

# Nine-year elementary school in Brazil: legal and pedagogical actions in official documents<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Social literacy is a concept that has been widely addressed in studies related to reading and writing. The need for 'students' literacy in native languages that exceeds standard school curricula is a major issue for literacy discourses in Brazil (SOARES, 2004, 2010a; TERZI, 1995; KLEIMAN, 1995; CERUTTI-RIZZATTI, 2009, 2012). Thus, this study attempts to facilitate a discussion of the politics related to increasing the number of elementary school years to nine, and verify the implications of literacy education in this new educational scenario. The theory and methodology of this study are based on Social Literacy New Studies (STREET, 1984, 2010; HEATH, 1983; BARTON; HAMILTON, 2000) and propose an analysis of documented data concerning the introduction of the nine-year elementary school. The data of the results reveal that the initiative to increase Brazilian students' education is important, but beyond increased schooling, it does not establish a clear strategy that schools should implement at this grade level. The documents describe treating literacy as a social practice, but do not specify that literacy is a part of the broader social literacy. Therefore, the schools need to identify the relationship between phonemic-graphemes and graphemes-phonemic in literacy (CERUTTI-RIZZATTI, 2009) to create an effective strategy for the social practice of writing. Further, the documents reveal our students' insufficient knowledge about the culture of writing.

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## Keywords

Literacy – Educational Politics – Nine-year Elementary School.

# **Letramento no ensino fundamental de nove anos no Brasil: ações legais e pedagógicas previstas nos documentos oficiais<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Resumo**

*Letramento é um conceito que vem sendo amplamente abordado em estudos relacionados à leitura e à escrita. A necessidade de o letramento escolar propiciar aos sujeitos um domínio da língua materna que se estenda para além da própria escola é uma das principais questões presentes nas discussões realizadas em torno do tema no Brasil (SOARES, 2004, 2010a; TERZI, 1995; KLEIMAN, 1995; CERUTTI-RIZZATTI, 2009, 2012). O objetivo deste trabalho é possibilitar uma discussão a respeito da política de ampliação do ensino fundamental de nove anos e verificar as ações educacionais previstas em termos de leitura e escrita dentro desse novo cenário educacional. Assim, quanto aos aspectos teóricos e metodológicos, o trabalho pauta-se nos novos estudos do letramento (STREET, 1984, 2010; HEATH, 1983; BARTON; HAMILTON, 2000) e propõe uma análise de dados documentais a respeito da implantação do ensino fundamental de nove anos. Em termos de resultados, os dados evidenciam que a iniciativa de aumentar o tempo de escolaridade do aluno brasileiro é importante, mas que, infelizmente, ainda não se estabeleceu um caminho claro do que a escola deve fazer nesse ano a mais de escolaridade. Os documentos mencionam um trabalho efetivo com o letramento como prática social, mas não deixam claro que a alfabetização é uma parte mais ampla do processo de letramento e que a escola precisa abordar as relações fonêmico-grafêmica e grafêmico-fonêmica na alfabetização (CERUTTI-RIZZATTI, 2009) para garantir um efetivo trabalho do uso social da escrita. Além disso, evidencia-se nos documentos o pouco conhecimento a respeito da cultura escrita de nossos alunos.*

**I-** Este trabalho é fruto de discussões iniciadas na disciplina Fala-em-interação social e letramento, ministrada no segundo semestre de 2011 no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Estadual de Maringá. Somos imensamente gratos ao programa por nos possibilitar essa profícua interlocução e esse espaço enunciativo na (re)construção do texto. Agradecemos também aos pareceristas anônimos da revista as sugestões que possibilitaram uma reorganização do artigo. As inconsistências que permanecem são de nossa inteira responsabilidade.

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## **Palavras-chave**

*Letramento – Política educacional – Ensino fundamental de nove anos.*

In 2006, the federal government of Brazil approved Law 11,274 (BRAZIL, 2006a), which increased the duration of elementary education in the country from eight to nine years. This law also consolidated the proposal to standardize teaching levels and make them compulsorily offered by the government, as realized by the *Law of Basic Tenets and Guidelines of National Education* (LDB), Law 9,394 (BRAZIL, 1996) and *National Education Plan* (PNE), Law 10,172 (BRAZIL, 2001a). This measure extended the duration of schooling to increase literacy, enhance pedagogical culture in elementary schools, and prevent negative results in national and regional educational evaluations. The implementation of this *nine-year elementary school* (hereafter 9yES) introduced a new alternative with the objective of improving quality in education.

It is noteworthy that before this plan was established, others were implemented with the same goal. Among them, it is important to highlight the following: automatic promotion that quickened students' learning when the possibility of retention or reprobation after each grade was eliminated; the flux correction programs, which focused on learning acceleration of reprobated groups (NEVES, 1994); and the *Basic Education Cycle* (CBA), which proposed a new understanding of literacy (GORNI, 1999; PERONI, 2003; KRAMER, 2006b). In 2001, the Cardoso administration implemented the *Programa Bolsa-Escola*, a government-funded educational program, which realized the first lady's vision of guaranteeing children's access to and permanence in school by linking attendance to family income (BRAZIL, 2001b).

In 2004, the Lula administration reconfigured the *Programa Bolsa-Escola* into the *Bolsa Família* (Family Allowance or Funding) (BRAZIL, 2004a), and linked the program with the *Food Access National Program* (PNAA), which focused on preventing hunger and promoting nutritional and food security (Brazil, 2003). Currently, this program is supported by the Rouseff administration.

However, discussions, analyses, and debates on the pitfalls of such programs are prevalent in Brazilian political, economical, and pedagogical realms. According to Saviani (2006, 2008), Arelalo (2005), and Kramer (2006a, 2006b), all programs (such as the *Bolsa Família*, Flux Correction, and Basic Education Cycle) may have merits and drawbacks, which implies that educational politics can influence public administration and pedagogical actions. From this perspective, this study raises the following questions: 1) how do educational policies challenge the "not" culture (Street, 2010, p. 44), which leads educational agents or programs to view such policies as *not social literacy*? And 2) how do educational agents or programs propose working with written language in school?

To address these questions, we must first examine the problem of children's contact with social literacy when they enter school through official documents (BRAZIL, 2004b, 1996, 2001a, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2009; PARANÁ, 2001) and obtain data about the legal and pedagogical basis of increasing elementary schooling to nine years. The theoretical instruments adopted for this proposal (Kleiman, 1995; TERZI, 1995; ROJO, 1995; STREET, 1995, 2001; TFOUNI, 2000; SOARES, 2004; CERUTTI-RIZZATTI, 2009, 2012; JUNG, 2007) present the social literacy practice and recognize that, in addition to literacy, there are several ways of cultural contact with written text.

Therefore, in this study, we discuss the repercussions of elementary schooling's extension and verify this program's educational on literacy. In addition, we will analyze 9yES' implementation to determine if it is being conducted under the best conditions, especially in regard to literacy in this new educational context.

## **Theoretical basis of social literacy**

In Brazil, research and academic discussions have focused on social literacy since the mid-1980s. Although Brazilian Studies

assign “social literacy meanings not always concordant, a point have in common: they are contextualized within the field of teaching of written language” (SOARES, 2010a, p. 60). The concept of social literacy originated in Brazil in correlation with the concept of literacy, and although the two work in conjunction in most jobs, it is currently used to deny the relationship between literacy and social literacy. The anthropological concept that bases the new Social Literacy Studies is not the who came to Brazil and are nascent work carried out here within this (SOARES; MARINHO, 2010). Considering our educational reality, we have always focused on the writing practice.

Since the mid-1980s, research regarding social literacy has been conducted in Brazil in the fields of applied linguistics and education, as seen in studies by Mary Kato, Angela Kleiman, Leda Verdiani Tfouni, and Magda Soares. These researchers (KLEIMAN, 1995; TFOUNI, 2000; Soares, 2004) found that, although educated, children and adults do not functionally use their reading and writing knowledge. Around 1990, discussions on the function of orality resumed and recognized the interdependence between orality and social literacy.

According to Marinho (2010, p. 80), “the orality is the writing practices enabling context.” The term *social literacy* represents the functions of writing modes in social processes and communication (TFOUNI, 2000), which denotes the relationship that individuals and communities establish through writing in social interactions (KLEIMAN, 1995; ROJO, 1995; TFOUNI, 2000; JUNG, 2007). This relationship is conditioned by four aspects: 1) the broad or restricted use of writing in diverse social situations, 2) the knowledge that they have about these situations, 3) the power relationships that involve the social use of writing, and 4) the value that the community attaches to this mode of language.

Within this conception, social literacy is defined as a social phenomenon influenced by the local social, economical, cultural,

political, and educational conditions, resulting in different social literacy patterns within each community (STREET, 2010; MARINHO, 2010). Thus, social literacy includes a social dimension based on social and cultural conventions that dominates writing in a particular community. Furthermore, it includes an individual dimension, which encompasses the life experiences of individuals within each community.

Understanding social literacy through this assumption implies that each individual or social group (independent of their literacy level) possesses some knowledge about writing and its social practices. For example, people generally know the function of newspapers, magazines, checks, notes, letters, and so on even without knowing how to read and write (TERZI, 1995). According to Marinho (2010), they can participate in *social literacy* to a certain extent:

[...] these events are guided by principles, rules and senses that allow you to not only understand the logic of a social *literacy event* but also the logic and meanings of social *literacy practices*. (p. 83)

Marinho (2010) also mentions the concept of social literacy with regard to establishing an interface with orality, since the concept of a social literacy event allows one to examine the relationships and meanings that both children and adults establish through written texts:

There are several studies that point to this interdependence between the practices of writing and orality, including Heath, to propose that the social literacy event allows you to examine the forms and functions of literate and oral traditions and coexisting relations between spoken and written language. For this author, the speech events can repeat, enhance, enlarge, adjust or contradict what is written. Sometimes the written material is not to be read but is

necessary to have. Therefore, it is essential that the subjects of the interaction can be identified when writing takes precedence over speech. (p. 81)

However, the main objective when describing social literacy events is to understand social literacy practices and recognize patterns in such events, since these patterns carry meanings for participants (STREET, 2010).

Usually, social literacy events are activities including written texts that are either read or discussed. They are communicative events mediated by written texts. In addition, social literacy practices relate to general *cultural modes* that people bring to a social literacy event through reading and writing. We believe that social literacy events and practices occur in different social contexts including schools and various *social literacy branches* (KLEIMAN, 1995). This enables individuals to become involved in different social literacy events and practices. Soares (2004) mentions certain social contexts in everyday life in which writing and speaking occurs: work, school, daily routine, family, bureaucratic life, and intellectual activities.

In school, the focus on oral speech is secondary since the emphasis of teaching is placed on writing. The majority of teachers, ranging from kindergarten to first grade, the first year of literacy, are concerned about teaching *tools* such as writing names, working with labels, and copying items from the board.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, people mistakenly consider or underestimate oral speech <sup>2</sup> and its importance for the constitution of social literacy. This is why speech and listening skills lose their importance in daily school activities and remain unexplored by teachers. According to Terzi (1995), teachers consider oral activities

**1-** For a more detailed reading, please refer to the studies by Andrade (2011) and Albuquerque (2007).

**2-** Written language is a verbalization of a planned text, which is why it should be taught. On the other hand, spoken language is spontaneous and, therefore, free. For more details, I suggest reading Rojo (1995 - refer to the bibliography).

to be a bridge for written activities, while they simultaneously impose writing on speech.

This view was institutionalized and became the conventional teaching practice. Good oral language development may even be considered as a necessity to attain literacy, complying with the belief that the *right*<sup>3</sup> pronunciation of words enables literacy and good social performance. This relationship is in accordance with the independent model of social literacy recognized by Street (1995), in which writing is conceived as neutral and autonomous, regardless of socio-cultural context.

According to Corrêa (2004), writing has a greater value than spoken language in society because it is seen as “fixable in space, flexible in relation to the object that it encompasses, and invariable in time” (p. 12). Usually, written text is defined as unchangeable and unquestionable. However, Rojo (1995) stated that this was a misconception:

[...] if speech comes before or has a priority above writing, it is not in the sense that oral speech is the means and web through which all communication of human beings is produced: the speech itself, the individual, listeners, the individual's world, the oral speech in writing (intellectual speech) and, finally, an object of/in the world, that is, writing itself in its physicality. (p. 87)

A historical and literary example that we can present to support this discussion can be found in an excerpt from *Don Quixote*. A dialogue between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza demonstrates the excellence of being literate (Don Quixote) as well as the effective use of oral speech (Sancho Panza). A significant differentiation occurred within the hierarchy that existed between the two men. Kleiman (1995) also mentions the phenomenon of literacy:

**3-** The one imposed by writing the standard form.

The phenomenon of literacy, then, goes beyond the world of writing as defined by the institutions that are in charge of formally introducing individuals to the written world. One can affirm that school, the most important of the literacy agencies, is not worried about literacy as a social practice, but just with one of the aspects of literacy: the teaching of writing. (p. 20)

Kleiman (1995) indicates that the oral component is a literacy constituent since individuals have direct contact with literate society and incorporate traces of the written language into their oral speech:

[...] oral speech is the object of analysis for many studies on literacy [...] in certain social classes, children are literate in the sense of having oral strategies even before being literate. (p. 18)

This becomes clear when observing practices and conversations of illiterate children and adults as they combine their speech with words and actions that are characteristics of written language. According to Kleiman (1995):

[...] their oral speech begins to have the characteristics of literate oral speech since it is close to the mother tongue during daily routines in which oral practices are acquired (p. 18).

Rojo (1995) also shows, throughout her research, that oral capacity is essential to literacy constitution during childhood. According to Rojo (1995), oral capacity is the foundation of literacy since it is through contact (via oral speech) that a child creates his/her relationship with writing. Rojo (1995) states:

[...] It is the child's mode of participation in oral speech and reading and writing practices, depending on the family degree of literacy and, moreover, on the

school and/or pre-school that the child attends. This allows the child to build up a relationship with writing as a discursive practice as well as an object. (p. 70)

One of Rojo's major contributions (1995) toward the initial years of elementary education includes research on learning fairy tales through language games. Since her research, it has been empirically proven that, through such games, children increase their knowledge and literate discursivity, which includes naming, recognition, and anticipation.

These studies regarding social literacy show that their practical impact has been gradual. According to Soares (2010a):

Our view on social literacy has been predominantly an assessment; [...] we have evaluated a lot, and researched little or nothing about the causes and circumstances that might explain the low results or failure of our children in reading and the low levels of social literacy. (p. 62–63)

In the future, to contribute toward the formulation of educational policies, more investigations related to reading and writing should be conducted from an anthropological perspective that focuses on the familiarity, value, or legitimacy of written texts. This would enable a better understanding of students' needs and facilitate the recognition of orality's central role in the acquisition of writing.

In the following sections, we present an analysis of the legal basis and pedagogical action for 9yES introduction in Brazil.

### **Legal basis of 9yES introduction in Brazil**

Since 1990, six-year-olds have been allowed in Brazil's elementary schools. According to the *Law of Basic Tenets and Guidelines of National Education* (LDB), Law 9394/96,

[...] each state, city, and the union must enroll all children seven years of age onward and, voluntarily, from six years of age onward, in elementary school. (BRAZIL, Art. 87, § 3º, 1996, p. 43)

In addition, LDB/96 (BRAZIL, 1996) also states that seven-year-olds can be enrolled in the first grade of eight-year elementary schools. In order to justify this allowance, their enrollment was supported by Article 29 LDB (Brazil, 1996), which states the following:

Children's education, especially the first step of basic education, has as its objective the integral development of the child until six years of age in physical, psychological, intellectual and social aspects that complement the family and community. (p. 24)

With legal support that Children Education was until six years-old, Paraná Education State Council (CEEP) ruled the enrollment of children to complete six years-old up to 1<sup>st</sup> March in the first grade. Resolution 09/01 (PARANÁ, 2001) allowed enrollment in the first grade of eight-year Elementary School of children at complete seven years-old or of the ones who would be six years-old up to 1<sup>st</sup> March of the current year. Article 7 stated:

To enroll in the first grade of eight-year Elementary School, the candidate must be seven years-old or, voluntarily, six years-old up to 1<sup>st</sup> March of the year he will course the grade. (PARANÁ, 2001, p. 2)

Another noteworthy point is that the access anticipation and schooling obligation of six-year-olds is contextualized in the educational politics of all European, most Latin American, and the Caribbean countries. According to the OREALC-UNESCO data (2007), among the 41 Latin American and Caribbean countries that have compulsory schooling, 22 begin schooling at six years of age, 15 begin at five years of age,

and four (Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua) begin at seven years of age. Among the countries that begin compulsory education at six years of age, five also consider the final preschool grade as compulsory.

These data enforce the argument that, from an affirmative educational politics perspective, the legal measure of an additional year in elementary school is progressive in a Brazilian context (ARELARO, 2005; KRAMER, 2006a; GORNI, 2007), especially once it democratizes access and provides opportunities to everyone, regardless of social class.

The *National Education Plan* (PNE) (BRAZIL, 2001a), which deals with the objectives and goals of elementary schooling, defines the following goals:

I - Universalize attendance for all elementary school students within five years from the date of this plan's approval. To guarantee access and permanence of all children, this plan must be established in collaboration with the union, states, and cities in areas particularly in need of such programs.

II - Increase the duration of compulsory elementary schooling to nine years, beginning at six years of age and universalized up to 14 years of age. <sup>4</sup> (p. 57)

According to the Culture and Education Ministry (MEC) (BRAZIL, 2004b, 2009), the expansion of elementary schooling is an educational policy present in over 1,200 Brazilian cities. Currently, Brazil has laws (BRAZIL, 2004b, 2006d, 2006e, 2009, 1996, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d) that support the reorganization of schools to include six-year-olds. All these documents were the results of social movements and public policies aiming to diminish social inequalities. It is important to understand that social inequalities are not natural but man-made issues relating to dominion over others (CUNHA, 1995).

**4-** All direct quotations were freely translated from their original Portuguese texts.

Besides the PNE (Brazil, 2001a),<sup>5</sup> there are other legal instruments that support the expansion of elementary schooling by one year. However, according to Kramer (2006b), it is insufficient to merely proclaim such a right; it is necessary to provide children the opportunities to effectively use it.

The legal basis for a system-wide reorganization, after the PNE, was established by Law 11,114, May 16, 2005 (BRAZIL, 2005a), which made six-year-old children's enrollment in elementary school compulsory. In addition, Law 11,274 (BRAZIL, 2006a), approved by the Senate on February 6, 2006 and implemented by 2010, extended elementary schooling by one year and included six-year-old children's enrollment in elementary schools.

In Law 11,274 (BRAZIL, 2006a), the following measures, shown in Table I, were established:

Based on the Brazilian Constitution (BRAZIL, 2004c) and LDB Law 9,394 (BRAZIL, 1996), elementary education is an individual's public right. Based on this perspective, elementary schooling in Brazil should be prioritized, and its future must be guaranteed. Other teaching levels are prioritized from this one.

Resolution 03/2005 (BRAZIL, 2005b), Art. 2, presented terminology for 9yES organization, as exemplified in Table I:

**Chart I – Nine-year Elementary School (9yES)**

Learning Stage	Intended Age Group	Duration
Children's education	Up to five years of age	
Nursery	Up to three years of age	
Kindergarten	Four- and five-year olds	
Elementary School	Up to 14 years of age	Nine years
First Years	Between 6–10 years of age	Five years
Final Years	Between 11–14 years of age	Four years

Source: BRAZIL, 2005b, p. 27.

**Table 1– Resolutions and Law alterations summary**

Law 11,114 (BRAZIL, 2005) changed Art. 6/30/32 and 87 from LDB/96 and made school compulsory for six-year-olds without changing the length of elementary schooling.
Resolution 03/2005 from the Educational National Council (Brazil, 2005b) defined the national rules regarding the increase of elementary school. Art. 1 (BRAZIL, 2005b) focused on the anticipation and compulsory enrollment in elementary schools for six-year-olds. Article 2 (BRAZIL, 2005b) directed 9yES reorganization by adopting the following criteria: Basic Education (for children up to five years of age); Elementary School (for children between six and 14 years of age). Elementary school includes two phases: 1) the initial years, offered to children between six and 10 years of age; and 2) the final years, offered to children between 11 and 14 years of age. <sup>6</sup>
Law 11,274 (BRAZIL, 2006a) changed Art. 29, 30, 32, and 37 from Law 9,394 on December 20, 1996, and established the guidelines of national education, stating that 9yES will include compulsory enrollment for six-year-olds.
Constitutional Amendment 053 (BRAZIL, 2006b) changed Art. 7, 23, 30, 206, 211, and 212 of the <i>Federal Constitution</i> and Art. 60 of the <i>Transitory Constitutional Act</i> .

Source: The authors.

**5-** See reference in Brazil (2001a).

**6-** For more examples, refer to Chart I of this study

In addition, the expert opinion law CNE/CEB nº 6/2005, approved on June 8, clearly defined that:

The teaching systems shall provide conditions for six-year-olds at elementary school according to their chronological age: whether they are already six years of age or if they will be six years of age by the beginning of the school year. (BRAZIL, 2006c, p. 10)

These changes will be directly reflected in the public administration of the cities involved, as they have a constitutional obligation to provide elementary schools and assume its expenses, which include creating new classrooms, acquiring better teaching material, and making human resources and physical space available to adequately execute the proposed activities.

During this transitional period, school systems shall offer curricula that ensure the successful continuance of children's development, whether they are six or seven



years of age. In addition to the human resources and teaching material necessary for the success of the program, new classroom furniture must be obtained to adapt to the students (Brazil, 2004b). Six- or seven-year olds require a curriculum that complements their strengths, potentials, and needs.

On one hand, this reorganizational effort shows progress in the learners' spirit, while on the other it highlights the phenomenon of living with old perceptions.<sup>7</sup> One issue present in such discussions is regarding writing instruction to children in 9yES and its effects on social literacy. These two aspects are examined in the following section to understand the motivating factors behind the introduction of this curriculum.

### **9yES introduction in Brazil: pedagogical basis**

For the first time in Brazil's history, the first stage of basic child education has been established by the *Law of Basic Tenets and Guidelines of National Education* (LDB), Law 9,394 (BRAZIL, 1996) and the importance of daily education work with children (0–5 years of age) has been acknowledged by the *Brazilian Curricular Directives for Childhood Education* (RCNEI). Another equally important document was developed at the state level: the *Pedagogical Guidelines of the Paraná Education Secretariat* (PARANÁ, 2010), to enhance theoretical-methodological reflection upon the 9yES proposal.

**7-** According to the historical contributions of Ariès (1978), the number of children began increasing by the end of the 17th century, consolidating through the centuries, and arriving at its current importance by the 19th Century. Ariès (1978) covers its history by beginning with an analysis of pictures, paintings, literature, and clothing from that period. He demonstrates that up to the 12th century, children appeared in paintings as miniature adults and figures of angels (infant saints). In the 16th century, children are represented without clothing and there are portraits of dead children beside their families. These mark a change in the representation of childhood, because people began considering that children had souls. Such change had much to do with Christianization. Thus, families in the 17th century wanted pictures of their children while they were still children. Therefore, portraits of living children alone became quite common.

The RCNEI and *Pedagogical Guidelines of the Paraná Education* seek to recognize the concept of reading and writing that will be supported by speaking and writing in 9yES. It is also noteworthy that an analytical or conceptual trail is not desirable since we only want to outline the abovementioned documents' methods of dealing with social literacy issues and, based on this, show a didactic-pedagogical proposal for 9yES.

With regard to the conception of language, particularly written language, there has been no significant advancement in the concept of social literacy. In addition, considering the RCNEI (Brazil, 1998d), the oral speech issue has been divisive:

Research in the language field tends to recognize that the social literacy process is associated with the construction of oral as well as written discourse, mainly in urban areas, where most children, since an early age, are in contact with written language through many different text carriers. (p. 121)

This statement highlights the document's acknowledgement that a constituting part of social literacy is orality. Throughout the text on the development of oral language, orality is considered to be a natural development through contact with adults. This occurs through participation in daily speech and situations that involve the reading of written text:

The widening of one's oral communication abilities occurs gradually through a process of trial and error that involves children's participation with language usage in daily conversation, listening conditions, music, games and other settings such as more formal situations, which may involve reading different texts. (BRASIL, 1998d, p. 127)

Concerns with the development of orality are extant, and this is why written texts

have a particular function. However, nothing in the above quote, and in the document, deals with Portuguese, especially with regard to the social literacy process associated with the construction of oral and written discourse.

Gusso (2010) provides separate guidelines for orality, reading, and writing. It would be difficult for a teacher of Portuguese to acknowledge how orality and writing constitute social literacy or how reading and the production of different writing genres may precede “reflections on multiculturalism and the elimination of bias, including the linguistic one” (GUSSO, 2010, p. 140). In other words, how does orality help students understand that, in a written text, “the author represents different roles: he plans, he writes, he revises and corrects detected faults”? (GUSSO, 2010, p. 147) It appears that a cultural perspective on orality and writing would help in such comprehension.

For the concept of social literacy to have sufficient theoretical basis, the first chapter of the *Pedagogical Guidelines of the Paraná Education Secretariat* (PARANÁ, 2010) comprises a text by Soares (2010b) wherein the concept of language is provided:

It is common knowledge that a passport is necessary to gain admittance to a foreign country. It may also be considered necessary for admittance to the written world. However, such a requirement is highly singular because two passports are required. One passport is the acquisition of a type of *technology* – the system of the written alphabet and orthography and the conventions for their use—while the other is the development of *competence to use the abovementioned technology* in social practices that involve the written language. (p. 16)

In the above statement, a sharp division between literacy and social literacy exists. Thus, one type of learning consists of learning the

alphabet, written orthography, and other usage techniques such as reading-writing (literacy), whereas the development of competence for the use of writing technology is another type of learning (social literacy). However, according to Soares (2010b):

[...] you may not want to use a SINGLE method for the initial learning of written language; it is necessary to use methods in the plural: a combination of procedures that teach and build knowledge, providing the child an entry in the world of writing, which is the purpose of the initial learning of written language. (p. 27)

An issue that requires highlighting is that some teachers do not realize that literacy is part of the much wider social literacy process. According to Cerutti-Rizzatti (2009):

[...] we understand the proposal for literacy as a *country* and social literacy as a *continent*. There can be no understanding of literacy without an alphabetical code, but that is part of a larger phenomenon, which is the functionality of written language in human life. (p. 13)

The education process should enable students to control the relationships between graphemes and phonemes for the social use of writing. Therefore, as suggested by Soares, a single method should not be exclusively used. However, we comply with Cerutti-Rizzatti’s statement that students should recognize the relationship between spoken and written language to enable effective recognition of the functionality of written language in everyday life.

With regard to the idea of social literacy, the RCNEI presents an analysis of writing during the early years of Fundamental Education (EF):

[...] it is through such diversified contact with their social milieu that

children discover the functional aspect of written communication. This is done by developing interest and curiosity for language [...] and indicates their reflection on the function and meaning of writing when they perceive that it represents something important. (BRAZIL, 1998d, p. 127)

The social literacy idea that preceded the RCNEI (BRAZIL, 1998d) with regard to 9yES is not anthropological since it acknowledged and developed writing in terms of a technology and not social practices. According to Brazil (1998d):

For children to write, they have to deal with two parallel learning processes: the writing system of the language and characteristics of the language used for writing. Learning the written language is intrinsically associated with exposure to several texts, which builds children's capacity to read, and writing practices, which develops the ability of autonomous writing. (p. 128)

Although the document cites contact with several texts in terms of writing concepts, it recommends making students understand the nature and characteristics of writing. Thus, what guided the elaboration of the document was actually the autonomous model of literacy. Moreover, along with justifying work through orality and writing, the document acknowledges the active agency of children in the learning process:

Recent research based on the analysis of children's agency and current practices have shown new directions with regard to teaching and learning of oral and written language while considering the children. When children are considered active in acquiring knowledge, and not merely passive receivers of information,

a profound transformation occurs in the way they learn to speak, read and write (BRAZIL, 1998d, p. 120).

However, without the knowledge of how children participate in a social literacy event with their families in school and other domains, it is difficult for teachers to understand the nature of children's participation in such events (GIDDENS, 1989).

The above finding shows that struggle and progress influence the incorporation of social literacy from childhood in Brazilian society. Similarly, it is difficult for orality to be conceived as part of social literacy, whose basic components are *a social literacy event and practice* within the new 9yES structure. The idea of literacy as a social practice should serve as a foundation since it renders the initial years of 9yES as indispensable, especially in regard to oral discussion mediated by writing. In fact, it enables the construction and reconstruction of knowledge of oral as well as written discursiveness. Such contact or relationship with written text will help children understand the conventions of writing, such as letters, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences, which enables the children to distinguish them from the conventions of orality. According to Paraná (2010):

The inclusion of the six-year-olds in basic education creates several debates on the learning and teaching process, which unavoidably emerge because of the different aspects taken up by teachers and families. An aspect that requires emphasis is the organization of pedagogical work and the underlying concept. It is extremely important that teachers have clarity regarding the theory adopted and expressed in the school's pedagogical proposal and the process, prioritizing approaches toward disciplines taught in the school. (p. 14)

According to the *Pedagogical Guidelines* (PARANÁ, 2010), teachers should be thorough with regard to the concept of language in the 9yES proposal and implementation of the language acquisition process. It is only thus that the inclusion of six-year-olds in basic education may be significant and justified. In addition, the program will provide children additional and vital contact with the reading and writing world.

Street (2010) emphasized that,

Writing is a component within a wider political struggle. In the long run, this is what we do all along. How do we know and how can we do it? I suggest the use of the ethnographic perspective based on social literacy theories that follow education not merely as teaching but as learning. (p. 52)

## Conclusion

Currently, the *Federal Constitution* (BRAZIL, 2004c) prescribes that children's education is offered to children up to five years of age. Moreover, all children who are already, or will be, six years of age in the present year have the right to enroll in a compulsory elementary school in Brazil. The extension of compulsory schooling is a victory for the working class and, in our view, it must be defended.

The primary goal of this study was to determine whether there was a concern in terms of enrolling children in school at an earlier stage to provide them access to written instruction mediated through oral discussion. The results show that, unfortunately, there is

still no definite implementation of the plan that promotes literacy as a social practice in Brazilian education (STREET, 1995; Heath, 1982, 1983). The distinction between literacy and social literacy is not always clearly presented, and to develop an effective social literacy policy, more research from this perspective is needed.

It is important to understand that the inclusion of six-year-olds in elementary school is one of the most compelling social rights of Brazilian citizenship. Such an inclusion must be ensured and the educational work developed herein should take into account the uniqueness of the children's actions. In addition, children of the aforementioned age must have their educational needs met (ROJO, 1995). This is true not only for six-year-olds but also for all children six to 10 years of age, which is within the age range of elementary schooling.

There are other pedagogical, administrative, and financial measures that should follow the current 9yES educational policy because it is not only about transferring educational contents and activities of traditional first grade to six-year-olds, but also about developing a pedagogical proposal that considers the singularities of this age group. Further, it presents a proposal of *learning* in which orality and writing constitute social practices.

Finally, regarding the present study, the pedagogical proposal is based on the way children participate to gain oral competence and reading and writing skills. It is through these skills that they recognize reading as another method of communication and that written text acts as a mediator of their relationship with the world and others around them.

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