

Reading strategies and the fictional narrative: conditions for
comprehension^{1 2}

*Estratégias de leitura e a narrativa ficcional: condições para
compreensão*

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Abstract: This article intends to address two conditions for children's acquisition of the reading and writing skills of the genre "tale": the characteristics of the fictional narrative text and the strategies of reading comprehension. Considering the theoretical assumptions of Propp, Claude Bremond, Harvey, and Goudvis, this study shows how, in a specific experience, as opposed to what happens in textbook activities, students came into contact with this literary genre and perceived how they articulated the comprehension of the narrative through the activities proposed by this research. The results indicate that children, when involved with fictional narrative texts in a consistent and meaningful way, assume the role of protagonists in both actions: the comprehension and the production of this textual genre.

Keywords: children's literature, reading comprehension, structure of the narrative text, textbook

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Resumo: Este artigo pretende abordar duas condições para que a criança se aproprie das capacidades de leitura e produção de texto do gênero “conto”: as características do texto narrativo ficcional e as estratégias de compreensão leitora. Diante dos pressupostos teóricos de Propp, Claude Bremond, Harvey e Goudivis, mostra-se como, numa experiência específica, em contraposição ao que ocorre nas atividades existentes em livros didáticos, alunos vivenciaram o contato com essa literatura e como articularam a compreensão da narrativa através de atividades propostas nesta pesquisa. Os resultados revelam que as crianças, quando envolvidas de forma consistente e significativa com o texto narrativo ficcional, assumem o papel de protagonistas tanto na compreensão como na produção desse gênero textual.

Palavras-chave: literatura infantil, compreensão leitora, estrutura do texto narrativo, livro didático

1 - Conditions for the understanding of the text from the perspective of reading strategies

We begin this text with the following premises: students enjoy reading when stimulated by teachers who demonstrate their passion for the books or when exposed to good texts; most school institutions do not offer an effective classroom work which teaches the student how to read; teaching how to read, more than teaching to decode, means making students, by reading, understand the text and attribute meaning to what was read.

North-American studies evidenced by the National Reading Panel (Langenberg, 2000), name this process as *comprehension*, and for these researchers there are four required conditions that must be activated when reading: the relations established with previous knowledge and the reader’s experience; the knowledge already apprehended by this reader about the characteristics of the text to be read; the context of production of the text and the purpose of the reading; and the use of strategies pertaining to the act of reading. The author and his collaborators affirm that

Reading, however, requires the coordinated and flexible use of several different kinds of strategies. Considerable success has been found in improving comprehension by instructing students on the use of more than one strategy during the course of reading. (p. 47)

We are addressing, therefore, reading comprehension strategies, a North-American methodology which originated from metacognition studies. According to Pressley (2002), metacognition is defined as the knowledge about thought processes, which leads to the comprehension of the text.

Previous knowledge, the first condition to comprehend what is read, is considered the basis for the other reading strategies, because readers cannot understand what they are reading without thinking, without establishing a relationship with what they already know. Kleiman (2002, p.13) affirms that the process of comprehending a text is characterized by the use of previous knowledge: readers activate, when reading, what they already know, the knowledge acquired throughout their lives. From this perspective, the cognitive process of reading depends on the participation of readers, who act equipped with their own cultural “baggage”, participating in the construction of meanings permitted by the reading. In this relationship with the text, looking for the writer’s intentions, readers become protagonists. Hence, when we begin a reading, we bring up a series of pieces of information we have about the world, related to what we are reading. Previous knowledge is, thus, defined by North-American theorists as the *mother-strategy* or the *umbrella-strategy*, because it aggregates all the others (Souza & Cosson, 2010, p. 66).

When we consider the activation of previous knowledge as a fundamental condition for the metacognitive actions to occur in the act of reading, we are admitting that during this activity there is an exchange between previous and new knowledge, activated at the moment of reading a text. There is no doubt left of the importance of readers being able to learn and select from their previous knowledge those that can benefit a significant interaction with the written material being faced.

Knowing the characteristics of the text being read is the second condition. When playing the roles of reader and writer, the student, a reader in training, has also the opportunity to enter the world of texts: of appropriating the distinctive aspects of certain genres, detecting the differences between the “language you write” and the “language you speak”, recognizing each genre’s inherent specificities. For example, the *crônica*³ and the tale are different genres, even

³ The *crônica* is a Brazilian literary genre characterized by short narrative texts, usually humorous and dealing with daily topics.

though both can be classified as prose. Similarly, the lyrics of a song and the *cordel*⁴ are written in verse, but are very different forms of poetry, each with its own compositional style and linguistic resources, which must be considered when producing and interpreting texts from these different genres (Lerner, 2002). Based on this concept, for the teaching of reading to fully occur, it is not enough to offer students an empirical contact with text models. Instead, students must be offered the opportunity to experience the real situations a genre is used in, to inform students about the forms and use contexts of each genre, considering the necessity of its usage and identifying who its interlocutors are. We must work with text genres as a teaching unity, and with the reading and writing of these texts as an object for this action.

According to Caldas (2010), by exploring textual diversity, teachers bring students closer to the original production situations of non-school texts. The author affirms that this closeness provides learners with the conditions to comprehend the workings of the text genres, apprehending, from this process, a text's particularities, which contributes to the learning of the reading practice.

The third condition for comprehension, i.e., the recovery of the production context and the reading purposes, became prominent when different academic perspectives started assessing Bakhtin's (2003) theoretical predicates. This author presents a new understanding of language—the enunciative-discursive perspective—and sees discourse as a social practice and a form of interaction. Based on this, text's production contexts, the different communication situations, and reading's purposes and intentions become fundamental for the desired comprehension.

What we defend is that, for texts to be comprehended, it is not enough to know the language structures or the text typology, it is essential to have access to the socio-historical context in which the text was written. Hence, it is necessary to seek information about the text's production conditions. It is important to know who the author is, what his intentions were when writing the text, and, preferably, to try to recover the linguistic-discursive operations used by the text. The text is rebuilt from the context in which it was written and, therefore, it has an intentionality that makes it a discourse. If every discourse is a configuration of an intentionality (Maingueneau, 2000), by interpreting it, we seek to recover this intentionality, based on the possible interactions between the written text and the previous knowledge shared by author and

⁴ *Cordel* is the name of a literary genre and of a publication format. The small, inexpensive booklets called *Cordel* gave rise to a poetry genre of the same name. Originated from the oral tradition, these often-narrative poems are printed in booklets accompanied by woodcuts.

reader, which allows for the establishment of several relationships for the comprehension of the reading object.

If reading is a social practice with the intention of seeking for answers towards an objective, a personal need, we can understand it is always associated to a purpose (Arena, 2008; Solé, 1998), such as: 1) reading for obtaining information; 2) reading for reviewing a text written by oneself; 3) reading for pleasure; 4) reading aloud to communicate a fact to an audience; 5) reading to study or reading for several other individual and/or collective, personal and/or social reasons. It is evident that different objectives demand different texts, and that each demands a different reading mode.

Research by Fischer, Frey, and Lapp (2008), Hampton and Resnick (2009), Harvey and Goudvis (2008), Pressley (2002), and Solé (1998) indicate that, when children learn reading strategies and begin using them consciously, they become active readers, able to control the meaning they attribute to the text. Davis and Souza (2010) explain that reading is a matter of strategy, through which the reader of any age can connect to the texts, question what was learned, and infer, in order to conclude or interpret. To these authors (2010), independent and proficient readers develop strategies. Thus, teaching students reading comprehension strategies allows them to reflect on what they read and to comprehend what is written, while also providing them with the instruments to delve into new readings.

The strategies that must be taught (Souza & Santos, 2011), seeking textual comprehension before, during, and after the reading, are the following: connection, inference, questions to the text, visualization, summarizing, and synthesizing. The connections are subdivided in three types: from text to text, from text to reader, and between text and world.

According to Souza and Santos (2011), in the text-reader connection, students are stimulated to notice the relationships between the read text and their lives. Children will establish contact with the text from their own experiences, and it will make their comprehension easier. Text-text connections happen when, during the reading, the student makes connections with other read texts. This type of connection helps the reader to better proceed along the text, to better attribute meanings to the reading material. Text-world connections are used for children to understand the relationship between the read text and world around them.

To Fountas and Pinnell (2001), inference is a difficult strategy to be taught. The authors affirm that inferring means making a decision or formulating an opinion through the reasoning of the facts arranged in a text. The reader, by inferring, overcomes the literal sense of what is read and finds what is not explicit, comprehending what is implicit, what is between the lines of the text. Inquiring the text being read helps children notice the difference between direct questions, about the explicit facts, and the inferential ones. By questioning the text before, during, and after reading, the student begins to assemble information on the subject being read, and this practice will bring this student to the active comprehension of the text.

Visualizing is one of the many abilities that help readers comprehend the text. It refers to our capacity to create mental images based on what is being read or on the words being listened to. According to Harvey e Goudvis (2008), students who visualize while reading not only enrich their reading experiences, but also remember what was read for a longer period.

Summarizing is learning to determine the importance. It is searching for the essence of the text; it presumes that children are taught to disregard details and non-essential information to build what is nuclear, although it does not mean that there is only one main idea. It implicates activating previous knowledge, recovering knowledge about text structure, among others, to determine what is essential in the text.

Synthesizing requires the use of several strategies: referring to previous knowledge, outlining information, asking questions, separating what is more important. It occurs when readers relate the information with their own thoughts and model it with their knowledge. They construct, thus, a new text.

Reading practice is not an isolated or neutral instance, but it is accomplished in a process that relates the text to the previously performed readings, to the previously obtained knowledge, and to the lived experiences. To Fonseca and Geraldi (2002), the “delving” that a student usually performs when reading falls short of the possibilities offered by the text, perhaps because the text, many times, is presented to the student only through the textbook. On the texts used in textbooks, several theorists have pointed out the lessening of their value, especially regarding the educational purpose of training a proficient reader.

Rojo's (2010) analysis of Portuguese Language textbooks indicates that, at least regarding this material, school is yet distant from incorporating the literacy required by the contemporary world, and further distant from fulfilling the ideals proposed by Oswald de Andrade, of integrating and opening a dialogue with local and valued cultures.

Indeed, textbooks generally present methodological mistakes on the teaching of reading. As an example, in this article, we will analyze a textbook for the 4th year of Primary Education and will focus, as the axis of our analysis, on the teaching of the structure of the narrative text—namely from the tale genre—because this is one of the conditions for the full comprehension of the text and for the authorial production of new texts. .

One of our objectives is to discuss how textbook authors guide the teaching of such a genre and, afterwards, contrast this with the learning situations experienced by the children of the 4th year from the first cycle of Primary Education of a public school from the country side of São Paulo.

2 - The tale in the textbook

In the studies we have carried out about the selected textbook, we have focused on the initial years of education and prioritized two aspects: the incidence or not of the use of fictional narrative texts and the “*methodological formulation quality*” of the activities for the teaching of the tale genre.

The textbook, in Brazilian schools, is the main element responsible for diffusing knowledge. Lajolo (1996) defines the textbook as the material that will be used in classes and courses and that was probably written, edited, sold, and bought with the purpose of being systematically used in schools. For this author, the importance of textbooks increases in countries such as Brazil where a precarious educational situation makes these books determine contents and condition teaching strategies, marking, decisively, what is taught and how this teaching is performed.

We also understand the textbook can be a facilitating instrument for the teaching and learning process (Marcurschi, 2008), but we stress there must be a dialogue between these two

subjects, book and teacher, because, ideally, both should have a common purpose: teaching the student. What the textbook expects is that, from informative texts, illustrations diagrams, and tables, it would be possible to solve exercises which, upon completion, would favor the learning process (Lajolo, 1996).

Indeed, many textbooks have been using texts when proposing activities to teach the learners how to read and write. It remains to be seen whether the reception of these texts happens how Silva and Carbonari (1997) suggest it, that is, never as a passive act, since the text is a living, dialectic sign, directed towards the other. Frequently, school institutions, when adopting a textbook, limit themselves to only using the texts within this book. Hence, teachers end up working with the narratives selected by the textbooks' authors. Silva and Carbonari (1997) point out that such texts are inserted in the first level of didacticism, as the author of the textbook selects texts which, in general, were not written aimed at education and elaborates a work about them. Then, the teacher, by adopting the textbook or by consulting it, will be using texts already didacticized, thus becoming only a transmitter in the process of didacticizing the material brought to students.

To verify this level of didacticism present in the selected textbook, we first identified the texts contained in the book and, from the collected data, we have produced a table (Table 1) to better visualize the information. Later, we analyzed a text from this textbook.

It is important to indicate that the option to analyze the reading procedures suggested by a specific textbook is directly related to the fact that the book belonged to a collection indicated by the *Programa Nacional do Livro Didático* [National Textbook Program] (PNLD) 2013 and was adopted by the school where our intervention was developed to be used with the subjects of the research from which this paper originates. When indicating this collection, the *Guia de Livros Didáticos* [Textbook Guide] (PNLD, 2013) offers the following description of this material's characteristics:

As atividades de leitura encaminham experiências significativas que colaboram para a formação de um leitor. Por meio de objetivos diversificados de leitura, são desenvolvidas diversas habilidades de compreensão leitora, como a ativação de conhecimentos prévios, a antecipação e verificação de hipóteses, a compreensão global, a produção de inferências e a localização de informações explícitas em um texto, sendo esta última a estratégia mais enfatizada no conjunto das atividades de leitura. [The reading activities articulate meaningful experiences which help educate the learner. Through diversified reading objectives, several reading comprehension abilities are developed, such as the activation of previous knowledge, the anticipation and verification of hypothesis, the overall comprehension, the production of inferences, and the pointing out of a text's explicit information, the latter of which being the most emphasized strategy in the set of reading activities.] (p. 71)

Despite this indication, when we proceeded to the analysis of the textbook belonging to the collection indicated by the PNLD/2013, it became evident that the emphasis lied in the aspects related to fluency in the oralization of the text (each student reads, aloud, a part relative to a determined character) and that there is a limit to the comprehension activities, which are restricted to questions/answers about what is explicit in the text, never addressing the abovementioned “several reading comprehension abilities..., such as the activation of previous knowledge, the anticipation and verification of hypothesis, the overall comprehension, the production of inferences, and the pointing out of a text’s explicit information” (PNLD, 2013, p. 71).

Main text’s title	Didactic unit	Text genre
“Você e seus direitos” [You and your rights] – Luise Takashina. In: <i>Revista Recreio</i> [Recreio magazine], year 3, n.135. São Paulo: April, October/2002.	Unidade 1: Falando de direitos e deveres [Unit 1: Speaking about rights and responsibilities]	Argumentative
“Irapuru, o canto que encanta” [Irapuru, the charming chant] – In: Walde-Mar de Andrade e Silva. <i>Lendas e mitos dos índios brasileiros</i> [Legends and myth from the Brazilian indigenous populations]. São Paulo: FTD, 1997.	Unidade 2: As lendas [Unit 2: The legends]	Legend
“Anta-cachorro” [Tapir-dog] – In: Ricardo Azevedo. <i>Meu livro de folclore</i> [My folklore book]. São Paulo: Ática, 2011.	Unidade 3: Seres do nosso folclore [Unit 3: Beings from our folklore]	Tale
Sumário [Summary]–In: Mary e Eliardo França. <i>Fábulas 2</i> [Fables 2]. São Paulo: Ática, 1995.	Unidade 4: As fábulas [Unit 4: The fables]	Summary
Lixo e desperdício [Garbage and waste]. “Tudo se transforma” [Everything is transformed] – Available at: http://www.canalkids.com.br/cidadania/genteboa/lixo.htm - Accessed: March 11, 2003.	Unidade 5: Nosso lixo de todo dia [Unit 5: Our everyday trash]	News article
“Visita a Mildendo” [A visit to Mildendo] – In: Jonathan Swift. <i>Viagens de Gulliver</i> [Gulliver’s travels]. Adapted by Clarice Lispector. São Paulo: Melhoramentos, 1963.	Unidade 6: Lugares fantásticos [Unit 6: Fantastic places]	Tale
“Medo, medinho, medão” [Fear, little fear, great fear]. – In: Edson Gabriel Garcia. <i>Meninos & meninas: traquinagens, brincadeiras e emoções na rua</i> [Boys and girls: romps, games, and thrills on the street]. São Paulo: Loyola, 1992.	Unidade 7: Medo: você tem? [Unit 7: Fear: do you have it?]	Tale
“Um sapato em cada pé” [A shoe in each foot] – In: Cláudio Fragata. <i>Recreio especial: Era uma vez...</i> [Recreio special: Once upon a time...], n.1. São Paulo: April, n.d.	Unidade 8: Convivendo com as diferenças [Unit 8: Living with differences]	Tale
“Trem de Ferro” [Iron train] – In: Manuel Bandeira. <i>Meus poemas preferidos</i> [My favorite poems]. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro, 1998.	Unidade 9: Um jeito especial de usar as palavras [Unit 9: A special way of using words]	Poetry
“O maior espetáculo da Terra” [The greatest show on Earth]. In: <i>Revista Recreio</i> [Recreio Magazine], year 4, n.157. São Paulo: April, March/2003.	Unidade 10: O mundo do circo [Unit 10: Circus’s world]	News article

Table 1 – Texts from the analyzed textbook

Source: the authors

As we can notice in Table 1, the analyzed book uses more prose (narrative) texts than poetry. Only didactic unit 9 addresses the poetic text. There is, however, a variety of types of narrative texts, distributed throughout the book, such as: tales, legends, news articles, among others. We noticed a higher incidence of tales. We have chosen to discuss unit 3, *Seres do nosso folclore* [Beings from our folklore]. In this unit, the author of the didactic book, aiming to teach the “tale” genre to the readers and users of his book, presents two texts by Ricardo Azevedo, “Anta-cachorro” [Tapir-dog] (Azevedo, 2011) and a fragment of “O lobisomem” [The werewolf] (Azevedo, 2000).

A tale usually narrates an action and possesses a unique structure. When we think about prose for children, we immediately imagine a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end. In other words, an initial situation presents the place where the story happens and the characters involved, so, later, these characters can establish relationships with the theme and the plot’s entanglements; this is the part commonly known as the development. It is during the development that the cause and effect ties are presented which, for Propp (2006), are necessary for the reader to understand and engage with the actions proposed by the author through the characters and the narrator. The end of the narrative is the conclusion, when characters can return to their initial situations or even end the story obtaining an amelioration or producing a degradation (Bremond, 1972).

For students to comprehend a narrative text, they must understand the micro relations established within the text—i.e., a text’s contents, the organization of the narrative’s structural elements, the form, and the modes of presentation of the facts (cause and effect relationships)—and, also, the author’s style.

This teaching must be processual. First, teachers must aim to indicate and clarify to students the social importance of this learning, keeping in mind that the purposes of reading and writing are what qualify what is being interpreted (reading) or produced (writing) as a real social practice. Lerner (2002) explains that if school teaches how to read and write with the sole purpose of teaching students how to perform these actions, students will not learn reading and writing’s social functions. On the other hand, if the school sidelines its didactic purposes in favor of its social practice ones, it will be abandoning, at the same time, its own teaching function. We need to reconcile the inherent needs of the didactic purpose with the intention of educating readers and writers who can act in an autonomous manner in social practices.

By guiding their reading and writing activities towards a finality, students are committed to the result of this action. Thus, because they know the purpose of their task, they can take the initiative, anticipate, and organize their writing plan. This makes it possible to avoid the occurrence of activities which do not connect content to objective and allows students to have more time to solve meaningful and challenging problems, to construct necessary knowledge, to establish relations between situations and knowledge, and, therefore, to consolidate what was learned and enable its appropriation.

Usually, however, neither the school nor the adopted book follow these paths. We discuss here, as an example, a school book developed for the 4th year of Primary Education, from which we selected the unit intended to teach students how to write a tale. In unit 3 of the textbook in question, the first text, “Anta-cachorro” [Tapir-dog], serves to introduce folklore and folkloric characters. The questions asked about Azevedo’s (2011) text only lead students to repeat referential information: “3) Segundo o texto, por que o animal anta-cachorro não consegue trepar em árvores?... 4) O que esse ser faz quando seu adversário sobe em uma árvore?” [3) According to the text, why can’t the tapir-dog animal climb trees?... 4) What does this being do when its adversary climbs a tree?] (Buranello, 2008, p. 49).

On page 51, the author presents another text by Azevedo, this time a fragment from the book *Armazém do folclore* [Folklore’s warehouse]. The text “O lobisomem” [The werewolf] is used to teach students the “parts” of the tale; the textbook’s version of the story, however, begins with a “(...)”, a sign that part of the text was suppressed when transposing it. The textbook’s following section, titled “Respondendo por escrito” [Answer in writing], announces: “o texto que você leu apresenta uma história, isto é, acontecimentos organizados em uma sequência. Chamamos esses textos narrativas. Uma narrativa costuma apresentar as seguintes partes” [The text you have just read presents a story, that is, events organized in a sequence. We name these texts narratives. A narrative usually presents the following parts] (Buranello, 2008, p. 53).

The first part of a tale, as the textbook’s author announces, is the “Introdução” [Introduction] defined as such: “trata-se do início da história. Geralmente traz a apresentação do local, da época e dos personagens” [it is the beginning of the story. Usually it introduces the place, the time, and the characters] (Buranello, 2008, p. 53). The same author, however, has chosen to omit the beginning of Azevedo’s (2000) story and, when comparing the textbook’s version with the original, we notice the exclusion corresponds to a page and a half. While Azevedo (2000) begins by contextualizing the werewolf character and its legend:

Quando, num lugar, aparece um homem magro e abatido, caladão, sempre olhando torto, com sobrancelhas grossas e orelhas compridas, é melhor ficar esperto: o tal sujeito pode ser o Lobisomem! Toda meia noite, de quinta para sexta-feira, o homem que vira Lobisomem desaparece... [When, somewhere, a thin an beaten man appears, quiet, with a side glance, thick eyebrows and long ears, it's better to be smart: this person can be the Werewolf! Every midnight, from Thursday to Friday, the man who shifts into the Werewolf disappears...] (p.106)

Buranello (2008) selects the 14th paragraph of the tale to start the didactic unit and the teaching of the structure of the narrative text:

Lá em Rio Antonio, perto de Caculé, interior da Bahia, vivia uma mulher, grávida de sete meses. Certa noite, o marido...chegou dizendo que precisava sair com ela. Era noite de lua cheia. O homem queria passear. A moça estranhou, mas foi. [In Rio Antonio, near Caculé, in the countryside of Bahia, there lived a woman with a seven-month pregnancy. A certain night, her husband... arrived saying he needed to go out with her. It was a full moon night. The man wanted to go for a walk. The lady thought it was strange, but she went along.] (p. 51)

From what is exposed, we find serious problems regarding the comprehension of the text and of the structure of the narrative text: first, the 14 paragraphs which preceded the beginning of the didactic unit's text, and were present in the original version, situated the myth and the origin of the werewolf. Hence, children do not have the opportunity to access one of the basic conditions of comprehension: the context of the narrative's production. Another issue to be addressed regards the initial situations announced by the author of the textbook, because, although the clipping made by him evidences the time, the place, and the introduction of the characters who will experience the events of the tale, there are also, at the beginning of Ricardo Azevedo's tale, elements describing the myth of the werewolf character. By cutting the text and removing it from its original support, the textbook removes fundamental aspects for the recovery of the text's production context, limiting its understanding and the use of reading strategies which would comprise a broad system allowing for the acquisition, evaluation, and use of information.

Next, when the second part of the narrative text is presented to students, under the title of "Desenvolvimento" [Development], Buranello (2008) splits it in three categories:

a apresentação do conflito (ou do problema). Algo acontece para romper o equilíbrio da situação inicial. O desenvolvimento do conflito. Os personagens vão agir de acordo com esse conflito (ou problema). A solução do conflito. O problema ou o conflito apresentado é resolvido. [The introduction of the conflict (or of the problem). Something happens to break the balance of the initial situation. The development of the conflict. Characters will act according to this conflict (or problem). The solution of the conflict. The problem or conflict is solved.] (p. 53)

Even though the textbook defines the development of the tale in these three parts, there is not, at any point, any type of guidance for students to notice the cause and effect relationships throughout the narrative. For readers to comprehend the text, they would need to understand

the cause-effect relationships, because they provide the story with dynamism and liveliness. In other words, an event (the cause) makes another event (the effect) happen. A cause might have several effects.

In the textbook's transposition of Azevedo's (2000) tale, if students were made to understand, for example, that the cause is the reason for something to happen, and that the effect is what happens, this cause + effect relationship would explain why something happened, and children would better grasp and enjoy the tale, by comprehending it. In this tale, for example, the man took the woman out for a walk (cause); it was a full moon night, so he shifted into a werewolf (effect).

The textbook's author, however, only points out, on the text itself, the parts he understands to be the presentation of the conflict or problem, the development of the conflict, and the solution of the problem, without ever explaining, to the children, the relationships between the characters, nor the causes and effects leading to the conclusion.

About the conclusion of the text, the textbook author does not offer students an understanding that there is a strict relationship between the causes and effects which, when coherent, conducts to the resolution of the conflicts and to the conclusion of the narrative. Once again, Azevedo's (2000) text used by the textbook is fragmented. Buranello (2008) presents the following passage as the story's conclusion:

No outro dia, a moça acordou cedo. O marido ao lado roncando. A mulher olhou bem para ele e quase desmaiou. O sujeito dormia de boca aberta. Entre os dentes amarelos havia um monte de lã vermelha. O Lobisomem era ele mesmo! [On the other day, the lady woke up early. The husband was besides her, snoring. The woman looked carefully at him and almost fainted. The man was sleeping with his mouth open. Between his yellow teeth, there was a lot of red wool. He was the werewolf!] (p. 52)

In Azevedo's (2000) original tale, the narrative continues with another 12 paragraphs offering the reader the possibility of learning popular recipes for avoiding werewolves. One of these beliefs is presented in verse. Nevertheless, the textbook's author, by fragmenting the text, denies children the opportunity to comprehend the folkloric myth of the werewolf and all its popularity in the national imagination.

Consequently, the part that was selected to be transposed to the textbook denies children also the opportunities to comprehend reading strategies such as inferences, as permitted by passages from the original text: "*Outra coisa que funciona, se por acaso o cachorro danado aparecer é fechar os olhos, esconder os dentes e as unhas da mão, e rezar...*" [Another thing that works if,

by chance, the damned dog appears is closing your eyes, hiding your teeth and your hand nails, and praying...] (p. 108). This passage allows children to infer how to fend off the werewolf and keep it away. The next passage allows for visualization: “*Essa é a verdade verdadeira sobre o Lobisomem: esse monstrengo covarde e cruel, metade bicho, metade gente, é o retrato do Mal.*” [This is the truest truth about the Werewolf: this coward and cruel monster, half animal, half person, is the portrait of Evil.] (p. 109). Students are led to imagine and infer, through visualization, how the werewolf would be. Both passages were removed from the textbook version.

The text’s fragmentation, from which this attempt at teaching the parts of a tale’s narrative originates, will have as its result the non-comprehension of the text in its totality. Consequently, students’ experiments with textual production will probably produce fragmented narratives, making it difficult to explore the narrative parts and to establish cause and effect relationships. From our experiences, the teaching of narrative structure must use texts in their original supports, showing students the constituent parts of the genre, in a processual work, lasting not only a single day, but continuing for a longer period, at specific moments. This process encompasses working each of the elements composing the narrative, with examples, reflections, and organizing tables, which can lead students to learn and comprehend the “tale” genre. Next, we will describe an action aimed at this purpose.

Cause and effect: an analysis of a practice

The official documents presenting directives, parameters, and curriculum descriptors—the PCN (Brasil, 1998) and the Currículo do Estado de São Paulo [State of São Paulo’s Curriculum] (São Paulo, 2008)—emphasize the need for Basic Education schools to allow students to develop the ability to establish a cause-effect relationship between a text’s different parts and elements. The present investigative work aimed to identify, in school’s use of the writing of fictional narrative texts, aspects—especially those related to the discussion of cause-effect relationships—which are relevant for working with text production and reading. What motivated us to perform this research was the understanding that these aspects have been neglected in the way textbooks address written language.

While making this research, in which we put our concepts in practice, we were based on the conviction that there is a profound connection between reading and writing when the

objective is learning a text genre. The task of reading to elaborate a text based on what was read, by summarizing, synthesizing, or rewriting, has an important impact in the learning process. We believe it is necessary to break with the textbook logic, which presents the text with the sequence “first you read, then you answer questions, so then you can verify if what was read was understood”. In this case, reading appears only with the function of a verifying device, and not of learning a genre. Instead, we propose to think that reading can be performed already with the intention of writing, in a process involving the reading behaviors and procedures of those who are or intend to be proficient writers.

Based on what we have discussed so far, we understand that the production of narrative texts of literary nature does not occur to verify if the discourse built by the student meets the expectations of the school or to evaluate if students followed the norms and rules. In the way we directed our didactic procedures, the research subjects were placed in situations of reading and producing narrative texts, with the intention of observing these subjects’ degree of awareness regarding the causes and their possible/desirable effects in this genre, as well as the control they exerted over these actions. These are the reflections which, in our understanding, will support the teacher in identifying children’s level of comprehension, limitations, and potential.

Methodologically, this study is part of a larger qualitative research, classified as a case study, because it was applied to a restricted field for the observation of a group of six students before, during, and after their participation on a interventive workshop in a public school, from the countryside of São Paulo, with IDEB⁵ scores below the established goals. This case study, however, was performed only with three of the six children. The cut made in this paper regards the analysis of a subject who attended the group, but whose production was not analyzed in the larger research.

In order to provide consistency to our presuppositions, during the second semester of 2014, reading and text production workshops were undertaken in the reading class of a public school, once a month, outside of the regular school hours. All students from the 4th year were invited to participate, but only six subjects attended the meetings. During these moments, children were immersed in an environment in which child literature had a prominent role and they were challenged to think about their writing based on the new elements offered, so, at the

⁵ IDEB stands for Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica [Index of Development of Basic Education].

end of the process, they could write tales in an autonomous, dialogic manner, thus improving their abilities to read and to produce texts from this genre. We opted, within the limits of this article, to present the production of only one student, so we could perform a more analytical and instructive study.

During these meetings with the children, tales were read, the participants' previous knowledge on the subject was assessed, and the plots' basic features were presented. Other aspects were also discussed, such as: linearity, cause and effect, and how the texts integrate humor, fear, joy, emotion, or any other intended idea. The possibility of children establishing connections between the text under discussion and other, previously-read texts was also a relevant aspect. Thus, from tales originated in popular tradition, it was possible to work with basic characteristics such as the stories' time being always the past and the places being described in way which allows readers to visualize them (Giroto & Souza, 2010). This knowledge allowed students, in their interaction with the text genre, to control effects of varied meanings, as we will observe in the analysis of a student's writings, below.

To study the aspects which define a tale's plot, the group performed analysis activities of the writing of the texts' authors, based on the ideas of Gancho (2004). Children were led to reflect on the initial situation, the conflict, the climax, the outcome. Each of the children presented their ideas and, in the end, they would reach a consensus. Their conclusions were registered, so they could be consulted when needed.

In the activities to analyze the texts proposed as the study objects and the texts produced by the children themselves, highlighters were used, of varied colors for every element of the narrative. This allowed students to better visualize the presence, or absence, of the main characteristics of the fictional narrative genre.

At another moment, an activity was proposed aimed to broaden the children's comprehension of this genre's direct cause and effect relationship. The group read a text together and the "causes" that were identified, structuring the narrative, were distributed to the students in a table, so they could go back to text to look for the "effects" generated by each of those "causes" and fill out the table. A different procedure was proposed, another day, in which the researchers distributed the "causes" shaped as a jigsaw puzzle, and the children had to find the "effects" matching those "causes". This activity allowed children to better comprehend the cause-effect relationships established in the tale's plot and helped increase their understanding

of the genre's structure, because, when going back to the reading to find elements to support their finding of the effects, children would improve their text interpretations.

In a next step of this investigative work's practical phase, we organized text production activities. With the participation of the students in the planning, we decided that they would produce texts from the genre "tales of horror", i.e., narratives of horror or of a similar theme. The objective of the writing was the exhibition of the produced tales on the school's walls, so children from other classes could read them. These agreements were registered, with the intention of having them as a guide for the plot and style options of the students/authors.

It was also agreed that, before writing the text, children would have to plan their own writing, by filling out an organizing table in which they would anticipate the narrative elements their texts would contain. We provided a group feedback to the students, with questions regarding the excessive number of characters, the lack of clarity in describing a place, or, even, the absence of consistent relationships in the boxes in which they registered the causes and effects.

After this feedback, children re-planned their text projects and wrote the first version of their tales. Hence, characters, time, place, narrator, causes and effects were combined in a whole for the construction of their narratives. The material was collected and analyzed to base both our diagnosis of the children's knowledge as well as the present research about the didactic procedures we prioritized in opposition to what is usually proposed in textbooks.

The weekly workshops dedicated to the execution of planning, text production, and analysis activities continued until the end of the semester, for a total of ten meetings, in which the participating students significantly expanded their knowledge of text plot and were able to return to their own writings to enrich them with the acquired knowledge. During these moments, students took part in dynamics which allowed them a close and dialogical contact with their native language. Student's works resulted in the production of a tale book, donated to the school's reading class, where the research took place. The execution of the workshop, combined with the interviews which were recorded throughout the meetings, had the function of verifying the appropriation of the cause and effect elements by the students and, especially, of analyzing how they raised their awareness between their initial and their final productions.

To better expose the advancements regarding students' reading and writing competences as a result of the experiences proposed in this investigative work, we have selected a subject's first and last productions to analyze the identified progresses closely and consistently. We have organized the collected data in Table 2, presenting the evaluation of the progresses of student "C".

Criteria	Descriptors	08/25/2014			10/27/2014		
		NF	PF	CF	NF	PF	CF
1. Theme suitability	Does the text meet the proposed theme?		X				X
	Is the text retelling what was planned in the organizing table?		X				X
2. Suitability to genre's features	Are time and place defined?		X				X
	Are characters present?			X			X
	Is there the introduction of a complicating element/conflict?		X				X
	Is there an organized conduction of the development of the events?		X				X
	Is there a cause and effect relationship between the narrated events?		X				X
3. Use of writing conventions	Is the narrator the one that was planned in the organizing table?		X				X
	Are words separated correctly?			X			X
	Are words spelled correctly?		X			X	
	Does the text present a correct use of upper- and lower-case letters?			X			X
	Is the punctuation adequate?		X			X	
	Is direct and/or indirect speech used adequately?		X				X
	Does the text present adequate use of nominal and verbal agreement?		X			X	
	Are the paragraphs correctly used?		X				X
Were synonyms used to avoid repeating certain words?		X			X		

Table 2 – Level of fulfillment of criteria and descriptors

(NF= not fulfilled; PF= partially fulfilled; e CF= completely fulfilled)

Source: the authors

To clarify how this data was collected, it is important to point out that the first text produced by each student was the product of a rewriting proposal, based on a tale read aloud

by the researcher. The objective of this activity was to identify students' previous knowledge about the genre, mostly regarding cause and effect relational aspects.

The text chosen for this activity was "As chifrudas" [The horned witches], a translation by Heloisa Pietro published on *Folhinha*, in October 26, 1991. This tale tells the story of 12 horned witches who visit a housewife and cast a spell on her, making her lose the ability to speak and forcing her to serve them. Bewitched, the housewife goes to the well to obey one of the witches' orders. Then, the water spirit who inhabits the well teaches her how to break the spell, so the housewife manages to free her family and herself.

When producing the rewriting of this text, an activity with a diagnostic function, student "C" demonstrated previous knowledge of the genre by inserting a complicating element in the narrative, adding details to the moment the witches arrive at the woman's house. The student's text fragment, accurately reproduced below, evidences this previous knowledge:

Era uma vez um monte de bruxa que chegou na casa de uma Dona bateu na porta, a Dona abriu a porta com tranquilidade e todas as bruxas entraram uma atrás da outra com seus chifres enormes e todas sentaram na sala, quando a Dona foi ver tinha 12 bruxas na sala, a moça ia falar com ela mas não conseguiu falar por que as bruxas tinham feitiçado a Dona.

[Once upon a time, a bunch of witches arrived at a Lady's house and knocked on the door, the Lady opened the door without worrying and all of the witches entered one after the other with their big horns and all of them sat in the living room, when the Lady saw there were 12 witches in the room, the woman was going to speak but she couldn't speak because the witches put a spell on her]

However, when we analyze the rest of the story produced, we can notice that, as the text continues, the richness of details is lost, and the student starts omitting information that would be important for the reader, making some of the tale's passages incoherent. This becomes evident in the story's end, when part of the conflict is suppressed since the author goes straight to the conclusion, without considering it would be necessary to explicit the "causes" to make the "effects" coherent.

A Dona foi e pegou um baude cheio de água. Um espírito viu-lhe a Dona e disse:- Lave os pés do seus filhos e coloque na porta, peque o bolo que as bruxas comen de um pedaço para eles e coloque na porta e feche a trava. O castelo das bruxas pegou foi e elas foram embora, ainda hoje elas voltaram nesta mesma noite e as bruxas disseram: Saia daí água!

[The Lady went and took a bucket full of water. A spirit saw her the Lady and said: Wash your feet and your son's and put on the door, take the cake the witches ate give them a piece and put it on the door and lock it. The witches castle caught and they left, still today they came on the same night and the witches said: Go away water!]

By suppressing the steps responsible for the breaking of the spell, indicated by the “water spirit”, and the procedures the housewife should undertake to rid herself of the witches’ presence, the student/author demonstrates difficulty in establishing, throughout her narrative, the cause and effect relationship between the elements and, especially, between the parts of the text. Hence, textuality is compromised, because a significant part of the text was omitted to the reader.

The main difficulties regarding textuality diagnosed in the student’s text production were: 1) the text only retells, partly, what was previously read; 2) the proposed theme was addressed, but some of the structuring elements of the story were not present; 3) the need to introduce a conflict, an inherent aspect of the genre being produced, was met, but was not completely fulfilled in the conclusion; 4) the order was not coherent in the development of the events structuring the text; 5) the research subject also did not write the cause and effect relationships of the narrated events, thus making the comprehension of the fundamental elements of the narrative difficult for the potential reader without previous knowledge of the text.

Moreover, the difficulty of the child regarding grammatical aspects was made evident: punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, direct/indirect speech, and verbal and nominal agreement were used incorrectly, while synonyms were only sparsely included to avoid word repetition.

By mentioning the character of the “Water spirit” without any context, without pointing out the place it inhabits or the intentions it has while addressing the woman, and, also, by omitting the information of the first contact between the woman and the “mysterious voice”, representing only the final moments of these characters’ second encounter, student “C” presents ideas which do not generate an effect or do not have a cause. This can make the reading dull and demotivate readers from continuing along, because they will not be able to visualize the real cause and effect relationships which would provide the text with linearity and allow for the comprehension of the narrated events.

The progresses attained by student “C” by participating in the proposed activities in the text-production workshops are made evident in the analysis of the tale produced in October 27, 2014. The child created this tale by herself, and this was preceded by the elaboration of an organizing table which registered the planning of the text, including the narrative’s structural

elements and the causes and effects which would guarantee a coherent organization. The organizing table produced by student “C” is accurately reproduced in Table 3:

<i>Narrador (quem conta a história): 3 pessoas</i> [Narrator (who tells the story): 3 people]	<i>Espaço (Onde acontece a história): Em um castelo e uma cabana de ladrões que ficava na floresta amaldiçoada.</i> [Place (Where the story happens): In a castle and a thief's tent in a cursed forest.]
<i>Personagens (Quem participa da história): Felipe, Catarina, Charlies, Eduard, (Obs: Charlies é capitão da tropa de ladrões)</i> [Characters (Who participates in the story): Felipe, Catarina, Charlies, Eduard, (Obs.: Charlies is the captain of the thieves' gang)]	<i>Tempo (Quando acontece a história): 100 anos atrás e 20 anos depois.</i> [Time (When the story happens): 100 years ago, and 20 years later.]
Causes and Effects	
<i>Causa (a razão de algo acontecer): Felipe se apaixona pela princesa Catarina.</i> [Cause (the reason something happens): Felipe falls in love with princess Catarina.]	<i>Consequência (o resultado do que aconteceu): O Felipe é pobre e o rei Eduard não o aceitaria</i> [Effect (the result of what happened): Felipe is poor and king Eduard doesn't accept him]
<i>Causa (a razão de algo acontecer): Catarina foge do castelo com raiva de seu pai e vai para um acampamento de ladrões.</i> [Cause (the reason something happens): Catarina runs away from the castle angry with her father and goes to a thief's campsite.]	<i>Consequência (o resultado do que aconteceu): Seu pai fica preocupado e Charlies bajula sua cabeça culpando o Felipe.</i> [Effect (the result of what happened): Her father gets worried and Charlies sweet-talks him and blames Felipe]
<i>Causa (a razão de algo acontecer): O pai manda os guardas o matar mas o garoto foge para para o mesmo lugar que a garota.</i> [Cause (the reason something happens): The father sends the guards to kill him but the boy escapes to the same place as the girl.]	<i>Consequência (o resultado do que aconteceu): Os ladrões o segue. Ficam lá por uma noite e planejam algo para sair dali.</i> [Effect (the result of what happened): They stay there for a night and plan something to leave there]
<i>Desfecho (Como termina a história): Catarina e Felipe prende os ladrões que estavam sendo procurados e leva até o rei e de recompensa os dois se casam.</i> [Conclusion (How the story ends): Catarina and Felipe arrest the thieves who were wanted and take to the king and as a reward they get married.]	

Table 3: Narrative's structural elements

Source: the authors

The first version of this text was written based on the elements which were listed in the organizing table. Hence, characters, time, place, narrator, causes and effects were assembled for the construction of the text.

It is possible to notice how student “C” brings several other texts into her production. The influence of traditional fairy tales is evident. We understand this happens because school curricula usually work with this text genre. Furthermore, different media, oral storytelling activities, and other readings bring children closer to this text genre, making it a model for

students' writing. We understand, also, that activities about strategies—connections which were worked during the reading workshops—allow for the expansion of the student's references.

When analyzing the narrative elements, this intertextuality is a key factor for understanding the child's writing level. Additionally, the characters inserted in the narrative—the knight Felipe, prince Charlies (dishonest), the king, the thieves, and the princess—are given distinct roles which, since they were well defined, favor the fulfillment of their functions. Thus, these individuals' actions in the plot become fundamental to the story's conclusion. The protagonists, Felipe and the princess, have a more active role in the plot, because every action is centered in these characters. They were constructed and presented to the reader, and it is possible to understand the relationship that makes them so special and places them as the protagonists of the story being narrated.

Student "C" also presents another character, Prince Charlies, who fills the role of *villain*, defined by Gancho (2004) as the one who opposes the hero, either through a negative action, or because of having characteristics diametrically opposed to those of the protagonist. This narrative element creates the divergencies of the text, because the villain's interests conflict with those of the hero.

Even though the text presents problems with spelling and grammar, the student exhibits a clear perception of her need to construct the plot guaranteeing a direct relationship between the causes and effects, so readers can understand the conflict proposed by the narrative. The description of the characters' features gives readers a change to better visualize them in their minds (Giroto & Souza, 2010). When we consider both of the student's productions, it becomes clear that there was a significant gain in the description of the second story's protagonists. In developing the rewrite of the tale "A noite das bruxas" [The night of the witches], the housewife character was not described. In the second tale, the protagonists are described, as we can observe in Table 4.

Character	Description
Princess Catarina	<i>"havia uma linda princesa chamada Catarina. Sua beleza era defício de se encontrar"</i> [There was a beautiful princess named Catarina. Her beauty was difficult to find]
Felipe	<i>"o nobre e jovem cavaleiro Felipe"</i> [the noble and young knight Felipe]

Table 4 – Description of the protagonists in the second production of student "C"

Source: the authors

We can observe a quality improvement in the description of the characters, who became better defined, with indications of their actions and roles, which guaranteed the consistency regarding the cause and effect relationships described. When observing the narrative's time, we can notice a divergence between what the author proposed to do and the textual contents she privileges. In her text's temporal marks—"A 100 anos atrás em um castelo imenso" [A hundred years ago in a huge castle] and "Passaram-se 15 dias" [Fifteen days later]—we can notice a mismatch between the initially proposed plot and the time actually indicated for the actions. However, the verbs indicating what happened are used correctly. On the importance of time in the narrative, Cardoso (2001) affirms that time is an intrinsic part of our experience. Thus, the relationship between it and narrativity indicates that the events are marked by states being successively transformed.

Concerning the places presented in the plot, "C" manages to establish verisimilitude, defining who the characters are and building cause and effect relationships dialoguing with the places where the events occur—a castle, a city, a cart, a ball, a cursed forest, a thief's tent. The places selected by the student/author to set her story act as a support for readers, who are able to abstract and visualize the plot with the aid of something familiar: an environment which can be built in memory, and, in it, characters can be inserted, thus helping guarantee the cause and effect relationships in the text.

In the first text, when she was rewriting a tale, "C" did not characterize the places to ease the apprehension of the cause and effect relationships. She characterizes places better in her second tale, produced after she participated in the workshops developed by this investigative research.

While writing, the student created a problem for the princess and Felipe. They loved each other and could not be together due to the young man's poverty. In the climax of the narrative, this conflict was solved with Felipe saving the princess, leading to an outcome in which good wins over evil and order is reestablished in the kingdom. We understand that, during our meetings, "C" constructed her perception that plot is organized through actions interacting in cause and effect relationships, converging in the conclusion.

When we began this research, our objective was to verify whether, after a more effective work than the indicated by the textbook—a work which would emphasize cause and effect relationships—students would present positive changes in their productions' textual coherence.

We can conclude that the answer is affirmative. The positive changes identified in the production of student “C” and the other participating students corroborate this conclusion.

Therefore, this investigation posits that, by studying the structure of the narrative text, exploring particularly cause and effect relationships, students were able to know and comprehend what these situations are. We believe that, by providing students with the opportunity to learn these relationships, we are also helping them become analytical thinkers, willing to read more complex texts and to better engage with narrative fiction texts, which are so important for their humane education.

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