

Concepções e práticas de alfabetização no ensino remoto emergencial¹

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Resumo

O artigo tem por objetivo discutir concepções e práticas alfabetizadoras desenvolvidas por professores de escolas públicas, problematizando concepções que subjazem aos processos concebidos ou intencionados para o ensino remoto emergencial. A pesquisa é qualitativa, na qual foram entrevistados professores que vivenciaram o Ensino Remoto Emergencial na pandemia de Covid-19. Com o estudo questionou-se: Quais práticas alfabetizadoras foram possíveis no tempo de isolamento social e suspensão das aulas presenciais? Quais concepções teóricas orientaram as ações alfabetizadoras propostas/desenvolvidas com as crianças no tempo pandêmico? Constatou-se a dificuldade em alfabetizar na ausência de interações entre professores e crianças, entre livros, autores e situações em que leitura tenha sentido para os aprendizes. Por distintas orientações teóricas, a seleção de conteúdos e as práticas pedagógicas foram diversificadas – incluíram atividades impressas, orientações em grupos de *WhatsApp*, gravação de áudios e vídeos, aulas síncronas por aplicativo de videoconferência.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização. Ensino Remoto Emergencial. Práticas Alfabetizadoras.

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Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching

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Abstract

The article aims to discuss literacy conceptions and practices developed by public school teachers, questioning conceptions that underlie the processes conceived or intended for emergency remote teaching. The research is qualitative, in which teachers who experienced the Emergency Remote Teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic were interviewed. The study sought answers to the following questions: What literacy practices were possible in the time of social isolation and suspension of in-person classes? What theoretical conceptions guided the literacy actions proposed/developed with children during the pandemic time? Difficulties in teaching how to read and write were found in the absence of interactions between teachers and children, books, authors and situations in which reading makes sense for learners. Due to different theoretical orientations, the selection of contents and pedagogical practices were diversified – they included printed activities, orientations in WhatsApp groups, audio and video recording, synchronous classes by videoconferencing application.

Keywords: Literacy. Emergency Remote Teaching. Literacy Practices.

Concepciones y prácticas de la alfabetización en la enseñanza a distancia de emergencia

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Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo discutir las concepciones y prácticas de alfabetización desarrolladas por profesores de escuelas públicas, cuestionando las concepciones que subyacen a los procesos concebidos o destinados a la enseñanza a distancia de emergencia. La investigación es cualitativa, en la que se entrevistó a docentes, que vivieron la Enseñanza Remota de Emergencia. ¿Qué prácticas de alfabetización eran posibles en la época de aislamiento social y suspensión de las clases presenciales? ¿Qué concepciones teóricas orientaron la alfabetización de los niños en tiempos de pandemia? Se observó dificultad en la alfabetización en ausencia de interacciones entre maestros y niños, entre libros, autores y situaciones en las que la lectura tiene sentido para los alumnos. Debido a diferentes orientaciones teóricas, se diversificó la selección de contenidos y prácticas pedagógicas, que incluyeron actividades impresas, orientaciones en grupos de WhatsApp, grabación de audio y video, clases sincrónicas por aplicación de videoconferencia.

Palabras clave: Literatura; Enseñanza Remota de Emergencia; Prácticas de Alfabetización.

Introduction

In different time periods, educational and societal projects are articulated, revealing distinct conceptions and purposes that materialize in educational practices and processes. In these projects, literacy is central and constitutes a contentious issue, characterized by intense disputes of interests and narratives. The very concept of literacy is the subject of debates (MORTATTI, 2019).

In republican Brazil, literacy is seen as an “index of measurement and testing of the effectiveness of the modernizing action of education against barbarism and a rite of initiation in the transition from the private world to the public world of culture [...]” (MORTATTI, 2019, p. 20). Methods and processes for literacy were developed to facilitate the acquisition of technologies and skills for reading and writing. Blaslavsky (1988) considers that these methods emerged in classrooms as products of teachers' creativity, who refined them through a process in which a new method seeks to avoid or correct the disadvantages of the previous one.

From a historical perspective, different methods alphabetic, phonetic, syllabic, word-based, sentence-based, and global story-based were systematized from the 19th century onwards, guiding procedures with a focus on different units of language. In our country, the difficulty in teaching literacy to all children led to disputes between “old” and “new” explanations, with a strong focus on teaching leading to the perception that “the history of literacy has its most visible face in the history of literacy methods” (MORTATTI, 2006, p.1).

This implies that teachers sought ways to teach literacy, with their choices giving materiality to certain theoretical principles. By opting for a synthetic method and employing practices based on phonemes, letters, or syllables, teachers emphasize decoding as the guiding axis of the teaching and learning process. As a consequence, various forms of knowledge are mobilized in the classroom, reflecting teachers' conceptions of literacy.

Synthetic methods generally tend to prioritize the sense of hearing in relation to graphic signs, and activities such as reading aloud and dictation were common in these methods. All these activities are consistent with a particular assumption: the transformation of speech into graphic signs (FRADE, 2007, p. 25).

By transforming speech into graphic signs writing or vocalizing letters to reconstruct syllables and words reading teachers reveal their conceptions of literacy. This practice is based on the learner's acquisition of a technique to encode and decode, starting with phonemes, letters, or syllables. Such practices contrast with analytical methods, where literacy is guided by the senses of language. By

choosing an analytical method, teachers adhere to specific principles that structure approaches associated with reading as access to language.

In seeking to address understanding, these [methods] advocated for the completeness of the language phenomenon and the processes of child perception. While strategies for intelligent reading are encouraged, students' attention can also be directed to details of the word, such as letters, syllables, and sounds (FRADE, 2007, p. 26).

In Brazil, for over a century, both synthetic and analytic methods were used for initial reading and writing instruction. The historiography of literacy reveals that to overcome difficulties, these methods succeeded each other not without debates and disputes signaling shifts in conceptions, indicating the search for pedagogical alternatives, and generating both adherence and opposition. “Since the time of the Proclamation of the Republic, repeated efforts to change, stemming from the need to overcome what was considered traditional in each historical moment and the factors responsible for its failure, have been observed” (MORTATTI, 2006, p. 3). Consequently, “each of these moments has seen the foundation of a new tradition related to the initial teaching of reading and writing” (MORTATTI, 2006, p. 4).

As noted, synthetic methods were used for literacy in Brazil from the 19th century. Analytical methods began to integrate literacy practices in the following century, especially from the 1930s onwards. Blaslavsky (1988) asserts that the shift to analytical methods occurred in a context where synthetic methods operating with non-significant units of language encountered common difficulties in comprehension. Faced with the need for comprehensive reading, significant units of language were employed, with a focus more on psychological than linguistic notions.

According to the author, in the 20th century, psychology became interested in the ways of initial reading learning and the differences between the thinking of children and adults. It was believed that “adults analyze, while children only receive information in blocks, without making any distinctions,” a concept applied by Claparède to the first experiences conducted by Decroly-Degand in 1906, with the teaching of whole words. (BLASLAVSKY, 1988, p. 44).

The application of analytical methods occurs in this context of advocating for approaches better suited to children's cognitive processes, with an emphasis on the meaning in reading. In Brazil, the term "alfabetização" (literacy) to refer to the initial teaching of reading and writing began to be used from the late 1910s (MORTATTI, 2006), a time when various Brazilian states undertook educational reforms to align teaching with social development. Soares (2014) identifies the 1980s as a period of

Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching concept expansion, where literacy was discussed in response to increasing social demands for reading and writing, which began to include the social uses of written language.

During this period, Brazil experienced discussions influenced by the research of Emilia Ferreiro and Ana Teberosky, in which the psychogenesis of written language brought about a paradigmatic shift in the field of literacy. This perspective marked a significant shift from methods to the cognitive processes of children, understanding written language as a system of representation (FERREIRO; TEBEROSKY, 1985). Also during this time, the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs) were published (BRASIL, 1997), which criticized the way teaching was practiced in schools. Using the metaphor of a two-stage rocket, the PCNs highlighted the mistake of proposing the teaching of "first letters" – literacy – through an additive logic that, initially, teaches the alphabetic writing system and orthographic conventions of Portuguese, and then, in a second stage, proceeds to writing exercises and orthographic and grammatical training. The PCNs recommended rethinking theories and practices. "The current understanding of the relationship between the acquisition of writing and spelling skills breaks with the entrenched belief that mastering the basics is a prerequisite for starting language instruction and shows us that these two learning processes can and should occur simultaneously" (BRASIL, 1997, p. 27).

According to Soares (2014), new knowledge and paradigmatic changes in language and literacy teaching created demands for the teaching of reading and writing, leading to the need for the term literacy, which implies the social use of reading and writing. Literacy is now understood as learning a system of representation of the sound chain of speech through the graphic form of writing, also including the appropriation of the rules governing its use.

For Soares (1998, 2020), it is necessary to "literacy while teaching literacy," meaning "[...] reading and writing texts in the literacy cycle, always in the context of the social and cultural conditions in which learning and teaching take place" (2020, p. 189). According to Frade (2007), it is not enough to decipher the writing system and establish relationships between sounds and letters, nor is it sufficient to read texts from the school or literary sphere. More than that: "it is necessary for [learners] to use writing in social situations and to benefit from written culture as a whole, appropriating new uses that arise." (FRADE, 2007, p. 32).

In this context of debates, changes, and difficulties in ensuring the literacy and education of all children, Brazilian schools faced a new challenge the Covid-19 pandemic. Initially identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a new strain of

coronavirus. The disease quickly spread to all six continents, and on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it a pandemic. As a public health problem, the pandemic necessitated non-pharmaceutical measures to control the disease. Starting March 17, 2020, schools in Brazil were mandated to suspend in-person classes and subsequently adopt emergency remote learning.

Focusing on the teaching conducted during the pandemic period, we conducted research with the aim of discussing the literacy concepts and practices developed by public school teachers, examining the underlying concepts of the processes conceived or intended for emergency remote teaching.

By capturing teachers' perspectives on the subject, it became possible to address some guiding questions: What literacy practices were feasible during the period of social isolation and suspension of in-person classes? What theoretical concepts guided the literacy actions proposed or developed with children during the pandemic?

The answers to these questions were constructed through qualitative research a type of study conducted in the location where the phenomenon occurs, involving interaction and engagement with the social world. This approach was chosen due to the aim of exploring the diverse representations produced by individuals in their lived world (BAUER, GASKELL, 2008), and, above all, understanding how they relate to their daily world. Qualitative research focuses on aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, working with a universe of meanings, motivations, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes (MINAYO, 2013). Instead of statistics, rules, and other generalizations, qualitative research works with descriptions, comparisons, and interpretations.

In our study, the participants are four literacy teachers from public schools in the northern region of Minas Gerais Montes Claros, São João da Ponte, Varzelândia, and São Francisco who provided interviews and discussed their knowledge and practices. The use of interviews is due to the fact that this instrument values "the presence of the investigator and provides all possible perspectives so that the informant can achieve the freedom and spontaneity necessary to enrich the investigation" (TRIVIÑOS, 1987, p. 146). The semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely, facilitated by a video conferencing application that enabled engagement with the schools and literacy processes. It is important to note that the participants are those who accepted the invitation, among the 327 teachers

Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching who had responded to an online form distributed between April and September 2020, in research conducted by the Alfabetização em Rede collective⁵.

To present the data more effectively, the article is structured into two sections, designed to give visibility to the voices and practices of literacy teachers. In the first section, we discuss the teachers' perceptions of literacy practices during the pandemic and the Emergency Remote Teaching period. In the second section, we analyze concepts, beliefs, and literacy methods present in the discourses and practices developed during the pandemic, which, in some ways, interact with ongoing processes in their professional teaching activities.

Literacy Practices in Emergency Remote Teaching

Starting in the 1980s, Brazil experienced what can be described as a true revolution in the field of early literacy studies, significantly influencing the school culture of literacy education. To varying degrees, the research on the psychogenesis of written language developed by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1985) impacted teachers' knowledge and practices, guiding changes in classroom practices related to literacy and the relationship between phonological awareness and literacy.

The theoretical framework developed by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1985) allowed for a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes children use to acquire written language. This framework influenced curricular guidelines, such as the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN) (BRASIL, 1997); public policies like the National Textbook Program (PNLD); and teacher training programs such as the National Program for Teacher Training in Literacy (PROFA) and the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC). In this context, the focus shifted from teaching children a mere technique for decoding to helping them understand the alphabetic writing system as a means of engaging with textual genres that circulate in the social world.

In the field of literacy studies, there has been a growing emphasis on "literacy through literacy" (alfabetizar letrando), where the goal is not just for children to grasp the alphabetic writing system but also to immerse them in the culture of writing. This approach encourages children to use reading

⁵ The Alfabetização em Rede collective is a group consisting of 117 researchers, established in 2020 by 29 Brazilian universities, under the coordination of Professor Maria do Socorro Alencar Nunes Macedo from the Federal University of São João Del Rei. This group conducted research using a survey completed by 14,735 teachers. The discussion of the results collected nationally is available in the e-book titled "Portraits of Literacy During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Results from a Networked Study", which can be accessed at: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/1yui7iko11h6h4s/Retratos.pdf?dl=0>

and writing in various social contexts, thereby integrating literacy into their daily lives and interactions (SOARES, 1998; 2020).

In the relationship between phonological awareness skills and literacy methodologies, studies have highlighted the need for systematic practices of reflection on words as sequences of sound segments (MORAIS, 2006; 2013).

These discussions were influenced by the unusual circumstances produced by the Covid-19 pandemic, and teachers, who sought to implement literacy that aligned with these theories, faced new challenges and demands. Teaching children without in-person interactions and exchanges proved to be nearly impossible. In remote education, practices were structured differently from in-person processes, as were the learning outcomes. The voices of teachers led us to realize that measuring learning in remote education is a complex and multifaceted equation.

Teacher discourses reveal the difficulties in conducting remote teaching practices that effectively reached children and provided them with the conditions to learn. In this context, parents also faced challenges in organizing processes and keeping children engaged with schools and learning. The uncertainties about the duration of the isolation period and the expectations for a quick return to in-person classes ended up harming the children. Initially, the educational networks did not present a clear plan. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that many parents did not create conditions for their children to engage in educational activities, thinking that the situation would be brief. In the words of a teacher:

Parents were very much in the mindset: “We’re going to return; so I’m not going to put them in online classes.” By the time we got to November/December, parents were desperate; and during those months, I saw an increase in attendance (P4. Interview on May 11, 2021).

The “desperation” of parents with the conclusion of the 2020 school year can be understood by the fact that, according to official guidelines⁶, the State Secretariat of Education of Minas Gerais (SEE/MG) adopted a system of continuous progression, where all enrolled children would be promoted to the next grade without retention or failure. As a result, parents of children who were not

⁶ In 2020, the State Secretariat of Education of Minas Gerais exceptionally adopted a system of continuous progression. The criteria for promotion to the following year were conditioned on completing activities outlined in the Tutorized Study Plans (PET), a type of activity booklet provided to students during the pandemic, according to the official website. Available at <https://www2.educacao.mg.gov.br/component/gmg/story/12056-em-ideb-que-traz-o-impacto-da-pandemia-na-educacao-minas-gerais-cresce-nos-anos-finais-do-ensino-fundamental-e-mantem-indice-historico-do-ensino-medio> Accessed on November 24, 2022.

Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching participating in remote learning became anxious, and this anxiety motivated them to enroll their children in remote activities to prevent formal setbacks in their educational progression.

The anxiety over "automatic promotion" can also be understood in the context of a lack of learning, as remote teaching did not prove sufficient for children to continue learning the curricular content. Parents are aware of the issues and the disadvantages arising from the non-presential nature of educational processes. In this discussion, we refer to Demo (1999), who, in addressing differences and inequalities, argues that parents who have a more realistic and harsh view of life's struggles do not appreciate automatic promotion or facilitated learning. They understand that it is necessary to have the conditions to compete in the real world. "Any family recognizes that their children have not only different but unequal chances, depending on how each one manages to assert themselves" (DEMO, 1999, p.12).

In other words, parents usually ensure that their children have opportunities to learn and develop. In this sense, the organization where parents did not engage in remote teaching and children did not complete the assigned activities may indicate a disbelief in the effectiveness of this mode of education for learning. However, on the other side of those parents who allowed their children to disengage from remote teaching, there are those who were concerned about completing and sending activities to the teachers. Yet, this practice did not always reflect an investment in learning. The teachers consider that:

Not all activities are completed by the children themselves; we feel that many of them are done either by a sibling or by the parents. With printed activities, you can tell that it wasn't the child who completed that work (P3. Interview on May 7, 2021).

When receiving the workbook, many were completed by other people; it was evident that it wasn't the child's handwriting (P2. Interview on May 6, 2021).

There is no control over who completes the activities the mother, a sibling, or a cousin does the work (P1. Interview on May 4, 2021).

According to the teacher (P1), many parents were concerned with sending in activities not only for the sake of possible learning outcomes. Parents indicated a demand for schoolwork but framed it within the context of other social needs the receipt of benefits necessary for the biological survival of their children. A teacher reports these concerns, which were expressed through questions from parents:

When will the food kit come? If I don't submit this activity, will I not receive the food kit? Is it mandatory to submit the activities in order to receive the food kit?" (P1, Interview on May 4, 2021).

From the narrative, we can infer that parents faced significant challenges in supporting their children's completion of activities. In a country marked by social inequalities like Brazil, these difficulties can be understood through various explanatory lenses, including financial hardships, daily struggles to maintain the family, work hours, and the time available to assist with their children's school activities. These issues are particularly acute for women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who often juggle multiple professional and domestic responsibilities, taking on double or triple work shifts. Additionally, illiteracy and low educational levels further complicate the situation. Failla (2016) discusses data from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), revealing that in 2015, only 13% of the Brazilian population had higher education, contrasting with 9% who were illiterate and 26% with only elementary education (1st to 4th grade or 1st to 5th year).

In our study, when parents were asked if the receipt of social benefits was conditional on their children completing activities, they highlighted their priorities. For them, meeting school demands meant simply filling out and submitting printed materials to teachers for attendance records and to maintain their children's connection with schools. Learning was a secondary concern compared to immediate survival needs, such as unemployment and hunger affecting many families.

This is a complex issue that needs to be viewed from various angles. From the parents' perspective, remote activities were a challenging task, especially considering Tardiff, Lessard, and Lahire's (1991) argument that teaching requires professional knowledge from multiple sources – disciplines, curricular proposals, experience, educational sciences, and pedagogy. From the teachers' perspective, the literacy practices developed during the pandemic seem to reflect established teaching knowledge and are embedded in the school culture and pedagogical organization with which they are already familiar.

Colello (2020) suggests that remote teaching practices align with how each teacher worked before the pandemic: some being more adventurous, experimenting with new possibilities and innovative practices, while others remained more traditional, reproducing pre-existing activities ingrained in the school culture. According to this logic, the author positions herself:

Depending on their professional training, educational stance, personal disposition, ideological positioning, theoretical grounding, level of experience, and subjectivity in work methods, each teacher has adapted their "today in the times of the pandemic" based on their "yesterday in the classroom." In other words, despite new challenges, remote teaching integrated, in each case, the possibilities and limitations of the educators. Rather than a direct transposition, it represents a perspective of continuity

Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching from where they were and in response to the new working conditions (COLELLO, 2021, p.153 – author's emphasis).

In our study, we observed this diversity of teachers' knowledge, whose implementation with children was influenced by material and objective working conditions. The innovative discourses indicate a search for differentiated practices aiming to reach children in a more concrete way. To connect with the children, one teacher conducted synchronous lessons using a video conferencing app, while another teacher recorded videos with stories. However, when discussing these practices, they noted that not all educators conducted online activities or used digital technologies and instead relied on sending printed materials to the children, as suggested by SEE/MG.

So, I really needed the school to be aware that I am doing this process [of classes via videoconference] and my colleagues didn't agree. They were going to maintain the way the system suggested, which were the complementary classes and the PET [Planos de Estudos Tutorados] only through the WhatsApp group" (P4. Interview on May 11, 2021).

I like to record audio; I enjoy storytelling; they have a good effect. So, at least once a week, I try to record myself telling a story. Not all colleagues are open to this. Even in person, sometimes they weren't into recording. Sometimes we pick a book and record the story; there are some apps that allow this" (P1. Interview on May 4, 2021).

The described practices indicate that teachers, according to their style and conditions, followed the suggestions of SEE/MG, which provided three tools for supporting remote teaching: 1) Planos de Estudos Tutorados (Tutored Study Plans) (PET) – Structured material in the form of a booklet, with content and activities from the subjects, which students could download from the official site, receive via email and WhatsApp, or in printed format if they could not access digital material; 2) *Se Liga na Educação* – A program broadcast by TV Rede Minas, Monday to Friday, on weekdays, in the morning shift, and retransmitted on YouTube; 3) *Aplicativo Conexão Escola* – A platform where students and teachers could access PETs and the classes previously shown on *Se Liga na Educação*.

It is important to highlight that the *Se Liga na Educação* program had access limitations, as the Rede Minas channel covered only 186 of the 853 municipalities in Minas Gerais, and access via YouTube depended on internet data. Additionally, this tool did not include the Literacy Cycle as it offered classes starting from the 4th year of Elementary School. In theory, these difficulties could be overcome by the *Aplicativo Conexão Escola*, whose data could be accessed by students and teachers linked to the network. However, P3 states that, contrary to what SEE/MG proposed, access to the content was conditioned on users having internet data.

Beyond these tools, teachers received guidance from schools to create WhatsApp groups for exchanging messages with children and their families. This was a channel frequently used as a complementary process to the PET activities. Teachers relied on their own resources for this task digital equipment, internet data, and technological knowledge meaning the development of the work depended on their personal conditions.

During the pandemic, teachers from different educational levels reinvented themselves and built a network of knowledge and collaboration through open classes, conferences, seminars, workshops, and other generally free processes, which enabled much connection, dialogue, and learning. However, specifically for working with children, the teachers in our study did not receive support from the educational networks to which they were linked. These networks did not ensure access to technologies or professional development processes needed to tackle the challenges of emergency remote teaching.

In this context, teachers were limited and could not perform more interactive pedagogical actions with the children. Nonetheless, in contrast to these limitations, some teachers managed to create conditions for innovation by conducting classes via video conferencing apps, recording audios and videos with story narrations, and providing guidance for the children. These practices offered greater opportunities for interactions and dialogues, although the lack of collective adoption of this format at the school could be explained by more conservative beliefs and conceptions or difficulties in using or accessing technologies.

These difficulties with digital technologies highlight the need for better technical preparation and the expansion of knowledge for using technological strategies and tools. On the other hand, the non-use of these tools can also be considered in the context of digital exclusion of both teachers and students, who are part of broader social processes that generate divisions and distancing from cultural and economic resources.

In our study, P4 indicates more consistent results in the year 2021. Based on his practices, the teacher states: "I am noticing that this class I have this year is achieving better results than last year's class. Last year, I didn't have such satisfactory results. The participation [of the children] was very low" (P4. Interview on May 11, 2021).

The analysis of the reality indicates that the differences are related to the use of technologies, the engagement and partnership with parents, and the interactions and dialogues with children, especially through synchronous classes via video conferencing applications. These positive results

Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching highlight the need to ensure ongoing academic training and social, cultural, and economic inclusion for everyone.

In light of the teachers' reports, we observe that the fulfillment of PET activities, when aimed solely at grades or attendance records, facilitated some interaction between teachers, parents, and children but did not foster true interactivity. In this approach, students primarily use technologies like WhatsApp, with a focus on providing instructions and passive reception, which does not move beyond the transmission of knowledge.

Beyond these passive and non-interactive practices, our study found the engagement and mobilization of students by one of the teachers (P4). When analyzing his pedagogical practices, it is important to highlight that, even when maintaining a more conventional work format—sending materials to the children P4 sought to avoid conservatism. For this teacher, the most important aspect was the ability to diagnose learning and difficulties, understand the reasons behind the non-completion of certain activities by the children, and find solutions and possibilities. As previously detailed, among these solutions, the teacher conducted synchronous classes, subdividing the class into three groups, with online sessions according to the availability of parents. Through this interaction channel, difficulties identified in printed activities were addressed during interactive and face-to-face moments mediated by digital technologies.

If the child just erases and does it again, they are not building anything. They understand that they made a mistake, but they don't know what they did wrong. So, this longer delay in the pace of learning is very difficult for me. Getting this across to parents is very complicated. They don't understand. 'Oh! I need to submit the PET with everything correct.' No! The PET is an activity that the child did, and if they did it wrong, or if they couldn't complete it, that's when I need to intervene. If the child didn't do it, that's fine! But why didn't they do it? Can't they understand what's being asked? Or are they just lazy? If they did it wrong, what are they confusing? Are they mixing up letters? Are they writing mirrored text? So, I need to identify the mistake and show the child what they are doing wrong, in addition to showing what is correct. Because if I just tell them to erase and submit a beautiful and perfect PET, I will show them that life is wonderful, with no mistakes and no worries." (P4. Interview on May 11, 2021).

When taking diagnosis as a possibility, the teacher understands that their pedagogical approach needs to be grounded in the knowledge that children have already produced, in the way they think and propose solutions to the issues presented to them. When discussing children's cognitive processes, Ferreiro and Teberosky (1985, p. 25) highlight that 'what previously seemed like an error due to a lack of knowledge' becomes understood as tangible evidence of the remarkable degree of knowledge they have already produced about language.

In our study, most teachers were unable to establish interactions and connectivity with the children. Due to difficulties in diagnosing the actual learning produced by them and anticipating possible gaps, the teachers expressed concern about the return to in-person classes.

When this return happens, how will we receive these children? I can see that many of them are the families who are developing the activities. This is very concerning (P3. Interview on May 7, 2021).

They [colleagues] say: – Look, if it were in person, this child would already be reading. I say: – Yes, but it's online, so online we learned to develop, but at the same time, we understand that in-person teaching is completely different (P1. Interview on May 4, 2021)).

The discourse highlights concerns about the return to in-person education and the gaps created by remote learning, which, for a significant portion of children, did not occur, meaning a lack of opportunities for engagement in activities and learning. This situation reveals the difficulties of teaching literacy in the absence of interactions and dialogues between teachers and children, with books and authors, with different materials and text formats, and in situations where reading and writing make sense and become part of lived experiences. The discourses also indicate the selection occurring within the educational system, where social and economic inequality manifests in the unequal distribution of educational opportunities, as noted by Ferreiro and Teberosky (1985) when discussing the educational landscape in Latin America.

Methods, contents, concepts, and practices of literacy

Literacy is a complex task that, historically, has taken on different contours based on societal demands for reading and writing, but is also associated with literacy content, materials, and teaching methods. Regarding methods, Frade (2007) highlights those that, in different historical periods, guided the organization of school spaces and times: 1) the individual method, which often took place in the home environment, involving a direct relationship between one teacher and each student; and 2) the mutual or monitorial method, where, within the same school space, work was proposed with different content to a large and heterogeneous group of students, with the relationship mediated by a teacher and more advanced students who acted as monitors. The author also presents the simultaneous method, which, contemporarily, is foundational to school organization, closely linked to the formation of graded and age-based classes with a smaller number of students.

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Frade (2007) also discusses the methods used for literacy, which are directly related to the content of this instruction, having evolved in complexity and traversed the processes of teacher education. Thus, beyond the propositions about literacy instruction:

From early childhood education, teachers engage with discussions and practices related to literary theories, theories of text genres, discourse theories, linguistic theories, socio-anthropological and psycholinguistic studies on the acquisition of writing. Many of these contents are relevant at any level of language instruction (FRADE, 2007, p. 32).

During the pandemic, teachers faced dilemmas related to literacy methods and content that were, in some respects, considered resolved issues. The simultaneous method had been widely accepted as a replacement for the individual or monitorial methods; literacy as the appropriation of language had surpassed the concept of reading and writing as mere text deciphering. Defending literacy as the learning of a language, which involves understanding what writing represents and how it works, Soares (2020) asserts that, until the 1980s, processes were guided by a restrictive concept that resulted in equally limited practices. Reading was understood as decoding and writing as encoding, with a focus on the sounds of speech in relation to the letters of the alphabetic system.

The analysis of teachers' perspectives allowed us to recognize conceptions and practices of literacy that became problematic in remote teaching. In terms of methods for organizing teaching spaces and times, we observed a return to the individual method. According to Faria Filho (2007), in Brazil, until the 19th century, the individual method was used to structure school times and spaces, involving someone who knows a teacher, a mother, or siblings teaching those who know nothing. The author discusses the characteristics of the individual method, which was predominantly used in the home environment and was considered costly and not very productive. During the pandemic, as education moved to the home environment, teaching became individualized, with parents assuming the responsibility for the necessary mediation of learning.

Considering the content that could be worked on, teachers selected certain aspects of the alphabetic writing system based on what they thought was a priority for children's literacy or what could be accomplished in the absence of interactions. These choices reflect the conceptions that constitute the knowledge built by teachers throughout their training and professional practice, indicating contents and activities aligned with specific literacy methodologies. Even when selecting content deemed relevant, teachers were perplexed by the difficulties of distance teaching, in the absence of in-person interactions and dialogues with children. "We try. What I find most difficult is the issue of literacy; the literacy process is very challenging" (P1. Interview on May 4, 2021).

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If we consider Vygotsky's (1991) perspective that literacy is constituted through interactions between individuals and language as an object of knowledge, it is possible to understand the teacher's position and the children's difficulties in acquiring written language skills in the absence of interactions and discursive mediations. Vygotsky argues that, unlike spoken language, which can develop without systematic teaching, learning written language requires explicit instruction.

Regarding the contents of literacy, the teachers expressed and clarified their theoretical and methodological choices:

The state provides what is known as the Minas curriculum, and within it, we make adaptations according to the child's level. If a child is at a higher level, we provide a more advanced activity, but if a child is still developing motor coordination, we focus on motor coordination activities with them. There is no way for me to develop work with a child who still lacks motor coordination (P3. Interview on May 7, 2021).

In listing the contents of literacy, P3 selects specific aspects and focuses on motor coordination skills. These choices reflect more conservative conceptions, rooted in a school culture that, for a long time, deemed it necessary to work with preparatory activities before beginning experiences to understand the alphabetical writing system. These practices were hegemonic prior to the 1980s, where literacy was oriented towards deciphering and the belief that perceptual and motor skills were central to learning to read and write.

Contrary to these practices, Tolchinsky (2001) emphasizes the symbolic nature of reading and writing, arguing that psychomotor development is not foundational. According to the author, "without active participation in interpretation and production activities, students will hardly construct knowledge about written language from psychomotricity exercises" (TOLCHINSKY, 2001, p.143). Similarly, discussing the psychogenesis of written language, Weiz (1999, p. VIII) asserts that the central issue of literacy is conceptual in nature: "That is, the hand that writes and the eye that reads are under the command of a brain that thinks about the writing present in its social environment.

By focusing on psychomotor skills, the teachers discuss the difficulties of teaching cursive handwriting.

One thing that we are still discussing today, as some teachers mentioned to me again, is the issue of cursive handwriting. We believe that cursive writing will end with remote learning because, in the classroom, we would spend a month of our planning time working on letter formation with the students. We sent worksheets to work on it, but then we gave up on cursive writing. Our school abandoned cursive writing; now we use print or block letters because they are not able to trace the letters. So, we have five classes from 1st to 5th grade; students in 4th and 5th grade have a decent cursive handwriting, but 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders only know print letters. If

Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching we show them cursive letters, they won't even recognize them as letters. (P1. Interview on May 4, 2021).

The discourse from P1 reveals a focus on teaching literacy centered around motor skills and dexterity. According to Ferreiro and Teberosky (1985), Vygotsky (1991), and Tolchinsky (2001), psychomotor skills play a secondary role in this learning process. "Even in situations of extreme difficulty, we will continue to insist that the direction of learning is towards usage, in contexts meaningful for understanding the [alphabetic writing] system" (2001, p. 143). In this direction, Ferreiro (2001) emphasizes the need for schools to connect with changes in the social world in order to teach relevant content. Therefore, it does not make sense to prioritize copying, or to engage in passionate debates about the virtues or drawbacks of specific types of handwriting whether cursive or print—at a time when it is urgent for students to learn how to use keyboards.

According to Vygotsky (1991), writing with meaning is essential for life. He argues that only then can we be sure it will develop not as a mere habit of hands and fingers but as a new and complex form of language (1991, p. 133). Vygotsky criticizes teaching methods that focus on letters and word formation in a way that obscures the living nature of written language, putting it in the background. He compares this mechanical writing approach to piano instruction that focuses solely on manual skills without involving the learner in the essence of the music.

Following this logic, by focusing on children mastering cursive writing, the teacher is selecting an aspect related to motor skills rather than conceptual development. By recalling that in face-to-face teaching, the pedagogical work would "stop" for a month to practice cursive letter formation, the teacher (P1) indicates an "old-fashioned" approach that separates meaning from signifier, where learning the trace of letters does not occur in the context of language appropriation as proposed by Vygotsky (1991).

This traditional perspective was also evident in concerns about writing uppercase and lowercase letters, and recognizing the initial letter of one's own name.

I can't tell you which of these 23 students know letters, which can differentiate them, or which can distinguish between uppercase and lowercase through an assessment; I just can't" (P3. Interview on May 7, 2021).

Working on the proper name, we made name cards and sent them with the initial highlighted in color. We also tried sending some concrete materials, like popsicle sticks, EVA letters, at least the vowels in EVA. We sent this material along with the workbook to see if it helped, you know?" (P1. Interview on May 4, 2021).

These efforts reflect conceptions where certain formal aspects overshadow the meaning of written language. P3 emphasizes the recognition of uppercase and lowercase letters, while P1 focuses

on proper names, particularly the recognition of the initial letter. The teachers understand that children need to grasp the writing system, highlight important elements, and make choices about what can feasibly be taught remotely.

In contrast to these positions, there are discourses that link learning to read and write with the desires and expectations of children, connecting language to understanding it as a system of representation.

I really enjoy reading to my students. I like to start the class with a reading. I show them that I'm reading a book and ask them, 'Do you have a book at home? Grab a book and read it to me.' I've been doing this a lot, and what I notice today is that children have difficulty with reading because they see the book as a toy rather than a learning activity" (P4. Interview on May 11, 2021).

As I said, the issue of bringing back playfulness in literacy is important; we have to work with playfulness to be able to teach children to read and write. You can't... Teach literacy today in a rigid, harsh way. You need to have something that attracts the child to engage in the literacy process (P3. Interview on May 7, 2021).

Teachers seek to reconcile practices with hegemonic theories, such as the psychogenesis of written language or traditional literacy methods creating didactic situations that focus on proper names and the classification of writing levels, as well as the exploration of words and syllables.

Last week, in the first grade, since it's the first term, we did a dictation. I was even looking at the dictation there, where the teacher dictates and they write, and the mother sends a photo of what the child wrote so that we can classify their writing level).

So I will repeat 3 times. The first time I say the word, the second time I will break the word into syllables, and the third time I say the word as a whole again (P4. Interview on May 11, 2021).

The account of the practices indicates a concern from the teacher (P1) in diagnosing the children's conceptual understanding of writing. This concern signals the perception that the appropriation of the alphabetic writing system is a process of construction by the child. Plat (2001) reminds us that cognitive-constructivist didactic theories understand learning as an individual process, stemming from the reconstruction and evolution of the learner's mental representations. However, considering sociocultural theories, it is understood that this construction occurs through interaction with others, in groups of peers or with adults, working together (PLAT, 2001).

According to these theories, we can assert that identifying writing levels is an initial activity. However, the development of written language as representation involves mediations, relationships, and interactions between individuals and the object of knowledge, which were hindered by remote

Conceptions and practices of literacy in emergency remote teaching teaching. More than learning a technique to decipher words and texts, children need to appropriate a form of language.

Final Considerations

The study conducted in the North of Minas Gerais allowed us to understand aspects of the problem of literacy for children in public schools, a problem exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and impacted by measures to control the spread of the virus and the suspension of in-person classes in school facilities during 2020 and 2021.

Through their discourses and practices, teachers reveal the knowledge they have mobilized, which aligns with the work done before the pandemic but also indicates knowledge developed in response to the need to propose teaching in a different modality. Thus, we observe a variety of approaches and practices, including more daring and innovative attitudes such as synchronous classes conducted through videoconferencing apps and efforts to incorporate digital technologies into pedagogical mediation processes. However, we also see the persistence of an entrenched school culture that signifies a pedagogical approach and literacy culture structured in more conservative molds.

Within the limits of available resources, the focus on deciphering practices indicates activities with limited potential to motivate children to learn to read and write a motivation that is essential for effective learning. In this regard, Colomer (2001) emphasizes that for effective teaching, it is fundamental to view reading as a social and cultural practice so that students can understand their learning as a means to expand communication possibilities and access to knowledge.

The challenges in implementing literacy during the pandemic highlight the need for ongoing professional development investments so that teachers can engage in continuous reflection on their knowledge and practices, updating their skills and exploring various modes of action. Additionally, there is a need for public policies that address social inequalities and enable greater integration of children and teachers into the realm of digital communication and information technologies.

The study highlighted the urgency of connecting schools with technological and digital development, to avoid reproducing the exclusionary processes observed outside the schools within the educational system. In the absence of consistent public policies and educational investments, there is a risk of reiterating discourses that blame teachers and parents for inadequate learning outcomes,

while also reinforcing conditions of exclusion and failure to ensure the fundamental rights of Brazilian children.

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