

MEMORY AND DISCURSIVE ETHOS: The Construction of Emilia Ferreiro in Latin American Obituaries (Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico)

Memória e ethos discursivo: a construção de Emilia Ferreiro
nos obituários latino-americanos (Brasil, Argentina e México)

Memoria y ethos discursivo: la construcción de Emilia Ferreiro
en los obituarios latinoamericanos (Brasil, Argentina y México)

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Abstract: The article analyzes representations of Emilia Ferreiro's (1937–2023) memory in obituaries published in Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, with the aim of understanding how different social actors, universities, unions, media outlets, and research centers construct discourses about her death and symbolically dispute her intellectual legacy. Based on the theoretical contributions of Philippe Ariès, Peter Burke, Dominique Maingueneau, and Pierre Bourdieu (via Gisele Sapiro), we examine the ways in which obituaries emphasize the continuity of her work and its international relevance, to the detriment of traditional mourning. The results demonstrate that Ferreiro's memory is part of a field of symbolic disputes, being appropriated by different institutions to legitimize positions on literacy, public policy, and institutional identity.

Keywords: Emilia Ferreiro; memory; literacy; early writing.

Resumo: O artigo analisa as representações da memória de Emilia Ferreiro (1937-2023) em obituários publicados no Brasil, México e Argentina, com o objetivo de compreender como diferentes atores sociais, universidades, sindicatos, meios de comunicação e centros de pesquisa constroem discursos sobre sua morte e disputam simbolicamente sua herança intelectual. A partir das contribuições teóricas de Philippe Ariès, Peter Burke, Dominique Maingueneau e Pierre Bourdieu (via Gisele Sapiro), examinam-se os modos como os obituários enfatizam a continuidade de sua obra e sua relevância internacional, em detrimento do luto tradicional. Os resultados demonstram que a memória de Ferreiro se inscreve em um campo de disputas simbólicas, sendo apropriada por distintas instituições para legitimar posicionamentos sobre alfabetização, políticas públicas e identidade institucional.

Palavras-chave: Emilia Ferreiro; memória; alfabetização; escrita.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza las representaciones de la memoria de Emilia Ferreiro (1937-2023) en obituarios publicados en Brasil, México y Argentina, con el objetivo de comprender cómo universidades, sindicatos, medios de comunicación, centros de investigación y otros actores sociales construyen discursos sobre su fallecimiento y disputan simbólicamente su legado intelectual. A partir de los aportes teóricos de Philippe Ariès, Peter Burke, Dominique Maingueneau y Pierre Bourdieu (a través de Gisele Sapiro), se examina cómo los obituarios subrayan la continuidad de su obra y su relevancia internacional, en lugar del duelo tradicional. Los resultados demuestran que la memoria de Ferreiro se inscribe en un campo de disputas simbólicas, apropiada por distintas instituciones para legitimar posturas sobre alfabetización, políticas públicas y identidad institucional.

Palabras clave: Emilia Ferreiro; memoria; alfabetización; escritura inicial.

INTRODUCTION

Emilia Ferreiro's death on August 26, 2023, generated widespread international attention, which reflected the profound impact she had on education, especially in the area of literacy. In Brazil and other countries, such as Mexico and Argentina, her passing was reported by various media outlets and institutions, each offering different perspectives on her legacy and her contribution to the transformation of education.

Emilia Ferreiro, a renowned Argentine psychologist and educator, built an academic and intellectual career that had a significant impact on Latin American education. With a PhD from the University of Geneva under the supervision of Jean Piaget, she stood out as one of the most influential theorists in educational psychology, making significant contributions to studies on writing acquisition and literacy (Mello, 2011).

In the 1970s, she began groundbreaking research in Argentina on the process of learning to read and write, based on the principles of the ¹Piagetian psychogenesis. This work would result in a profound reformulation of literacy conceptions in Latin America. However, with the rise of the last Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983), Ferreiro was forced into exile and settled in Mexico, where she consolidated her research. It was in this context that she published, in 1979, *Los sistemas de escrita en el desarrollo del niño*, co-authored with Ana Teberosky, a work in which she systematized the foundations of Written Language Psychogenesis. Her discoveries revolutionized pedagogical practices by showing that literacy is not merely the memorization of rules and conventions, but an active process in which children construct knowledge, formulating hypotheses about the writing system as they progress through different stages of development (Mello, 2011).

In addition to transforming concepts of literacy, Ferreiro's theory had a broad impact on educational policies in several countries, influencing teacher training and school curricula.

Therefore, this article analyzes the different representations of Emilia Ferreiro's memory in obituaries published in Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, identifying how different institutions, media outlets, and academic groups construct and perpetuate her legacy. The research draws on Peter Burke's (2000) concepts of social memory, Dominique Maingueneau's (2008) discursive *ethos*, and Pierre Bourdieu's field, as interpreted by Gisele Sapiro (2019), to understand how Ferreiro's figure is appropriated and resignified in different institutional and media contexts. Furthermore, it engages with Philippe Ariès's (2012) reflections on death and mourning in contemporary society, analyzing how discourses surrounding her death

¹ The term psychogenesis can be understood as the origin, genesis or history of the acquisition of knowledge and psychological functions of each person, a process that occurs throughout development, from the early years of childhood, and applies to any object or field of knowledge.

emphasize the continuity and symbolic immortality of her work, to the detriment of traditional mourning. By examining the narratives constructed in the obituaries, we seek to demonstrate how Ferreiro's memory is inscribed in a field of symbolic disputes, in which different social actors claim her intellectual legacy to legitimize their own perspectives on education and literacy. In Brazil and other Latin American countries, her passing was recalled by the press, universities, research centers, educational portals, specialized magazines, schools, teacher representative institutions, and educational blogs, all demonstrating Emilia Ferreiro's international influence and her importance for literacy and pedagogy in Latin American contexts.

The selection of obituaries analyzed in this article was not based on exhaustiveness, but rather on discursive representation and institutional diversity. We chose to include productions that represented different types of social agents involved in the symbolic struggle for Emilia Ferreiro's memory: media outlets with different editorial orientations, public universities, teachers' unions, and research centers. Furthermore, motivated by interest and intellectual curiosity, we actively sought out statements from institutions that, given their history, could have published an obituary in honor of the researcher. The selection sought to map the construction of Ferreiro's posthumous *ethos* across different fields of enunciation (academic, union, journalistic), prioritizing texts that circulated widely or that highlight institutional ties to the author. The methodological strategy adopted was, therefore, qualitative and analytical, guided by the diversity of institutional voices and the effects of meaning produced in different analyzed discourses.

For analytical purposes, we chose to organize the obituaries by country: Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina. Argentina and Mexico were places where Emilia Ferreiro lived and worked in educational and research institutions. Brazil, in turn, interests us as an example of the international impact of her work. Despite Brazil's historical and cultural peculiarities in relation to its neighboring countries, Ferreiro's work coincided with a period of dictatorships in most countries in the region. During this period, Ferreiro's critical view of literacy and writing resonated among those who saw education as one of the main instruments for overcoming authoritarianism—including in the classroom—and the social disparities that marked—and still mark—the region. Within each country, the texts were grouped by type of issuer (press, universities, unions, civic initiatives), allowing us to highlight the discursive specificities of each instance, as well as their disputes, silences, or selective appropriations of the researcher's legacy.

BRAZIL

“What may seem obvious today was not so obvious”: the repercussions of Emilia Ferreiro’s death in the mass circulation and specialized press

The Brazilian press constructed different memories of Emilia Ferreiro, reflecting perspectives and editorial objectives. Barbon (2023), in *Folha de São Paulo*, adopts an institutional and historical approach, highlighting Ferreiro's impact on Brazil and the honors she received, such as the Medal of Educational Merit² awarded by the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration in 2001. The text highlights how Ferreiro's work created a new paradigm in education: "What may seem obvious today was not so obvious before Emilia Ferreiro" (Barbon, 2023). Furthermore, Barbon compares Ferreiro to Paulo Freire to emphasize her importance for education in Brazil.

Opera Mundi (Editorial Staff, 2023) presents a politically engaged narrative that links Ferreiro's trajectory to the social and political struggles of Latin America—such as her exile during the Argentine dictatorship—while portraying her as a revolutionary figure in early childhood education. The outlet, which identifies as left-wing and progressive, frames her story within this broader context. The website highlights the statement from the Argentine Education Workers' Union mourning her passing and connects Ferreiro and her work to contemporary challenges such as prejudice in the classroom and the use of new technologies. *Opera Mundi* recalls the interview with the Argentine newspaper *Página/12*, in 2017, in which Ferreiro criticized teachers who categorize students as "bookish," "slow," and "undisciplined." In the same interview, Ferreiro highlighted how apps are appealing to children; however, they hinder their development of notions of time and causality. "How can you explain to a child that sending an email from Buenos Aires to someone in Rosario isn't the same as sending it to Australia, and that perhaps what was sent to Australia might arrive sooner?" (as cited in Redação, 2023).

D'Maschio (2023), writing for *Porvir*, a news portal specializing in educational innovation, highlights the May 2023 relaunch of the Latin American Literacy Network³—founded by Ferreiro in the 1990s—and mentions that her death occurred only three months after this event. This temporal mention does not seem coincidental; by emphasizing the proximity between the network's relaunch and the educator's death, the text suggests a kind of "passing of the baton," as if Ferreiro had symbolically laid the foundation for her work to continue, even after her absence. The narrative constructed by the portal can be interpreted as an attempt to demonstrate that,

² The award is granted by presidential decree, based on a proposal from the Minister of Education and after consultation with the Order's Council. It is presented to those who have made significant contributions to the Brazilian education system. (MEC, 2024).

³ It was a network founded in 1990 by Ferreiro and other researchers, and it is currently composed of researchers, academics and teachers from Argentina, Mexico and Brazil.

although the researcher is gone, the movement she created remains alive and active. D'Maschio (2023) highlights the testimony of Giovana Zen, president of the Latin American Literacy Network: "We are all heirs to her dream and will continue here, fighting for a Latin America that guarantees its children the right to learn to read and write" (as cited in D'Maschio, 2023). This discursive construction reinforces the enduring nature of Ferreiro's legacy, projecting her presence beyond her lifetime and linking her memory to an ongoing collective process of development. Thus, the portal not only reports on her death but also reiterates the timeless and transnational nature of her contribution to Latin American education. Finally, like *Opera Mundi*, the website highlights Ferreiro's concern for children's literacy amid new technologies and concludes the article with her 2013 participation in the program *Grandes Diálogos*.

Finally, *Planalto em Pauta* (FB Editorial, 2023) highlights Ferreiro's symbolic recognition, such as the Liberators of Humanity Medal⁴ received in 1994 in Bahia, which associated her with figures of struggle and transformation, such as Nelson Mandela, and reinforced her global impact and her connection with issues of social justice.

The narratives constructed by the different media highlight the multiplicity of appropriations and representations of Emilia Ferreiro's memory, which vary according to the editorial context and perspectives of each media outlet. Different social and cultural actors position her as a central figure in debates that go beyond literacy, connecting her to issues of equity, innovation, and social justice. This plurality of approaches demonstrates how the memory of an intellectual of her stature is continually reconstructed in dialogue with the interests and values of her receiving contexts.

Ratier's (2023) journalistic article, "The Second Death of the Researcher Who Revolutionized Literacy," examines how Emilia Ferreiro's legacy has been reinterpreted, forgotten, or even distorted over time. The author argues that the stereotyping of her work represented a kind of "first death," occurring during her lifetime, as her ideas were reduced to simplifications that do not align with her true theoretical proposal.

In a public debate characterized by superficiality, she was unfairly blamed for the high rates of functional illiteracy in Latin America.

Emilia Ferreiro was a fierce opponent of false silver bullets. In a public debate as shallow as a kiddie pool, she was blamed for the alarming rates of functional illiteracy in Latin America—a causal relationship that didn't exist, as the subcontinent's school system never ceased to be textbook-like. She was also "accused" of encouraging students to avoid correcting their mistakes—another falsehood, given that her

⁴ Proposed by then-representative and educator Maria José Rocha Lima – Zezé. This medal was awarded to South African leader Nelson Mandela in recognition of his struggle to end the segregationist apartheid regime in South Africa (Planalto em Pauta, 2023).

proposal included highly sophisticated, specific interventions to help students progress (Ratier, 2023, no pagination).

Ferreiro's theory has often been misinterpreted by educators who viewed it as a teaching method, when in fact it is an explanation of how children construct knowledge about writing. One of the most widespread misconceptions was the belief that this theory eliminated the teacher's role as a mediator in the teaching–learning process (Brasil, 1997; Gonçalves, 2007). However, Ferreiro emphasized the importance of considering children's errors as valid hypotheses in their knowledge construction, requiring teachers to be attentive and active in guiding this process. This approach required adequate preparation from teachers, but many lacked the necessary training and, consequently, ended up adopting a passive stance in the teaching process (Gonçalves, 2007).

According to Brazilian education researcher Regina Scarpa (2024), professionals accustomed to traditional methods struggled with this transition—particularly those involved in producing and marketing conventional teaching materials, such as primers—since the adoption of Ferreiro's approaches diminished their use and directly affected the market. This scenario contributed to resistance and distortions in the understanding of Ferreiro's theory, impacting its implementation in different educational contexts.

The marginalization of Ferreiro's ideas in certain contemporary educational debates is an example of the disputes surrounding his memory. According to Ratier (2023), the way his theories have been interpreted or distorted reflects changes in educational policies and discourses on literacy methods. This phenomenon highlights how what is remembered or forgotten is often determined by those with the authority to shape narratives. Giovana Zen, interviewed by Ratier (2023), emphasizes that many criticisms of the psychogenetic approach disregard decades of scientific production, which has led to the dissemination of misconceptions about the processes of teaching and learning, as well as reading and writing (Zen as cited in Ratier, 2023, no pagination).

Ratier (2023) emphasizes that the dispute over memory can directly affect the continued impact of Ferreiro's ideas, influencing how his work is perceived by new generations of educators and scholars. Without an active effort to value his contributions, there is a risk that his legacy will be progressively devalued or misunderstood. This process reveals the fluidity of social memory and the importance of considering the historical and political context in which these disputes occur. Ratier begins his text by mocking the decolonial currents that have gained ground in education and other areas of knowledge in recent years: "The silence surrounding the death of the Argentine psycholinguist Emilia Ferreiro says a lot about the lack of real interest in education, and also about a decoloniality for the English to see" (Ratier, 2023, no pagination).

Ratier's critique reveals a tension present in academic sectors that, while defending decolonial discourses and the valorization of Latin American knowledge, remained silent in the face of the death of an intellectual who was central to the renewal of literacy practices on the continent. By using the expression "decoloniality just for the sake of appearances," the author mocks the superficial or merely performative adoption of critical discourses. His provocation, therefore, exposes the disconnect between discourse and action, drawing attention to the selectivity with which certain voices are legitimized or ignored.

The critical depth of Ratier's text, combined with its widespread circulation on a portal, warrants analytical attention. His explicit stance on omissions in the educational field offers a privileged entry point for considering the disputes surrounding Ferreiro's memory.

Teachers' unions and organizations: collective struggles for critical education

Teacher-representing institutions pay tribute to Emilia Ferreiro, highlighting her alignment with values such as pedagogical innovation, educational equity, and the valorization of the teaching profession, while also consolidating their own relevance as representatives of the profession and advocates for education. Publishing these obituaries is, therefore, a way to reaffirm their institutional purposes and connect their audiences to the memory of a central figure in the history of education. Three obituaries converge in valuing Emilia Ferreiro as a transformative figure, but each constructs its memory based on institutional priorities. The *Centro de Professorado Paulista* (CPP) (Redação CPP, 2023) highlights her contribution to literacy education based on the words of its president, Loretana Paolieri Pancera, who worked as a literacy teacher for 41 years: "Her contributions leave an invaluable legacy" (Redação CPP, 2023). Maria Carla (2023), from the Federal District Teachers' Union (SINPRO - DF), focuses on the global importance of Ferreiro's work, as indicated in the article title "The World Says Goodbye to Psycholinguist Emilia Ferreiro." The text emphasizes Ferreiro's connection to Piaget and emphasizes that her thinking was adopted by the Department of Education of the Federal District, demonstrating the relevance and international recognition of the pedagogical practices developed there. The Workers' Union of Osasco and the Region (Sinprosasco, 2023), in turn, emphasizes the existence of the Latin American literacy network, also celebrating its international influence and its role in the training of educators and researchers.

In this way, institutions reinforce their commitment to valuing education and teaching. These tributes not only highlight the relevance of the researcher's legacy but also align their institutional trajectories with the principles Ferreiro represented, such as the pursuit of quality, inclusive, and innovative education.

Universities: Ferreiro's legacy as a formative and institutional reference

Brazilian universities construct Emilia Ferreiro's memory in distinct ways, reflecting their own institutional identities, interests, and relationships with her academic legacy. The State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) emphasizes the tribute paid to the educator by granting her an Honorary Doctorate in 1995, positioning itself as an institution that recognized and valued her contribution to education. As stated in its official statement, Ferreiro is considered "one of the world's greatest scholars on the process of child literacy" (UERJ, 2023, no pagination). By highlighting this title, UERJ seeks to legitimize her relevance in Brazilian academia, reinforcing its role in preserving and disseminating the researcher's legacy. "The gap she leaves intensifies a deeper commitment to protecting the right to literacy for children and young people" (UERJ, 2023, no pagination). This emphasis on the honorary degree can be interpreted as a strategy to directly associate itself with a figure of great impact in the field of literacy and the psychogenesis of written language. UERJ also highlights that Ferreiro inspired Professor Anna Helena Moussatché, now retired, to create Proalfa, a youth and adult literacy project that remains active at the university 30 years after its creation. Thus, in addition to recognizing Ferreiro with an honorary degree, UERJ highlights the incorporation of her work into a university outreach project.

Similar to UERJ, the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), through its School of Education, emphasizes the practical application of Ferreiro's contributions, pointing out how her research directly influenced literacy in Bahia (UFBA, 2023). This perspective focuses on a close connection with local pedagogical practices, positioning UFBA as a key institution both in benefiting from and disseminating the educator's legacy. In doing so, the university constructs a narrative that legitimizes its role as a reference point for the implementation of Ferreiro's ideas in the educational field.

The UFBA obituary also establishes a personal connection between Ferreiro and the institution by mentioning that Professor Giovana Zen, affiliated with the university, completed a postdoctoral internship under the researcher's supervision. This detail reinforces the idea of Ferreiro's legacy continuity within UFBA, creating a direct connection between the university and her intellectual output. This narrative strategy indicates an effort to demonstrate that the educator's influence was not only recognized but also incorporated into the institution's academic practices. As can be seen, the researcher's social memory is actively constructed, reflecting the relations of power and identity within the university environment.

In a publication by the Institute of Advanced Studies at USP (IEA-USP), Cláudia Regina (2023) reveals Ferreiro's experiments in Latin American countries, including Brazil, highlighting how her ideas influenced educators and researchers throughout the region. She also mentions her seminal works, such as *Psychogenesis of Written Language*, and the honors she received, including the Liberators of Humanity Medal and several honorary doctorates. By announcing an event for the Alfredo Bosi Chair

of Basic Education in Ferreiro's honor, the IEA-USP not only commemorates her contribution but also reinforces its role in disseminating and continuing the researcher's legacy. This institutional gesture solidifies USP as a space for preserving and celebrating great intellectuals in education.

Peter Burke (2000) argues that memory is not an objective reflection of reality, but a social construction. Both individual and collective memory are selective, subject to interpretation and, often, distortion, and are shaped by different social groups. The author emphasizes that "memory is a reconstruction of the past" (p. 70), which demonstrates its mutable nature and its adaptation to the needs of the present. Burke also points out that social memory is a space of dispute, in which different groups compete to impose their versions of historical events and decide what should be remembered or forgotten.

The impact of Emilia Ferreiro's death in Brazil can be interpreted within a broader historical and cultural context. Her ideas found a favorable environment in the country, especially during the period of redemocratization, when there was a search for educational methodologies that could break with traditional and authoritarian teaching approaches. In a Brazilian historical context marked by struggles for equity and social justice, Ferreiro's constructivist proposals—emphasizing children's autonomy in the construction of knowledge—emerge as significant references for the development of new pedagogical practices.

ARGENTINA

Official universities and institutions: recognition in her home country

In Argentina, her home country, there has been extensive reflection on her groundbreaking contribution to education, emphasizing the lasting impact of her theories on literacy and the understanding of children's cognitive development. The Official Portal of the Argentine State recognizes her as a central figure in Latin American education, referring to her influence in the development of a new pedagogical approach focused on the processes of reading and writing. In her honor, the portal republishes a text by Mónica Báez, from the National University of Rosario (UNR), which had been published in the newspaper *La Capital*. Báez reaffirms Ferreiro's relevance not only as a psychologist and as a pedagogue, but also as an intellectual committed to educational and social transformation (Báez as cited in Argentina.gob.ar, 2023).

Her work is revolutionary as it enabled the construction of a new perspective on these subjects —‘who have the bad habit of not

asking permission to learn’—through the certainties she provided and the challenges she left to educators, psycholinguists, psychopedagogues, speech therapists, and other professionals dedicated to interpreting and supporting these thinking beings. Often unfamiliar to our adult and literate gaze, they are now approached with recognition and respect (Báez as cited in Argentina.gob.ar, 2023, no pagination) (Our translation).

The tribute emphasizes Emilia Ferreiro's ability to combine scientific rigor with social commitment, especially to children in vulnerable contexts, promoting schooling as a means of combating exclusion. Báez (2023) celebrates her as a transformative figure, focusing on her innovative and respectful approach to children's cognitive processes, which redefined literacy methods. By underlining the influence of Jean Piaget and Ferreiro's reformulation of scientific questions, the text reinforces her role in the reconstruction of educational sciences, consolidating the relevance of Argentine pedagogical thought in the international academic scenery (Báez as cited in Argentina.gob.ar, 2023).

The obituary published by the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences of the National University of La Plata (UNLP) expresses institutional mourning for the passing of Emilia Ferreiro, highlighting her honor as Doctor Honoris Causa from the university and her relevance as a trainer of generations of educators. As we have pointed out in relation to Brazilian universities, this narrative directly connects Ferreiro's memory to the prestige of the institution, while reinforcing UNLP's identity as a space for academic training committed to quality education (UNLP, 2023).

Mass circulation press: the memory of Emilia Ferreiro between intellectual and political legacy

Three of the country's leading newspapers reported Ferreiro's death. Gigena (2023), in *La Nación*, favors an academic and institutional approach, emphasizing her scientific contributions. Taking a more conservative approach, it emphasizes her relevance as a researcher but avoids exploring in depth aspects of her political trajectory, such as her exile or her social engagement. *Infobae* (2023) adopts a middle-of-the-road approach. Without resorting to more explicit ideological ties, it combines the appreciation of her academic work with the recognition of her social commitment. The newspaper calls attention to her work on behalf of marginalized sectors of Latin America, presenting her as an intellectual who not only transformed literacy but also sought to address educational inequalities. *Página 12* (2023), aligned with the progressive camp, presents a clearly more engaged narrative, connecting Ferreiro's legacy to her political and social trajectory. The text underscores her forced exile under the Argentine military dictatorship, her advocacy for inclusive public

education, and her critique of exclusionary systems—elements that reflect the newspaper's editorial stance. By portraying Ferreiro as a symbol of resistance and progress, the narrative aligns with the outlet's progressive orientation and its readership engaged in social causes. In short, representing Emilia Ferreiro in this way allows each newspaper to solidify its editorial identity and strengthen the connection with specific audiences.

MEXICO

The CINVESTAV research center and the consolidation of the psychogenetic approach in Mexico

In Mexico, the country where Ferreiro conducted much of her research and remained since her second exile, media coverage highlighted her influence on educational policymaking and teacher training. Her second exile occurred in 1976. Until that year, Emilia Ferreiro developed her work with the support of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) in Argentina. With the renewed intervention in universities after the 1976 military coup, the censorship imposed by Argentina's last military dictatorship (1976–1983) extended beyond her research to include the works of Piaget and countless other scientists, artists, and intellectuals. Confronted with this repressive environment and mounting political pressure, Ferreiro was once again forced into exile.

The Center for Research and Advanced Studies (Cinvestav), linked to the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), honors her career by recognizing her as Emeritus Researcher of the Department of Educational Research (DIE), consolidating the institution as a fundamental hub for the dissemination and strengthening of the psychogenetic approach in Latin America.

She decided to move to Mexico to join the Department of Educational Research (DIE) at Cinvestav in 1981. At this institution, she established a distinguished scientific career and contributed to the training of dozens of researchers specializing in the field of education, from a psychogenetic perspective (Cinvestav, 2023) (Our translation).

The obituary published by Cinvestav also highlights her theoretical and practical contributions to the field of literacy, as well as the impact of her work on teacher training and the recognition of literacy as a right. It also mentions the honors she received for her scientific career, such as honorary doctorates from seven universities, the Andrés Bello Order from the Venezuelan government, and the

National Order of Educational Merit from Brazil, attesting to the relevance of her work in the Latin American and international educational landscape (Cinvestav, 2023).

Press and news portals: affective and academic voices in the construction of memory

The obituaries published by Torres (2023) in *La Crónica de Hoy* and by the editorial staff of *NetNoticias* (2023) address Emilia Ferreiro's legacy, focusing on her academic and scientific career. Both construct a memory of Ferreiro as a scientific and educational figure, emphasizing her impact on research and teaching. Torres (2023), in *La Crónica de Hoy*, places her career within the development of educational research in Mexico, reinforcing her connection to Cinvestav and her influence on educational policies. *NetNoticias* (2023) presents a more objective and generalist approach, highlighting her role as a transformative intellectual in literacy and teacher training. The newspapers construct a memory of Ferreiro more linked to her scientific impact and less to her political career, consolidating her status as a figurehead within the Mexican educational system.

The *Jardín Lac* obituary (2023) stands out for its more literary and emotional structure, presenting an account that emphasizes Ferreiro's personality and her way of thinking and questioning the world. It brings together multiple voices from countries such as France, Argentina, and Mexico, all emotionally connected to Ferreiro's trajectory, creating a rich publication that broadens its interpretative relevance. *Jardín Lac* is a Mexican civil association that seeks to recognize, imagine, and build options to preserve, honor, and enrich diversity. One of the association's directors is Daniel Goldin⁵⁵, Ferreiro's research partner.

Rather than presenting a traditional biography, the text highlights her rigorous intelligence, her critical stance toward academic theories, and her commitment to the democratization of knowledge. The mention of the "sparkle in her eyes," her "insatiable curiosity," and her intellectual demanding nature reveal a restless and provocative Ferreiro, who constantly challenged those who worked with her (Jardín Lac, 2023).

By stating that "a true democratization of knowledge begins by recognizing the active role of every person, literate or not, in the construction of knowledge" (Jardín Lac, 2023, no pagination), the text underlines one of the most transformative aspects of Ferreiro's work: the valorization of children's active construction of knowledge, breaking with the idea that literacy should be merely a mechanical process of

⁵⁵ Daniel Goldin studied Hispanic Language and Literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). He is an editor, writer, and essayist. He was responsible for creating the editorial project for children and young people at the Economic Culture Fund of Mexico. He has worked on several research projects with Emilia Ferreiro (Editora Pulo do Gato, 2022).

reproducing letters and words. The reference to her mentor, Jean Piaget, also appears as a symbolic element, but not as a simple academic connection –Ferreiro is portrayed as an intellectual who followed in Piaget's footsteps, but who also questioned and expanded his theory.

Jardín Lac's tribute suggests that Ferreiro was not just a researcher, but a thinker who transformed the relationship among children, literacy, and written culture, influencing not only pedagogy but also public policy and educational practices.

The testimonies accompanying the tribute are written by researchers and teachers from different countries, offering multiple layers of interpretation regarding Ferreiro's impact. Elsie Rockwell, from Mexico, contextualizes the importance of psychogenesis within Mexican and international educational research. She emphasizes that Ferreiro brought an innovative perspective by considering children as epistemological subjects who develop hypotheses about writing autonomously, a concept that has become essential to contemporary educational studies.

For Emilia, these children were always “her main intellectual colleagues.” She didn’t propose any new “method” to teachers; she simply invited them to “accompany their students with admiration and attentive listening in the gradual process of their entry into written culture” (Jardín Lac, 2023, no pagination).

Graciela Quinteros (Argentina/Mexico) and Celia Díaz-Argüero (Mexico) offer personal accounts of their relationship with Ferreiro and its impact on their academic trajectories, highlighting the researcher's rigor and intellectual demands, but also her influence on the transformation of teaching how to write.

Emilia was, and always will be, for all of us who knew her, a brilliant person. Her work capacity and personal demands were impressive, but very difficult to keep up with. She always valued and fought for what she believed in, in the political arena and in academia, no matter the cost (Jardín Lac, 2023, no pagination) (Our translation).

This tribute preserves her memory and reaffirms the transformative impact of her work, solidifying it as a reference for future generations. Furthermore, by bringing together testimonies from different countries and disciplines, the tribute reflects the transnational and interdisciplinary dimension of her influence.

Sapiro (2019) argues that Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "field," traditionally used to understand social structures within national contexts, can be expanded to include a transnational approach. This perspective considers that social, cultural, and scientific fields are not restricted to the borders of nation-states, but are constituted

through global interactions, including migration, cultural exchanges, and international influences.

From a transnational perspective, the symbolic disputes, the distribution of capital, and the power relations that, according to Bourdieu, structure fields must be analyzed within a global logic. In this context, agents and institutions interact, collaborate, and compete in a transnational arena, influencing one another.

Furthermore, Sapiro emphasizes that this transnationalization of fields allows for the circulation and adaptation of models and practices from one country to another, enabling the formation of international networks that can both challenge and reinforce local structures. This process results in a dynamic relationship between the local and the global, in which fields are continually transformed by transnational influences that redefine their hierarchies and power relations.

Therefore, by adapting the concept of field to a transnational scale, the Bourdieusian analysis is expanded, offering a deeper understanding of how social fields are structured and operate in a globalized world. In this scenario, national borders become permeable, and transnational interactions play an increasingly important role in the configuration of fields and the distribution of power among their agents (Sapiro, 2019).

DISPUTES OVER MEMORY AND DISCURSIVE ETHOS: BETWEEN FORBIDDEN MOURNING AND SYMBOLIC PERMANENCE

An analysis of Emilia Ferreiro's obituaries reveals how her death was reinterpreted by various institutions and media outlets. To understand this phenomenon beyond the dynamics inherent in the field of education, it is important to consider Philippe Ariès's reflections in *History of Death in the West* (2012), particularly regarding the changing attitudes toward death in contemporary societies.

Ariès (2012) offers a crucial perspective for understanding how Emilia Ferreiro's obituaries structure her memory and avoid the expression of traditional mourning. Ariès argues that, from the 20th century onward, death increasingly became a forbidden and silenced event, shifting from a public and ritualized sphere to a private, medicalized experience. In this sense, mourning, which was previously a visible and socially shared practice, was progressively repressed, giving way to discourses that emphasize continuity, symbolic immortality, and the overcoming of loss.

In the analyzed obituaries, this rejection of mourning manifests itself in the way Ferreiro is represented: instead of a funereal or farewell tone, the narratives highlight her ongoing influence on education and teacher training, reinforcing the idea of the permanence of her work and intellectual presence. This phenomenon can be interpreted in light of Ariès's "inverted death," in which real death is replaced by a

celebration of continuity. The texts downplay the idea of finitude and irreparable loss, emphasizing the lasting impact of her theories and constant presence in pedagogical practices (Ariès, 2012).

Furthermore, the dispute over Ferreiro's memory observed in the obituaries reflects a central aspect of the death of the other, as described by Ariès (2012). In this model, death is not simply an individual event, but a phenomenon experienced collectively, where rituals and discourses reinforce the deceased's continued presence in the memory of the living. Different institutions and news outlets shape the educator's image according to their own interests and values, constructing narratives that link her to specific educational and political traditions. Thus, rather than emphasizing grief or absence, discourses about Ferreiro reaffirm her symbolic presence in Latin American education, consolidating her legacy as an invaluable reference for the field.

This highlights the intersection between the contemporary rejection of mourning and the construction of social memory. While, on the one hand, there is a tendency to avoid public expressions of suffering, on the other, Ferreiro's death becomes an event of symbolic reaffirmation, in which different social actors claim her intellectual legacy as part of their own institutional and ideological narratives. Thus, obituaries not only record her passing but also operate as devices for maintaining and contesting her memory, as suggested by Ariès's reflections on death in Western modernity.

Another central aspect of Ariès's (2012) theory is the concept of "cult of the other," which refers to the preservation of the memory of the dead in institutional and public spaces. This phenomenon applies to Ferreiro's case, whose legacy is claimed by various social actors. Universities highlight their institutional relationships with the educator, whether through honorary degrees or the influence of her research on curricula. Trade unions emphasize her impact on the valorization of teaching and the formulation of educational policies. The press and research centers present Ferreiro as an intellectual reference, consolidating her as a fundamental figure in the history of literacy. This process of institutionalizing memory helps ensure that her influence remains active, consolidating her as a theoretical and practical reference for future generations.

The shift in focus from loss to the continuation of legacy, the institutional struggle for memory, and the exaltation of the educator's enduring influence reveal how her trajectory transcends the individual sphere, becoming part of a collective narrative shaped by symbolic disputes and the construction of a cult around her memory. Thus, Ferreiro's death is not merely a biographical event, but a turning point that mobilizes various social agents in shaping what will be remembered and perpetuated about her life and work.

The way in which the death of a public figure is discursively elaborated also fits into a broader context of meaning construction, related to how contemporary society deals with the disappearance and immortalization of its intellectuals. In this sense, it

becomes pertinent to bring this analysis closer to studies on epitaphs⁶ and discursive *ethos*, as discussed by Lima (2016). Like obituaries, epitaphs are discursive constructions that strategically select elements of the deceased's identity, which were intended to preserve their memory. Both textual genres are part of the same field of symbolic disputes surrounding the meaning of death and the legacy left by an individual. Discursive *ethos* refers to the construction of the speaker's image within a discourse, that is, to the way the discursive subject presents themselves and is perceived by the public based on textual and contextual elements. As explored by Lima (2016), discursive *ethos* allows us to understand how the characteristics attributed to Ferreiro in different institutional contexts are mobilized to project certain images of the educator. This relationship between obituaries and epitaphs is therefore part of a broader discursive tradition, in which death not only marks the end of a public figure's career but also inaugurates a new cycle of disputes over how that career will be remembered.

Lima (2016) analyzes the role of epitaphs and emphasizes that they are discursive devices that promote an idealized representation of the deceased, legitimizing their symbolic permanence in society. These discourses seek to reinforce values, beliefs, and social representations, especially in the Christian context⁷, in which death is seen as a passage to another existence.

This perspective connects directly with the analysis of Emilia Ferreiro's obituaries, which also function as texts of social memory and symbolic representation. Like epitaphs, obituaries select elements of the deceased's trajectory to project a specific image of their legacy. Lima (2016) argues that epitaphs operate through an interdiscourse that mobilizes different registers—religious, historical, biographical—to construct a scenography that situates the deceased in a place of honor or transcendence. In Ferreiro's obituaries, we find similar mechanisms: each media outlet or institution emphasizes specific aspects of her trajectory to frame it within a narrative convenient to their own editorial and institutional objectives.

In the case of the epitaphs analyzed by Lima (2016), the funerary *ethos* is the projection of the deceased's posthumous identity, discursively constructed by those who write the funerary inscription. The concept of *ethos* has its foundations in Aristotle's classical rhetoric but has been expanded by discourse analysis theorists such as Dominique Maingueneau (2008), who defines it as the self-image projected in discourse. For Lima, this image is not simply a reflection of the deceased's identity,

⁶ It is a short text, usually inscribed on tombstones or funeral monuments, whose purpose is to honor and summarize the life of the deceased. Traditionally, epitaphs include phrases highlighting the deceased's virtues, religious references, farewell messages, or poetic expressions intended to perpetuate their memory (Lima, 2016).

⁷ It refers to the way death is understood and ritualized within Christian traditions, especially in the West. This context is characterized by the conception of death not as an absolute end, but as a passage to another existence, whether to eternal life in paradise, purgatory, or damnation, according to different theological interpretations (Vaccari Lima, 2016).

but a socially mediated construction, influenced by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and societal values. This post-mortem representation is not neutral, but rather part of the symbolic dispute over the individual's memory and their place in the community. In addition to highlighting her presence and legitimizing different actors and institutions in the maintenance of Ferreiro's work, the obituaries address that "indifferent passerby" (Lima, 2016), who might be interested in her life and legacy.

The funerary *ethos*, therefore, functions as a discursive strategy that guides the reader's reception and shapes how the deceased will be remembered. This process also occurs in other genres, such as obituaries, which, although longer and more argumentative, share the function of constructing a social memory for the deceased (Lima, 2016).

In Ferreiro's case, there is a dispute over the *ethos* she should occupy in the collective memory: the texts oscillate between the *ethos* of scientist, education activist, innovator, or even "martyr" of a misunderstood pedagogy, as Ratier's article suggests when mentioning Ferreiro's "first death" while still alive, when her ideas were distorted. Ultimately, both genres of text—epitaphs and obituaries—actively participate in the formation of social memory, as discussed by Peter Burke.

It is worth adding that the photos accompanying the obituaries represent an important element in constructing this discursive *ethos* about Emilia Ferreiro, which emphasizes her legacy to education and the permanence of her work. In most of the photos, Ferreiro appears smiling, sometimes pensive, sometimes more expressively, representing in all cases a counterpoint to the traditional mourning in contemporary society. The photos emphasize her head or bust, a focus that recalls her intellectual work and aims to highlight her individuality, paying tribute to her. The predominance of photos taken in older age reinforces her long career and the knowledge accumulated over years of dedication to education; the braids, another characteristic of Ferreiro, denote a *savoir-faire* and the demarcation of a path. Braids are also a symbol of intertwining, closeness, unity, and strength, reinforcing the timelessness of Ferreiro and her work, as it is a hairstyle not dictated by fashion and shared across cultures⁸. Finally, the National University of La Plata chose a photo of Ferreiro among books, which establishes a contrast between the finitude of her body and the permanence of her work on the library shelves.

⁸ In her book *Written Culture and Education*, Rosa Maria Torres, when interviewing Emilia Ferreiro, mentions that braids were already "part of the myth" surrounding the Argentine researcher. In response, Ferreiro replied that when she wanted to "go underground," she would cut off her braids. Despite refuting the myth surrounding her name, Ferreiro indicates how her image was associated with braids (Ferreiro, 2001, p. 165).

Figure 1 – Photographs of Emilia Ferreiro featured in obituaries across different outlets and institutions



Source: authors' elaboration based on D'Maschio (2023); Planalto em Pauta (2023); Sinprosasco (2023); Opera Mundi (2023); Ratier (2023); Presidencia de la Nación Argentina (2023); Netnoticias (2023); Jardín Lac (2023); and Universidad Nacional de La Plata (2023).

Based on reflections on social memory, discursive *ethos*, and the history of death in contemporary society, it is clear that the way Ferreiro is remembered reflects both her lasting impact on education and the symbolic interests of those who claim her trajectory.

The obituaries analyzed operate as memory-building devices, perpetuating and contesting the educator's image according to distinct institutional and ideological frameworks. Comparing these discourses with Ariès's (2012) reflections on the "death of the other" and "inverted death," we observe that Ferreiro's death is not represented as a final event, but as a milestone in the reaffirmation of her legacy. Traditional mourning is replaced by a celebration of continuity, in which her symbolic presence remains alive in pedagogical practices and teacher training.

Furthermore, the relationship between obituaries and epitaphs shows that the construction of Ferreiro's memory follows the same discursive principles that govern funerary inscriptions: there is a selection of elements that reinforce her intellectual authority and relevance for future generations. The *ethos* projected in these texts solidifies her position as a major figure in Latin American education, reaffirming the permanence of her ideas and her transnational influence.

Thus, the analysis highlights how the death of an intellectual not only marks a biographical conclusion, but also inaugurates new disputes and negotiations surrounding their memory. Their legacy, far from being a fixed record, continues to be reinterpreted and appropriated, demonstrating the complexity of the processes of constructing social memory and the symbolic permanence of key figures in the field of education.

FINAL REMARKS

An analysis of obituaries published in Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina revealed that Emilia Ferreiro's memory was mobilized by different institutions and media outlets, depending on their discursive identities, values, and positions in the educational and media fields. By projecting distinct *ethos* of the educator—sometimes as a scientist, sometimes as an activist, sometimes as a symbol of pedagogical resistance—the texts examined confirm that her death was inscribed within a field of symbolic disputes. The absence of traditional mourning, replaced by narratives of continuity and celebration, strengthens the symbolic permanence of her work, as discussed by Philippe Ariès.

The dispute over memory is not limited to the immediate discursive space of death. It also extends into later initiatives. In August 2024, Emilia Ferreiro's daughter, Valeria Garcia Ferreiro, announced the creation of the García Ferreiro Foundation in Mexico. This initiative aims to preserve, organize, and make available the vast

collection of books, documents, and objects accumulated throughout the academic careers of her mother and father, the physicist Rolando García⁹. She wrote a letter published on the foundation's website, written in a personal and emotional tone, highlighting the symbolic and material weight of this inheritance, described as an "overwhelming legacy" from both parents, carrying stories and knowledge from lives intensely dedicated to education and science (FGF, 2024).

Then, suddenly, I was faced with an overwhelming and priceless legacy, wavering between the awareness of its importance and the impulse to tear it up and throw it away without looking... without looking back (FGF, 2024) (Our translation).

The García Ferreiro Foundation thus emerges as a space of memory and continuity, ensuring that Emilia Ferreiro's contributions to Latin American and global education remain accessible to future generations. The goal is not limited to preserving documents and records, but also to inspire new initiatives that reflect her trajectory and her struggle for a fairer society. In this sense, the foundation presents itself as an invitation to resistance and renewal, as expressed in the message accompanying its creation:

This virtual page is an open door in search of new accomplices, comrades who join this niche of resistance against the dominant paradigms; a place that articulates with other initiatives in struggle and from where it is possible to reformulate the urgent problems of our world and of our Latin America (FGF, 2024) (Our translation).

Her daughter's gesture in creating the García Ferreiro Foundation not only offers a careful destination for Emilia Ferreiro's intellectual heritage but also reaffirms the relevance of her work in a transnational context. The foundation thus becomes a space for preserving and disseminating her memory, ensuring that her contributions continue to inspire educators and researchers in a wide range of contexts. This act symbolizes a conscious resistance to oblivion, while also establishing a bridge

⁹ Rolando Garcia was an Argentine scientist (1919–2012). In 1948, he earned a master's degree in meteorology from the University of California (UCLA), Los Angeles, and in 1953, his doctorate with a thesis on "Atmospheric Motion under Stationary Conditions." He was one of the driving forces behind the modernization of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), where he served as Dean of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences from 1957 to 1966. Due to political persecution, he emigrated to Europe, where he collaborated with Jean Piaget at the Institute of Genetic Epistemology at the University of Geneva. In the 1980s, he settled in Mexico, where he continued his career as a professor and researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Sciences and Humanities (CEIICH) at UNAM (Exactas UBA, 2019).

between the past and the future, ensuring that Ferreiro's legacy remains alive and engaged with contemporary educational and social transformations.

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Received on: 2025.04.15

Approved on: 2025.06.14

Published on: 2025.07.21 (Original)

Published on: 2025.08.23 (Portuguese version)

RESPONSIBLE ASSOCIATE EDITOR:

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PEER REVIEW ROUNDS:

R1: three invitations; three reports received.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Silva, P. R., & Fuentes, N. M. Memory and Discursive Ethos: The Construction of Emilia Ferreiro in Latin American Obituaries (Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico). *Revista Brasileira de História da Educação*, 25, e383. DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.4025/rbhe.v25.2025.e383en>

FUNDING:

The RBHE has financial support from the Brazilian Society of History of Education (SBHE) and the Editorial Program (Call No. 30/2023) of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

TRANSLATION:

This article was translated by Aline Uchiva (ilneuchida@gmail.com).

LICENSING:

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