

# FROM COMPOSITION TO GENRES: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TEACHING OF THE WRITTEN TEXT IN BRAZILIAN SCHOOLS <sup>1</sup>

Maria Auxiliadora Bezerra \*

**ABSTRACT:** *Generally, the study of the written text in Brazilian schools has changed from composition to genres. Many theoretical perspectives influence this change, which included textual production. The teaching of composition, emphasizing its structure and linguistic code, has been questioned when researchers defend the teaching of textual production, considering its production conditions. The publication of the PCN [Portuguese abbreviation for National Curricular Parameters] impelled the teaching of genres. In this context, this article aims at tracing a brief history of the teaching of the teaching of the written text in Brazilian schools. I realized that this teaching is initiated through the reading of miscellaneous authentic texts and, still very slowly, it is approaching the oral production, without any effects in the teaching of the linguistic component (be it systemic or functional).*

**KEYWORDS:** *text production; composition; genres; teachers' development.*

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\* Universidade Federal de Campina Grande – UFCG.

<sup>1</sup> I presented this work at the IV Congresso Internacional da Associação Brasileira de Lingüística [IV International Congress of the Brazilian Association of Linguistics](ABRALIN), held at the Universidade de Brasília, in February, 2005.

## INTRODUCTION

European and American researches on textual/discursive genres that were developed starting from the 70s, and can constitute, in general, three great groups (American linguists, Australian linguists, and Geneva linguists)<sup>2</sup>, elicited the interest of Brazilian researchers in the 90s. There are many studies on concepts and classifications (1) in an attempt to clarify typologies and terminologies (Meurer, 1998 a; Marcuschi, 1999); (2) description of many genres (Motta-Roth, 1995; Biasi-Rodrigues 1998; Collins<sup>3</sup>, 1993, 1994; Machado<sup>4</sup>, 1997; Mello, 2004; Coutinho<sup>5</sup>, 2004; Dionisio, 2004 and 2005 and Hoffnagel<sup>6</sup>, 2005) and (3) the teaching of textual production based on genre theories (Rojo<sup>7</sup>, 1998 and Biasi-Rodrigues).

Applied Linguistics, regarding the teaching of textual production based on genre theory, and relating theories of literacy to theories of genre, produces a great amount of research. This is reflected in teachers' development, in official documents about the teaching of language (Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais – PCN [Portuguese abbreviation for National Curricular Parameters], Programa Nacional

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<sup>2</sup> Among American scholars, we can mention Carolyn Miller, Charles Bazerman, John Swales, and Vijay Bhatia, who try to understand the genres from an articulate vision between the social processes and the varied uses of language. Among Australian scholars, we have Halliday, John Saeed, and Joan Rothery, who explained the textual aspects of genres, in a systemic-functional approach, and associated them to teaching. Moreover, among Swiss researchers, we can cite Jean-Paul Bronckart, Bernard Schneuwly, Joaquim Dolz and Pasquier, who dedicate their researches on genres to the teaching of French as a mother tongue, and propose an approach centered on the diversification of texts, and in the relationship that they have with their production context.

<sup>3</sup> Influenced by the works of Swales.

<sup>4</sup> Influenced by the works of Bronckart.

<sup>5</sup> Influenced by the works of Charaudeau.

<sup>6</sup> Influenced by the works of Bazerman.

<sup>7</sup> Influenced by the works of Bronckart, Schneuwly and Dolz.

do Livro Didático—PNLD [Portuguese abbreviation for National Textbook Program], among others), in textbooks and in the classroom itself (but not necessarily in this order). In this context, I wrote the present article with the aim of tracing (without exhausting the topic) a route of the studies of genres that influence the teaching of the text in Portuguese Language classes. I organized this article in three topics: The composition, textual production and genre route; studies of genre and the teaching of Portuguese; and conclusions.

## **1. COMPOSITION => TEXTUAL PRODUCTION => GENRES**

Researchers and teachers involved in the teaching of the Portuguese language know that the teaching of writing as text production (and not spelling of words) in Brazilian schools reflect more or less the route of this topic. Here we have implied influences of many different theories, and these theories reach school through a process of didactization. Transformations that reference knowledge, i.e., scientific knowledge, which implicate in observation, questioning, and description, in contact with the teacher's experiential knowledge, the school culture, and common sense, all resulting in school knowledge, implicate in a reinforcement of the "truth".

Geraldi (1984) was one of the first Brazilian researchers to defend (and propose) the study of textual production in opposition to composition. Textual production is understood here as the writing of texts taking into consideration its production conditions. Composition is understood here as a text devoid of context and enunciative features and with emphasis in its structure and linguistic code (as we can see in example 1, below), which is traditionally taught.

Example 1

Vamos descobrir os elementos de uma boa narração em dois fragmentos: um de um autor romântico e outro de uma autora contemporânea (...)

Vamos fazer também uma narração em terceira pessoa, contando o encontro entre dois personagens? Escolha um tema: Um garoto e uma garota: são sorteados pelo professor para fazer um trabalho em dupla; disputam numa loja o último CD dos Titãs (...)

Lembre-se

Para uma boa narração:

- . Crie os personagens com cuidado.
- . Pense bem em que ambiente você irá colocá-los.
- . Use adequadamente os discursos direto, indireto ou interior.
- . Crie um “suspense”, desvendando a história aos poucos.<sup>8</sup>

The writing proposal of this text emphasizes the structural elements of a narrative (characters, time, place, and narrator) and linguistic resources (direct and indirect speech). It does not worry about its production context (who writes to whom, with what purpose, about what) or its functioning, which gives the activity the status of a composition: A text that circulates only in the classroom, where what matters is the mastering of crystallized forms, not the enunciative aspects.

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<sup>8</sup> Let us discover the elements of a good narrative in two fragments: one from a Romantic writer and another one from a contemporary writer (...)

Let us also do a third-person narration, telling about the meeting between two characters—right? Choose a theme: A girl and a boy: The teacher chooses them at random to work in pairs: they try to buy in a record store the last Titãs [A Brazilian Rock band] CD (...)

Remember that

For a good narrative:

- . Create the characters carefully
- . Use adequately the setting where you will place them
- . Create a “suspense”, telling the story slowly.

GONÇALVES, MA. S. e RIOS, R. *Português em outras palavras*. [Portuguese in other words] São Paulo: Scipione, 1997, v.7, p.161-162)



Geraldi (ibid.), who understands language as an action carried out among speakers with the objective of informing, influencing, convincing, denouncing, arguing and so many other acts practiced through language, proposes the teaching of the text (especially the written text) based on this basic foundation: The language user has something to say to someone with some communicative objective. Therefore, in a school context, the text should have an objective—different from the usual one: It is written only to be scored.

The change from “composition” to “textual production” results from the publication of linguistic theories belonging to different paradigms, which approach language as diversified objects (in the first case—composition—as “utterance”; in the second—textual production—as “enunciation”). In this manner, undergraduate courses, graduate courses and in-service teacher courses start to concern themselves with the study of reading and writing (their conceptions, procedures, teaching and other aspects). In the 80s, curricular disciplines, such as “theory and practice of reading”, “theory and practice of textual production”, “reading and writing”, “teaching of reading”, “teaching of writing”, “practice of reading and textual production”, start to emerge. Writing is studied in its cognitive, socio-interactional, pragmatic, methodological (and other) aspects, and mostly with an instrumental/implemental feature, for it was believed that in these disciplines the student used writing as an instrument, a tool to be used in certain situations or necessary moments, as we can see in the *ementa* (a short description of a syllabus) below

### Example 2

Aquisição de conceitos relativos à escritura. Desenvolvimento de uma prática de escritura de gêneros argumentativos do domínio acadêmico.

(Ementa da disciplina Prática de Leitura e Produção de Textos, do curso de Letras da UFCG/PB)<sup>9</sup>

This *ementa* points to the study of writing in specific genres of the academic world (such as summaries, reviews, and reports). That happens, according to it, in classes of this discipline, in which students write academic texts in order to appropriate themselves of these models and hence demonstrate their ability to use them.

Reexamining the idea of “instrument” (i.e., tool) linked to writing (since this is not the codification of information but a language mode, socio-historically situated and present in many social practices), undergraduate language courses that had these disciplines in their components changed their *ementas* and their methodologies. We can give as an example the Universidade Federal de Campina Grande, which did start to develop a didactic work with students with emphasis on the learning of writing; but writing as a practice of academic literacy, a process that demands revisions and is suitable to communicative situations. Besides, it approaches writing from socio-cognitive and socio-interactionist perspectives and analyzes how it is handled in primary schools.

In the first half of the 90s, in elementary and secondary schools, Portuguese textbooks, on certain occasions present a composition concept, at other times they present a textual production concept; thus reflecting a theoretical-methodological transition stage in textbooks. However, they approach only the written mode of language

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<sup>9</sup> Acquisition of concepts related to writing. Development of a practice of writing argumentative genres belonging to the academic domain.

(*Ementa* of the discipline Practice of Reading and Production of Texts, Undergraduate Language Course at the UFCG/PB).

in its formal register, considering that, traditionally, it is the role of the school to teach students this linguistic register. Example 3 below illustrates this transition stage.

Example 3

a) Descrição de objeto: interpretação de um texto

O texto que você vai ler é uma descrição.

Descrever é contar com detalhes as características de uma pessoa, de um animal, de um lugar ou de um objeto.

Para fazer uma descrição, é importante observar bem o que se quer descrever.

(Segue o texto Cara de lua cheia, de Maria Mazzetti, que faz parte do livro Entrou por uma porta e saiu pela outra.)

\* Você descobriu o objeto que o texto descreveu?

Agora é a sua vez de fazer a descrição de um objeto qualquer.

Conte como ele é (tamanho, formato, cor); do que ele é feito (madeira, ferro, plástico, borracha, papel etc.); para que serve (utilidade e importância).

Vamos confeccionar o objeto que você descreveu?

Utilize material de sucata (.....) para confeccionar o objeto que você descreveu. Entregue seu trabalho ao professor. Ele vai fazer uma exposição com todos os objetos.

b) Descrição de pessoa

As mães são personagens de muitas histórias. Leia o que alguns escritores disseram sobre elas.

(Seguem fragmentos de vários livros de literatura infantil, em que os filhos descrevem suas mães.)

\* Você já observou bem a sua mãe? Como poderia descrevê-la?

Lembre-se, para fazer a descrição de uma pessoa, é bom observarmos:

. As características físicas (cor dos olhos, dos cabelos, formato do rosto, do nariz, da boca, altura etc.);

. O modo de ser (do que gosta, do que não gosta, o que costuma fazer e dizer, como se comporta diante de diferentes situações: zangada, alegre, triste etc.).

Dê um título para sua descrição.

\* Muito bem!

Agora mostre para sua mãe e peça-lhe para descrever você. Pode ser bem rapidinho! Ela fala e você escreve. Se ela preferir, deixe-a escrever.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> a) Description of an object: interpretation of a  
The text you are about to read is a description.  
Describing is telling with details the characteristics of a person, an animal, a place, or an object.  
In order to make a description, it is important to observe well what one wants to describe.  
(The text *Cara de lua cheia*[Full moon face], written by Maria Mazzetti, which is part of the book *Entrou por uma porta e saiu pela outra* [Came in through a door and went out by another one] follows)

\*Have you found the object the text described?  
Now it is your turn to describe any object.  
Tell us how it is (its size, shape, color); what it is made of (wood, iron, plastic, rubber, paper, etc.); what it is used for (usefulness and importance).

Let's now manufacture the object you described, shall we?  
Use recycled material (...) to make the object you described. Hand in your object to the teacher. She/he will make an exhibition with all the objects.

NAHUM, Erdna P. *Meu caderno de Redação e Criação*.3.ed. São Paulo: Scipione, 1991, v.4,p.26-27)

Description of people

Mothers are characters of many stories. Read what some writers told about them.

(Fragments of many books of literature for kids—where daughters/sons describe their mothers—follow.)

Have you ever observed your mother carefully? How would you describe her?  
Remember that, in order to describe a person, it is good to observe:



Examples 3a and 3b constitute the beginning of the lessons, and they are preceded by instructions addressed to the teacher. In the first lesson (example 3a), the writer informs the teacher that *the texts that come before activities have as an objective to show students a model of narrative and descriptive schemes, and a model of sentence construction as well. They are a pretext and teachers should avoid the practice of students copying word by word their sentences and proposals.* In the second example (3b), the writer guides the teacher to make *as a practice the description of one of the school people, and before writing the description, stimulate students to observe this person in detail (...).*

Judging by the given guidelines, this is a composition activity, and its objective is to make students learn to describe someone or something (i.e., description by using description). The text is seen here as a fixed, prepared linguistic product—devoid of a communicative situation. However, when the writer proposes in 3 a that the described object is to be manufactured in order to be presented in an exhibition, and in 3 b that the descriptive text is to be read by the described person herself (the mother) who, in turn, will also make a description of the author of the description (the daughter/son), she approaches a textual production activity—for

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. The physical features (color of the eyes, and hair; the shape of the face, nose, and mouth; height, etc.);

. The way of being (what she likes, what she does not like, what she usually does, how she behaves in different situations: when she is angry, glad, sad etc.).

Give your description a title.

Very well!

Now show your description to your mother and ask her to describe you. Do it quickly! She speaks, and you write down. If she prefers to, let her write it.

NAHUM, Erdna P. *Meu caderno de Redação e Criação*. 3.ed. São Paulo: Scipione, 1991, v.4,p.42-45)



the text then has an interlocutor and seems to go beyond the classroom environment. That is, the writing of a text seems to be a moment of interlocution, and so, it entails more than only structure and linguistic code. Nevertheless, we have to add that the writer does not refer to “textual production” in any of in her books—referring from the very title of the collection (of textbooks) to “composition”.

The dissemination of the term “textual production” (referring to the written text; and promoted by in-service teacher courses, conventions/ conference/ symposiums, specialized bibliography, and textbooks) stimulated the reduction of the syntagm to “production”. This way, we can find in didactic collections of textbooks sections named “composition”, “production”, “producing”, “text production”, “textual production”, and “producing texts”; and teachers refer to the teaching/learning of the written text as “production”, especially when forming the pair “reading and production”. When referring to classes where the teaching of the written text is emphasized, we can find testimonies like the one below:

Example 4

As notícias, em geral, atenderam às expectativas, mostrando que a **leitura** e discussão de vários textos anteriores à **produção** apresentaram o resultado previsto.(grifo nosso)<sup>11</sup>

For being an innovative didactic experience with reading and writing based on social and cognitive theories related to these two components of native tongue teaching, the term “production” was used because of the publicizing and didactization of these theories.

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<sup>11</sup> The news, in general, lived up to the expectations, showing that the **reading** and discussions of many texts prior to their **production** presented the expected result. (Emphasis added).

PINHEIRO, F. E. *Desenvolvimento de estratégias de leitura no 2º grau*. João Pessoa, 1993, p.53, dissertação de mestrado.

Example 5

Com referência à **produção textual** e seguindo a programação indicada para essa série, incluíam-se na parte de **redação** a descrição, narração e dissertação.<sup>12</sup>

Pinheiro, when announcing her topic, uses the term “textual production”, which refers to recent theoretical knowledge; but when she refers to the course syllabus (first grade of secondary school) she uses the term “composition”, associating it to the classical textual typology (description, narration, and dissertation) that constitute the tradition in the teaching of composition in schools. That is, the learning of the formal characteristics of these texts is emphasized, and they are linked to the standard language register, without linking them to their production conditions (who says, what, to whom, why, what for, how?).

In the second half of the 90s, when researchers turned their attention to the analysis of Portuguese textbooks<sup>13</sup> and alternative ways of teaching, and the PCN for primary and secondary schools are published—we see as a consequence a movement in undergraduate courses, as well as in classrooms and in textbooks. This movement proposes a text production based on genre theories (influenced by Bakhtin, 1992 [1953], Bronckart, 1997, Schneuwly and Dolz, 1997, as we will see in the following item). Then we start to see the term “genres” in in-service teacher courses and in teachers’

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<sup>12</sup> With reference to textual production and following the scheduling of this series in the section of composition, description, narration and dissertation were included.

PINHEIRO, F. E. *Desenvolvimento de estratégias de leitura no 2º grau*. João Pessoa, 1993, p.53, dissertação de mestrado [Master degree dissertation].

<sup>13</sup> This happens probably because of the influence of the Programa Nacional do Livro Didático (PNLD [short for National Textbook Program]), which in 1996 starts the process of pedagogic evaluation of the textbooks, with the objective of having The Ministry of Education (MEC) buy them for distribution to students and state schools.

discourse—it will be only later present in textbooks as well. Due to this new theoretical apparatus, we can find in schools the use of these terms (composition, textual production, and textual/discursive genres), sometimes referring to different theoretical notions, at other times being equivalent to them. Teachers, when assembling theoretical knowledge they had access to in their undergraduate or in-service teacher courses perform—in a process of didactic transposition—a crossing of terms and notions. Therefore, they bring about an effect of overlapping, i.e., the use of non-equivalent terms that came from different theoretical sources when referring to the same linguistic fact. In other words “composition”, which comes from prescriptive language studies, is overlapped by “textual production”—that is part of the principles of enunciative theories—and then by “genre”, which is related to interactional studies. All this brings about a reduction of terms, because when we use a term instead of another, we reduce notions and characteristics that refer originally to each one of these terms (Rafael, 2001:166).

## **2. GENRE STUDIES AND THE TEACHING OF PORTUGUESE**

Researches about genres developed in Brazilian universities influenced initially higher education where genre (textual/discursive) theories were promoted, and dealing with the written text in classrooms was reformulated consequently. I can mention, for instance, the works of Motta-Roth (1) and her team (1995, 1996, 1998) at the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, who analyze academic texts of different areas of knowledge (reviews, summaries, articles) in their rhetorical organization with the results redirecting the teaching of reading and production of texts in English with academic objectives. Meurer (2) and his team (1997, 1998a e b) at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, who study genres of miscellaneous discursive domains (dissertation and thesis abstracts,



email interviews, self-help books, police records and opinion texts—among others)with the objective of describing and analyzing their rhetorical aspects. Rojo (3) and her team (1998, 1999, 2001) and Machado and her team (1999a e b, 2000), at the Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, who describe spoken and written genres in order to improve teachers' development.

The two latter research teams contributed decisively to the promotion, in Brazil, of the studies made by Bronckart, Schneuwly, Dolz and Pasquier, at the University of Geneva (Switzerland), on the teaching of mother tongue based on (discourse or discursive, following Bakhtinian concepts) genres.

Geneva linguists' points of view find proper space to develop among Brazilians, since they have as their core interactionist theoretical principles, which are the basis of the PCN, a document that does not propose a teaching program, but a set of concepts that guide it. Therefore, the contribution of these linguists influences proposals for the teaching of the oral or written text among Brazilians rapidly. I say *rapidly* because researchers knew about these points of view starting in 1997/1998. However, only six years later, they are already part of the theoretical foundations of the PNLD; provide a basis for dissertations and thesis of Brazilian teachers; and they are subjects of studies in undergraduate Language courses; they are also part of teachers' manuals that accompany collections of textbooks—especially at primary school level. I agree with Matêncio (2004) when he says that the Geneva linguists' studies were the ones that most influenced Brazilians in the field of teaching/learning of genres.

The PCN of primary and secondary schools, which propose the text as a study unity, suggest an emphasis on genres—with their thematic, compositional and stylistic aspects (a clear indication of the Bakhtinian perspective), a replacement for the traditional proposal of the narrative, descriptive and argumentative structures:

Os gêneros discursivos cada vez mais flexíveis no mundo moderno nos dizem sobre a natureza social da língua. Por exemplo, o texto literário se desdobra em inúmeras formas; o texto jornalístico e a propaganda manifestam variedades, inclusive visuais; os textos orais coloquiais e formais se aproximam da escrita (...). A funcionalidade dos discursos estipula o como e o que dizer. (PCNEM, 1999, p.43-44)

Quando se pensa no trabalho com textos, outro conceito indissociável diz respeito aos gêneros em que eles se materializam, tomando-se como pilares seus aspectos temático, composicional e estilístico. Deve-se lembrar, portanto, que o trabalho com textos aqui proposto considera que: alguns temas podem ser mais bem desenvolvidos a partir de determinados gêneros; gêneros consagrados pela tradição costumam ter uma estrutura composicional mais definida; as escolhas que o autor opera na língua determinam o estilo do texto. (PCNEM +, 2002, p.77)

Todo texto se organiza dentro de determinado gênero em função das intenções comunicativas, como parte das condições de produção dos discursos, as quais geram usos sociais que os determinam. Os gêneros são, portanto, determinados, historicamente, constituindo formas relativamente estáveis de enunciados, disponíveis na cultura. São caracterizados por três elementos:

- . Conteúdo temático: o que é ou pode tornar-se dizível por meio do gênero;
- . Construção composicional: estrutura particular dos textos pertencentes ao gênero;
- . Estilo: configurações específicas das unidades de linguagem derivadas, sobretudo, da posição enunciativa do locutor; conjuntos particulares de seqüências que compõem o texto etc. (PCNEF, 1998, p.21)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Genres—more and more flexible in the modern world—tell us about the social nature of the language. For example, the literary text unfolds in many ways; the journalistic text and the advertisements manifest varieties (including visual ones); the oral texts—whether they are formal or informal, approach the writing text

In the meantime, it is worth emphasizing that if these theories are known in the academic world, the same does not happen among primary school level teachers—to whom, a priori, these documents are directed. The PCN are hermetic documents because they are based on theories little or not known by the great majority of primary and secondary teachers—especially those who ended their undergraduate college courses in the 80s (since, in principle, they are detached from academia for a longer time). Therefore, these documents are very criticized by researchers and teachers who state that the reader of these Parameters is not the primary school teacher, but the specialist (Soares, 1997).

Recognizing this fact, many universities and education authorities create courses for teachers that are already at work, and

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(...). The functionality of the discourses stipulates how and what to say. (PCNEM, [Portuguese abbreviation for National Curricular Parameters for the Secondary Schools] 1999, p.43-44)

When you think of working with texts, another inseparable concept concerns the genres through which they take form, having as a basis their thematic, compositional and stylistic aspects. One should remember, therefore that working with texts as proposed here considers that: Some themes can be better developed with certain genres; consecrated genres usually have a more defined compositional structure; the choices the author operates in the language determine the style of the text. PCNEM [Portuguese abbreviation for National Curricular Parameters for the Secondary Schools]+, 2002, p.77)

Every text organizes itself inside a determined genre due to its communicative intentions, and as part of the conditions of the production of discourses—that generates social uses that determine them. Genres are, thus, determined historically, and they constitute relatively stable forms of enunciations available in the culture. They are characterized by three elements:

- . Thematic content: what can become speakable through the genre;
- . Compositional construction: particular structure of the terms belonging to the genre;
- . Style: specific forms of the derived language units, especially the enunciative position of the speaker; particular sets of sequences that compose the text, etc. (PCNEF [Portuguese abbreviation for National Curricular Parameters Curricular for the Primary Schools], 1998, p.21)

the Ministry of Education itself create programs (e.g. *Parâmetros em Ação*[Parameters in Action] ) which lead to the study and interpretation of the PCN. These initiatives contribute for the divulgation and influence of these documents in the teaching of the mother tongue, but they may have faults. People responsible for the presentation of the PCN are not always specialists; neither are they people with experience with these documents. Due to this, there is the risk of turning scientific knowledge into school knowledge in a false and not very adequate way.

Marcuschi (2004), when doing a quick evaluation of the PCN, states that there is a decisive influence of these documents on the teaching of the mother tongue. Therefore, I believe that this influence shows itself in indirect ways, through the PNLD. The evaluation made by the PNLD (which considers principles of the PCN) contemplates the practice of listening and reading of texts; the practice of producing oral and written texts; and the practice of the linguistic analysis, involving aspects such as textual typology, theme, textuality, reading as an effective interlocution situation, conditions of production of oral and written text, theoretical-methodological focus of the linguistic contents and evaluation of learning. The results are divulged in a catalog titled '*Guia do Livro Didático* [Guide of the Textbook]', which has a description and a critical review of collection of textbooks, with the objective of choosing the one that adapts itself in a better way to the school reality.

It is worth emphasizing that these collections of textbooks used to have in their covers the information '*Material de acordo com os Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* [This material is in accordance with the National Curricular Parameters]'<sup>15</sup> but after the consolidation of the PNLD, they prefer to have the label '*PNLD* (year of the evaluation) and *Code* (number the collection was given, in the moment

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<sup>15</sup> For example, *Linguagem e Interação*, E. V. Tiepolo, R. Gregolin e S.G.Medeiros (Editora Módulo, 1998).



of its evaluation)<sup>16</sup>. This fact contributed for the verification that the PCN( although being a changing fact in the teaching of Portuguese) exert their role in an indirect way in schools<sup>17</sup>, perhaps because of the fact that the evaluation made by the PNLD implicates in theoretical-methodological changes in the elaboration of textbooks and consistent information in teachers' manuals on theories and methodologies with the purpose of guiding teachers in their classes. In other words, textbooks are the material that defines the curricular contents to be studied in each grade (for many reasons—although these reasons are beyond the scope of this article<sup>18</sup>), and when they are changed, they also entail a change in the school—although I know that this change cannot be effective if teachers do not have a basic knowledge of the proposed changes.

So, going back to my focus here (genres) I verified that the aspects evaluated by the PNLD when referring to text (i.e. diversity of genres, linguistic variation, thematic diversity and cultural context; reading objective , diversified reading strategies, conditions of production, planning, textual revision and reelaboration—among others) draw on sociointeractional theories of learning and interactional theories of genre (both supported by Geneva linguists). The recommended collections of textbooks –complying, totally or partially, with established criteria for the study of the text (written

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<sup>16</sup> For example, *Português: uma proposta para o letramento*[Portuguese: a proposal for literacy], by Magda Soares (Editora Moderna, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> I do not mean the PCN must be obeyed as a norm, even because they are parameters—they aim to present general principles for teaching. Therefore, each school reality has to define its teaching program.

<sup>18</sup> For being a profession without social prestige with consequently low wages, teachers need to work in many schools. Therefore, they have no time to prepare their class material. Besides, because of the lack of social prestige of the profession, teachers usually do not come from the upper classes—that usually have diversified literacy practices and a dialect in accordance with the one expected by the school. This all contributes to the use of the textbook in their classes.

or oral)—end up guiding the didactic activities. That is what I can in see in examples 6 and 7 below.

#### Example 6

##### Produção oral e escrita

Vocês vão fazer um debate na classe sobre as vantagens e as desvantagens do meio de transporte ferroviário.

1. Leia as opiniões: (são apresentados três fragmentos de textos: um a favor desse meio de transporte, outro defendendo o rodoviário e o terceiro ponderando que os dois meios são convenientes dependendo das peculiaridades de cada região). Agora discuta com seus colegas e seu professor e escrevam na lousa uma opinião sobre o assunto.
2. Debater é discutir uma questão controversa. Os participantes de um debate exprimem suas opiniões, procuram modificar as dos outros, ajustam às suas, para construir uma resposta comum à questão proposta. No debate, há vários papéis: apresentador, moderador, participante e público.  
(...)
3. Vamos preparar o debate da classe:
  - a) Comece conhecendo mais sobre o assunto. Reúna seu grupo de trabalho e ouçam a opinião de pessoas, pesquisem em enciclopédias, revistas, *internet*. Façam anotações que possam ajudar nos argumentos durante o debate.
  - b) Planejem o debate:
    - . Combinem sobre quem será o apresentador, o moderador e os participantes. O público será a classe.
    - . Organizem as participações no debate: (seguem as instruções do que cada membro do debate fará).
  - c) Sentem-se numa mesa em frente à classe e realizem o debate.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Written and Oral Production

You are going to make a debate in the classroom about the pros and cons of the railway system as a means of transportation.

### Example 7

Leia o painel de textos a seguir a fim de colher mais informações sobre a gravidez na adolescência: (seguem-se os textos)

Com base nos textos lidos e em suas próprias idéias sobre o assunto, escolha um dos temas abaixo e escreva um texto argumentativo, no gênero artigo de opinião, defendendo seu ponto de vista. (...) Ao produzir o texto, siga estas orientações:

- a) Pense no leitor: o texto ficará exposto no mural que será montado no projeto do capítulo Intervalo desta unidade e lido por colegas de outras classes, professores e funcionários da escola, familiares, amigos; você também pode enviar seu texto a um fórum de debates da Internet.
- b) Após escolher o tema, tome uma posição em relação a ele (...)
- c) Planeje seu texto, levando em conta a estrutura do texto argumentativo. (...)

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1. Read the opinions: (three fragments of texts are present: one in favor of this means of transportation; another defending the road system and a third one pondering that the two means of transportation are suitable depending on the peculiarities of the region). Now discuss with your classmates and teacher and then write down an opinion on the board.
  2. Debating is discussing a controversial subject matter. The participants of a debate express their opinions, try to modify the others' opinions, and adjust theirs in order to build a common answer to the proposed matter. In a debate, there are many roles: presenter, moderator, participant and audience. (...)
  3. Let us now prepare the classroom debate:
    - a) Start knowing more about the subject matter. Gather your work group and listen to people's opinions, do some research on encyclopedias, magazines, and the internet. Take notes that may help you during the debate.
    - b) Plan the debate:
      - . Decide who is going to be the presenter, the moderator, and the participants. The audience will be the others in the classroom.
      - . Organize the participations in the debate: (instructions for what each member of the debate will do follow).
    - c) Sit down behind a table in front of the classroom and start the debate.

CÓCCO, Ma. Fernandes & HAILER, M.A. *ALP novo*, São Paulo: FTD, 1999, v.4, p.151-

e) Fique atento à linguagem. Ela deve ser adequada ao gênero e ao perfil dos leitores do texto.<sup>20</sup>

Examples 6 and 7 demonstrate activities of text productions that are not usual in textbooks before this theoretical influence (debate, opinion article). They present detailed guidelines, taking into consideration theme (railway system and teenage pregnancy, respectively), textual organization (participants, roles, argumentative sequences), language (register suitable to the genre and the interlocutor), and elements of the enunciation (interlocutors, place, aims, time).

One can disapprove of this procedure, claiming there was a didactization of genres—the procedure then lost its communicative objective. Therefore, whatever the conceptual content is, when it becomes the object of teaching it is didactized—because teaching is one of the objectives of the school. However, it is possible to create real communicative situations for working with genres without limiting oneself to the classroom environment (see, for example, Baltar, 2004, and Bezerra, 2002).

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<sup>20</sup> Read the following texts in order to gather information about teenage pregnancy: (texts follow)

Based on the texts you read and in your own ideas about the subject matter, choose one of the themes below and write an argumentative text, belonging to the opinion article genre, defending your point of view. (...)When producing the text, follow these instructions:

a) Think about the reader: the text will be put in a wall board and will be read by students from other classrooms, teachers and school staff, families, and friends; you can also send your text to a debate forum in the internet.

b) After choosing the theme, take a position in relation to it (...)

c) Plan your text, taking into consideration the structure of the argumentative text. (...)

e) Pay attention to language. It must be suitable to the genre and the profile of the text readers.

CEREJA, W.R. & MAGALHÃES, T.C. *Português: linguagens*. São Paulo: Atual, 2004, v.8, p.161-163



Considering that learning happens through the mobilization of knowledge from diverse sources and that it is a result of a process of didactization, I can see that in teachers' manuals, there is reference knowledge from genre theories that are reconstructed in the proposed activities in students' books, and that they are influenced by traditional composition theory, as seen in examples 8a and b below:

Example 8

a) Considerando o aluno como um usuário da escrita, o objetivo principal da produção de textos, na escola, é trabalhar a elaboração da mensagem como instrumento de comunicação, em atividades que tornam possível a construção do raciocínio lógico. Por isso, deve abranger toda a tipologia textual e todos os gêneros do discurso. Não basta trabalhar variedade de textos dentro de um mesmo tipo ou de um mesmo gênero. O aluno precisa entrar em contato e aprender a escrever todos os gêneros que estão presentes na sociedade letrada em que vive.

As práticas de linguagem são aquisições acumuladas pelos grupos sociais na história da humanidade.

(CÓCCO, Ma. Fernandes & HAILER, M.A. *ALP novo*, Manual do Professor, São Paulo: FTD, 1999, v.4, p.17)

b) Pegue uma folha de papel e escreva as dez primeiras palavras que lhe vierem ao pensamento.

Sente-se junto com um colega, observem as palavras escritas por vocês e verifiquem se existem palavras que tenham ligação umas com as outras.

Criem um poema, tentando usar essas palavras soltas.

Escolham uma outra dupla e troquem os poemas.

Vocês darão um nome para o trabalho deles e eles farão o mesmo com o de vocês.

Seu professor sorteará algumas duplas que lerão o resultado do trabalho para a classe.<sup>21</sup>



<sup>21</sup> a) Considering the student as a user of the writing, the main objective of the production of texts, in the school, is to work with the elaboration of the message as a tool of communication in activities that make possible the construction of a

When I compare the two fragments above (8a and b), I see that information that comes from genre theories,

*The student needs to get in touch with and learn how to write in every genre available in the literate society he lives in. Language practices are acquisitions accumulated by social groups in the history of humanity.* (8a)

cross with information that come from composition

*Pick up a sheet of paper and write down the first ten words that come to your thoughts. Sit down near a classmate, and observe the words you both wrote. Then check if there are words that have a link with the others. Create a poem, trying to use the loose words.* (8b),

resulting in an overlapping of inadequate knowledge. The crossing of principles that come from genre theories with composition principles does not seem to be teaching proposal easy to be accomplished. Even if these theories influence the teaching of

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logical reasoning. Because of that, it should comprise all the textual typology and all the discourse genres. Working with many texts that belong to the same type or genre is not enough. The student needs to get in touch with and learn how to write in every genre available in the literate society in which he lives in. The language practices are acquisitions accumulated by the social groups in the history of humanity.

CÓCCO, Ma. Fernandes & HAILER, M.A. *ALP novo*, Manual do Professor, São Paulo: FTD, 1999, v.4, p.17

b) Pick up a sheet of paper and write down the first ten words that come to your thoughts.

Sit down near a classmate, and observe the words you both wrote. Then check if there are words that have a link with the others.

Create a poem, trying to use the loose words.

Choose now two classmates and exchange the poems.

You will give a name to their work and they will do the same with yours.

Your teacher will choose at random some pairs who will read the result of the work for the classroom as a whole.

CÓCCO, Ma. Fernandes & HAILER, M.A. *ALP novo*. São Paulo: FTD, 1999, v.4, p.87.

miscellaneous texts, they do not state that any text is suitable for teaching. Besides, their production conditions are not always adequate in a school situation. For that reason, when the manual cites that “*The student needs to (...) learn how to write in every genre available in the literate society*” it is being inadequate.

In a literate society, there are situations where students only read texts and situations where they read and write them. For this reason, school should not teach writing of all kinds of texts—as it is stated above in the manual (Example 8). This manual is influenced by composition theories that emphasize textual structures: Certainly the reason for asking students to create a poem taking into consideration only a set of words.

Another element (though of less impact) that cannot be neglected concerning the teaching of genres in school is that a written text is a part of the *vestibular* (college entrance examinations—a common practice in Brazil). Universities start to demand from the *vestibulandos* (the students who take the *vestibular* examinations) the elaboration of a determined genre, according with the given production conditions. Because of that, secondary schools started to worry about the subject. However, the teaching of genres does not follow the linguistic, philosophical or political conceptions of the PCN. Emphasis is given to implemental/instrumental teaching of genre (what is clearly not a feature of genres) with presentation of static (not “relatively stable”) and crystallized models of texts. The *vestibulandos* then use these models, but lacking a sociocommunicative context—they only reproduce them in the *vestibular* examinations. For example: The required writing of an argumentative letter in the composition exam at the UNICAMP *vestibular*; and the writing of an opinion article at the UFBA, UFPB, and UFCG *vestibulares*—among other proposals—influences Portuguese classes in secondary schools, considering that what is taught is the structure of the letter or the article and that the formal register is emphasized—but the enunciative situation is neglected.

In other words, in a *vestibular* situation (generally a very selective exam, with a few available places for many applicants) what is taught to students is not a manner of enlarging their literacy, effectively, but only a conditioning to make them answer these exams. Therefore, composition is taught—not genres.

## CONCLUSIONS

The presence of the study of genres in Brazilian schools has increased, although the teaching of composition is still recurrent. The PCN can be considered the impelling component of this study with genres, but their decisive influence takes place through the PNLD. I can also add the theoretical-methodological contributions of Geneva linguists, through the undergraduate and in-service teacher courses; the Portuguese textbooks (based on these theoretical-methodological principles) and, in an indirect way, *vestibular* examinations

I can see this influence—more effective concerning written production and still very slowly when concerning oral production—taking place through the proposal of effective use of miscellaneous genres; presented or not in didactic sequences, and including simulated or real situations. After all, being in a classroom, genres are the object of teaching/learning, losing some of the communicative features they have when they circulate in their own discursive domain. The study of genres in the classroom is often restricted to school literacy—where texts with a didactic characteristic (summary, test, questions and answers...) are emphasized.

Concerning the fundamental aspects of genres, thematic and compositional aspects are already being considered, but without any effects of the theory in the teaching of linguistic elements (be they systemic, functional or enunciative).



**RESUMO:** O ensino do texto escrito em língua portuguesa, na escola brasileira, em geral, passou da redação ao gênero, incluindo a produção textual, influenciado por perspectivas teóricas diversas. O ensino da redação, enfatizando sua estrutura e código lingüístico, começa a ser questionado quando pesquisadores defendem o ensino da produção textual, considerando suas condições de produção. A publicação dos Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCN) impulsionou o ensino dos gêneros textuais. Nesse contexto o objetivo desse artigo é traçar um breve percurso histórico do ensino da produção escrita em Língua Portuguesa nas escolas brasileiras. Percebemos que esse ensino se inicia por meio da leitura de textos autênticos e variados e, muito timidamente ainda está chegando à produção oral, sem reflexos no ensino do componente lingüístico (seja sistêmico, seja funcional).

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** produção de texto; redação; gêneros textuais; formação de professor.

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