point to a decline in the quality of this teaching at the time when the study on the subject was being produced.

The responsibility for the quality of reading education, in this context, is not attributed to the teacher, but to the conditions of the teacher's work at the time, which would have deteriorated from a previous, better structured moment until the moment the research was produced:

However, while **I recognize** the great significance of 'intra-school mechanisms' in explaining problems of this nature, **I also know** that the teacher, the **figure who personifies these mechanisms, is more victim than guilty for this situation**, because one cannot ignore the *chain of alienations* to which he has been harshly subjected. (D2, 1984)

In the same way and for the same reasons, we all watched, in this period, a **process of devaluation of the teaching professionals** that had a 238.8% salary loss between 1964 and 1983. **Poorly paid, prevented from organizing as a category, for having their rights of assembly and struggle revoked and for being forced to run from school to school, crammed with classes**. Awarded with a 'modernization' of the curriculum and programs of their subjects, but prevented from studying and updating themselves, **these teachers cannot carry on their backs the burden of this general crisis**. (D2, 1984)

The school is observed as being in a process of degradation towards the precarious condition observed at the time of the research, and the term school is even attributed a negative semantic charge, using this word to qualify the badly done teaching. The negative qualification of the basic school, authoritarian, poor and decadent, is also evident in the questioning of its own pedagogical status:

If reading is the responsibility of the school, of this **authoritarian** and bureaucratically **instituted school**, in a situation of **penury** and **decay**, which can only respond to this responsibility in the form of a sketch, is it possible and desirable in it to teach reading? (D2, 1984)

Although new methodologies emerge and there is concern with the teaching of reading, **school action** is **flawed** and **demotivating**. (D1, 1983)



In the statements under analysis, it is possible to observe that the traditional teaching of reading is characterized positively, as a past before the decay that brought about the state in which the school would no longer provide reading learning, even if new methodological resources were offered. Thus, in the researches, school failure is attributed to the inadequate treatment that reading would receive by the school that was constituted at that historical moment, in which it would assume a utilitarian character:

All this dynamism of the reading process, however, often ends up being left out of school, where **reading** takes on **immediate** and **utilitarian** purposes, such as: reading to do interpretation exercises, to study content items, to acquire writing models, to like and get used to, to raise awareness and politicize. (D8, 1987)

For countless reasons, said and felt by many people, there is an **acute crisis** in the ability to read written texts. Despite being literate, many young people and adults **today** lack this basic skill. Added to the deficiencies also in verbal expression skills, we are faced with a **discouraging situation** as far as basic communicative skills are concerned. (D12, 1989)

The insufficient academic training with which the students would leave school was noted, and in the works observed there were references to reading activities carried out without defined objectives, marked by the absence of criteria in the execution of the activities. Recognizing the existence of a crisis in learning and in the development of activities to teach reading in school, this institution is responsible for overcoming the situation then in force, which would require cleaning up the teaching practiced:

**The school needs to adopt measures to remedy the 'crisis' in teaching** that has also affected the field of reading, which has been detected through the poor performance of the student-reader (D7, 1987).

The offer of renewed theoretical and methodological subsidies could contribute to improve classroom practices. Such resources would come to the aid of teachers to overcome the crisis in reading that was then in force. When proposals for pedagogical work are presented, reading is considered so as to emphasize its importance for the personal development of the student-reader, of his or her taste and habit of reading, enabling everything from the acquisition of knowledge to the production of instruments for the transformation of society. Reading is also considered a fundamental resource for school education, since proficient reading practices favor learning in all subjects of the curriculum.

Thus, it is defended the need for the interest in reading to be cultivated in the activities carried out at school, this could be achieved by developing the habit of reading, which is considered a guarantee for access to information, knowledge, and greater participation in modern society:

This is the reason for the concern in analyzing reading in its comprehensiveness: as a **factor for personal and professional development**, how to **stimulate interest** and, consequently, **instill the habit of reading**. It is important to check the pedagogical aspect, the methodology used in school and its efficiency, the teacher's performance in the intellectual life of the individual. (D1, 1983)

Reading is an **essential factor in the educational process**. It is the best procedure the student uses to **penetrate** the immense field of possibilities that **science and culture** have to offer. (D11, 1988)

Reading is considered a means to the development of other activities. It is considered an essential activity because its exercise enables the development of other skills, especially those related to written communication.

Considering it as an instrument of insertion in the field of science and culture, reading would be understood as a form of access to knowledge, pointing to the need to train readers from the beginning of schooling. This training would take place through interaction with the text, and the main agent would be the basic education teacher.

## 2.2. The interlocution with the basic school teacher

According to the dissertations analyzed, the references to the elementary school teachers position them as one of the main projected recipients of the pedagogical proposals produced by the researchers, even though the first recipient of the academic research may be other researchers who are interested in the theme. The division of responsibilities seems to be a strategy for the enunciator to have the adhesion of his projected reader to the pedagogical proposals that he will present with the aim of contributing to changes in teaching practices. In this sense, sometimes the figure of the teacher and the figure of the researcher are associated in the same subject, as can be seen in the following passage:

Dear 1st grade Portuguese Language Teacher, my colleague at work. I am convinced that reading is not an activity like any other, much less at school. Few activities like this have so much meaning, so much to do with life and people. **This is what moved me to intersperse the teacher's apron with research data.** It was always this consideration: that reading as one of the axes of the school process can both be an essential tool in the learning of other knowledge and can be considered for the effect it has on the cognitive development of students and, therefore, on their lives. (D12, 1989)

In this passage, the discursive representation of the teacher is constructed in two different moments. In the first moment, when the researcher uses the expression dear teacher to address his reader, a differentiation is made between the position occupied by the enunciator in the research field, and the position of the one to whom he is addressing, the basic school teacher, and then the identification between one enunciator and another in the same speaker<sup>5</sup> is presented, so that the research on reading would contribute to his teaching practice.

The researcher then addresses his pedagogical proposal to the teacher, his colleague, considered to be the interlocutor of the research. In these moments, he reaffirms the need to develop specific reading practices for reader training. This goal is made explicit in the following passage, in which the attempt to solve problems from inside the classroom is evident:

I must reiterate that this work does not aim at the search for systematic or governmental global solutions, but **at helping teachers in their**

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<sup>5</sup> At this point, it is made reference to the polyphonic theory proposed by Ducrot (1987) according to which the one who is responsible for the sayings, the speaker, enunciatively organizes the voices attributed to certain enunciators, who express different points of view.

**planning in the classroom**, in their concrete work in relation to the activity of reading, **which implementation depends only on their pedagogical and political choices** [...]. (D4, 1986)

In this way, the search for the reconstruction of a teaching of reading that would recover the quality that had traditionally characterized this teaching is based on the offer of theoretical and methodological subsidies that would promote pedagogical transformations from the classroom, from the teachers' work, despite the adverse conditions for the development of this work:

It is necessary, therefore, to overcome the artificiality that permeates the teaching of reading, enabling true reasoning and reflection, allowing critical analysis and action, **aiming to establish a new direction for classroom teaching. It is suggested, for this, a more participant relationship between teacher and student**, through the exchange of experience and a constant dialogue between reader/text/author. (D11, 1988)

In the passage above, it is observed the polemical relationship established between the academic discourse and the representation that is built in it of school practice in the teaching of reading: this practice would be characterized by artificiality, which would prevent the relationship with the truth, the development of reasoning and reflection, and the critical training of readers aimed at social action. The work in the classroom would depend on sufficient training for teachers, so that they could meet the needs they verified with the students, which means, in this case, positioning themselves in agreement with what is positively represented in the academic discourse about what is reading and its teaching.

In order for the projected reader to position himself in relation to which group he intends to belong - of the teachers committed or not committed to the quality of the teaching work -, the image of the teacher is then built by opposing the negative characteristics to the positive ones, discriminating different ways of receiving the proposals of pedagogical renovation offered in the researches:

If there is **a minority** of Portuguese Language teachers **who try to change** teaching procedures, there are, on the other hand, those who are **complacent** with the situation; others who are **dissatisfied**, sometimes **afraid of the changes** that are urgent and necessary. The training they received was based on concepts that need to be reformulated in order to achieve the real goals of teaching. **And in reality**, we can conclude that **most are unaware of new procedures for teaching reading**, often because they are unable to improve themselves due to lack of conditions. (D10, 1988)

The negative representation is countered by another that projects the need for teachers to have training that matches in quality the degree of responsibility they would have in their work of educating readers:

**Teachers occupy a prestigious place in the formation of the student and in the pedagogical task.** They are the ones who, with their individual characteristics, encourage, motivate, arouse, interest, the spirit of research and mark the reading classes. Therefore, we need

**teachers who are capable, creative, well-trained, and concerned with their work. In a word, they are directly responsible for the success of the teaching of reading.** (D1, 1983)

Between the negative and the positive characterizations, it is proposed the need for changes in classroom practices, and, therefore, in the training of the teachers themselves, who would be the main agents responsible for these changes. The critical formation of the reader would go through the critical formation of the teachers themselves, which would enable them to critically take their own practices:

It seems to me that **the coherent way out for the teacher may be to seek a shared "praxis" that offers security and allows a critical interference. It is up to the educator to break away from the established, to propose the search and to aim for progress,** beyond the dichotomy between quantity or quality. This requires problematizing the known, transforming it into a challenge that promotes mobility. (D8, 1987)

The reference to the teacher is made, therefore, not only when pointing out the need for continued education, but also when attributing to him/her the responsibility for going beyond the common, daily ways of working in the classroom, seeking new teaching methods, new possibilities for teaching reading.

It is considered the teacher's responsibility, then, to prepare himself/herself to develop the work with reading in the classroom, in order to promote transformations, given that it would be up to the educator to break with the established. The reference to the teacher goes through, therefore, both by the pedagogical aspect, by the situations related to the teaching of reading in the classroom, and by the political aspect, regarding the professional organization around better working conditions, and also by the relations established with the educational legislation and the official documents of curriculum reference:

One consequence of the isolation that has characterized the various instances of the Brazilian school system is that the **supposed interlocutor of a Proposal<sup>6</sup> of this kind, the high school teacher,** ends up becoming a **simple receiver**, or perhaps not even that, since his levels of expectation, his working conditions, his diversity of training and clientele, are apparently disregarded in the process of developing guidelines that, paradoxically, should guide his professional conduct. (D5, 1986)

The goal seems to be to ensure that elementary school teachers have working conditions that guarantee the possibility of a critical appropriation of the pedagogical guidelines that would be assigned to them in their initial and continuing training. In this sense, even if the adverse conditions to which teachers are being subjected in their work were considered, these conditions could be transformed as long as changes in pedagogical practices are made by teachers in their academic, social, and political performance. The polemical relations that are established in the discourse under analysis are constituted, therefore, based on the opposition between scientific academic proposals for the teaching of reading, with the criticality resources that they would

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<sup>6</sup> It is about the Curricular Proposal of Portuguese Language and Writing Techniques for high school (São Paulo, 1978).

offer, and the pedagogical practices that were being carried out in basic school, characterized as outdated, inefficient and lacking quality.

The researchers then propose to produce and offer teaching resources based on renewed theoretical and methodological bases that could help in the solution of problems encountered in the school context. In this way, it would be possible to take the knowledge produced in the academic context to a wider society, since this could contribute to recovering the quality in the teaching of reading and to grounding pedagogical proposals that would help transform the school reality.

### **2.3. Proposals to renew the teaching of reading in elementary school**

The formalization and presentation of proposals for the teaching of reading in elementary school are based on theoretical and methodological references qualified as innovative, renewed, and more appropriate to support the process of change that was deemed necessary in teaching practices, having as a common point the goal of forming critical readers. In general, the dissertations analyzed point to the use of linguistic theories as the theoretical basis of the research conducted, as can be seen in the following passage:

This work was born out of a concern to study reading in both its theoretical and practical aspects. More specifically, we are concerned with studying how the teaching of reading reflects, and with what consequences, the theoretical currents of reading developed by linguistics. (D9, 1988)

The knowledge produced by linguistic studies enabled the constitution of new perspectives in the development of research on the teaching of reading. In the dissertations analyzed, contributions from linguistics and its aspects, such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, enunciation theory or discourse analysis, were used to address the themes and research objects and to substantiate proposals for the teaching and learning of reading in elementary school. The theoretical references produced by linguistic studies increased the understanding of grammatical elements beyond the phonological and morphosyntactic aspects, which made it possible to understand the text as a unit of meaning.

The proposal of alternatives was then carried out with the movement of the researcher in his work of appropriation of theoretical subsidies, which, agencied, founded the proposition of reading practices considered satisfactory for the constitution of a truly democratic and transforming teaching.

This is what can be observed in one of the dissertations whose objective is to elaborate a proposal for the teaching of reading to 5th to 8th grade students (currently 6th to 9th grade), "aiming at the formation of critical and mature readers". The work in the classroom would involve more directly the goal of

**Formalize a proposal for the teaching of reading**, aiming at the formation of a critical and mature reader who must unveil the text, associate ideas, present his / her critical position before the ideas conveyed by it, dialogue with teacher, colleagues, text and author, recreate the text through the possibility of several readings, produce new texts. (D 10, 1988)

Presenting his/her proposal, the researcher justifies the theoretical option chosen based on the fact that, with its application, it would be possible that the teaching of reading could

more easily achieve the purpose of forming mature and critical readers, in a continuous and gradual process that would need to be started from the first grades of primary school, considering at each stage of schooling the level of understanding of the student-readers.

The work of reading could be conceived as developing in two distinct phases: one of *comprehension* and the other of *interpretation*. To prepare the teaching proposal, the students' level of schooling and the gradual evolution of the difficulties presented by them during the activities would have been considered. A similar objective is observed in another of the works analyzed, in which the purpose of the research is presented:

**Develop a proposal for teaching reading**, in which the study of the text enables the formation of this reader, who should not only seek the meaning intended by the author, reacting, questioning, in short, appreciating with criticality, positioning him/herself before the ideas conveyed by the text, but also consider the written message as the possibility for reflection and recreation, leading to the production of new readings, revealing the liberating character of the act of reading, in which the reader becomes aware that it is important to understand and associate the new knowledge acquired through the text with his/her world knowledge, expanding it, as well as assuming, before the text, a critical attitude. (D11, 1988)

Understanding that the teaching of reading is an essential factor of the educational process, it is defended, in the research in question, the importance of teaching reading as a way to develop the ability to relate a text read to others. It is observed that the teaching of reading is considered to have different functions, either to enable the study of the text, or to expand the reading comprehension that develops through reflection and recreation, having as its fundamental objective to enable the student to assume a critical attitude towards the text read.

The renewed pedagogical project that would guide reading education presupposed the school context as the main factor for the development of reading activities, insofar as acting on it would make it possible to expand the inclusion in the school of the different social practices in which the act of reading is materialized. Such renewed practices would require the revision of the current conceptions of language and teaching, according to which language would be understood as an instrument of communication, reducing didactic activities to the objective of training students to use this instrument.

The conceptions around reading would change, therefore, to actually consider the importance of the act of reading in the lives of students, and to develop a teaching methodology towards *reading as a practice of awareness* for the *formation of critical reader*.

The passage below presents a proposal for the teaching of reading that has as its main objective to confer *a function* and *a systematization to the activity of school reading*, considering that the teaching of reading would be complicated by the lack of orientation for the reading practice in school. Reader training activities are being carried out without criteria, without goals, which would cause insufficient intellectual and social formation of those who graduate from basic schooling:

**We propose, for school reading, as an alternative** to those two postures, **a dialogical and conscientizing educator-student participation based on Paulo Freire's pedagogical principles**. We can say that this work is an attempt to become a link between certain pedagogical, psychological and linguistic theories and proposals - or

aspects of them - and their application to the concrete, daily work of the teacher, regarding the activity of reading. (D4, 1986)

Considering these elements, the teaching of reading should be oriented towards a practice that would offer subsidies to student-readers so as to enable them to understand the reality in which they live. The starting point for the elaboration of the proposal, according to the researcher, was the search for a bibliography to make the students aware of the Brazilian reality, a set of texts to be used in the activities to be developed in the classroom. In order to gather this bibliography, the researcher turned to several intellectuals, asking them to indicate about fifty works whose reading could make the students aware of the country's reality<sup>7</sup>.

Using the basic principles of Paulo Freire's pedagogy, the dissertation argues that the relationship between educators and students should be established in such a way that both can appropriate the knowledge produced in the process of teaching and learning. In this way, the awareness of reality and the perspective of acting on this reality would be guaranteed. The suggestions provided by the work are guided by the option of making the students active participants in the educational process, which would be done based on the critical dialogue established in the pedagogical relationship. In this sense, the moments of decision would be made with the participation of all, with the objective that the students could appropriate knowledge in a critical way, and that they would have as a basic principle to question and criticize knowledge and reality.

The teaching methodology that supports the didactic proposal in this paper is guided by the premise that "the learner, along with the educator, must be the subject of the educational process and the reading activity must be a problematizing activity, involving the social reality of the students" (D4, 1986). For the development of this proposal, some necessary steps for the reading activity are suggested, and these considerations are directed specifically to the teacher:

- Prepare him/herself to use the text, starting from the reading, the identification of the main ideas, determining the objectives of the reading, planning activities that complement the reading;
- Prepare the student for the activity, exposing the objectives and methods of the work, carry out and evaluate the activity. (D4, 1986)

It is evident in the above passage the orientation that the work in the classroom should be carried out in such a way that the objectives and the organization of the activities to be performed are always explicit. This explicit character would be the methodological counterpart of the perspective according to which reading is considered a pedagogical activity that has an eminently social purpose, being politically transformative.

In a similar direction, one of the dissertations analyzed aims at investigating which "factors contribute to the occurrence of critical reading" (D6, 1987). In the research, real classroom situations are observed in order to "enable the capture of the particular process of verbal interaction through critical reading" (D6, 1987). The aim, from what is observed in the investigated context, would be to "provide subsidies for Linguistic research and for the teaching of reading".

The research is presented, therefore, with the purpose of contributing both to the researches that are developed in the academic context and that have Linguistics as their focus, so as to investigate the relations between theoretical currents and the teaching of reading that is developed in school, and to classroom practice in basic school. The goal of the research points

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<sup>7</sup> In this way, an extensive bibliography is suggested in the dissertation, with works from different areas of knowledge aimed at understanding the Brazilian reality. Among the authors who made indications for the referred bibliography are professors Florestan Fernandes, João Cruz da Costa, Alfredo Bosi, Antônio Cândido and the jurist Dalmo de Abreu Dallari.

in two directions, the academic and the pedagogical, which are interrelated because they are considered from a common base for their development: the teaching context. To achieve this goal, the theoretical approach is based on the notion of verbal interaction associated with the need to form critical readers.

The results achieved with this research are presented as the articulation between individual characteristics and the social-historical positions that regulate these characteristics, because it is considered that, when proposing a teaching of reading for the formation of critical readers, it is necessary to take into account the reflections of this articulation in linguistic use:

**The results of this research** showed that some individual characteristics and the socio-historical position of each reader are reflected in the linguistic, through the different degrees of the dialectical deepening of meaning relations. (D6, 1987)

The results we reached in this research showed that, in fact, there is an articulation of the socio-historical factor and individual factors that lead to critical reading, since criticism itself manifests itself within a coherent whole. (D6, 1987)

Critical reading is presented by the researcher as a process that develops over the dialectical tension that is established at the moment of reading, because, for comprehension to happen, reading should be based on the confrontation between the meanings given to the text by the author and the meanings captured by the reader.

Critical reading is intended as a skill that depends on the interaction between the individual and the social, that is: to be able to read, it is necessary to exercise the reader's ability to give relevance to certain factors of meaning of the text according to the situation in which the reading takes place.

Therefore, it is assumed that the interrelation between situational context and language uses opens paths to various possibilities of meaning and sense production, and that these possibilities of production, in reading situations, are not restricted only to aspects related to the text and the reader, because they would be related mainly to the socio-historical and ideological position in which the act of reading is performed. Thus, the development of critical reading would be related to the expansion of the level of awareness that would be developed by subjects when working with aspects associated with the thought-language relationship and the language-society relationship.

It is recurrent, thus, in the dissertations that compose the corpus of analysis, the methodological orientation of reading education directed to the production and transformation of the social context in which the subjects of the pedagogical relationship interact. The development of social conditions would be sustained in the formation of critical readers, aware of their cultural, political and economic conditions. The quality of reading would be associated, then, with the possibilities of social action that would guarantee the reader, in opposition to the instrumentality and technicality that was conferred to this skill in the conceptions and proposals for schooling carried out in the context of the military regime.

## **Final considerations**

From a discursive perspective, the analysis of the data evidenced in the documents that compose the *corpus* of the research a recurrent mode of organization with regard to the work of constituting the teaching of reading as an object of academic investigations: a process in which, upon detecting the existence of a crisis, its causes and effects are observed in the school



context, and then subsidies are sought in academic productions in order to propose solutions to the problems encountered. The tradition is represented as a previous period in which reading education was more satisfactorily carried out, and the social practice of reading was more fully developed in the country.

The discussions around reading in basic schooling, as well as the formulation of proposals to change these conditions, are interrelated with the ways in which the function of teaching reading in the school context is perceived, emphasizing its importance for life in society, both in terms of training students in their skills as readers, and in terms of the need for reading practices to contribute to forming critical citizens.

From the results of the discussions around the problems found in the classroom practices, other possibilities were proposed to carry out the work of reader education in basic schooling. The proposal of alternatives was then carried out with the movement of the researcher in his work of appropriation of theoretical subsidies, which, brought together, were the basis for the proposition of reading practices considered satisfactory for the constitution of a truly democratic and transforming education.

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