

Chapter 2

The Didactic in Initial Literacy: Between the Perception and Representation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents reflections derived from various investigations carried out with both children and teachers about the literacy process in school. There is a tendency to extrapolate results from different disciplines such as psychology and sociology, among others, to direct application in the classroom. Teachers follow different trends, without adapting to the teaching and learning needs of reading and writing. The great absence in these discussions is usually didactics, a discipline that deals with studying teaching practices. In advanced research, it has been found that teachers ignore pedagogy, put didactics as an adjective and the activity as a noun; however, although the proposed activities are very interesting, if they are not articulated around an objective that gives them meaning, they do not favor learning. Hence, it is necessary to understand the teachability of reading and writing, which implies didactic knowledge of the content and refers to what is teachable and how it can be taught.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a topic of global concern. Governments are worried about making all their citizens literate because they know that it is a condition for development. After all, it generates possibilities to reduce poverty; however, the results are not always as expected, sometimes because not everyone can attend school and other times because despite going to school, not everyone manages to become literate in the full sense of the word. It is to this second situation that allusion will be made in this chapter; hence the focus on didactics. The chapter aims to highlight the need to return to didactics, influenced by the beliefs

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and conceptions that both teachers and students have, and the reasons why the didactics of initial reading and writing move between teaching practices based on auditory and visual perception.

We will begin by exposing what is meant here by literacy,

According to UNESCO (2021), ‘literacy is understood today as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digitized, text-based, information-rich and rapidly changing world’ (2021). This organization states in the same document:

Even in the 21st century, worldwide, at least 750 million young people and adults do not know how to read or write and another 250 million children are also unable to acquire basic math and literacy skills, leading to the exclusion of numerous social groups that are unable to fully integrate into their communities or environments (UNESCO, 2021, n.p).

The call of the UNESCO is also consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations (UN), since, if this problem is addressed, not only SDG 4, *quality education*, but also SDG 1, *no poverty*, and because it is two of the most important objectives worldwide, the states have established commitments translated into generating policies and concrete actions to quickly close this gap (ONU, 2022). On the other hand, according to Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, in Spanish CEPAL), citing UNESCO – INNOVEMOS 2012 claim: ‘Literacy is a social process, which is related to the distribution of knowledge within society. For this reason, it can be understood as a right of individuals and a duty of societies’ (2014, p. 7) and adds that it is not possible to achieve effective democracy if a large part of the population has not become literate.

In the document cited above, it is also stated that the concept of literacy has been modified concerning the object because it is no longer considered only a process of handling basic skills, but rather a continuous process of development in reading, writing, and mathematics. There has also been a change in what for: there has been a move from a perspective strictly focused on what is productive, towards a perspective that relates it to work, social and personal development demands. Lastly, attention has been shifted from the subject to the context, seeking to ‘ensure the conditions for people to read and write. It is about developing written culture by promoting literate societies that give social value to these skills and are committed to lifelong learning’ (CEPAL 2014, pp. 7-8).

It is known that the school can produce functional illiterates when it does not train students as social users of reading and writing. The concepts of literacy - illiteracy have changed from the all-or-nothing classification: that is, there may be people who have some literacy, such as knowledge of letters and the ability to put together simple sentences, but are not fully literate, in both are not in a position to function with properly in society. This conception derives from the modifications that have been made to the concept of literacy, mentioned in the previous paragraph. These modifications demand more complex actions on the part of the school and the communities because they must promote the construction of literate and literacy environments that allow continuous learning and the development of people. This is stated in the UNESCO document – INNOVEMOS 2012, cited in an ECLAC document (2014): if you seek to decode letters, less effort is required than if you seek to enable people for lifelong learning.

Even though Comenius, considered by many to be the father of didactics, in his work *The Great Didactic* defined the *Pampedia* ‘as an *artificium docendi* destined to imagine an education for all in everything’ (González-Novoa & Perera-Méndez, 2021 p. 24). Today this ideal continues to be one of the greatest challenges in Latin America, in part because, as mentioned by the Inter-American Development Bank - IDB (2018): ‘Several studies document that teachers in the region do not have good practices in

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