

Of reading and critical understanding: notes of reflection

Implicaciones de la lectura y la comprensión crítica: notas de reflexión

Implicações da leitura e da compreensão crítica: notas de reflexão

Implications de la lecture et de la compréhension critique: notes de réflexion



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ABSTRACT

Reading and critical comprehension are used as similar words. However, these are different, although inter-dependent, terms. The first is a process in which the reader questions and takes a position based on the ideas obtained from their readings in accordance with the development of their criteria. The second is a pedagogical event in which readers are empowered to recognize the world around them by reading at different levels. In the argumentative body of this essay, both notions are addressed as sociocultural practices with great impact on autonomous readers. Finally, it concludes with didactic notes in the form

RESUMEN

La lectura y la comprensión crítica se emplean como vocablos similares. Sin embargo, se trata de términos diferentes, aunque inter dependientes. El primero es un proceso en el que se cuestiona y se toma postura por parte del lector tras las ideas obtenidas de sus lecturas de acuerdo con el desarrollo de su criterio. El segundo es un evento pedagógico del cual los lectores se empoderan para reconocer el mundo que les rodea al leer en distintos niveles. En el cuerpo argumentativo de este ensayo se atienden ambas nociones como prácticas socioculturales con gran impacto en los lectores autónomos. Finalmente, se concluye con

RESUMO

Leitura e compreensão crítica são usadas como palavras semelhantes. No entanto, estes são termos diferentes, embora inter-dependentes. O primeiro é um processo em que o leitor questiona e se posiciona a partir das ideias obtidas em suas leituras de acordo com o desenvolvimento de seus critérios. O segundo é um evento pedagógico em que os leitores são capacitados a reconhecer o mundo que os rodeia através da leitura em diferentes níveis. No corpo argumentativo deste ensaio, ambas as noções são abordadas como práticas socio-culturais de grande impacto para leitores autônomos. Por fim, conclui com notas didáticas em forma de

RESUME

La lecture et la compréhension critique sont utilisées comme des mots similaires. Il s'agit cependant de termes différents, bien qu'interdépendants. Le premier est un processus dans lequel le lecteur s'interroge et prend position à partir des idées issues de ses lectures en fonction de l'évolution de ses critères. Le second est un événement pédagogique au cours duquel les lecteurs sont amenés à reconnaître le monde qui les entoure en lisant à différents niveaux. Dans le corps argumentatif de cet essai, les deux notions sont abordées comme des pratiques socioculturelles ayant un grand impact sur les lecteurs autonomes. Enfin, il se termine par des

of reflection.	apuntes didácticos en reflexión. forma de reflexión.	notes didactiques sous forme de réflexion.
Key words: Reading and critical comprehension, Readings, Autonomous reader	Palabras claves: Lectura y comprensión crítica, Lecturas, Lector autónomo	Mots-clés: Lecture et compréhension critique, Lectures, Lecteur autonome

What if the piece of wood discovers that it is a violin?

Arthur Rimbaud, 1995

Nowadays, given the preeminence of different types of text in multiple media, physical and digital, it is imperative to comment on their reading possibilities, but beyond that primary notion, it is appropriate to point out the implications of reading in the present. This is why, in the following lines, this work is structured around two aspects that underpin it. Firstly, the definition of reading is established as a psychosociolinguistic process, in addition to critical reading and its characteristics. Secondly, critical understanding, critical literacy, and their characteristics and implications in the formation of the autonomous and informed reader are discussed (Ramos, 2013). Likewise, the importance of critical understanding and books in the formation of this type of reader is addressed and it concludes by reflecting on some closing ideas concerning the impact within the pedagogical field.

Pointing out these relevant theoretical details, as the thematic axis of this work, is necessary in principle to examine them carefully, to identify the importance of the reading process as an interactive social practice (Medina, 2014), which involves, on the one hand, who produces the text and, on the other, who reads it; that is, the reader. So, the following question arises: what is the importance of perceiving critical literacy as a process of understanding and production highlighted within the training of autonomous readers? From now on, we will try to answer this interrogative premise.

To begin the arguments of the discussion, it is considered necessary to define the implications of what reading is. However, the reader must first be warned that within the academic field the reading of any type of written text has tended to be seen as decoding

graphic signs without considering the important factor of comprehension. In this sense, Velásquez (2008) considers that reading is associated with reading without stumbling, enunciating the words fluently while using correct diction. For its part, the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, 2023, definition 3) maintains that it is the “interpretación del sentido de un texto”¹.

Likewise, Lerner (1996) establishes that it is investigating reality for a better understanding while assuming a *critical stance*² regarding what the author says and what he intends to say; while Fraca (2004) points out it as a psychosociolinguistic process through which meanings are integrated that come from the information obtained in the text and the knowledge that the reader has, using mechanisms of metacognition and recognition of the discursive purpose.

As can be seen, in the brief inventory offered by the authors selected in the preceding lines, there are diverse opinions about what the word reading means. In principle, the univocal conception is highlighted and focused on the realization of the strokes fixed in the written support based on correct pronunciation and diction, while the second focuses on the interpretation of the message decoded by the reader. Next, the act of reading is attended to propose a critical position about what is stated in the written text and what the author meant; while the last position not only summarizes the previous ones but also views reading as a psychosociolinguistic process integrating new knowledge, elaborating meanings and using cognitive and metacognitive strategies to do so.

So reading has very important implications because it requires generating knowledge based on pre-existing concepts in the reader's mind so that the reader can achieve an understanding of the reading and construct their meanings as a product of the interaction between themselves and what they read. These conceptions of the act of reading or reading as a process in terms of the construction of meanings are correct. This is because, although today there is still a traditionalist approach to reading and the development of vocalization subskills, in at least the last three decades this direction has been changing as new orientations and paradigms have been generated in the field of the

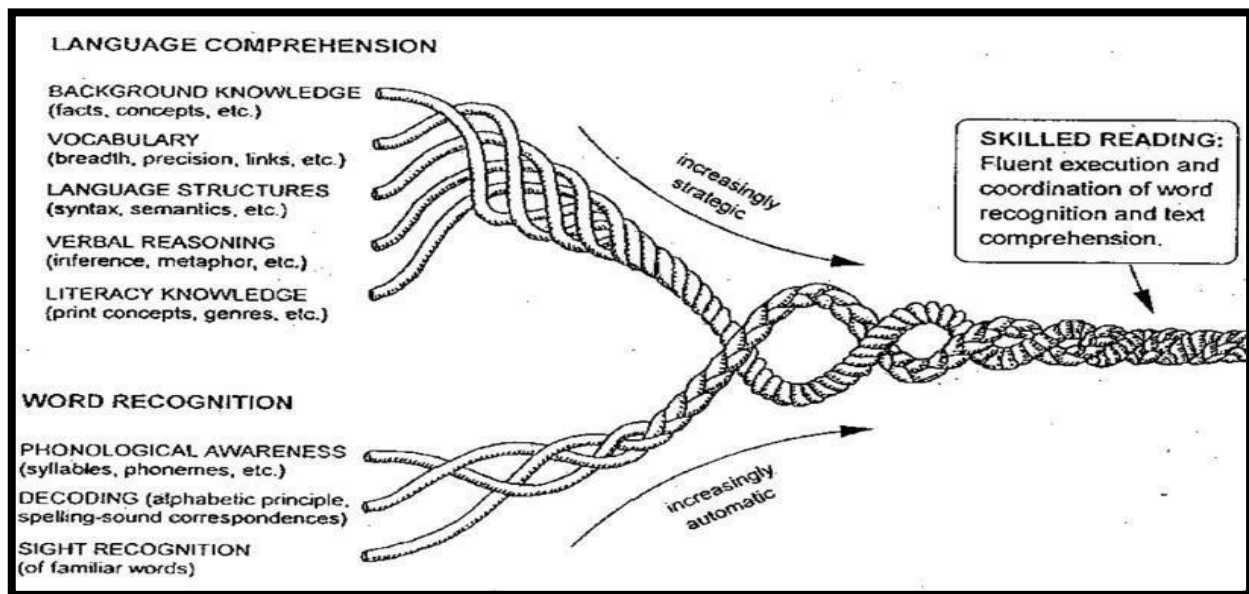
¹ interpretation of the meaning of a text

² The italics correspond to the author of this essay

reading. By way of illustration, if reading is considered only as an act of decoding the written code, without considering that understanding the message is necessary for its assimilation and accommodation in the reader's cognition, reading would be viewed as an incomplete process.

Therefore, it can be stated that every reader should be able to use their skills by exercising their judgment as an efficient speaker of their language, developing not only as a decoder but as an individual who understands and produces other discourses. Figure 1 shows the implications of skilled reading, proposed by Scarborough (2001) and adapted by Tapia (2019) in the reading rope.

Figure 1
Reading rope



Adaptation of Tapia (2019)

In the reading rope, three key elements allow the reader to obtain an understanding of the text read. Each one is subdivided into several threads that are associated with each other to build a strong rope. For example, the recognition of the word as an automatic increase leads to visual identification as an initial aspect that leads to decoding and phonological awareness acquired by the language user in an initial stage. Consequently,

the next element, language comprehension, is strategically increased by understanding prior knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, and literary knowledge. These threads allow us to reach the last state related to skilled reading; In this, a fluid execution and coordination of word recognition is carried out, based on the previous states, and with this, the understanding of the text is achieved. However, it must be noted that this type of reading is not enough, but it is necessary to reflect on another type of reading.

In the order of ideas presented, reading as a process has been described in various ways. Currently, we talk about reading comprehension, reading comprehension, comprehensive reading, instrumental reading, and critical reading, among others. Regarding critical reading, authors such as Medina (2014) and Rodríguez (2007) agree on the conception of this as an ability to recreate or rewrite ideas by meaningfully expressing thoughts, questions and emotions from the decoding of any type of text, which currently includes multimodal, digital and multilingual texts on the Internet (Cassany, 2006; Cassany, Hernández and Sala, 2008) and paratexts (Vitale, 2013), among others.

Regarding critical reading, Freire (2004) highlights at least two important elements, namely: critical perception and interpretation. These are fundamental when performing critical reading because, as highlighted before, as a psychosociolinguistic process, a series of strategies or skills, cognitive and metacognitive, are involved that the reader must possess when decoding a text, and beyond. Therefore, he is expected to establish a position with his criteria about what he reads. In this order of ideas, Medina (2014) states that the skills of a literate subject; that is, those who know how to read and write, and the ability to understand their social reality and participate in the creation or recreation of their own history and cultural identity are part of what critical reading is. The following table summarizes the implications of critical reading.

Following Cassany (2005), based on epistemological knowledge, ontological reality, authorship, and educational objectives.

Table 1
Critical Reading

Epistemological knowledge	It is obtained through sensory experience of the world or rational thought; facts are distinguished from inferences and opinions of the reader.
Reality Ontology	It can be captured directly and, therefore, is used as a reference for interpretation.
Authorship	Detecting the author's purposes is the basis of the highest degrees of interpretation.
Educational objectives	Develop superior comprehension and interpretation skills.

Taken from Cassany (2005)

Furthermore, Cassany (2011) highlights several elements concerning critical reading, which are found below in table 2.

Table 2
Elements of critical Reading

- There are several meanings, which are also dynamic, situated.
- Dialogue, seek social interpretations (negotiated, integrative).
- It is read differently in each situation (depending on the text, genre, etc.).
- Emphasis on ideology; the intention, the point of view, the exercise of power are sought.
- Pay attention to what is implicit, what is hidden.
- Various sources are sought and contrasted.
- Appointments are interested; They are voices that are incorporated (and there are others that are silenced).
- Understanding and agreeing (with ideology) are different things.

Taken from Cassany (2011)

As can be seen from the previous tables as a synthesis of the ideas of the cited sources, in these the critical reading and the elements that make it up from the ontological perspective and epistemological knowledge. At this point, it is necessary to address the conceptualization of these second element that serves as the central axis of this argument. The same thing in question is critical understanding, also called in other contexts critical literacy or critical literacy (Cassany, 2006). This should be understood as a global process in which the reader carries out, as a metaphor, three types of readings, which are: (i) reading the lines, that is, literal reading; (ii) reading between the lines in which ironies,

sarcasm, and double intentions are understood; and (iii) reading behind the lines in which ideologies, arguments, points of view, among others, are identified.

In this type of reading, there is a need to understand not only the explicit text but from its structural and organizational manifestations as a discursive genre, but also the implicit data of oral or written discourse, based on the author's ideology, cultural references, and procedures. reasoning and construction of knowledge. So, the application of all these skills or abilities in front of a discourse allows reading to become a democratizing practice that leads to the formation of an autonomous reader.

From the angle of critical understanding, and with a special focus on psychology, the cognitive processes used when constructing inferences are identified, classified, and determined as a type of skill necessary to achieve an optimal understanding of the text read. Table 3 highlights critical understanding with the name critical literacy from epistemological knowledge, ontological reality, authorship, and educational objectives, following the ideas presented by Cassany (2005).

Table 3
Critical literacy

Epistemological knowledge	Knowledge is not natural or neutral, it is always based on the discursive rules of a particular community and, consequently, it is ideological.
Reality Ontology	It is not possible to definitively capture it or capture it with language; The truth does not correspond to reality, but can only be established from a local perspective.
Authorship	Meaning is always multiple, culturally and historically situated, constructed through different power relations.
Educational objectives	Develop critical consciousness.

Taken from Cassany (2005)

As seen in the previous table, a series of conditions of a different nature are necessary to achieve the process of understanding or critical literacy. In this sense, if we take into account that critical literacy is a practice of analyzing texts from a critical perspective (Tosar and Santisteban, 2016), with the reader actively positioning himself

on controversial topics, it is necessary to take into account the cultural object of attention as an object of criticism; in this case, the book or text to read. So, this becomes a topic of interest based on the interactions that preceded it or those that are being formulated immediately or in the future. In this sense, the scenario in which these elements will be developed will allow a correct initiation of the process of training autonomous readers (Serrano, Peña, Aguirre, Figueroa and Madrid, 2002), and the reconstruction of the meaning and significance of the texts that These are elaborated during their readings (Borromé, 2016).

Therefore, the importance of books in forming an autonomous reader can be seen from the perspective of the latter's formation, taking as a starting point the idea of the book as an object of aesthetic value, from the first stages of the reader's life. subject. In any of their variants, be they: album books, books to put together, coloring books, illustrated books, novels, or sagas, in any of their formats, they allow you to approach fictional worlds by specifying new stages within the development of the imagination. and intellectual growth.

Whatever the case, it addresses in some way the following topics: firstly, *a reason to read*: depending on the needs and interests of the reader in training, he or she may only want to be entertained, informed, or learn through the book pages. This can lead them to satisfy their needs to learn new things and even reflect on a particular topic. In this sense, the book is usually the initial step towards the construction of a good reading process that will be consolidated over time and with the readings that are addressed.

Secondly, *the autonomous reader is a mediator between the book and the reader in training*: it is up to the advantaged readers to be the bridge between texts with different themes and the readers in training. Thus, they will facilitate the mediation process to contribute to it, allowing a significant and lasting result for those who begin as a reader by obtaining enjoyment from the activity of reading, as well as advancing in obtaining new knowledge and developing better reading skills.

Thirdly, *change of paradigms to know the world and transform reality*: based on the multiple readings that the reader makes, his or her cognitive development will expand, thereby allowing new changes in paradigms, thought structures, or visions of the

world. In this way, the construction of meanings allows reality to be transformed and facilitates the appropriation of new meanings and feelings to perceive a different reality in which the autonomous reader can take a stand regarding certain situations in his or her environment.

By way of closing, it is important to highlight the aspects that refer to the content of this text: firstly, reading is a psychosociolinguistic process that consists of integrating new knowledge and elaborating meanings based on the content of the written text. For this reason, reading is not only decoding the information written on a medium, whether physical or digital, but it goes beyond that. A series of conditions are required to achieve a critical reading. In this regard, it could be observed that according to the rope of reading designed by Scarborough (2001), a total mastery of certain elements that make up the different threads of reading is necessary for the achievement of a skilled reading that in turn implies criticality.

Concerning critical reading, Freire (2004) highlights two key elements, critical perception and interpretation. The understanding of the text depends on these, when the reader uses a series of cognitive and metacognitive strategies that allow the information to be fixed in their mind, but also to construct their meanings according to their reality. Hence the importance to understand that the act of reading, in any of its dimensions, is an activity with a social and cultural nature, since it depends on the construction of mental models that the reader develops. In turn, Cassany (2006) points out that in critical understanding or critical literacy, the reader performs three different types of readings: reading the lines, reading between the lines, and reading behind the lines. In this way, the reader will be able to develop and consolidate strategies that will allow them to understand irony, sarcasm, and even ideologies with which they can contrast their own opinion.

On the other hand, the formation of the autonomous reader is achieved through his initial relationship between the book as an aesthetic object, regardless of its format, and him as a reading subject. Therefore, three notable aspects must be taken into account: the motive or intention when reading, the autonomous reader as a mediator between the book and the subject in training, and the implications in the change of paradigms of those

who understand the text when knowing the world and transforming it. reality, judging it with one's criteria. For this reason, the approach to books and texts of different kinds allows an approach to various themes that favor the development of the imagination and intellectual growth of the reading subject while advancing in their reading processes.

Finally, taking into account the theoretical conceptions presented by the various authors regarding reading and critical understanding is extremely relevant to encourage the reflection of those who are beginning as readers or are in training and those who pursue the goal of being autonomous readers.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author of this work declares that he has no personal or financial conflicts that inappropriately influence the development of his research.

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