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Reading in infancy and childhood: incidence in the construction of the reading subject

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Abstract

In this article it is considered that the periods of infancy and childhood have a substantial influence on the construction of the reading subject. This process involves various actors: children, mothers, fathers, caregivers and teachers. However, the characteristics of the act of reading must also be taken into account. In this sense, it is necessary to understand its psychological, linguistic and contextual aspects. In conclusion, promoting the formation of reading subjects from infancy and childhood implies recognizing the deep and complex characteristics of reading in order to produce better teaching practices and motivation towards this activity.

Keywords: Learning, reading habit, childhood, reader, reading.

Reading in childhood

The activity of reading is one of the main ways in which we are introduced into culture. From childhood, an effort is made to transmit the values of culture (Jaeger, 2001) and to develop the capacities of children. It is not a simple exercise of knowledge transmission. It goes much further, it is the constitution of capable and autonomous subjects, able to act as citizens. Reading is one of the most important forms, although not the only one in which this occurs. There are many actors involved in the development of reading skills, from parents to teachers. The activity of teaching reading, not only at the level of basic literacy, but of reflecting on what is read. Developing a critical attitude is an activity that must be formed from an early age. However, we must not forget that reading is not only a cognitive process, it is linked to emotional states such as the pleasure of imagining and living possible worlds, especially at an early age.

We intend to argue that the exercise of reading in early childhood is vital for the construction of the reading subject in which the early reading process acquires meaning through the affective relationships that are woven, through the intervention of the family and/or caregivers in this process and its incidence in the cognitive and emotional development of the subject.

The meaning of these readings in infancy and childhood makes possible the entrance to the symbolic world that must be full of meaning, sense and intentionality for the readers, this process implies recognizing or identifying which books to read and at what age to read each one of them, and advancing in this process according to the interests and needs of that subject (the child) in his reading process.

From these approaches, we consider that it is necessary to continue the journey, analyzing reading as an act and a means to access knowledge and the review of its understanding through evaluative analysis, which engages teachers and students in processes that allow them to identify its impact, depth and strategies. Similarly, it should not be forgotten that reflection on reading and its processes is framed within the imperative need to investigate the purposes of education in the contemporary world (Vélez-Medina, 2014; Vélez-Medina, 2016). Is teaching a means for work or for the construction of a citizen capable of developing his or her skills and human capacities?

The challenges of education are marked by the ends that are proposed, and at present, the challenges include an education that promotes the critical capacity of the subject, the acceptance of contingency and responsibility for actions in the world.

Reading is an interactive process that requires an investigation work that helps to find the level of knowledge and understanding and the procedures to implement it as an effective strategy of adaptation and a movement of change in the practices of assessment of reading comprehension.

Now, reading is a process of symbolic interpretation in which aspects such as the knowledge and handling of the language or the language, in which one reads, the knowledge or at least the approach to the subject, and the cultural level and knowledge that the subject has of the reading, come into play. In this way, reading is a human activity, and becomes an instrument of significant importance for the development of language and thought processes, in which it is used as a vehicle for the transmission of information. As a medium, reading is a resource that increases the capacity for learning and knowledge achievement, and the result of writing provides the reading subject the opportunity to expand and concentrate the knowledge that humanity handles in the deciphering of the universe.

Reading fulfills a ludic function as recreation and management of free time or management of leisure, that introduces you in reading verses, fables, stories, novels, etc., which become strategies of recreation and improved use of time in a happy, fun way and with objectives of improving the quality of life. Reading also has an aesthetic value, as a means of communication between an active subject artist and a reader.

The exercise of reading is for human beings, an encounter in which, from the different roles, it is possible to walk a path through which we seek approaches between the ability to read and the handling of written material. For this purpose, the handling of training techniques and processes is essential, such as the correct interpretation of linguistic signs and symbols, combinations, intonations, tones, shades, speed, not only to go through a page but also to interpret it and extract its

main idea, its secondary ideas, the complementary elements, from time, place, mode, etc.

Reading processes

There is a creative activity in reading. There is no single meaning in the text or a single meaning in the writing. It is a naive view to assume the uniformity of the meanings of the saying in a text.

Reading allows not only the contact with the linguistic signs printed on the sheets, the recognition of the author's ideas, but also, and not less important, the deciphering of ourselves as subjects. The activity of carrying out a good reading implies investigating the roles of the one who reads and of the one who writes, besides it requires recognizing which is the world of reference of the text, the representations or ideas that the speech enunciates or hides.

On the one hand, there is the writer with his understanding of the world exposed in the text. The reader seeks or presupposes the author's intention, even the writer reveals clues or does so explicitly, so that the reader recognizes them. However, it is usual in reading that the identification of the writer's intentions is not complete by the reader. This happens because our readings are intentional and shaped by our thoughts, emotions, categorizations and even our social environment.

In this regard, María Ángeles Redondo states:

The understanding of a text is understood as an intentional mental process, in which the reading subject constructs an interpretation of the textual information, based on the clues present in the text and his previous knowledge. To elaborate an interpretation, the reader uses a wide range of reading strategies, given the diversity of problems to be solved [our translation]. (Redondo, 2008: 2)

Besides the text, the context is another factor to be taken into account. This conditions both the approach to issues and the importance given to them. Context is presented as a background upon which the readings are chosen. It is useful to the extent that it expresses ideological positions, conceptions and beliefs of the reader, elements that make or modify what is read.

Understanding meaning implies not only the extraction of supposedly hidden information, but the generation of meaning by means of different factors related to the act of reading and that, ultimately, produce the meaning of the text that the reader expresses (Cassany, 1995). By this analysis, we mean that, in relation to reading, the process of communicating what is read should be understood not as a transmission of the meaning of the text, but as an adaptation or interpretation.

Continuing with the topic of the generation of meaning, it must be recognized that this is related to life experience and the capacity to communicate. In this sense, reading becomes a shared activity, an interpersonal communicative action and not reduced to the mental processes of the subject. This means that trying to make ourselves understood allows us to interpret texts with greater acuity (Sánchez, 2015). In this sense, Cassany, in his book *Tras las líneas*, states:

Understanding the lines of a text refers to understanding the literal meaning, the sum of the semantic meaning of all the words. And between the lines, to everything that is deduced from the words, even if it has not been explicitly said: the inferences, the presuppositions, the irony, the double meanings, etc. And what lies behind the lines is the ideology, the point of view, the intention and the argument to which the author points [our translation]. (Cassany, 2006: 52)

It is then a matter of recognizing what is the world of meaning in which the text was produced and in which it circulates. Thus, the language of the different textual themes and typologies are not the same. In the realm of discourse, revealing the text implies understanding both the text and the actors related to the reading, i.e., the writer, his intentions, the context, etc. The text expresses social relations and with it speech acts are expressed, not only said, but also done. But additionally, it is a priority to understand that the text in its circulation also implies a doing with it, a way of using it by the readers for certain purposes. Now, these aspects must be included in the models to encourage reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension

The understanding of what is read is one of the aspects that is most attempted to be implemented in reading education and training. Of course, there is no single model or method to ensure text comprehension. In addition, text typologies and readers' interests make multiple models of comprehension possible. The approach must be different when the purpose is an inferential reading of an argumentative type to the understanding of what a narrative expresses. Even if we follow the idea of reading levels, just for an analytical understanding, there are at least five reading levels: Paraphrasing of text, explanation of central thesis of a paragraph, analysis of the logic of the text (logical structure of the document, order of the arguments), evaluation of the logic of the text (coherence, validity, veracity, etc) and, finally, representation or voice of the author (Olave, Rojas and Cisneros, 2013).

These levels are adequate for an inferential and argumentative reading, but are insufficient or unnecessary when the nature of the text is narrative or poetry. They may even be useless if what we are reading is a text of another typology such as a text expressing a recipe to be followed to obtain a dessert or a simple menu to order food. Therefore, the types of reading comprehension must be adapted to the types of texts. But this is not enough since the reader and the context, as mentioned, modify the meaning of what is read. However, one should not arrive at the idea that everything is interpretation, "pure subjectivity". There are limits to the interpretation of the text, since there are margins that range from the document in its linguistic, typological and logical construction to those expressed by the author and known from the different works he or she has produced, and even from the context, temporality or situation in which it is read.

In short, reading comprehension is framed within a range of acceptable interpretations determined by the text, the reader and the context of the reading. In this sense, reading is a complex activity in which reading comprehension is not capricious but governed by factors that are difficult to determine but not impossible to do.

In this way, a good reader is one who knows how to extract from the reading, the explicit and implicit, deep and superficial messages from the written material in front of him/her.

We affirm that the real evaluation of reading is based on the relationship that is established between the reader and the reading context, which is born from informal observation to a systematic and planned evaluation of the readers' behavior, who are committed to reading tasks and authentic texts in which the readers' abilities prevail, whether or not a guide is used. This effective and authentic assessment results from a process of comprehension, which as an essential component requires a guide to work in a natural environment of the person performing the activity (Elder & Paul, 2003).

The previous knowledge provides a possible explanation of the final results of understanding, which are also reasons that affect the final understanding. The structure of the text provides an assessment from the skills developed in the management of this knowledge. The metacognition directly related to reading comprehension is nothing else than the management of the knowledge that each one of us has of our processes and capacities, such as the knowledge of ourselves, the knowledge of the capacity to set tasks and the control we have to regulate them.

In terms of interests and attitudes we must be clear about what interests move us as readers, the objectives we set, the results we expect. From the different approaches to the analysis of the types of learning, it has been demonstrated that people understand better the materials in which they are interested and if they have previous knowledge. The interpretation can be improved from the knowledge of the attitudes of the subject reader since the reading process is a process of recovery and understanding of some type of information that has been stored through a code and we call language either: visual, tactile, notation or pictograms (Parodi, 2010).

Reading in infancy and childhood

The acquisition of the reading process does not have a defined linear path, it is built little by little, through the encounters, relationships, intuitions, desires and uncertainties that each human being establishes. The earlier a child reaches reading the more easily he or she can connect it to the world, assuming, in this case, that reference is made to reading that goes beyond the decoding of words in which the family plays an important role.

In this process, special attention is paid to the parents and/or caregivers, because through this contact between father, mother, caregiver, book and child, the latter recognizes not only the value of the book for the possibility it gives him/her to know and recognize the world, but also for the development of the emotional level in the relationship established with the adult or caregiver. These first contacts with books establish the relationships that are woven between children (childhood) around the book.

The apathy of children and adults for reading does not happen by itself, there are factors that produce it. Children come into the world eager to know, explore, and communicate, as well as to find answers to imaginaries, which for them are normal. Only recently has it been accepted that many of the most important processes for the development of literacy take place before a student enters a classroom for the first time. In this sense, neuroscientist Hyman, Rector of Harvard University, states that:

In the dance of life, genes and environment are inseparable partners. On the one hand, genes outline a basic scheme of the brain. Then the stimulation from the environment, either light reaching the retina or the mother's voice in the auditory nerve, turns the genes on and off, fine-tuning brain structures both before and after birth [our translation]. (Mustard, 2003: 75)

Esmeralda Caballero's research indicates that most of the difficulties of children from vulnerable populations in learning to read have their origin in the lack of opportunities in the educational context in childhood (Caballero, 2008). These difficulties can be recognized and corrected even before entering basic education. The following are some approaches that seek to improve reading levels.

Proposals to encourage reading

Children require that teachers, parents and/or caregivers, through their voices, bring them closer to fascinating stories that encourage and motivate them to encounter other new realities, that fill them with meaning and sense of life, because otherwise, the process of reading acquisition will be reduced to

a mechanical process, they will be able to answer questions about the topic, identify ideas, make summaries, but without finding true meaning and significance.

Encouraging reading requires a welcoming environment. It is not suggested to rush the acquisition of reading, but a gradual learning strategy (Castañeda, 2006). The development of reading plans and programs to encourage reading requires the support of national policies that allow us to confront the profound problems in relation to education and the social gap between those who can receive a good education and those who have difficulties in passing through educational institutions (Caballero, 2008). This implies the concurrence of different actors, both the state and the family and society have different responsibilities in the care of children.

These concerns are materialized in an educational center's reading plan that includes three distinct but complementary facets and converge in the improvement of reading competence.

- First of all, we have what we could call the activities of dynamization of reading, which includes magazines, literary contests, literary routes, meetings with authors, celebration of the day of the book, etc.
- Secondly, the library represents a significant element as a space and as a tool for research and information processing.
- Finally, the third element and object of the project that is presented: the development of strategies and reading processes as cognitive processes and, as such, object of a didactic treatment in the classroom.

Reading and the daily life at school, as well as the promotion of reading are some of the typical and always stimulating experiences that put the need on the level of reality and involve the whole educational community. These three facets and their linkage to encourage reading can generate greater levels of understanding and passion for it.

Conclusions

Finally, to conclude, reading becomes a creative act, not one of passive consumption. It is a real work that demands effort and ingenuity. As in all art, it starts with a process of entertainment, search, inquiry, investigation, and reflection, to culminate in an activity that is internalized and leads the reader to processes of mediation between what he or she reads and what he or she writes. Therefore, reading will be the essential tool to become moderately assertive writers.

The constitution of a good reader is not reduced to form the pleasure of reading, it also requires the qualification of the act. This means that one cannot only sensitize reading as an act in which one finds some entertainment, but must go beyond it to deepen the types of reading comprehension, the analysis of the text, its internal coherence, its usefulness for reading context and the understanding of the writer's interests.

In this way, the need to rethink the reading materials that we use from the school, to induce the child, in such a way that facilitates the approach to books, but recognizing that it is not enough, a significant, sequential, durable and lasting process will be required. A permanent accompaniment and follow-up to achieve significant objectives that guarantee long term results.

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