



## Literacy and the knowledge's heterogeneity about writing in Brazil and France

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes the practices of first grade elementary school teachers in Brazil and France in dealing with the heterogeneity of students' knowledge about alphabetical writing, as well as the different levels of appropriation of the writing system of children in both classes at the beginning and end of the school year. The theoretical framework is based on the studies of Ferreiro and Teberosky (1999); Ferreiro (2001); Morais (2012); Goigoux (2007); among others. From the immersion in the data, it was observed that the teachers mobilize professional schemes, postures, didactic gestures, and professional gestures to meet the heterogeneity of knowledge about students' alphabetic writing. However, the different ways in which they mobilize them, coupled with their knowledge about what students already know and what they still need to learn, resulted in significant differences in the alphabetic writing learning of Brazilian and French students at the end of the school year.

Keywords: Literacy. Heterogeneity. Teaching. Learning.

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### A alfabetização e a heterogeneidade de conhecimentos sobre a escrita no Brasil e na França

#### Resumo

Este artigo analisa as práticas de professoras do 1º ano do ensino fundamental no Brasil e na França no atendimento à heterogeneidade de conhecimentos sobre a escrita alfabética dos alunos, assim como os diferentes níveis de apropriação do sistema de escrita das crianças de ambas as turmas ao início e final do ano letivo. O aporte teórico está pautado nos estudos de Ferreiro e Teberosky (1999); Ferreiro (2001); Morais (2012); Goigoux (2007); entre outros. A partir da imersão nos dados, foi observado que as docentes mobilizam esquemas profissionais, posturas, gestos didáticos e gestos profissionais para atender à heterogeneidade de conhecimentos sobre a escrita alfabética dos alunos. Contudo, as diferentes maneiras como os mobilizam, atreladas aos conhecimentos que possuem sobre o que os alunos já sabem e o que ainda precisam aprender, resultou em diferenças significativas nas aprendizagens da escrita alfabética dos alunos brasileiros e franceses ao final do ano letivo.

Palavras-chave: Alfabetização. Heterogeneidade. Ensino. Aprendizagem.



## La alfabetización y la heterogeneidad del conocimiento sobre la escritura en Brasil y en Francia

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### Resumen

Este artículo analiza las prácticas de profesoras del primer año de educación primaria en Brasil y Francia para atender a la heterogeneidad de conocimientos sobre la escritura alfabética de los estudiantes, así como los diferentes niveles de apropiación del sistema de escritura de los niños de ambas clases al comienzo y al final del año escolar. El marco teórico se basa en los estudios de Ferreiro y Teberosky (1999); Ferreiro (2001); Morais (2012); Goigoux (2007); entre otros. A partir de la inmersión en los datos, se observó que los profesores movilizan esquemas profesionales, posturas, gestos didácticos y gestos profesionales para responder a la heterogeneidad de los conocimientos sobre la escritura alfabética de los alumnos. Sin embargo, las diferentes formas de movilizarlos, unidas a su conocimiento sobre lo que los alumnos ya saben y lo que aún necesitan aprender, dieron lugar a diferencias significativas en el aprendizaje de la escritura alfabética de los estudiantes brasileños y franceses al final del año escolar.

Palabras clave: Alfabetización. Heterogeneidad. Enseñanza. Aprendizaje.

### Introduction

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The current discussions around the literacy process in Brazil, such as the National Literacy Policy (hereafter NLP), produced in 2019 by the Ministry of Education, signal, among other aspects, the use of phonics instruction as a pillar for learning to read and write, which brings us back to the phonics method of literacy. Raising the flag of scientific evidence, the current literacy policy of the president Jair Bolsonaro government is based on evidence from experimental research developed by first world countries.

Among the countries mentioned, the NLP booklet brings France as a reference, highlighting the recommendations for phonics instruction contained in the "Observatoire National de la Lecture" (National Reading Observatory), created in 1997, for literacy practices, signaling that this country makes use of the phonics method. However, the Brazilian document seems to forget the body of empirical research that has been produced on the national scene, disregarding the vast contribution that researchers from north to south of Brazil have made to the discussions of literacy through the results of their investigations.

The present study is inserted precisely in this set of empirical research that besides analyzing literacy practices in the Brazilian context, also analyzed



the French context, which enables us to question the way phonics instruction is defended by the National Literacy Policy. As we could observe in our research, in France there is no defense of the phonics literacy method, but rather a variety of actions mobilized by literacy teachers in the process of teaching reading and writing.

Considering that the knowledge and practices of literacy teachers are (re)invented daily in the classroom in an attempt to develop a differentiated pedagogy, which, as Chartier (2007) observes, is more evident in the literacy class, we will present in this article data from a research that aimed to investigate the practices of 1st grade teachers in attending the heterogeneity of students' knowledge about alphabetic writing in the context of Brazil and France, as well as the progression of this learning on the part of children in these classes. Thus, our object of investigation is opposed to the homogeneity that the NLP establishes by resuming a literacy method of synthetic march.

In this article, we will initially present some reflections on the official guidelines for the teaching of reading and writing in Brazil and France, and on the knowledge and teaching actions mobilized in the classroom. Then, after explaining the methodological aspects of the research, we will discuss the results found, as well as some final considerations.

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## **Curricular proposals for the teaching of reading and writing in Brazil and France**

In dealing with the curricular proposals for the teaching of reading and writing in Brazilian and French literacy classes, it is imperative that we address the cycle of schooling, considering that its policy, which eliminates retention in the literacy cycle, emphasizes a teaching that contemplates the different needs of the learners. In France, the literacy class is institutionally enrolled in a three-year cycle of fundamental learning, but the work of appropriation of alphabetic writing begins in early childhood education. As Chartier (2007, p. 149) points out: "[...] the learning of reading and writing is thus conceived as a long process that begins in the last year of early childhood education and continues into elementary school".

The French syllabus concerning the cycle of fundamental learning (cycle 2), published in the Special Official Bulletin No. 11 of November 26, 2015, makes it explicit that, in the said cycle, the French language constitutes

the central learning object and must involve orality, reading, and writing. In this proposal, literacy is not seen as the teaching of the written code in a specific year, but as a process that begins in early childhood education.

This change in conception and teaching practice, according to Chartier (2007), made, at the same time, the role of the literacy class lighter and heavier: lighter in the sense that the literacy class is no longer "the" literacy class, and the students' knowledge is considered since childhood education (early childhood education); and heavier, because the goal of the literacy class can no longer be reduced to the teaching of coding and decoding, but needs to "[...] articulate the work with the code and with textual understanding, both in its reception and in its production" (CHARTIER, 2007, p. 151).

In this perspective, the document refers to the skills developed in the Grand Section, the last year of early childhood education, related, among other things, to the discovery of the alphabetic principle, and presents the skills that should be worked throughout the cycle in the four axes of French language teaching: understanding and expressing oneself in orality, reading, writing, and understanding the functioning of language (FRANÇA, 2015).

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Regarding writing, its teaching should contemplate both the mastery of the writing gesture and the production of short texts, articulating this teaching to the learning of reading. Regarding the understanding of the functioning of the language, related to the study of reading and writing throughout cycle 2, the knowledge involves orthographic and comprehension issues, focusing on word formation (morphology) and the relationships between them (syntax). Specifically in the Preparatory Course (PC), first year of elementary school, the French teaching activities should emphasize the reflection about words (meaning and form), also considering agreement marks, gender and number variations, and verb tenses.

It is important to note that, unlike France, the curriculum proposals published in Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN, in Portuguese abbreviation) and the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN, in Portuguese abbreviation), do not have specific goals for the teaching of Portuguese language, nor do they address the specificity of literacy. Such specificity was only considered in programs such as Pro-Literacy – Continuing Education Program for Teachers in the Early Years/Grades of Elementary School: literacy and language (BRASIL, 2008) and National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age – PNAIC [in Portuguese abbreviation] (BRASIL, 2012)



, which ended up serving as references for the development of curriculum proposals in the area of Portuguese language, with regard to the initial years of elementary education.

In the PNAIC, a program that was in force before the implementation of the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC, in Portuguese abbreviation), the teaching axis related to linguistic knowledge highlighted skills related to understanding the principles that govern our writing system and that needed to be ensured in the first year, so that during the cycle (first three years of elementary school), other knowledge related to reading and writing could be worked and consolidated (BRASIL, 2012).

With the approval of the BNCC, on December 20, 2017, the literacy cycle now involves only the first two years of elementary school. According to that document, for the child to become literate, he/she must be able to:

[...] 'encode and decode' the sounds of language (phonemes) into graphic material (graphemes or letters), which involves the development of phonological awareness (of the phonemes of Brazilian Portuguese and their organization into larger sound segments such as syllables and words) and knowledge of the Brazilian Portuguese alphabet in its various formats (print and cursive, uppercase and lowercase letters), in addition to the establishment of graphophonic relationships between these two systems of language materialization (BRASIL, 2017, p. 87-88, our emphasis).

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We perceive, with this, a link of literacy to the explicit teaching of the correspondences between phonemes and graphemes, and the phonics method, an aspect also present in the National Literacy Policy, published on April 11, 2019, through Decree No. 9,765. The NPL considers "phonemic awareness" and "systematic phonics instruction" as two of the essential components for literacy, the former being defined as the "[...] conscious knowledge of the smallest phonological units of speech and the ability to manipulate them intentionally [...]; and the latter the [...] explicit and organized teaching of the relationships between the graphemes of the written language and the phonemes of the spoken language" (BRASIL, 2019, p. 50).

We live, therefore, a moment in which the Brazilian official documents for the literacy field seem to privilege a return to the phonics method of literacy. However, we point out that the materialization of an attendance to the heterogeneity of learners' knowledge is related to aspects that go beyond theories,



policies, and decrees, among them, the knowledge and practices that teachers mobilize in their daily actions.

## **The construction of knowledge in action: the teacher as an active agent in his or her literacy practice**

The practices developed by teachers in the classroom mobilize different types of knowledge built over time and throughout their professional careers. This knowledge, which is moved daily in the relationship that the educator establishes with his or her peers, with the prescriptions, and with the students, among other actors, reveals how teachers constitute themselves as educators through their teaching actions. In this sense, it is an action that refers to knowing, understanding, and know-how in the teaching function.

In this function, among the multiple instituted knowledges, those coming from experience are the ones that stand out the most. According to Tardif (2008), experiential knowledge is acquired through daily practices, and, therefore, it is not defined in the curricula or in the training institutions, much less systematized as theory and doctrine.

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According to Goigoux (2007), as far as teaching practice is concerned, experiential knowledge provides for the construction of schemas which refer to the organized and stabilized forms of teaching that teachers use in the mediation process between children and knowledge, with a view to providing teaching that is adjusted to the potential of each student.

In this sense, the more experienced the teacher is, the more action schemas he or she will have "stored". Such schemas, which are not always mobilized in a planned and intentional way, need, as Goigoux and Vergnaud (2005) point out, to be analyzed in the teachers' conducts in classroom situations, because they concern the records of activities that take place in interaction with students.

Thus, the schemas become stabilized over time in the teachers' actions, and the existence of situations that can be repetitive, but unique, is necessary for these situations to be mobilized. Linked to this, teaching practice can also aggregate a multi-agenda of professional and didactic gestures that constitute the professional schemas.

Professional gestures correspond, metaphorically, according to Bucheton and Soulé (2009), to the teacher's actions situated in the diversity of



classroom situations (the time; interactions; knowledge; tasks; the relationship with knowledge; students' attitudes; among other aspects) and to the actualization of his or her concerns that may refer to both words and body movements. In this perspective, the invariant actions of the teaching activity developed from childhood education to higher education constitute the substrate of professional gestures.

Regarding the concerns that govern teaching practice, Bucheton and Soulé (2009) highlight the actions of:

[...] 1) managing and organizing lesson progress, 2) maintaining a space for linguistic and cognitive work and collaboration, 3) making explicit the meaning of what is happening, 4) supporting the work in progress, 5) all with a focus on learning of any kind (BUCHETON and SOULÉ 2009, p. 32).

Such concerns are shown as pillars that support the ordinary act in the classroom, as well as for the knowledge, experiences, and skills of the professional teacher.

Within this framework of professional gestures, there are also the postures assumed by teachers in the development of their activities, which function as "[...] a pre-constructed schema of intellectual and linguistic actions that the individual evokes in response to a given situation or school task" (BUCHETON, 2006, p. 32).

Bucheton and Soulé (2009), considering the diversity of behaviors and aids offered by teachers to their students, pointed to the existence of six postures: 1. posture of control, which aims at framing the situation, rigidly guiding the progress of tasks and trying to make the whole group advance in synchrony; 2. posture of accompaniment, in which there is an occasional individual or collective help, developed laterally according to the progress of the task and the obstacles to be overcome; 3. posture of letting students do their own work, in which the teacher gives the students all the responsibility for their work, authorizing them to experiment with the paths they choose; 4. posture of over-support or counter-support, which refers to the interference of the teacher, who, faced with the need to advance more quickly with the class, may end up doing the task in the student's place; 5. posture of teaching, in which the teacher formulates, structures the knowledge, the norms, demonstrating the exercise to the students; and, finally, 6. a posture called "magic" in which the teacher captures

the children's attention, even if only momentarily, by means of games, theatrical gestures, striking narratives, among other actions.

Besides the professional gestures, we also have the didactic gestures made by teachers in the classroom, which refer to the didactic interventions teachers make in the teaching-learning process, aiming at the development of students' abilities.

In this direction, didactic gestures are the teacher's gestures when considering the teaching object, while professional gestures are broader and encompass the teacher's actions in their entirety, allowing to characterize their functions and tasks regardless of the teaching subject.

Regarding the group of didactic gestures that govern teaching practice, we are guided by the four fundamental gestures considered by Schneuwly (2009), which are: the implementation of the didactic device; the creation of the didactic memory; the regulation and institutionalization. The first one – "implementation of the didactic device" – refers to the way the teacher will present the teaching object to his or her student, that is, to the didactic interventions he or she will perform. The second – "creation of the didactic memory" – corresponds to the interventions in which the teacher resumes the contents that have already been taught in order to make connections with what he or she is teaching at the moment, which enables the construction and sharing of a common knowledge by the class. The third fundamental gesture, "regulation", is focused on interventions that seek to overcome the learning difficulties of the students. And the fourth, "institutionalization", is directed to the process of the teaching action of fixing the knowledge of a teaching object that has already been established by experts (MESSIAS; DOLZ, 2015).

That said, we signal that it is in the action developed in the classroom that the teacher becomes a teacher, through the practice he or she performs, the didactic and pedagogical situations he or she experiences/(re)translates/(re)organizes, and by the procedures he or she uses.

## Methodology

In this section we will present the investigative field of the study, the profiles of the teachers and the researched classes, and the methodological procedures used for data collection. The field of our investigation was constituted in the space of two public schools inserted in two different contexts: Brazil and



France. In Brazil, the research was carried out in a school of the Secretariat of Education of the Recife city – Pernambuco, Brazil, located in the outskirts of the North Zone of the city. In France, the school field of research was located in the city of Lyon, north of the municipality central region, and received a large number of immigrant students who lived near the school.

The two teachers participating in the research were very experienced. The Brazilian teacher (hereafter BT) had 30 years of teaching experience, 20 of them in the early years of elementary school, and the French teacher (hereafter FT) had 20 years of teaching experience, 5 of them in the early years. The Brazilian teacher had a degree in Pedagogy, completed in 1994, and a specialization in “Teaching Early Childhood Education and Elementary School 1”, completed in 2000, both from the Federal University of Pernambuco. At the time of the research, she worked in a 1st grade class of elementary school and, in the second shift (afternoon and evening), she worked as a vice-manager in a school of the state education system of Pernambuco. Her class was composed of 24 students with an average age of six years.

The teacher from France was a graduate of the Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres – IUFM (University Institute of Teacher Formation) and had a Diploma of General University Studies from the University of Lyon in Applied Mathematics and Social Sciences obtained in 1994. She taught a Preparatory Course (PC ) class and had no other professional activity. The FT class was composed of 25 students, with an average age of 6 years.

As for the methodological trajectory, we used a qualitative approach, from which we developed class observations, interviews with the teachers, document analysis referring to the activities contained in the French students’ class notebooks and diagnostic activities of word writing with the Brazilian students. In the Brazilian school, the class observations took place in three weeks during one school year (in April, May and October), totaling fifteen days of observation. In the case of the French school, the observations took place over five days, in the middle of the school year (the months of January and April). In the first month, we observed three school days, one day each week, and in the second month two days in a row. For each day of class observed, we made field diary entries, audio recordings of the classes, and photographs of the spaces and activities.



We evaluated, in both classes, the students' entry and exit profile regarding the appropriation of the alphabetic writing system, using a word writing activity with picture support, performed with the Brazilian students at the beginning and at the end of the school year, and the writing activities contained in the French students' class notebook.

The data obtained both from observations and interviews were submitted to Bardin's (2004) categorical content analysis. For the discussion of the data obtained, we sought support from several researchers, including Ferreiro and Teberosky (1999), Ferreiro (2001) and Morais (2012), as well as the categories developed by Cruz (2012), defining the following levels for the appropriation of the alphabetic writing system:

- Initial Pre-Syllabic (PI): in this stage, the writings have no relation with the sound parts of the words.

- Pre-syllabic with beginning phonetization (PII): children begin to establish some grapheme/phoneme correspondences in the syllables or initial and/or final letters of words in their writings.

- Syllabic (S): the child records a letter for each syllable of the word. This registration can happen based on a sound correspondence of the letter with the represented syllable (qualitative syllabic), or using letters with no relation to the oral syllable (quantitative syllabic).

- Syllabic-Alphabetical (SA): children begin to think at the phoneme level and to spell more than one letter to represent a syllable.

- Early alphabetical (AI): children have little mastery of letter/sound correspondences, although they have already grasped the alphabetic basis of our writing system (one letter for each phoneme).

- Intermediate alphabetical (AII): they have a reasonable command of letter/sound correspondences, predominantly using graphemes with conventional sound value.

- Consolidated alphabetical (AIII): children have little difficulty in letter/sound correspondence. However, they still make some spelling mistakes.

- Alphabetical with conventional writing (AIV): children write without making any spelling mistakes, although they may not use accentuation correctly.

This characterization of writing levels is also related to the study of Campelo (2015), who analyzed and characterized the psychogenetic evolution



of writing in public school children in Rio Grande do Norte, taking as reference the research of Emília Ferreiro and collaborators. In this study, the author characterized the writing levels of literacy students from the state of Rio Grande do Norte by means of the three evolutionary periods proposed by Ferreiro (1990): 1st period – distinction between iconic and non-iconic representation; 2nd period – construction of intrafigural and interfigural differentiation modes; 3rd period – phonetization of writing.

In the following section, we will present the results of the research organized in two sections, one for each teacher participating in the study.

## **The heterogeneity of learners' knowledge about alphabetic writing and the practice of the Brazilian teacher (BT)**

The treatment of the heterogeneity of learners' knowledge about writing in the classroom will be analyzed from the actions that BT developed in the face of this phenomenon. To do so, we signal the levels of appropriation of the alphabetic writing system (henceforth AAVS) that all students in her class presented at the beginning of the school year.

As is to be expected for a 1st grade class at the beginning of the school year in Brazil, we observed a large number of students who were still at early levels of writing. More than half of the learners (60.8%) had a pre-syllabic hypothesis, and most of the diagnoses of these children (39.1% were at the pre-syllabic level) did not show any type of phonological correspondence between the writing and the sound-letter relation of the words presented. The number of students who were at the syllabic level of writing was low (21.7%), and even fewer showed a syllabic-alphabetic hypothesis (17.3%). At the beginning of the year, no student had an alphabetic writing hypothesis.

We realized, then, that the class was basically composed of two large groups of students: those who were at the pre-syllabic level and those who were at the syllabic level. Within these two large groups, we can subdivide, in the case of the first, those who were already beginning to make some kind of correspondence between writing and the sound-letter relation from those who had not yet established any kind of correspondence and, in the case of the second group, those who wrote one letter for each syllable and those who already paid



some attention to the phoneme level. With this, we signaled the existence of a heterogeneous class, but one that had students with close writing levels.

Despite BT's vast experience in teaching, we noticed that she had difficulties in dealing with the different knowledge of the students, as well as a lack of systematicity in the work of appropriating the alphabetic writing system. However, there were attempts to attend to the heterogeneity of the class, revealed through the mobilization of "professional schemas" (GOIGOUX, 2007), "didactic gestures" (SCHNEUWLY, 2009; MESSIAS; DOLZ, 2015) and postures (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009).

The actions developed by BT showed four types of professional schemas that constituted her practice and were related to dealing with heterogeneity: teacher-class interaction with collective reflection; groupings; help/intervention, and differentiated activities.

The interactions that the teacher developed with the class with a view to collective reflection were the most used schema, mobilized in nine of the fifteen observed classes (9/15), followed by grouping (5/15). This shows that the teacher tried to contemplate the heterogeneity of the know-how about alphabetic writing in the teaching situations carried out simultaneously with the whole group. The schemas corresponding to help/intervention (2/15) and differentiated activities (1/15) were also present, but were not much mobilized in her practice, revealing a timider way of work. Moreover, articulated with some of these schemas, the teacher also mobilized the didactic gesture of regulation and postures of control, support, over-support or counter-support, which will be described soon.

The Brazilian teacher rehearsed actions that sought to meet the heterogeneity of the class, despite the fact that teaching needed adjustments in relation to the demands of the learners in some situations. In other words, BT was testing ways to contemplate the different knowledge about writing in her class. In this sense, the collective work was the driving force to attend to this phenomenon in the classroom, with the mobilization of the professional schema related to "teacher-class interaction for collective reflection", used in the moments of writing words.

By mobilizing this schema, it is important to highlight that the teacher used the didactic gesture of regulation, creating means for students to find the answer and overcome obstacles (SCHNEUWLY, 2009; MESSIAS; DOLZ, 2015),



while also assuming postures of “control, over-support or counter-support” (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009), disregarding, in most situations, the student’s error, anticipating some answers and doing the activity in the place of the children. This type of posture was evidenced when the teacher reflected on the writing of words, but disregarded the letters said by the students, or when she anticipated their answers, failing to reflect on the learners’ own errors.

In one of the observed classes (Class 01), when working with the mobile alphabet, the children were organized in pairs with different levels of knowledge and, besides asking them to assemble some words, BT chose to reflect on the number of letters and syllables, instead of writing them. To do so, the words were initially written on the board (SCHOOL, GIRL, BOY), their letters and syllables were counted, and then put together by the children using the mobile alphabet.

This strategy of writing the word on the board even before asking the child to write can be analyzed as an “over-support or counter-support posture” (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009) for children to advance faster in the activity. Moreover, it can also be interpreted as an attempt to control children’s errors, considering that it would be a good opportunity to problematize the writing hypotheses presented by the class.

Regarding grouping, although the classroom was organized in pairs, with children who presented close levels of knowledge and other distinct hypotheses, the request for joint and cooperative work was not constant, and grouping was stimulated in five of the fifteen observed classes. For this, the teacher encouraged the formation of these groups, but left it up to the children themselves to choose where to stay, revealing a certain inconsistency in this work, since it would be more appropriate for the teacher, as someone who knows the difficulties of the students, to direct the types of grouping.

However, as the levels of knowledge about writing in the class were heterogeneous, this ended up reflecting in most groupings, even with the choices being made by the students themselves. In these groupings, we noticed BT’s perspective in instituting help cooperative work among the learners. Moreover, these situations also served to reduce the teacher’s closer interactions with students who presented difficulties, since she let the students work in a more autonomous way, having a colleague as a support for any doubts that might arise.

The mobilization of the schema related to differentiated activities happened together with this work with groupings, when the teacher proposed a work with literacy games involving the association of the image to the word, and the image to the first letter of the figure. This schema was mobilized in a single class (Class 14), of the set of observed classes, and was in line with what Morais (2012) states, that the implementation of different activities is still a difficulty for teachers in dealing with the heterogeneity of the class.

Finally, the help and intervention with a learner who presented learning difficulties with writing was a conduct carried out in an unplanned and intentional way, but that sought to account for the learning difficulty of a specific student. This schema was mobilized to solve similar episodes, which happened on two days of the set of observed classes, and referred to the student's difficulty in performing an activity that involved reflection on the alphabetic writing system.

14 These punctual actions and the other schemas, gestures and postures mobilized reveal BT's attempt to "[...] enable, to the highest possible degree, the participation of all students in the different activities and tasks, even if their level of competence, their interest or their knowledge are in a first moment very scarce and inadequate" (ONRUBIA, 1996, p. 134). This attempt, among the actions previously explained, is shown as groping made by the teacher to attend the heterogeneity, being the collective action the "easiest" way to BT to perform a work in which everyone could be contemplated.

Thus, the groping evidenced by little consistency of schemas, actions and attitudes ended up reflecting on the learning about the alphabetic writing system. At the end of the school year, we identified that most of the students had made progress, but also that some remained in the same hypothesis with which they had started the school year. Moreover, we draw attention to the incidence of children who still presented pre-syllabic levels at the end of the year (34.7%), exceeding the number of students with alphabetic hypothesis (26%). Those with syllabic and syllabic-alphabetic levels totaled about 39%. In short, few children reached the end of the year writing based on a correspondence between sounds smaller than the syllables (phonemes) and graphemes. In the following section, we present the analyses of the French context.



## The heterogeneity of learners' knowledge about alphabetic writing and the French teacher's practice (FT)

The analysis of the writing activities contained in the learners' notebooks from the beginning of the school year made it possible to trace the input profile of the children in the French school's Preparatory Course about their knowledge of the alphabetic writing system. This notebook was used only in the school context and contained the class activities performed individually by the students, as well as the teacher's correction performed after the child had finished the task.

Based on the analysis of the writing in the children's notebooks, we found that most students started the PC with an alphabetic writing hypothesis (88%), with only one student (4%) having an initial pre-syllabic hypothesis and two students (8%) having a syllabic-alphabetic hypothesis. Such a panorama is quite different from that presented in the 1st year of elementary school in Brazil, in which most children evidenced early levels of writing at the beginning of the school year. In PC's class, we noticed that heterogeneity was related to the mastery of letter/sound correspondences, since a large portion of the class already understood that letters represent or note the sound-letter relation of the words we speak.

That said, the teacher's practices had to attend the children who did not yet think alphabetically, in order to make them reach this hypothesis, while at the same time contemplating the students of this level, aiming to consolidate the grapheme/phoneme correspondences, as well as the orthographic norms and rules. To deal with these different knowledges, FT, as well as BT, also mobilized "professional schemas" (GOIGOUX, 2007), "professional and didactic gestures" (MESSIAS; DOLZ, 2015; SCHNEUWLY, 2009), as well as postures (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009) in her actions.

We identified the use of six schemas in the French teacher's practice: the groupings; the aids and interventions; the differentiated activities; the individualized attention; the teacher-student interaction in collective teaching situations and the teacher-class interaction with a view to collective reflection. Although some of these are the same ones mobilized by BT, we will see that the way FT mobilized them in her practice was different.



It is important to note that these schemas, which also included gestures, were articulated in the teacher's practice and, in many situations, concomitantly, since the groupings were proposed to perform different tasks, while some students benefited from the teacher's help, interventions, and assistance.

The groupings were a frequent schema, being carried out in four of the five observed classes (4/5). This was because the teacher's practice was based on working with workshops, where the class was organized into four groups to perform the daily activities. In this organization, each group was formed by children with different knowledge about reading and writing, considering the teacher's intention to enable mutual help among the learners. In this sense, they were intentional groupings that envisioned an active role for the students.

Before proposing the activities to the groups, the teacher always explained each of the tasks, making the learners aware of what had to be done and preparing them for cooperation. This also contributed to the management of the class atmosphere, since this professional gesture, through group interactions, allowed, among other situations, the confrontation between learners to solve common issues, as pointed out by Bucheton and Soulé (2009).

16 The group work involved activities to consolidate alphabetic writing and grammatical aspects, and lasted about an hour, four days a week. For this, the class was organized into four groups, three groups of six and one group of seven learners who alternated the four types of tasks that were proposed, one for each group, throughout the week. Generally, two or three of these tasks were more mechanical, involving painting, drawing or math (addition) for the children to answer them autonomously, while the others were accompanied by the teacher and involved exercises that dealt with the appropriation and consolidation of the alphabetic writing system.

These moments served both to give more specific attention to one of the groups in the workshops and to be able to intervene with some learners in the different groups or outside of them. These aids and interventions were mobilized routinely (3/5) and in a conscious and planned way, as well as evidenced professional gestures of support (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009), given the teacher's intention to promote the understanding, learning, and growth of these learners with difficulties who received her aids and interventions.

The help provided to certain students at the same time that the learners were working in groups evidenced a differentiation within a situation that was



already differentiated. This was also revealed when FT used these moments of work in the workshops to provide individualized assistance, in two of the five classes observed (2/5), to learners who presented difficulties with reading and writing or who needed to advance in other competencies. For this, there were also the differentiated activities.

The use of these activities, in three of the five observed classes (3/5), revealed an attentive look at the heterogeneity of knowledge about alphabetic writing that permeated the class, showed as a schema that was mobilized by the teacher's awareness of what the students already knew and what they still needed to learn. For this, FT, from one of the classes (Lesson 05), started to adopt a new organization: black, red and green folders containing different activities in each one; and a poster with the students' names separated by the colors of the folder, fixed on the wall below the blackboard.

This separation, as well as the activities, was proposed based on the different levels of knowledge about writing presented by the children. In this sense, all the students classified as black had consolidated alphabetic hypotheses; those classified as red mixed children with a consolidated alphabetic level with an intermediate one, and those classified as green gathered children with an intermediate alphabetic level who presented a little more difficulty. Thus, the activities in each of the folders sought to contemplate and meet the specificities of each of these groups.

Such activities, developed to complement the pedagogical activity, were done during the class, but without the direct monitoring of the teacher, since at these moments it was assumed the "attitude of letting do" (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009), but a letting do that was based on the resolution possibilities of the children.

It is important to note that the interactions established by FT with certain children or with the whole group in collective moments also revealed themselves as a professional schema, mobilized in three of the five observed classes (3/5). Such interactions, imbued with the didactic gesture of regulation (MESSIAS; DOLZ, 2015; SCHNEUWLY, 2009) and the professional gesture of support (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009) sought to propitiate the learners to overcome their difficulties, leading them to understand, say and do what was being proposed.

The support gesture (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009), of leading the student to learn, was also present in the moments in which FP mobilized the collective



reflection schema in which the interaction happened between the teacher and the whole class. This happened in three of the five observed classes (3/5). In these collective situations, the whole class was stimulated to reflect on the proper writing of words and their phonemes. The procedure adopted by the teacher was, in her interactions with the class, to build a path that would lead the students to understand what was being asked of them. This practice, as well as the schemas, gestures, and postures mobilized, ended up reverberating in the students' learning at the end of the school year.

All children finished the school year at the alphabetic level, with 68% with consolidated alphabetic hypotheses and the other 32% at the intermediate alphabetic level. On the other hand, we noticed that some students remained in the same levels of appropriation of the writing system in which they started the year, especially in the consolidated alphabetic level. However, remaining at the consolidated alphabetic level is not serious, since the consolidation of these aspects will take place over the other two years of the Fundamental Learning Cycle and that the spelling and accentuation of words in the French language is complex. Thus, all the children finished the PC class understanding how the alphabetic writing system works, unlike what we observed in the Brazilian context in the 1st grade class in which many students finished the year without reaching the alphabetic hypothesis or without consolidating the sound/graphics correspondences.

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## Final considerations

In this article, we analyzed the practices of first grade teachers in Brazil and France in dealing with the heterogeneity of students' knowledge about alphabetic writing, as well as the different levels of appropriation of the writing system of children in both classes at the beginning and at the end of the school year.

When analyzing children's knowledge about the alphabetic writing system, based on the studies of Ferreiro and Teberosky (1999), Ferreiro (2001) and Morais (2012), we draw attention to the disparity, at the beginning of the school year, between 1st grade of elementary school in Brazil and students of PC in France. While most French children started the first year of the learning cycle with syllabic and alphabetic hypotheses, understanding that writing represents



the sound-letter relation of words, in Brazil, the students in the investigated class had initial hypotheses of writing, with a predominance of the pre-syllabic level.

Such scenario leads us to consider the need for literacy public policies in Brazil begin to think and experience the understanding of the alphabetic writing system even before this stage, since early childhood education, as happens in France, and as proposed by Morais (2012) and Soares (2016).

In the aspect regarding the work with heterogeneity of knowledge about alphabetic writing, we identified “professional schemas” (GOIGOUX, 2007) and “postures, didactic and professional gestures” (BUCHETON; SOULÉ, 2009; MESSIAS; DOLZ, 2015; SCHNEUWLY, 2009) mobilized by both teachers in order to address this phenomenon.

The mobilization of the schemas in the context of pedagogical actions was operated differently by the teachers, although some of them were the same (the groupings, the help/interventions, the differentiated activities, the collective reflection). This is because both presented different postures in relation to the knowledge they had about what their students already knew and what they still needed to learn so that they could advance in their learning about writing.

We highlight this knowledge and evaluation of the learners’ knowledge as one of the basic elements for the use of these schemas in a more intentional way. While the French teacher evidenced this knowledge, the Brazilian teacher showed difficulties in evaluating and dealing with the different knowledge of the students. In other words, BT was aware of the need to attend to the children’s different knowledge about writing, but did not seem to know how to act.

The Brazilian teacher’s attempt to address the individualities and difficulties of some students through non-productive grouping, and occasional help and interventions, revealed themselves as groping (CHARTIER, 2000) aimed at managing the different knowledge of writing in the classroom. However, the way they were conducted did not contribute significantly to the students’ learning. As a result, they progressed in schooling without making significant advances in their knowledge of writing. Such data meets what was pointed out by Souza and Costa-Maciel (2021) about the fact that a third of the students in the Recife school system concluded the literacy cycle (3rd year of elementary school) without consolidating the learning objectives in reading measured in the network assessment.



In the case of the French context, we highlight the progression of knowledge about writing evidenced by most of the students in the PC's class, in which the teacher's directions and interventions were more effective both in dealing with heterogeneity and the activities related to the axes of reading and writing. With this, we identified the possibility of advances by the learners who have a practice that attends and, consequently, meets the difficulties and different knowledge presented in the group/class.

Thus, we believe that it is not the resumption of a phonics method, with a homogenizing perspective, as proposed by the current National Literacy Policy, that will propitiate the learning of the written language, but the valorization of the heterogeneity of knowledge about reading and writing that permeates the students in the class. It is necessary that teachers know how to evaluate the students' knowledge and, based on this, organize their pedagogical interventions to work in the perspective of heterogeneity in order to make all students advance.

## 20 Notes

- 1 Continuing education program for literacy teachers proposed by the Ministry of Education in 2012 with the integration between professionals from public networks from various municipal and state education departments, professors and students from different universities in Brazil. This program proposed a set of "learning rights" related to the different areas of education.
- 2 The PC class corresponds, in Brazil, to the 1st grade of elementary school.
- 3 The difference in relation to the quantity and periodicity of observations of the French context with the Brazilian one was due to the initial difficulty in finding schools able to receive us, given the procedures required by the French education system, as well as the duration of the Doctoral Stay that made it impossible to make observations at the end of the year.
- 4 The option to analyze the students' class notebooks is explained by the fact that we did not have the opportunity to join the school at the beginning of the school year and we were not present at the end of the school year.

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