Mailce Borges Mota
UFSC
mailcemota54@gmail.com

Donesca Puntel Xhafaj
UFSC/PPGI
donescax@gmail.com

Gisele Luz Cardoso
IFSC-Gaspar
gisele.luz@ifsc.edu.br

Literacy in Brazil: a systematic research synthesis of recent studies

Abstract: This paper reports the results of a systematic review of studies on literacy published in Brazilian journals over the past five years (2003-2008). Following a set of criteria for the selection of material, we reviewed 43 research papers in the area of language and education. The systematic review shows that these studies address nine main themes related to literacy, none of them discussing literacy as it relates to the acquisition and use of a second/foreign language. The review also shows that the studies are, for the most part, empirically-based and conducted with children.
Keywords: literacy; reading/writing instruction; research synthesis

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta os resultados de uma revisão sistemática de estudos sobre letramento publicados em periódicos acadêmicos brasileiros nos últimos cinco anos (2003-2008). Obedecendo a um conjunto de critério para a seleção dos trabalhos, revisamos 43 estudos da área de lingüística e educação. A síntese sistemática mostra que os estudos tratam de nove temas relacionados ao letramento, nenhum deles voltado para questões de aquisição e uso de segunda língua/língua estrangeira. A revisão sistemática também mostra que

os estudos são, em grande maioria, empíricos e conduzidos com crianças.

Palavras-chave: letramento; ensino de leitura e escritura; síntese de pesquisa.

1. Introduction

The study reported here is part of a broader, ongoing research project which aims at investigating the relationship between first language (L1) literacy, second/foreign language (L2[1]) literacy development, and second/foreign language (L2) achievement. As pointed out by several researchers (Bialystok, 2001; 2007, Cummins, 1981; 1986; Tarone, Bigelow & Hansen, 2009), the impact that the ability to operate with two or more languages has on cognitive development in general is not precisely known. Likewise, the extent to which L1 levels of literacy interact with L2 levels of literacy and affect L2 achievement is still a neglected area of study. However, there is now evidence that bilingualism enhances higher-order cognitive processes such as metalinguistic awareness (Francis, 1999) and fosters what Goncz & Kodzopeljic (1991) call analytic orientation towards language, a phenomenon from which L2 speakers are believed to benefit. There is also evidence showing that L1 literacy facilitates L2 literacy (Cummins, 1991) and mediates the relationship between L2 performance on standardized tests and academic language proficiency (Collier, 1989).

In order to tackle the question of whether L1 literacy relates to L2 literacy development and L2 achievement – the major goal of our ongoing research project – we have planned a series of stages in the research, the first one being a comprehensive review of the literature. The review of the literature is itself subdivided into several stages, one of them being a synthesis of the research produced in Brazil in the area of literacy over the last five years. The aim of the present paper is to report the results of this synthesis in particular. In what follows, we present the theoretical background to the present paper, the method we employed to carry out the research synthesis, and the conclusions we draw from the body of knowledge we reviewed.

2. Theoretical background

In a recent publication, Soares (2004:5-6) traces the contemporary use of the term literacy to the early 1980s, when it was adopted, in different countries at approximately the same time, to refer to reading and writing as social practices and, therefore, to a more complex phenomenon than reading and writing as a result of *reading*

Mailce Borges Mota, *Donesca Puntel Xhafaj e Gisele Luz Cardoso,* Literacy in Brazil: ...

instruction or of the learning of written systems – that is, the process of alphabetization. However, as well remarked by Soares (2004:6), in most developed countries the study of literacy developed somewhat independently from issues related to alphabetization, which shows that, although related, the two phenomena have each their specificities and should be treated as different in nature. This, Soares claims (2004: 6) is in contrast to studies on literacy in Brazil, where the two concepts – literacy and alphabetization – overlap, sometimes erroneously, and where one (literacy) is seen as rooted in the other (alphabetization).

Disentangling the two phenomena is, in itself, a daunting task. Although there is a relationship between literacy and alphabetization, this is not a causal relationship and some degree of autonomy exists for both processes. In the present research synthesis, we side with Olson's (1999: 481) view in that "literacy is a more general concept than reading and writing, including not only competence with and uses of reading and writing but also the roles that reading and writing play in the formation and accumulation of the procedures, laws, and texts that serve as the primary embodiment of historical culture".

However, given the perspective taken in our country, which emphasizes the interdependency of the two processes, in the present research synthesis we examine studies on literacy and alphabetization published in Brazil between 2003 and 2008. The research synthesis is a type of review of literature adopted in various areas of knowledge[2] which has as its main aim the mapping and integration of accumulated knowledge in a given area in order to determine what can be considered consolidated findings, controversies, and aspects that need further investigation. The ultimate goal of a research synthesis is to suggest future research that will lead to the growth of an area of knowledge (Cooper, 2003). By identifying patterns and inconsistencies in the methods and results of studies, a research synthesis can give us a precise– that is, well-documented and well-organized --idea of the state of the art in a disciplinary field. The findings obtained through the present research synthesis will contribute to a better understanding of the concerns about literacy and alphabetization in this country in the period between the years 2003 and 2008 and will allow us to determine the aspects that need to be addressed by future research in these areas.

According to Norris & Ortega (2006), the research synthesis has as its focus the analysis of a group of studies in terms of theoretical claims (in the form of theories, models or hypotheses), methods (in terms of variables investigated, participants, instruments, and types of

analysis of data), and results reported with a view to determining (1)the generalizations that can be made from the studies reviewed and (2)the inconsistencies and conflicts in the studies. Cooper & Hedges (1994:6) qualify the research synthesis as an empirical investigation, proposing what they call *review as research*. To be carried out in a systematic manner, the research synthesis must (1)address a reserch question, (2) select the studies to be reviewed, (3)review the studies, (4)present and discus the results of the review, and (5) draw conclusions on the state of the art. As noted by Cooper (2003:1), the cumulative nature of science requires, from time to time, that a systematic review of the knowledge gained in an area be carried out so that members of that area can be informed of what is known, what is not known, and why. The research synthesis differs from traditional reviews of literature in that these are generally narrative, organized mainly around a chronological principle, and limited to restating the conclusions found in the studies reviewed.

The research question addressed by our research synthesis was: what is the main focus of investigation of studies on literacy published in Brazil over the last 5 years (2003-2008)? In the remainder of this paper, we present the method employed in the selection of the studies included in our research synthesis and discuss the findings of our analysis. The final portion of the paper will be devoted to conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for further research in the area of literacy in our country.

3. Method

A number of journal articles published in Brazil between the years 2003 and 2008 were included in our research synthesis. The selection of journals obeyed the following criteria. First, the main source for searching for and selecting the journals was the journal database of *Portal de Periódicos CAPES*. That is, to be included in the review, the journal had to be available online in the databases of the *Portal*. Second, only journals originally published in Brazil were included. Third, only journals from the areas of Education and Letras/Linguistics were included. Fourth, the journals had to be indexed in the *Qualis* classification system as "A" or "B" in quality. Finally, the journals had to be indexed as "national" or "local". By applying these criteria, we were able to locate and select a total of 73 journals.

After the selection of the journals, we conducted a search for articles with the following keywords: literacy/*literacia*/*letramento*, alphabetization/*alfabetização*, reading/*leitura,* and writing/*escrita.* To be selected for review, the articles had to be written in Portuguese or in

English. By applying these criteria (keywords and language) we were able to select 47 articles[3]. These articles were then assessed in two rounds: first, by reading the abstract or the introductory paragraphs, we grouped the articles into categories according to their focus. Then, by skimming them for research questions, methods, and results, we refined and adjusted our initial categories and regrouped the studies. These procedures left us with 43 studies. In this phase of our review of literature on literacy in Brazil, we decided not to include books, theses, dissertations, printed-only articles, or online articles indexed as Qualis other than A or B national/local in the same period because we wanted, first, to gain a better sense of the techniques involved in research syntheses.

4. Results

The articles selected were divided into nine categories/groups, according to their main focus of investigation. The categories/groups which emerged as a result of our second round of readings were: 1) oral x written language; 2) alphabetization; 3) metalinguistic awareness; 4) variables that might impact reading and/or writing; 5) reading and behavior; 6) literacy and school performance; 7) literacy and alphabetization in the academia; 8) alphabetizing/ promoting literacy; 9) studies peripherally related to literacy and/or alphabetization. We address the studies in each of these categories/groups next.

4.1. Oral x written language

Two studies address the relationship between oral and written language. Franchetto (2008) reports on the author's experience working on the construction of alphabets for the Wapichana and the Kuikuru tribes in the North of Brazil. In both cases, there had been previous attempts at transposing the tribes' oral language into written words and what took place was a disregard for the richness of their languages. What Frenchetto experienced was the resistance of the Indians in accepting that, in order to adequately convey their language --their phonemes -- they would have to move away from Portuguese (a language considered as naturally having a written form) and insist on representing their language accurately, without having to sacrifice vital parts of it.

Pauluk (2004) discusses the revolution brought about by the creation of the Greek alphabet, showing that one of its first impacts was making people aware that the oral discourse could be separated from its speaker. Along with this separation between man and thought

came the search for universality and autonomy of discourse, and the possibility of discourse to be appreciated as a whole since one no longer had the burden of having to attend to it on-line. Additionally, culture started to be transmitted through writing and thought became philosophical and analytical. Still, the author points out that there isn't a Science of Writing, though the endeavors being currently pursued by semiotics and cognitive science make him believe that we might be walking towards this goal.

4.2. Alphabetization

Five studies focus on alphabetization. Araújo and Oliveira (2005) claims that though alphabetization is frequently assessed in Brazil, there are no standard tests to assess this ability since there is no definition of what alphabetization is. According to the author, the alphabetization process has a clear end, which is when the reader becomes fluent enough so as to be able to comprehend (the true objective of becoming alphabetized)) and thus there is no reason for it not to be assessed precisely. What is needed, in Brazil, it is claimed, is to overcome the confounding between the objective (comprehension) and the process (alphabetization) for only then the misconceptions will stop hindering both alphabetization and its assessment.

Souza and Maluf's (2004) show that, in the beginning of the process of alphabetization, reading and writing not always go hand-in-hand. Their study explored how these skills were related in a group of 73 children attending the 1st and 2nd grades in a public school. Through the analysis of 2 writing and 2 reading tasks it was possible to conclude that for the children in the 1st grade there was an advantage for *writing* and for the children in the 2nd grade there were no significant differences in the performance in the two skills, though they did, actually, perform better at *reading*.

Frade (2007) points out that the methods for alphabetization were always divided into those which revolved around decoding (the alphabetic, the phonic, the syllabic) and those which gave priority to comprehension (wording, sentencing, global). Nowadays, with the advent of the new term – literacy – researchers came to realize that language must be treated both as an object of reflection and as a cultural object, which implies, sometimes, different methods for each. For the author, the ideal attitude is not to take sides but to be flexible and to associate both kinds of methods. In the same line, Mota (2007) observes that the current debates about written language teaching have treated alphabetization and literacy as two excluding abilities.

However, though there isn't an agreement on the fact that becoming alphabetized does indeed have an impact on the cognitive processing of individuals, in at least one aspect of cognition - metalinguistic thought – alphabetization might indeed change one's way of processing language and thus impact literacy. Departing from that, what the author proposes, borrowing Soares' (2004) words, is to "alphabetize while making one literate[4]"; that is, to promote reading automaticity by speeding up decoding so that subjects can devote more resources to comprehension.

Leite (2006) discusses the concepts of alphabetization and literacy, highlighting the importance of a clear understanding of these two processes that may be different, but are linked and cannot be seen as two separate processes. He also discusses Paulo Freire's critical perspective about the literacy process and brings Vygotsky's and Wallon's theories regarding education and affection.

4.3 Metalinguistic awareness

Dias (2006) presents software developed by Capovilla, Macedo, Capovilla, and Diana (2005) – the Computerized Phonic Alphabetization. According to her, since studies have shown that difficulties in reading and writing are, in great part, due to problems in phonological processing, activities which associate the playful character of the computer language to the systematic presentation of letters and their respective sounds and to phonological awareness activities can help children develop the grapho-phoneme correspondences more easily and thus impact written language acquisition. Another study concerned with the development of phonological awareness was Souza and Bandini's (2007), which brings a proposal to enhance this ability in deaf children. They point out that one of the reasons why deaf children have difficulties in learning how to read and write is due to the fact that they have limited phonological awareness of Brazilian Portuguese (in the case of Brazilian children), a language which is not their first but in which they will become alphabetized. For them, a possible solution would be to train the phonological abilities of these children as early as possible. From the positive results obtained with 4 deaf children of hearing parents who used the Training Program for Phonological Awareness during 12 sessions of 45 minutes each, they conclude that deaf children do have phonological consciousness and, more importantly, that this can be improved.

Capovilla, Capovilla, and Soares (2004) point out that though the analysis of the formal structure of the language can be divided in metaphonolgy and metasyntax, the relationship between metasyntax

and the written language is little studied. Thus, the objective of their study was to present a test to evaluate this awareness – the Test of Syntactic Awareness[5] which was performed by 204 children from the 1st to the 4th grade who also performed tests of phonological awareness, silent reading, spelling and vocabulary. The results corroborate the evidence from the literature on the correlation between reading, writing, syntactic awareness and phonological awareness. According to the authors, the correlation between the metalinguistic abilities and reading and writing indicate a causal relationship, with some abilities being good predictors of alphabetization and the acquisition of a written system as a good way to develop further these abilities, making them more complex.

In their study, Mota and Castro (2007) point out that what some authors propose is that though some *implicit* metalinguistic knowledge exists before the formal experience of learning to write and that it is this process that will allow for the more *explicit* metalinguistic knowledge to develop. In this study, 25 adult participants (non-alphabetized, with little schooling, and schooled) performed a series of tests of phonological and syntactic awareness with results indicating that metalinguistic knowledge is affected by alphabetization, though there was no indication that it continues to develop after the alphabetization process has taken place[6].

4.4 Variables that might impact reading and/or writing

Guarinello, Berberian, Santana, Massi, Rivabem, Jacob, and Machado (2006) remark that though learning disabilities and dyslexia are difficult to define, there are professionals who are devoted to minimizing these problems. In this study, the authors take a look at the activities used with this intent and discover that the interventions, besides miming the regular school activities, are of a mechanic nature, which might improve the decoding skills of learners though at the price of impeding advances in literacy. They also report on the work of a learner who has been mistakenly taken to have learning disabilities but produces totally understandable pieces of writing, though with orthographic irregularities. On a related line, Massi and Gregolin (2005) observe that many children are taken to have learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, due to the fact that they do not follow the pattern expected by the school. The "symptoms" they display, however, are simply external marks of their reflection and analysis of the language being constructed. In this article, besides a review of the literature on dyslexia and the frailty of its definition, the authors also conducted a

case study with a child taken to present writing disability by school, parents and doctor, and show that though he had irregularities in his spelling, he was actually perfectly able to produce a coherent text.

On a somewhat similar vein, Pinto (2006) denounces the unfairness of educators who expect all children to develop in the same rhythm when being alphabetized. According to her, we cannot expect that simply because children are at the same age they will develop identically since they might not have the same developmental profiles. A child who attends pre-school will certainly have undertaken activities which aimed at developing his/her oral language and this will have an impact on alphabetization. In other words, one's knowledge will be built depending on one's abilities but also on the opportunities one has been given to acquire it.

A concern with the reading comprehension of university students was expressed by Oliveira and Oliveira (2007). In their study, 138 Radiology, Psychology and Accounting students who attend evening classes in private universities in Minas Gerais answered a questionnaire about their study conditions and performed a Cloze test[7]. Unfortunately, the reading performance of the participants was low, with less than 50% of accuracy, which might, in part be due to the students' far from ideal study conditions[8].

Barrera and Maluf (2004) raise a social concern as regards the acceptance of linguistic variation in their study of 65 children who were in the 1st grade in a public school in the outskirts of São Paulo. Data collection consisted of each child telling a story (from pictures) and reading and writing tests (in the beginning and at the end of the school year). In addition, 8 of their classes were observed in order to assess how the teachers dealt with linguistic variation. As expected, the children who presented more linguistic variation had low scores in both the writing and reading tasks and the feedback of the teachers when instances of linguistic variation arose was usually prescriptive (and sometimes judgmental).

Suehiro's (2006) article sought a relationship between environment, biological maturity and gender and difficulties in learning how to write through the application of the Scale for the Assessment of Difficulties in Learning to Write[9] (Sisto, 2001) to 287 2nd and 3rd graders enrolled in 2 private and 2 public schools. The results showed that, within this group, there were few children with a high degree of difficulty in writing, the boys having more difficulties than the girls. Counterintuitively, the older children made many more mistakes than the younger ones, though the author suspects that the data related to

age was contaminated by the fact that most 10 year-olds (30 out of 40) were from the public schools. Those were also the students who had the lowest performance.

Guidetti and Martinelli (2007) carried out a quantitative study to investigate the relationship between reading comprehension and writing performance of 148 children between the ages of 8 and 12 years attending the first cycle of the primary school in three public schools in Brazil. Their reading comprehension was measured through the Cloze test and their writing performance was measured by a writing evaluation scale. Based on the results of Pearson correlations, the authors suggest that the better/higher the reading comprehension, the better/higher the writing performance, claiming that reading comprehension and writing performance walk hand-in-hand.

4.5 Reading and behavior

This group encompasses six studies that investigated the impact of reading on readers' lives. The first one was conducted by Rodriguez (2005). She questioned several readers of sentimental novels about the impact this kind of reading had on their lives and after analyzing the interviews, the author concluded that books like "Sabrina", "Julia", and "Bianca" published by Nova Cultural, although having predictable stories and being considered only entertaining literature, have a strong impact on their readers' daily lives. Some of the participants of the interviews stated that they even changed their ways of living and behaving for the better after and while reading this kind of literature.

Bachert and Mourão (2007) carried out a qualitative study focused on the reading comprehension of students with disciplinary problems in a private school in São Paulo. Twenty seven students from the 5th to the 8th grades were interviewed regarding their reading habits, among other issues related to reading and books. The results of the interviews revealed that most of the students did not enjoy reading very much, preferred to read magazines and only read texts when absolutely necessary, i. e., with a specific aim. The researchers suggest that texts should be selected in order to attempt to improve the students' behaviors in class, instead of applying verbal or written punishments and suspensions from school.

Bueno and Steindel (2006) conducted a qualitative, investigative, and descriptive study based on the analysis of the "*Cadernos de Planejamento e Registros*"[10] kept by the toy librarian of a municipal school in Florianópolis, SC. The notebooks contained records and planning of the activities carried out in both the school library and the

toy library from 2002 to 2004. Only the activities concerning students from the 1st to the 4th grade of primary school were analyzed. It was found that in the first grade, when children cannot read very well, the activities performed are more playful and performed through games, dramatizations, and story telling with the use of visual resources. In this phase, children show more dependency on the teacher. Drama was a repetitive methodology conducted during all the years while fairy tales were used in the 2nd and 3rd grades. Poetry was the genre employed with the 2nd graders, mostly. Along the years, and especially in the 4th grade, students showed more autonomy in selecting their books. Older children preferred to read more informative books, mainly to fulfill school assignments.

Sisto and Fernandes (2004) investigated how frustration due to errors in writing affects a child's behavior. Their sample consisted of 834 students from 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades of three public schools and one private school. The results showed that the boys reported more aggressiveness in general and also made more errors in spelling. However, in the 4th grade, the boys who made more errors where the less aggressive ones. The authors conclude that the degree to which failing affects aggressiveness tends to decrease with time.

Terzi and Ponte's (2006) article focuses on citizens' identification processes, which take place along a citizens' life, starting much before school, with birth certificate, and continuing with the use and creation of other documents that serve to identify citizens for different purposes. The authors claim that these documents are crucial for a global identification process of each citizen.

Silva and Oliveira (2004) report on a study conducted in a public school in Campinas (São Paulo). A school newspaper was kept by the students of that school during two years with the orientation of university students who were doing their practicum in that school. The production of the school newspaper led to reflection about the social and cultural relationships of the pupils with writing and reading.

4.6 Literacy and school performance

This group puts together six articles related to literacy and school performance. The first one was carried out by Chacon (2003) in São Paulo. He collected fifteen texts written by three students attending the 1st grade of primary school, in the same public school, with the goal of analyzing the use of correct or incorrect punctuation. In his analysis, Chacon observed how his participants perceived punctuation and how they oriented themselves in punctuating their texts. Chacon

noticed that the children tried to punctuate their written texts taking into consideration that this activity was part of themselves, and not a school assignment. He adds that the way the participants composed their texts showed the way they speak.

The study carried out by Capovilla and Dias in 2007 aimed at investigating the reading strategies employed by 438 public school students attending the first cycle of primary school, in a public school in São Paulo. The authors focused on the logographic, the alphabetical and the orthographic reading strategies and their relationship with the learners' school grades. The reading strategies could be identified by means of the Word and Nonword Reading Test[11]. The analyses showed increase of the total score from the 1st to the 3rd grade, with the predominance of the logographic strategy in the 1st grade, development of the orthographic and alphabetical strategies in the 2nd and 3rd grades and the establishment of the orthographic strategy in the 4th grade.

In 2007, Capovilla, Dias, and Montiel evaluated the phonological awareness of 363 children attending the first cycle of primary school, by means of the Test of Phonological Awareness and Speech Production. In general, the test results demonstrated that the total scores and the individual scores increased with school level, especially from 1st to 3rd levels. Also, school grades positively correlated with phonological awareness scores in all school levels. The results also revealed that the PCFO is a valid instrument to assess children's phonological awareness, more specifically, from 1st to the 3rd levels.

Santos, Suehiro and Oliveira (2004) explored the relationship among reading comprehension and academic performance in specific subjects of the program in Psychology at a private university in São Paulo. The participants were 115 freshmen who performed a Cloze test and answered a questionnaire focusing on the most used means of evaluation in higher education. The results showed a statistically significant correlation between reading comprehension, academic performance and learning assessment.

In the same vein, in 2006, Oliveira and Santos conducted a study aiming at exploring the relationship between reading comprehension and academic performance, but also considering the age and gender of the students. The participants were 270 undergraduate students attending the Administration, Law or Psychology programs, at a private university in São Paulo. Participants also took a Cloze test. As data, the researchers had the results of the Cloze test and the students' school grades for their first semester. The participants were divided into three groups, according to their ages (the younger, the

intermediate and the older groups). Statistical correlations were run between gender (male and female) and academic performance and between gender and reading comprehension across programs. Also, the correlations were computed taking into consideration the participants' ages. It was not possible to relate the Cloze scores with the school grades. Among other findings, the results of this study show that females, as compared to males, obtained higher scores in the Cloze test and demonstrated higher academic performance as well. However, these differences were not statistically significant. In addition, the academic performance of the intermediate age group was relatively worse than the other two groups.

Di Nucci's (2003) research aimed at unveiling the reading and writing practices present in the educational context of 30 students attending the 3rd grade of the middle school, in a state school in São Paulo. By means of recorded individual interviews, the researcher found that reading practices such as making notes in one's notebook and writing practices such as copying from the blackboard are related to academic activities requested in the classroom, although poster reading and graffiting were also practices present in their daily lives. They concluded that educational literacy is associated to academic practices, that is, to traditional school activities that are still dominant in the middle school regarding literacy social practices.

4.7 Literacy and alphabetization in the academia

Soares (2006) talks about the research regarding education in Brazil and, more specifically, regarding alphabetization. She states that this is a very recent area of study in Brazil, since the first studies date from 1968, when the first graduate programs started in Brazil. She argues that, in terms of general history, 40 years of research are too little and that the studies on alphabetization in this country have just started, with the Center for Literacy, Reading, and Writing, at the School of Education of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Maciel, 2000, in Soares, 2006), contributing to the area for over two decades now. As remarked by the author, the research on literacy/alphabetization carried out at CEALE aims at following the construction of knowledge on literacy along time. Their sources of research are dissertations and theses produced in graduate programs in Brazil. Referring to her own research, Soares states that her primary interest is in studies on reading instruction (alphabetization) conducted in Brazil, in the field of education, with emphasis on those from the second half of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century. She

explains that one of her research goals is to identify continuities and changes in research on education.

In 2007, Trindade mapped the social and school practices regarding literacy/ alphabetization at The Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. She conducted ethnographic and textual analyses of various works, including theses, dissertations, monographs and articles written at her research center at UFRGS following her and her colleagues' research lines. She presents some of the themes that emerged from her analysis: influence of historical studies, contextual analysis regarding literacy, and post-modern and post-structuralist approach in the field of Cultural Studies. Trindade (2007) concludes by saying that this analysis allowed her and her colleagues to search for indications of their own discourses concerning literacy/ alphabetization and its multiple representations.

In that same year, Trindade, Itaqui and Costa performed a similar, though broader, search. They analyzed the abstracts of theses and dissertations concluded in all universities of Rio Grande do Sul. They consulted several research sources and used the terms alphabetization and literacy at first. They noticed that the majority of the abstracts had as key words the general terms of education and alphabetization, with key words such as literacy used to refer to sub-areas (Trindade et al, 2007).

In an interview given to Nilcéa L. Pelandré and Adriana Fisher in 2006, Maria de L. Dionísio[12], discusses the terms *alfabetização, letramento* and *literacia.* She says that the distinction between *letramento* (literacia*)* and *alfabetização* does not exist in Portugal. She argues that the former is a series of abilities to use writing and a series of social practices that involve any written text. Thus, the term *literacia/letramento* is plural, involving all uses of languages and not only the written one. The plural meaning of the word *literacia* locates these practices in peoples' lives as practices that are made use of in order to achieve specific aims. In this sense, *literacia* is more than just a series of abilities stored in people's heads. The term *alfabetização* has a more specific meaning and refers to the education of adults who do not know how to read and write, and is thus rarely used to refer to the education of children in their early years of school. Finally, *literacia* in Portugal, differently from *alfabetização,* does not have to be related to schooling.

In her introduction to a special issue of *Perspectiva* dedicated to studies on the teaching of Portuguese and literacy, Pelandré (2006) emphasizes the importance of discussing how these two variables relate because of the results of the assessments carried out by the Brazilian government demonstrating the difficulties students have regarding reading and writing.

Maluf and Pagnez (2006) carried out a review of the literature (theses/dissertations and articles[13] produced between 1987 and 2005) on the relationship between metalinguistic abilities and written language acquisition. The first thing observed after analyzing the abstracts of the 157 works found was that the theses/dissertations (a total of 113) largely outnumbered the articles. It was also possible to identify an increasing interest in the area with the greatest number of works having been produced between 1999 and 2004. Among all metalinguistic abilities, the one which received more attention was phonological awareness. In addition, most of the research was empirical and conducted with children without any disabilities or impairments.

4.8 Alphabetizing/ promoting literacy

In 2006, Rojo conducted a study in a public school in SP about the process of the appropriation of knowledge and the practices of a 1st grade teacher in an elementary school. This teacher was participating in a two-year teacher education project. Rojo analyzed two classes of this teacher: one in the beginning of the project and another one year later, half ways through the program. She collected data and interpreted them based on the work of Schneuwly (2002, 2005). After analyzing the two classes, the researcher identified changes in the teacher routines. According to Rojo, the second class was significantly different from the first, although they had the same teaching focus. For Rojo, it seemed that in the second class the teacher tried to apply the knowledge she was gaining in the project. However, her old practices could also be revealed. Rojo concludes by showing her concern about how to best approach teacher education and teacher practices and how to integrate both.

Macedo and Mortimer (2005) discuss literacy practices in a 1st grade classroom of primary school. The teacher of this particular group developed a school project about the Dengue epidemic. The analyses were based on Bakhtin's view of speech and discourse and on some ethnographic perspectives regarding interaction. The researchers concluded that the teacher's interventions facilitated the construction of an open dialogue between her and the students who could report what they knew regarding the illness.

Menegolo, Cardoso, and Menegolo (2006) interviewed teachers from Cuiabá (MS) and asked how the proposals for the teaching of writing (prescriptions from the state and federal organs) influenced their practices when teaching 4th graders in the period between 1990 and 2000. Though the participants reported to know at least part of the proposals, they also stated not to be too worried at the time with

their implementation and adopted a mixture of the contents suggested with their old practices. Some teachers stated that they did not feel able to deal with the changes proposed since they had not received any training on how to do so.

4.9 Studies peripherally related to literacy and /or alphabetization)

In concluding this section, we present four articles that are not directly linked to literacy or alphabetization per se, but have a subtle and discrete relation to these concepts.

Chagas (2007) conceptualizes the terms cohesion and coherence and explore their relationship and importance in the organization of written texts. She also mentions the importance of the use of semantic strategies, not only in written texts but also in speaking. These strategies are also used, she adds, for the comprehension of the world.

Next, Soares and Marinho's (2004) article aims at presenting orientations for parents to participate and get more involved in their children's academic lives and to promote the development of behaviors that facilitate their children's learning. The authors conclude by saying that a considerable part of the education of children depends on the parents themselves and not to school alone.

Finally, Fleming (2004) revisits the terms and concepts regarding Information and Communication Tools literacy. He shows that the notion of literacy as related to the competencies to use ICT tools has been referred to in different ways, including digital literacy and media literacy. In a related vein, Demo (2007) proposes that we broaden our view of alphabetization, taking into consideration the new informational frame of the world, where technology generates knowledge. In his point of view, traditional alphabetization is but the first step one takes, since one now must be also alphabetized in ICT, technology, information, media, and visuals. Moreover, the driving force behind digital alphabetization must be critical thinking, since technology cannot substitute interpretation. For him, to be computer literate means to be able to recognize the necessary information, locate and evaluate it, and use it effectively.

5. Conclusions, limitations, and suggestion for further research

In the present paper, we have synthesized 43 studies concerning literacy and alphabetization in Brazil in attempt to determine the issues that have received the attention of researchers over the period between 2003 and 2008. First of all, we should mention the blurry line

that divides the meanings of alphabetization and literacy in Brazil. As Araújo and Oliveira (2005) pointed out, there is much confusion as regards the definition of alphabetization, how it differs from text comprehension and, we add, how these two aspects differ from or relate to the use of language for social purposes.

Secondly, it is important to highlight that, in comparison to the research on literacy and alphabetization in the area of education, there is relatively little research on these issues in the area of language studies. Given the relevance of language to the study of literacy and reading/writing instruction, we feel compelled to urge researchers in the area of language to turn their attention to issues related to literacy and alphabetization. Another important and, apparently, neglected sub area (both in the Letras/Linguistics and Education journals) is that of digital literacy. In our search, we were able to find only 2 articles addressing this important issue in a period of 5 years.

As could be observed, most of the studies reviewed were empirical and these investigations were mainly conducted with children. As regards the issues focused on by the articles here reviewed, most of the attention seems to have been devoted to the discussion around the relationship between literacy and alphabetization, the importance of metalinguistic (especially phonological) awareness in literacy acquisition, the importance of literacy/alphabetization for academic performance, the emotional/psychological impact reading/writing can have in people's lives, and the importance of teacher development so that we can have well-informed and well-prepared teachers conducting our learners into the realm of the written word.

Finally, none of the studies selected for review addressed the relationship between L1 literacy, L2 literacy development and L2 achievement, the focus of our main research project. Given the relevance of the concept of literacy and the status it holds in contemporary societies and given the role bilingualism and multiculturalism play in present times, we have to make a much greater effort to try to understand (1)how being able to use our first language resources for an array of purposes relates to and affects how we make use of a second or third language and (2)how using one or more languages relates to our cognition in general. This research synthesis shows that these are issues left out of the agenda in our country and future research should address them soon.

The present research synthesis has, among its various limitations, two that are noteworthy. First, the period we covered is too short to take stock of research in an area that is, itself, new in the country. Future

research syntheses have to include work produced in a larger number of years. Second, our criteria for selection of the work to be reviewed might have been too strict. First, we excluded theses, dissertations, books and chapters in books where, we believe, there is important material to be consulted. We are aware of the fact that results of theses and dissertations are not always made available in journals. Also, our criteria excluded journals of other areas (e.g. psychology), journals with other Qualis indexes (international or C), and articles written in other languages (e.g. Spanish). Future research syntheses should expand criteria to include this work.

Notes

1. English

2. In the area of psychology, the journal *Psychological Bulletin*, published since 1881, is entirely dedicated to reviews of literature. In the area of L2 acquisition, *Language Teaching*, published since 1968 also specializes in reviews.

3. The bibliographical references of the 44 articles selected can be seen in the reference list in the end of this paper.

4. Our translation.

5. The test comprises the following subtests: grammaticality judgment, sentence correction, correcting only the grammar of sentences with problems in grammar and semantics, and word categorization.

6. However, the authors recognize that this might have been due to the non-standard test which was used to classify the alphabetized subjects is schooled and less-schooled.

7. The Cloze technique was created by Taylor (1953). It consists of systematically omitting every fifth (5th) words of a text. The participant has to fill in the blanks with the adequate word. Each blank is as big as the omitted words.

8. Most of the participants reported to work and to have few hours of sleep. Their study happens at work or during lunch breaks and, at home, they commonly study with the TV on and, sometimes, talking to other people. Also few of them said to read non-mandatory books or newspapers and the strategies reported to be used when preparing for a test were simple (not requiring planning or monitoring).

9. A dictation of 114 words where 60 of them present some kind of difficulty (consonantal encounters, digraphs, composed syllables and complex syllables).

10. A notebook for planning and registration.

11. The TCLPP (Capovilla & Capovilla (forthcoming); and Capovilla *et al.*, 2006) is a test that measures silent reading competence.

12. Chief Editor of the *Revista Portuguesa de Educação* (Universidade do Minho).

13. Though it was not part of their scope, in the end of the article the authors also mention some books on the relationship between metalinguistic knowledge and literacy acquisition. These are not taken into consideration in the discussion of the results.

References

ARAÚJO E OLIVEIRA, J.B. Avaliação em Alfabetização. **Ensaio: Avaliação e Políticas Públicas em Educação**, 13, p. 375-382, 2005.

BIALYSTOK, E. Acquisition of literacy in bilingual children: a framework for research. **Language Learning**, 57 (Sup.1), p. 45-77, 2007.

BIALYSTOK, E. **Bilingualism in development: language, literacy, and cognition**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

BACHERT, C. M. & MOURÃO, M. H. A orientação de conduta por meio da leitura e discussão de textos. **Ciências & Cognição**, 11, p. 110-119, 2007.

BARRERA, S. D. & MALUF, M.R. Variação lingüística e alfabetização: um estudo com crianças da primeira série do ensino fundamental. **Psicologia Escolar e Educacional**, 8 (1), p. 35-46, 2004.

BUENO, S. B. & STEINDEL, G. E. A biblioteca e a brinquedoteca: mediadores do livro, objeto prazeroso de saber e lazer no ambiente escolar. **Ciências & Cognição**, 8, p. 10-21, 2006.

CAPOVILLA, A. G. S. & DIAS N. M. Desenvolvimento de estratégias de leitura no ensino fundamental e correlação com nota escolar. **Psicologia em Revista**, 13 (20), p. 363-382, 2007.

CAPOVILLA, A. G. S., DIAS, N. M., AND MONTIEL, J. M. Desenvolvimento dos componentes da consciência fonológica no ensino fundamental e correlação com nota escolar. **Psico**, 12 (1), p. 55-64, 2007.

CAPOVILLA, A.G.S., CAPOVILLA, F.C., & SOARES, J.V.T. Consciência sintática no ensino fundamental: correlações com consciência fonológica, vocabulário, leitura e escrita. **Psico-USF**, 9 (1), p. 39-47, 2004.

CHACON, L. Oralidade e letramento na construção da pontuação. **Letras**, 61, especial, p. 97-122, 2003.

CHAGAS, C. E. C. Cognição e texto: a coesão e a coerência textuais. **Ciências & Cognição**, 12, p. 214- 218, 2007.

COLLIER, V. How Long? A synthesis of research on academic achievement in second language. **TESOL Quarterly**, 23, p. 509-531, 1989.

COOPER, H. Editorial. **Psychological Bulletin**, p. 129-139, 2003.

COOPER, H., & HEDGES, L. V. **Handbook of research synthesis**. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 1994.

CUMMINS, J. The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In: CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (Ed.). **Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework**. Los Angeles: National Dissemination and Assessment Center, 1981, p. 3-49.

CUMMINS, J. Empowering minority students: a framework for intervention. **Harvard Educational Review**, 56, p. 18-36, 1986.

CUMMINS, J. Conversational and academic language proficiency in bilingual contexts. In: J.H.HULSTJN & J. F. MALTER (eds.), **Reading in two languages: AILA review**, 8, 1991. p. 75-89.

DEMO, P. Alfabetizações: desafios da nova mídia. **Ensaio: Avaliação e Políticas Públicas em Educação,** 57, p. 543-564, 2007.

DI NUCCI, E. P. O letramento escolar de jovens do ensino médio. **Psicologia Escolar e Educacional**, 7 (2), p. 129-134, 2003.

DIAS, N.M. Alfabetização Fônica Computadorizada: Usando o Computador para Desenvolver Habilidades Fônicas e Metafonológicas. **Revista Semestral da Associação Brasileira de Psicologia Escolar e Educacional (ABRAPEE**), 10 (1), p. 149-15, 2006.

FLEMING, D. A ICT 'Literacy' Revisited: or What the Literate Citizen Really Needs to Know. **Contemporânea**, 2 (2), p. 45-73, 2004.

FRADE, I.C.A.S. Métodos de alfabetização, métodos de ensino e conteúdos da alfabetização: perspectivas históricas e desafios atuais. **Educação UFSM,** 32 (1), 2007.

FRANCHETTO, B. A guerra dos alfabetos: os povos indígenas na fronteira entre o oral e o escrito. **Mana**, 4 (1), p. 31-59, 2008.

FRANCIS, N. Bilingualism, writing, and metalinguistic awareness: oral-literate interactions between first and second languages. **Applied Psycholinguistics**, 20, p. 533-561, 1999.

GONCZ, L., & KODZOPELJIC, J. Exposure to two languages in the preschool period: Metalinguistic development and the acquisition of reading. **Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development**, 12, p. 137–163, 1991.

GUARINELLO, A.C., BERBERIAN, A.P., SANTANA, A.P., MASSI, G.A., RIVABEM, K.D., JACOB, L.C.B., & MACHADO, M.L.C.A. Dificuldades de aprendizagem da escrita: uma análise de acompanhamentos clínicos dessa modalidade de linguagem. **Revista Letras**, 70, p. 247-266, 2006.

GUIDETTI, A. A., & MARTINELLI, S. C. Compreensão em leitura e desempenho em escrita de crianças do ensino fundamental. **PSIC**, 8 (2), p. 175-184, 2007.

LEITE, S. A. S. O processo de alfabetização escolar: revendo algumas questões. **Perspectiva,** 24 (2), p. 449-474, 2006.

MACEDO, M. S. A. N., & MORTIMER, E. F. Interações nas práticas de letramento em sala de aula: o trabalho com projetos no primeiro ciclo. **Perspectiva**, 23 (01). p. 131-152, 2005.

MALUF, M.R., ZANELLA, M.S., & PAGNEZ, K.S.M.M. Habilidades metalingüísticas e linguagem escrita nas pesquisas brasileiras. **Boletim de psicologia**, 124, p. 67-92, 2006.

MASSI, G.A., & GREGOLIN, R. Reflexões sobre o processo de aquisição da escrita e a dislexia. **Revista Letras**, 65, p. 53-171, 2005.

MENEGOLO, E.D.C.W., CARDOSO, C.J., & MENEGOLO, L.W. (2006). O uso da história oral como instrumento de pesquisa sobre o ensino da produção textual. **Ciências & Cognição,** 9, p. 2-13, 2006.

MOTA, M.E. Algumas considerações sobre o letramento e o desenvolvimento metalingüístico e suas implicações educacionais. **Estudos e pesquisas em psicologia**, 7 (3). p. 118-130, 2007.

MOTA, M.M.E.P., & CASTRO, N.R. Alfabetização e consciência metalingüística: um estudo com adultos não alfabetizados. **Estudos de Psicologia**, 24(2). p. 169-179, 2007.

OLIVEIRA, K. L. , & SANTOS, A. A. Compreensão de textos e desempenho acadêmico. **PSIC**, 7 (1), p. 19-27, 2006.

NORRIS, J. & ORTEGA, L. **Synthesizing research on language learning and teaching**. Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006.

OLIVEIRA, R.A.M., & OLIVEIRA, K.L. Leitura e condições de estudo em universitários ingressantes. **PSIC - Revista de Psicologia**, 8 (1), p. 51-59, 2007.

OLSON, D. Literacy. In: WILSON R. A. & KEIL F. (Eds.), **The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences**. Cambridge, MA/London, England: The MIT Press, 1999. p. 481-482.

PAULUK, M. Um novo olhar sobre a escrita: a contribuição das ciências cognitivas e da semiótica para o desenvolvimento de uma ciência da escrita. **Ciências & Cognição**, 02, p. 02-10, 2004.

PELANDRÉ, N. L. Ensino da Língua e Alfabetização: diálogos com a formação docente. **Perspectiva**, 24 (2), p. 383-391, 2006.

PELANDRÉ, N. L. Educação e os estudos atuais sobre letramento (entrevista com Maria Dionísio). **Perspectiva,** 25 (1), p. 209-224, 2007.

PINTO, M.G.L.C. Do "era uma vez..." aos textos dos manuais escolares: um espaço de linguagem vivida num processo interactivo sujeito ao ritmo de cada criança. **Perspectiva**, 24 (2), p. 597-622, 2006.

RODRIGUEZ, S. M. Leitoras com coração: usos de leitura dos romances sentimentais de massa. **Letras,** 65, p. 23-37, 2005.

ROJO, R. Alfabetização e letramento: sedimentação de práticas e (des)articulação de objetos de ensino. **Perspectiva**, 24 (2), p.569-596, 2006.

SANTOS, A. A., SUEHIRO, A. C. B., & OLIVEIRA, K. L. Habilidades em compreensão da leitura: um estudo com alunos de psicologia. **Estudos de Psicologia**, 21 (2), p. 29-41, 2004.

SILVA, L. L. M., & OLIVEIRA, A. C. Buscando formas de ler e de escrever: um trabalho em parceria "universidade-escola pública. **Pro-Posições**, 15 (2), p. 175-186, 2004.

SISTO, F. F., & FERNANDES, D.C. Dificuldades lingüísticas na aquisição da escrita e agressividade. **Psicologia Escolar e Educacional**, 8 (1), p. 75-84, 2004.

SOARES, M. Pesquisa em Educação no Brasil – continuidades e mudanças. Um caso exemplar: a pesquisa sobre alfabetização. **Perspectiva,** 24 (2), p. 393-417, 2006.

SOARES, M. Letramento e alfabetização: as muitas facetas. **Revista Brasileira de Educação,** 25, p. 5-17, 2004.

SOARES R. Z., SOUZA, S. R., & MARINHO, M. L. Envolvimento dos pais: incentivo à habilidade de estudo em crianças. **Estudos de Psicologia**, 21 (3), p. 253-260, 2004.

SOUZA, E.C., & BANDINI, H.H.M. Programa de treinamento de consciência fonológica para crianças surdas bilíngües. **Paidéia**, 17(36), p. 123-135, 2007.

SOUZA, E.O., & MALUF, M. R. Habilidades de leitura e de escrita no início da escolarização. Psicologia da Educação, 19, p. 55-72, 2004.

SUEHIRO, A.C.B. Dificuldade de aprendizagem da escrita num grupo de crianças do ensino fundamental. **PSIC - Revista de Psicologia**, 7 (1), p. 59-68, 2006.

TARONE, E. BIGELOW, M. AND HANSEN, K. (in press). **Literacy and second language oracy**. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

TERZI, S. B. & PONTES, G. L. A identificação do cidadão no processo de Letramento crítico. **Perspectiva,** 24 (2), p. 665-686, 2006.

TRINDADE, I. M. F. Uma análise cultural de discursos sobre alfabetização alfabetismo/letramento e suas representações. **Educação,** 32 (1), 2007. http://coralx.ufsm.br/revce/revce/2007/01/a3.htm

TRINDADE, I. M. F., ITAQUI E. R., & COSTA, L. S. As pesquisas de alfabetização e alfabetismo/letramento em foco. **Anais do 16º COLE,** 2007**.**