

Educational inequalities and literacy*

Marcos Antonio Batista da Silva¹
Cleomar Azevedo²

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to review the scientific productions associated with literacy that have been published in indexed articles in two periodical portals, namely: PePSIC and LILACS. The bibliographical search was conducted by electronic means amidst indexed scientific productions, whose descriptor *letramento* (literacy, in Portuguese) were part of the title; it includes articles published in Brazil from 1995 through 2015. Data provided material to prepare worksheets that facilitated to systematize the information collected from the bibliography on literacy by means of electronic search. The proposal was to apprehend which topics and areas of knowledge have most frequently occupied such publications. Thus, the concepts of literacy, educational inequalities and ethnic-racial relations were discussed. Theoretical framework utilized was from contemporary authors working on these subjects, in addition to Thompson's depth hermeneutics (DH), a methodological reference. Results show that the journals were mainly from the areas of Education, Psychology, Geriatrics, Nutrition Science, and Nephrology, with a highlight to the following topics on literacy: school context (children, young people, and teachers), inclusive education in the educational environment and outside of it (older people), literacy in health (hospitals), and digital literacy. However, there was no focus on social inequalities, especially those connected with ethnicity/race. Future studies on literacy should be more comprehensive, especially in regard of the Blacks and Indians in Brazilian society.

Keywords

Literacy – Educational inequalities – Ethnic-racial relations.

* Translated from Brazilian Portuguese into U.S. English by Luiz Ramires, M.A and PhD candidate in Education. See CV at <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3750083880967778>

Contact: lularamires@usp.br, lularamires@yahoo.com.br.

1- Centro de Estudos Sociais (CES). Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. Contato: marcos.psic@yahoo.com.br.

2- Centro Universitário FIEO, Osasco, SP, Brasil. Contato: cleomar.azevedo@uol.com.br.



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Introduction

This study intends to analyze discourses on literacy published in Brazil from 1995 to 2015. It is understood that the production of knowledge, regardless of the field it belongs to, “cannot escape the systematic effort of investigating and assess what has been produced in a given period of time and area of influence” (DAYRELL; CARRANO, 2009, p. 7).

The investigation originates in the Graduate Program in Educational Psychology at the FIEO University Center and is part of the line of research on Educational Processes in the Social and Political Context, which deals with studies in contexts of formal and non-formal education, as well as their relations with educational policies and processes of social inclusion and exclusion; of assessment, performance and academic failure; and literacy.

In this article, in order to understand the concept of literacy, we believe it is important to look back at how the term has been used in Brazil. Then, we will highlight the educational inequalities in the country. With the purpose of locating the literature on literacy in regard of the academic productions, a review of such productions on educational and racial inequalities in Brazil was conducted (including the recent changes Brazil has gone through, and subtopics of the State, the social movements and the families).

Implementing specific public policies, capable of responding more efficiently to the serious situation of racial inequalities in Brazil is a requirement for the construction of a nation with more social justice. Thus, the exercise of recovering analytically the production on literacy in Brazil provides a starting point that defines and proceeds in broader way in this research.

Studies on literacy

The word literacy was introduced in Brazil through the literature of Mary Kato, in the mid-1980's. One of the first occurrences is in the book *No mundo da escrita: uma perspectiva psicolinguística* (in the world of writing: psycholinguistic perspective), by Kato (1986). The book brings evidence of psycholinguistic aspects that are involved in the learning of the schooled language by the children. The author discusses the importance of writing as a representation of the speech and its emergence, lists some of the problems concerning success or failure in learning how to read and write, and she also indicates points for reflection in relation to the didactic-pedagogical solutions for the problems addressed; finally, she discusses the theories about language is acquired.

Years later, in *Adultos não alfabetizados: o avesso do avesso* (illiterate adults, the reverse of inside out), Tfouni (1986, p. 3) proposed “to clarify some aspects of the cognitive functioning of Brazilian illiterate adults by observing how they use the language in a dialogical situation, in a specific task: the comprehension of logic-verbal reasoning”. In Tfouni's own words (1995, p. 10), “teaching literacy has to do with the acquisition of writing as the act of learning abilities for reading, writing and the so-called practices of language”. While teaching literacy involves the acquisition of writing by someone or a group of People, being literate emphasizes the social-historical aspects of acquiring the written system of a society. Therefore, for the author, literacy has the purpose of

investigating who is literate, but also who is not, and, for that matter, “it disconnects from checking the individual and focuses on the social” (TFOUNI, 1995, p. 10).

Kleiman (1995, p. 19) defines literacy as “a set of social practices that utilize writing as symbolic systems and as technology, in specific contexts”. The author emphasizes the need to take into account the social environment in which the individual is interacting. Although they are indissoluble and intertwined, writing, learning the letters and being literate not always have been considered as a set by researchers; while the writing systems are a cultural product, learning to read and write and literacy are process to acquire a writing system.

Literacy focuses on socio-historical aspects of learning to read and write. On one hand, the concept of literacy began to circulate in the academic milieu seeking to separate the studies on the social impact of writing from the studies on teaching how to read and write, whose school connotations highlight individual abilities in the use and practice of the written language. On the other hand, studies on literacy looked at the social development that followed the expansion of the uses of the written language since the 16th century, such as the social, political, economic and cognitive changes (KLEIMAN, 1995).

Studies on literacy were improved in an effort to describe the conditions of using the written language, in order to determine which were effects of literacy practices over minority groups or in non-industrialized societies that began to integrate writing as a technology of communication for groups that held power. That is, studies on literacy assumed that the effects were related to the social and cultural practices of the different groups making use of the written language (KLEIMAN, 1995).

For Soares (2001, p. 47), literacy is the “status or condition of who not only can read and write but also cultivates and exerts the social practices that make use of writing”. The author add that it is important to comprehend literacy from the perspective of other countries.

[...] it is literacy the developed countries are speaking of when they condemn, as they have frequently done, alarming rates of illiteracy (United States, Great Britain, Australia) or illetrisme (France) among the population; actually, they are not condemning, as it is usually believed in Brazil, a high number of people who cannot read and write [...], they are rather condemning a high number of people who evince they do not live the status or condition of who can read and write. (SOARES, 2001, p. 22-23).

Following this discussion on literacy, the emergence of new communication Technologies must be highlighted as they have changed a number of activities in the present, especially the so-called digital literacy. For Freitas (2010, p. 337): “Digital literacy is defined as using digital technology, communication tools and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, assess, and create information to operate in a society of society of knowledge”. Digital literacy has affected the process of teaching and learning how to read and write and literacy as well, leading researchers to investigate the consequences of these new practices in society (LUZ, 2016).

It is argued that the technologies have certain social, cognitive and discursive effects, resulting in modes of literacy. In this context, Luz (2016, p. 278) points that, in

order to provide sufficient opportunities of learning involving new technologies among students, “it is necessary to develop a better structured and informed teacher education, both in basic and continued trained, so that there will be teachers digitally literate and willing to utilize this knowledge in their daily classroom activities”.

One also observes that other literacy processes take a parallel path but not simultaneously, that is, the learner needs to master codes that are necessary in their every-day life. In view of this, we would be developing a process to learn literacy by directing the individual to write and read different literary genres with a concern towards the social uses of reading and writing, according to his or her reality. We may highlight, as an example, the enforcement of the Brazilian Senior Citizen’s Statute, Act No. 10,741/03, and Acts No. 10,639/03 and No. 11,645/08. The first act suggests public policies to ensure practices of literacy to people who are becoming old (MASSI et al., 2010). Social interaction, access to education and health are topics of concern to researchers, health professionals, and public policymakers.

The subsequent acts, which set forth that teaching African, Afro-Brazilian and Indian history and culture is mandatory – an education of ethnic-racial relations in Brazil –, reflect the tension in the history of educational policies in the country, as on one hand, there are policies aimed at maintaining the structural racism which is revealed by the invisibility of race and by the myth of racial democracy and, on the other hand, policies that result from social struggles that break with the former. The concept of literacy is a tool that potentiates a student to read the world, awakening his or her critical sense by getting to know and interacting with other cultures, mainly concerning the universe of African and Afro-Brazilian culture (PEREIRA, 2011).

Educational inequalities

Brazil’s school system has been questioned for its unsatisfactory results regarding the quality of the learning process and the development of the individual (FISCHER; GESSER, 2016). Despite the changes and investments by the government, there are students in Brazilian public schools who are not able to compete with other students in the social context, when they try to continue their studies and/or to find a job. That is, part of the students who graduate from basic schooling have difficulties to comprehend a text and in their writing.

In the country, concern with teaching how to read and write and with literacy has been the object of research in many universities and research centers such as the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP). In addition, international recommendations (World Bank), as well as the social movements (the Black movement), among others, have advanced the need to disaggregate educational statistics by sex and by color/race (SENKEVICS; CARVALHO, 2016; CARVALHO, 2005).

There is information in INEP website about assessment in the country – namely: Prova Brasil (Brazil’s Test) and the National System of Assessment of the Basic Education (SAEB) –, which are devised for large-scale diagnostics and whose purpose is to evaluate the quality of the teaching provided by the Brazilian educational system based on standardized tests and socioeconomic questionnaires. In the tests applied to the fifth

and ninth graders, students answer to questions of Portuguese focusing on reading, and mathematics, focusing on problem solving.

In the socioeconomic questionnaire, students give information about context factors that may be associated with their academic performance. Teachers and principals of the classes and schools being assessed also answer questionnaires which collect demographic data, professional profile and working conditions. Based on the information collected (by SAEB and Prova Brasil), the Federal Department of Education and the State and Local Departments of Education may define actions aimed at improving the quality of education in the country and to reduce the existing inequalities by promoting the correction of the distortions identified.

The average performance results in these assessments also subsidize the calculation of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), together with the approval rates in these spheres. In addition, data are also made available for society at large in order to follow up the policies implemented by the different levels of government. As for Prova Brasil, the specific performance of each educational network and the the school system as a whole can be observed, including the public schools in both urban and rural areas.

A highlight is the National Assessment of Alphabetization (ANA), a census-based assessment involving the third graders from public schools, with the main objective of evaluating the levels of reading and writing skills and literacy in Portuguese, mathematics, as well as the conditions of supplying alphabetization by the public school systems. It is worth reminding that, according to Directive No.482/2013, the National System of Basic Education Assessment (SAEB) now consists of three evaluation processes: National Assessment of Basic Education (ANEB), National Assessment of School Achievement (ANRESC), and National Assessment of Alphabetization (ANA).

Assessments are discussed as there is some kind of training for those sitting for the test. Maybe we should here take an in-depth look, considering how legitimate the assessment tests are and the data they provide about literacy in the country. Is there some type of bias or specificity in this assessment? Some questioning is appropriate: the test applied in a specific school in a middle- and upper-class upmarket neighborhood is the same applied in a rural school or in the poor areas of the great cities? We are not thinking exclusively of the social status but of the knowledge one deems is necessary to possess in a given grade. A theme that is relevant to the upmarket student in urban area may be not relevant to a student from a countryside area, or from poor neighborhoods. On one hand, Prova Brasil aims to contribute with the making of policies that advance alphabetization and literacy; on the other hand, it is still about a diagnostic tool that needs to be improved (FREITAG; ALMEIDA; ROSARIO, 2013). In Brazil, by implementing SAEB, a set of information was produced which enabled to develop research on the country's school system. These studies have shown that the socioeconomic level of students, in connection with other factors (students behind grade, school failure, color/ethnicity), is significantly associated with the performance students achieve in cognitive tests. But it is necessary to stress out that this relationship is not deterministic, that is, there are school that participate in Prova Brasil which manage to be successful, as all the same there are schools whose results fall short (SOARES; ALVES, 2013).

The more we broaden our perspective in looking at the process of alphabetization and literacy, regarding the educational inequalities in all school levels, including higher education, the better will be the schooling process and the search for fairness in the country's educational system. Thus, we can quote, for example, the system's need to level Portuguese and mathematics, utilized by a number of universities in Brazil to improve school achievement and serving as an aid for students in the early years of higher education (MARTENS, 2016).

Educational inequalities and ethnic-racial relations

Paixão (2010), by means of information contained in the Annual report of racial inequalities in Brazil 2009–2010, shows great inequalities regarding blacks and whites in the educational system, considering the following data: distortion in the age-grade ratio in basic education; illiteracy rate; percentage of Brazilian children aged 0 through 3 years old who attend day-care nursery facilities; evolution of the average number of years of schooling of the population; average number of school years of those who are 15 years old; percentage of students who attended basic school; number of higher education students etc.

Despite the increased rate of participation, the inequality between the White population and other sub-represented groups (black, indigenous) is still very large, mainly considering the data obtained in the last Demographic Census, in 2010, which indicate that the distribution by color/race in the general population, taking into account whites and blacks, is next to equivalence where the presence of blacks is slightly higher.

Collecting data for the item color/race in the Basic Education School Census completed ten years in 2016. In the School Census, the same categories used by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) are utilized: white, black, brown, yellow, and indigenous. If the person chooses not to declare their color/race, there is the option not declared. In sight of this historical landmark, INEP launched a campaign to raise awareness of school managers and technicians involved with the School Census to correctly fill out the blank for this piece of information. Why should data on color/race be collected? What for? To encourage reflections. Thus, INEP presents an overview that demonstrates how the black and indigenous populations, despite the recent advancements, still find difficulties to access and remain in the several educational spaces.

The inequality observed in the educational indicators makes it clear how including the field color/race ensure more details for the analysis of the educational profile of Brazilian students. The item allows to develop policies intended to eliminate historical inequalities among populational groups that will be implemented, monitored and assessed. (BRASIL, 2016, p. 2).

Including the field color/race in school censuses fosters more detailed information to analyze the student's profiles. Separately, the pieces of information collected certainly do not help combat the racial inequalities but, if associated with other data, they may configure important information for new studies on ethnic-racial relations.

Educational inequalities in basic education are reflected in higher education. Thus, the presence of blacks at the university, in addition to being scarce, is unequal and restricted

to some areas (ARTES; RICOLDI, 2015). It is worth reminding that, in the educational system, access to higher education through Act No. 12.711/2012 has been adopted in public institutions from different regions. In the private institutions, the Program Universidade para Todos (university for all, PROUNI) also prioritizes groups that are historically in the minority, for those sitting for the High-School National Exam (ENEM). In 2016, according to INEP data, 9,490,952 candidates signed up to take ENEM.³ However, we do not have the numbers by color/race and sex for this study.

Methodology

This study is descriptive, with quantitative and qualitative dimensions; a survey was conducted about the scientific production associated with literacy. The bibliographical search was done by electronic tools in indexed scientific publications contained in the database of the Online Health Library,⁴ which encompasses a wide range of scientific production. In addition, a search was also conducted in website of Psychology Electronic Periodicals (PePSIC),⁵ which is a source of the Online Health Library – Psychology, from the Latin-American Union of Psychology Entities (BVS-Psi ULAPSI), a result of partnership between the Forum of National Entities of Brazilian Psychology (FENPB), the Dante Moreira Leite Library, the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo (IP/USP), and the Latin-American and Caribbean Center of Information on Health Science.

Searching for information on the Online Health Library oriented the study towards the database of Latin-American and Caribbean Literature in Health Science (LILACS),⁶ an important and comprehensive index of scientific and technical literature in Latin America and the Caribbean. For decades, such database has been contributing to increase the visibility, the access and the quality of information in health in the mentioned region. In another moment, the search utilized the PePSIC website.

For such, we utilized the descriptor *letramento* (literacy), which we consider to be representative of the publications related to the purpose of this work. The enquiries covered only the articles published in Brazil, from 1995 through December, 2015, in which the descriptor was part of the title. The survey took place between the months of August and September, 2016. Data subsidized the preparation of a worksheet in which the information was systematized. Only the abstracts of the publications were analyzed.

For the analysis, we adopted the perspective of the depth hermeneutics (DH), proposed by Thompson (2011). The author presents a structural conception of culture, which encompasses the symbolic nature of the social life. For Thompson (2011, p. 22), the patterns of meaning associated with the symbolic forms are shared in everyday life within structured social contexts that “involve power relations, forms of conflict, inequalities around the distribution of resources and so on”.

According to Thompson, “the DH approach must accept and take into consideration the ways in which the symbolic forms are interpreted by the subjects who make up the

3- Available at: <<http://www.brasil.gov.br/educacao/2016/05/mais-de-9-2-milhoes-de-candidatos-se-inscreveram-no-enem>>.

4- Available at: <<http://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/>>.

5- Available at: <<http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/>>

6- Available at: <<http://lilacs.bvsalud.org>>

field-subject-object” (THOMPSON, 2011, p. 363). The symbolic forms are here understood as actions, speeches, images and texts received, reproduced and put into circulation. They may be linguistic, non-linguistic or mixed, and must be considered by the peers as significant and recognized in socially structured contexts. For this study, we considered the abstracts of the articles found to be symbolic forms structurally situated and which deserve description and interpretation.

Thompson (2011) emphasizes five fundamental characteristics that distinguish the symbolic forms: the intentional dimension (the symbolic forms are expressions of a subject to another subject, with a certain objective or purpose); the conventional dimension (the production, circulation and reception of the symbolic forms involve rules or conventions); the structural dimension (the symbolic forms show an articulated structure); the referential dimension (the symbolic forms represent, concern and refer to something); and, finally, the contextual dimension (the symbolic forms are always part of specific socio-historical contexts, within which and through which they are produced, transmitted and received). For the author, these social contexts are specific in space and time, and they are also structured, that is, they entail “asymmetries and differences relatively stable in terms of distribution of and access to resources of several kinds, power, opportunities and chances of life” (THOMPSON, 2011, p. 198).

The DH methodology as a whole has three steps: the socio-historical analysis of the context where the symbolic forms are produced, circulated and transmitted; the analysis of the symbolic forms; the interpretation and reinterpretation of the material produced. Thus, following such perspective of analysis, we have thoroughly read some of the article published in the area of Psychology, as this is a study conducted in a Program of Educational Psychology. Next, we sought to identify the key topics related to the objectives of the investigation, and we assessed their core meanings. The sample found under the descriptor adopted included 31 publications: 29 from the LILACS database and two from PePSIC repository. It should be added, for the latter, that we actually found four articles but one of them was out of the period being researched – the year of 1994 – and the other one was already in the LILACS listing.

Results and discussion

Table 1 includes the articles on literacy published in Portuguese.

Tabela 1- Distribution of articles per five-year periods.

Five-year period	Amount
1995-2000	1
2001-2005	4
2006-2010	10
2011-2015	16
Total	31

Source: LILACS and PePSIC, 2017.

Data above indicate an increase, in each five-year period, in the publication of articles on literacy. One observes that the most significant periods were between 2006 and 2010, with ten publications; and between 2011 and 2015, in which the greatest concentration is found, with 16 articles. We believe that one of the possible reasons interfering with such result is related to the fact that, in recent decades, important actions and programs were implemented on the national level as well as internationally, aimed at the public policies of alphabetization (BRASIL, 2014).

We identified 16 different periodicals with publications of works associated with the term *letramento* (literacy), as shown by Charter 1.

Charter 1- Amount of articles published (LILACS and PePSIC, 1995-2015).

Journals	Amount
Educação em Revista Estudo e Pesquisa em Psicologia Fono Atual Interface – Comunicação, Saúde, Educação Jornal Brasileiro de Nefrologia Nutriva: Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Alimentação e Nutrição Revista Ciência & Saúde Coletiva	1
Psicologia: Reflexão & Crítica Revista Brasileira de Educação Especial Psicologia Escolar e Educacional Revista CECAF	2
Ciência & Cognição Paidéia (Ribeirão Preto) Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Fonoaudiologia Revista Brasileira de Geriatria e Gerontologia	3
Distúrbio da Comunicação	4

Source: LILACS and PePSIC, 2017.

Regarding the origin of the publications, a highlight is that almost all of them come from the Southeast area of (93.8 percent), and only one publication is from the South of Brazil (6.2 percent). It should be emphasized that such publications are concentrated in the states of São Paulo (56.3 percent), Rio de Janeiro (25,0%), Minas Gerais (12,5%) e Rio Grande do Sul (6,2%). Out of the whole set of periodicals researched, only one [Distúrbio da Comunicação (communication disorder)] published four papers; the others published one to three articles. The major topics addressed by journals were the following: Pathology of Speech and Language, Education, Psychology, Geriatrics, Sciences of Nutrition, and Nephrology. By detailing the contents of the publications a little more, taking the analysis

into consideration, we found a diversity of themes. It is clear that the target population of investigations consisted of children, teenagers, youths, adults and the elderly, in addition to disabled people, of both sexes.

Charter 2- Frequency of topics related to literacy.

Topic	Percentage (%)
Literacy in the health area	22.5
Literacy in the education area	74.3
Digital literacy	3.2
Total	100

Source: LILACS and PePSIC, 2017.

Charter 2 shows three trends found in the publications, considering the categories gathered and described according to the criteria defined by the investigators. The first trend is related to literacy in the health area, with 22.5 percent of matches (including alphabetization in health; knowledge, attitudes and practices in health; aging and health; longevity; hearing loss; disabled people; mental health). Regarding this trend (literacy and health), Rocha and Lemos (2016, p. 215) indicate that literacy in the field of health is a topic of interest for health professionals and researchers: “Functional literacy in health represents the cognitive ability to understand, interpret and apply oral and written information on health”.

Charter 2 also shows a second tendency, associated with the great majority of publications (74,3 percent): the topic of literacy in the educational area (including learning, educational assessment, cognition, comprehension, communication, language, teachers, education, inclusive education, child education, higher education, teaching, elementary and middle school, highs-school, reading, writing, literacy, vocabulary). For Resende and Macie (2015, p. 159), “the concept of literacy re-signified the concept of alphabetization and yielded profound changes in the pedagogical practice of teaching and learning how to read and write”.

Finally, we present the third trend (digital literacy), with 3.2 percent. For Castells (1999), today it is necessary to add to those competencies the skills related to digital literacies. Their symbol is the internet, giving rise to the network society.

Charter 3- Distribution of frequency in the articles by sex of the author(s).

Category	Male	Female	Mixed
Author	-	89.6%	10.4%

Source: LILACS and PePSIC, 2017.

One easily notices the constancy of female supremacy in the authorship of the papers published (89.6 percent). No article by one or more male authors was found, but we were able to find articles of mixed authorship (10.4 percent), consisting of male and female authors. Such category was determined by the researchers of this study on the grounds of the names found.

Therefore, the literature on literacy make us enter a predominantly female universe. And the male participation takes place in partnership with female authors in the writing of articles, as could be seen no Charter 3.

Charter 4- Distribution of frequency of article by number of authors.

Category	Percentage (%)
Articles with one author	9.6
Articles with two authors	29.0
Articles with treeh authors	19.5
Articles with more than three authors	41.9
Total	100.0

Source: LILACS and PePSIC, 2017.

When looking at the number of authors of articles on literacy, Charter 4 shows that the vast majority is made up by more than three authors (41.9 percent) and just a few articles were written by a single individual (9.6 percent). In *Cr terios de autoria e co-autoria em trabalhos cient ficos* (criteria of authorship and co-authorship in scientific Works), Montenegro and Alves (1997) say that co-authorship supposes the effort by more than one person and they discuss the norms of criteria on the occasion of these publications. For them, “it is necessary to understand that including someone as co-author of an article requires a major involvement in doing it, requires knowledge of its content and participation in its writing” (MONTENEGRO; ALVES, 1997, p. 274).

Concerning the abstracts, we observed first of all that, with a few exceptions, they include the theoretical and methodological framework and some of them mention the research instruments. Secondly, supported by the tool Find available at computer program Word, we searched the abstracts (31) to count the amount of words. Thus, we found a total of 4,578 words. On a second search, utilizing the same procedure, we were able to find 70 matches of descriptor letramento (literacy). That is, the descriptor corresponded to 1.5% of the total words in those abstracts.

Next, we noticed that the term letramento (literacy) appeared in the abstracts in a variety of contexts: stages of life (childhood, teenage, youth, adulthood, old age), literacy in health (nutrition, phonoaudiology, mental health, disabled people), social literacy (family, mothers), digital literacy, educational literacy, concepts on literacy. However, we noticed more emphasis on literacy issues in the areas of Health and Education.

Although such topics have already been addressed in the introduction to this article, it is worth reminding that “literacy in Health (LH) involves the capacity of obtaining,

processing and comprehending health-related information and basic services, required to make decisions regarding one own's health and medical care" (SANTOS et al., 2012, p. 293). Another comment is about the issues of literacy (education) in childhood, that is, we noticed that the relations of age should be considered as a useful category to understand the educational and social inequalities. It does not mean that they are just it, as such inequalities are expressed materially and symbolically. One can also observe that, in the abstracts, gender inequalities as well as racial and ethnic inequalities are not addressed.

Literacy and Psychology

Reviewing the National Graduate Plan (PNPG) for 2011-2020, by the Coordination of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), on one hand, in the global scenario, we see that the period between 2004 and 2008, in the area of Psychology/Psychiatrics, Brazil has published 1.07 percent of the world production (BRASIL, 2010, p. 230). According to the document, the advancement of Brazilian science has been qualitatively remarkable over the last decades.

On the other hand, if we revisit Charter 1 in this article, regarding the periodicals of the Psychology area, we find four journals (25 percent) in the period being searched with publications on literacy, in a total of eight articles (25.8 percent). Highlights are the journals: *Paidéia* (3 articles); *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional* (2 articles); *Psicologia: Reflexão & Crítica* (2 articles); and *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia* (1 article). Thus, for the purpose of this article, and due to the fact that the researchers involved with this study belong to an Educational Psychology Program, we prioritized the major topics that are contained in those Psychology periodicals for a more detailed analysis.

The first tendency in such periodicals includes the different approaches with which the term *letramento* (literacy) circulates within the school context escolar, as well as the consequences and outcomes for the practice of teaching how to read and write resulting from such approaches. For Assolini and Tfouni (1999), within the school environment, literacy is taken as a synonym of alphabetization, hence a non-alphabetized student is labeled as illiterate, ignorant and "analfabetical". Thus, those authors criticize such approach and present proposals of literate alphabetization and of a work that considers reading as an attribution of meanings. In turn, Barros and Spinillo (2011) add that even non-alphabetized people make social use of reading and writing and the educational institutions play a key role in such usage. Mota (2007) does a critical review of theoretical positions and proposes alphabetization to be seen in all of its aspects, both cognitive, emotional and social.

In the second trend, we highlight the reading skills of pre-school children with hearing disability. The study by Bandini, Oliveira and Souza (2006) suggests, among other aspects, a more effective participation of the family for the improvement of learning the Brazilian Sign Language (*Libras*), more pedagogical resources and better training of the professionals involved in the educational process.

The third tendency shows literacy practices in a mental institution. Tfouni et al. (2008) investigated the writing practices in a task of alphabetization in psychiatric hospital,

by using discourse analysis, as a contribution to rescue places of memory erased by the pathology and in order to provide, through the discursive materiality, the reconstructions of the truths of each inmate.

In the fourth trend, Di Nucci (2003) emphasized literacy of the young people in high-school. He concluded that youths seek reading due to their daily needs and for easy access, and also that schooled literacy is connected with the academic practices, that is, with traditional school activities which still prevail in high-school in relation to the social practices of literacy.

Finally, Torquato, Massi and Santana (2011), in another direction, verified which roles the literacy practices take for old people. The authors argue that, on one hand, old people emphasize the difficulties associated with spelling, textual and biological issues; on the other hand, they say that literacy activities are also utilized with the purpose of improving cognition, yielding benefit to promote an active and healthy aging process.

On the whole, these productions in the area of Psychology suggest that inclusion and social interaction, access to education and health depend on dialogical processes, which take place upon the different type of language. In this context, the conditions for reading and writing experienced by someone play a key role in their processes, especially if we consider the fact that today's society is based on activities involving levels of literacy.

Final remarks

By researching the universe of literature on literacy, we have found several directions that encompass its usage. On one hand, the concept of literacy began to be introduced in the academic milieu in an effort to separate the studies on the social impact of writing from the studies on how to teach reading and writing (alphabetization), whose schooled connotations stress out the individual abilities in the use and in the practice of writing. On the other hand, the studies on literacy discuss the social development that followed the expansion of the uses of writing, such as the political, social, economic and cognitive changes. That is, the studies assumed that the effects were related to the social and cultural practices of the different groups that made use of writing (including children, teenagers, youths, adults, old people, students), as we could see in this study.

However, as it would be impossible to encompass the infinity of ways to analyze the object, we chose to conduct a search of the discourses on literacy in two repositories: LILACS and PePSIC. We went further and selected only articles published in Brazil whose title included the term *letramento* (literacy) in the period between 1995 through 2015. Thus, as a suggestion for future research on the topic, we would like to insist on the importance of an analysis of the international publications.

Our intent was to apprehend which topics and areas of knowledge have more frequently occupied such publications, particularly in the area of Psychology. It should be stressed that only the abstract of the articles were analyzed. The first aspect we observed concerns the authors of the 31 texts analyzed and published in the country. In this context, we realized that the vast majority of authors is female and the male authors write articles only in partnership with a female scholar. Thus we were able to denotate the composition

of a first feminine ambience in the production of articles. Authors such as Beltrão and Teixeira (2004) suggest that the choices of women are closer to courses and careers related to teaching and care, among other aspects. That is why the results of this study also point to a coincidence in such direction.

The second aspect indicated has to do with the distribution of the production per location of origin. There was a greater amount of publications on literacy from the Southeast area of Brazil. Other researchers, such as Vieira and Sousa (2012), had already drawn attention to the unequal distribution of studies and the dissemination of their results in the form of articles among the different regions of the country. As we see it, the expansion of the undergraduate and graduate programs in Brazil has gradually undone the concentration of the system, however this has not yet reflected on the field of research on literacy. For more clarity about this relationship between research and regional inequality, new investigations in the area would be appropriate, with different indexed periodicals.

The third aspect pointed out has to do with the topics on literacy published in the periodicals. The results indicate that the vast majority of texts is related to the educational area. In turn, when the aspect being looked at falls in the areas of the periodicals researched, one sees that the area of Psychology, our focus of attention, corresponds to 25.8 percent of articles written about literacy, with an emphasis onto the educational issues involving children and youths in different levels of schooling; in inclusive education, within school environment and outside of it (psychiatric hospitals); and in the literacy of old people – that is, the emphasis fall on literacy in the health area.

We observed in the publications of the mentioned periodicals, during the period investigated, that there we no articles on literacy dealing with the context of ethnic-racial inequalities. New studies about this situation would be appropriate, that is, they should research which configurations of the ethnic-racial inequalities would be able to be apprehended in publications on literacy. As we see it, the work on literacy should be more comprehensive, within a multiple and historically situated perspective. Thus, a series of challenges is posed, both to research and to the educational policies, especially in regard of the Black population, kept away from beneficial standpoints preventing them from participating in negotiations with the largest possible collection of knowledge.

An ethical and political commitment is therefore construed: review the productions and the sustenance of educational inequalities. That is to say, it is necessary to take a look at the different forms of inequality, as the hierarchies involving gender, race/ethnicity, and age are intertwined in a complex way, and they cannot be reducible ones to the others. Our proposal, through this study, is to grant alphabetization and literacy visibility in all of their aspects, both cognitive, emotional and social. Finally, the scarce production on digital literacy must also be mentioned.

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Marcos Antonio Batista da Silva is a post-doctorate researcher at the Center of Social Studies (CES) of the University of Coimbra (Portugal), where he participates in the Project *POLITICS: The politics of anti-racism in Europe and Latin America: knowledge production, decision-making and collective struggles*, funded by the European Research Council. He is PhD in Social Psychology by the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) and invited professor at the University Center FIEO.

Cleomar Azevedo is PhD in Social Psychology by the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) and has done post-doctorate research in Social Science at the same institution. Professor and researcher in the Graduate Program in Educational Psychology of the University Center FIEO.