



The reading teacher as a trainer of citizens

El docente lector como formador de ciudadanos

Dra. Jennie Brand Barajas is a Teacher in the Universidad La Salle (México) (jennie.brand@ulsa.mx)
(<http://orcid.org/>)

Received: 2017-01-30 / **Reviewed:** 2017-03-21 / **Accepted:** 2017-04-05 / **Published:** 2017-07-01

Abstract

The present is a qualitative study by theorizing, from the approach of the problem of reading as a basic resource for the formation of citizens through education. It starts from the definition of the reading capacity, followed by the revision of the general characteristics of the reading brain proposed by Stalinas Dehaene (2014), as well as the revolutions in the materials and devices used for the writing, besides the changes in the form of reading, from Sumerian tablets to digital technologies. The process of Education for Development and the distinctive features of digital citizenship are presented, which are: immediacy in the production, transmission and reception of messages; interactivity between receiver and producer; the multi-authoritarian, which gives birth to "the prosumers"; the accessibility of the environment; freedom of expression; the democratization of access and the appropriation of a public space. All this allows contextualizing new forms of reading and new profiles of readers, as well as the generation of virtual reading spaces where communities of dialogue and exchange are formed. The study reaches the teachers and their reading biographies, which largely define their competence to encourage reading among their students and their

ability to mobilize them towards citizen responsibility through reading.

Keywords: Reading, nationality, books, teaching profession, digitization, responsibility

Resumen

El presente es un estudio cualitativo por teorización, que discurre desde el planteamiento del problema de la lectura como recurso básico para la formación de ciudadanos a través de la educación. Se parte de la definición de la capacidad lectora, seguida de la revisión de las características generales del cerebro lector propuestas por Stalinas Dehaene (2014), así como las revoluciones en los materiales y dispositivos utilizados para la escritura, además de los cambios en las formas de leer, desde las tablillas sumerias hasta las tecnologías digitales. Se plantea el proceso de Educación para el Desarrollo y los rasgos distintivos de la ciudadanía digital, que son: inmediatez en la producción, transmisión y recepción de mensajes; la interactividad entre receptor y productor; la multiautoría, que da nacimiento a "los prosumidores"; la accesibilidad del medio; la libertad de expresión; la democratización del acceso y la apropiación de un espacio público. Todo esto permite contextualizar las nuevas formas de lectura y los nuevos perfiles de lectores, así como generar los espacios virtuales de

lectura en donde se forman comunidades de diálogo e intercambio. El estudio llega hasta los docentes y sus biografías lectoras, las cuales definen, en gran medida, su competencia para fomentar la lectura entre sus estudiantes y su capacidad de movilizarlos hacia la responsabilidad ciudadana a través de la lectura.

Descriptor: Lectura, ciudadanía, libros, docencia, digitalización, responsabilidad.

1. Introduction

On January 13, 2017, seven days before leaving the presidency of the United States, Barack Obama gave an interview to New York Times journalist Michiko Kakutani to talk about the importance of books in his life. The report refers to the following:

From his peripatetic and sometimes lonely boyhood, when “these worlds that were portable” provided companionship, to his youth when they helped him to figure out who he was, what he thought and what was important. During his eight years in the White House — in a noisy era of information overload, extreme partisanship and knee-jerk reactions — books were a sustaining source of ideas and inspiration, and gave him a renewed appreciation for the complexities and ambiguities of the human condition. “At a time when events move so quickly and so much information is transmitted,” he said, reading gave him the ability to occasionally “slow down and get perspective” and “the ability to get in somebody else’s shoes.”

This fragment synthesizes central aspects of the place of the reading in the construction of the person and in particular of the citizen. First, reading helps to bring order to ideas, as well as to feed them to generate new or different ones. It allows having a kaleidoscopic vision of the human condition and the motivations that mobilize it. And finally, reading is to be open to others. In this sense, reading is encounter, with oneself, with the surrounding community and with the human species in general. Reading makes us citizens.

The article transits from the act of reading until its importance in the process of citizenship. At this time, when a broad spectrum of the population runs through the formal education classrooms, the teacher becomes a promoter of the first order of taste for reading, as well as the organizer of it to orient it towards the public conscience of their students.

2. Theoretical basis

2.1 Reading

The human species invented writing over five thousand years ago. From the earliest cuneiform letters to digital codes, writing has been the most important transmission medium in human history. It also developed the capacity for reading, through which we have access to the data of writing and the possibility of retaining and learning what is embodied in it. For Muñoz, Valenzuela, Avendaño and Núñez (2016, p.54), reading is defined as:

- A complex cognitive activity encompassing various levels of processing (Goodman, 2002, quoted in Muñoz et al., 2016, p.54).
- A system of representation and as an academic practice based on a process that starts with the relationship between the information provided by a written text and the previous knowledge that the reader possesses (Martínez, 1999, quoted in Muñoz et al., 2016, 54).
- A link to the world through an act that is intentional to and from the written text. It is an act of construction of meaning that implies a dialogical situation between a text and a reader, who must deploy a series of mental operations for the purpose of reaching an interpretation of the same (Cassany, 2006; Colomer and Camps, 1996). In Muñoz et al., 2016, p.54).

This can be summed up as thinking, learning and bonding. There is no doubt about the importance of reading in our development and



improvement, however, we are so familiar with the act of reading that we set aside the foundation that makes it possible. As put forward in his book *The Reader Brain*, Stanislas Dehaene (2014)

Our ability to read puts us face to face with the uniqueness of the human brain. Why is *Homo sapiens* the only species that teaches actively itself? Why is it unique in its ability to convey a sophisticated culture? How does the biological world of synapses and neurons relate to the universe of human cultural inventions? (P.16).

In particular on reading states:

If we are to reconsider the relationship between the brain and culture, we must address a riddle that I call the paradox of reading: why our primate brain can read? Why does it have a penchant for reading, even though this cultural activity was invented only a few thousand years ago? There are good reasons why this deceptively simple question deserves to be called a paradox. We have discovered that the literate brain contains specialized cortical mechanisms that are exquisitely arranged for the recognition of written words. It is even more surprising that the same mechanisms, in all humans, are systematically housed in identical brain regions, as if there were a brain organ for reading (p.17).

The author defends the “neuronal recycling” hypothesis, that is, some systems were not originally programmed for functions that we have developed as a species, but they had the potential to be open to changes in the environment. This is the case of the visual system, which was not designed specifically for reading, but its plasticity allowed the invention of writing as a system of idea transmission. Dehaene adds (2014):

The originality of our species can come from a combination of two factors: a theory of the mind (the ability to imagine the mind of others) and a conscious global work space (an internal retention where an infinite variety of Ideas can combine). Both mechanisms, inscri-

bed in our genes, conspire to make us the only cultural species (p.23).

This approach is interesting since the origin of the city is the common culture of a group that allows it to settle in a place and organize it according to these common principles. From these constructs emanates the scriptures and the alphabets, which necessarily lead to reading. The communication arises at the moment that there is another. As societies became more complex, this “other” began to distance itself, it was no longer just someone who was in the environment, but someone who was recognized as similar but living in another place. Thus the oral tradition left its place to writing. So summarizes Miguel Ángel Herrera (2011), this transit:

The reading was built for the city, because the latter found in orality serious limitations for its constitution as such, the information required needed another code. The cities in formation accumulated more people, they needed more spaces, they required more buildings. Thus broke the closed bond of the communal, which was maintained without problems in a smaller community and with ties of familiarity; this link was possible through orality, but in the city in formation social complexity put orality into crisis: new social relations appeared, material needs changed, within society were embedded strangers with who there was the need to socialize. Other towns appeared, the city appeared. Within a same historical-spatial context communities of somewhat different cultural contexts were found, in such a way that it was not enough to speak, one had to overcome the context a little, and the written language was constituted for those purposes; It was the system that was imposed, it was the society of knowledge that made its appearance, the written language-citizen allowed it (p.163).

This accounts for how the instruments and technologies emerge at times where it is necessary to reduce the complexity of the coexistence of human groups. Writing allows you to share literal ideas without the oral speaker’s interpretation. It



also allows for precise text that can be translated and shared. In this sense Jorge Luis Borges (1988) affirmed:

Of the various instruments of man, the most astounding is, without a doubt, the book. The rest are extensions of your body. The microscope, the telescope, are extensions of sight; the phone a is voice extension; then we have the plow and the sword, extensions of the arm. But the book is something else: the book is an extension of memory and imagination (p.1).

Martyn Lyons (2011), coincides with Borges in the place that gives the book, for this author the ease of transportation, the convenience of query and the ability to concentrate a large amount of data, make it an indispensable resource.

We know that writing was born in rocks and cave walls with pictorial representations. It was at the beginning of the fourth millennium BC. That the Sumeria bureaucracy invented cuneiform writing on clay tablets in “which accountants recorded assets with a sharp object through signs and numbers” (Lyons, 2011, p.16). From there the writings and materials to register them become more elaborate and until arriving at the papyrus, the parchment and the paper.

In the second and third centuries of our era there is a great revolution that leads to the first format similar to the book, the codex, which gathered a set of pages in a single volume and was the origin of the current printed format. The revolution of Gutemberg with its printing press is well-known, but less known is the so-called “reading revolution” in the late eighteenth century, which was “an explosion of recreational literature and an expansion of the periodical press” (Lyons, 2011, p. 9).

For the nineteenth century, several countries in Europe achieved universal literacy, but at the same time, the rulers of other regions of the world, particularly of the colonies, recognize in the reading capacity of their governed, a risk to their power, through writing, are transmitted ideas that could lead to the argumentated questioning of authority.

Also in the nineteenth century the systems of book production were improved, as well as their distribution and marketing, this last thanks to the transport facilities provided by the train. Thus, the best-selling authors, among them Jane Austen, Alexander Dumas, Lewis Carroll, Bram Stoker, Oscar Wilde, Victor Hugo, Jules Verne, Emily Bronte and Fiodor Dostoyevsky emerge. With them were born the so-called “copyright”.

On the other hand, the book becomes the main instrument for formal education, particularly in the West. Since then, as Caride and Pose (2015) affirm, “we read the world, convinced that few tools are as powerful as those provided by the interaction between reading and writing to break down barriers between people and peoples practical utilities” (page 68).

Reading takes us to culture and this “is what enables us to exercise an active, critical and democratically fruitful citizenship (Cerrillo, 2005, cited in Caride and Pose, 2015, p.68). Reading generates critical awareness that is a necessary condition for exercising citizenship. To this is added the self-consciousness, which for Damasio (2010, quoted by Caride and Pose, 2015):

It is attributed to it the portentous aptitude of opening ourselves to the inspection of the world, within and around it: without it - as an incorporeal motor that activates the subjects to be witnesses of what we pass in the knowledge of our existence and the opportunity of transcending in thought and social action. Feeling these options as their own is what allows them to assume responsibility for them, both intellectually and emotionally (p. 69).

Reading thus covers the dual function of expanding our awareness of ourselves, of our place in the community where we live, and of others. It is an action for transformation, every reading we do opens new points of view and understanding of the world. From a fixed place, which is the point of reading, doors open to the universe of letters, and these can carry us both to reality and to fiction, mobilizing our ideas, emotions and or impulses. But also, as Damasio



says, reading makes us responsible, once we know something, it is no longer justified that we do not have it present in our thinking and decision making.

According to Oller (2005, cited by Caride and Pose, 2015) “the reading dimension - not only how much is read but what, how, why and why - of a society is an indicator of the quality of its education and its values” (Page 69)

In this same line, Herrera (2011) states:

Reading is a social responsibility, of society in general, is a responsibility of the city. Today more than ever it is a mark of citizenship, for that reason the city must take care with care what they read its citizens. It is not a matter of prohibiting, but of orienting the readings, the idea is to generate reading sensitivity, to make a certain counterweight to the society of consumption, that of the commercial image, it is a matter of generating a series of experiences around the reader to allow more transcendent readings (p.162).

2.2 Citizenship, education for development and digital citizenship

The International Network of Education for Citizenship and Social Transformation (s.f.) in its document Education for development and global citizenship, proposes the concept of Education for Development:

It is a continuous socio-educational process that promotes a critical, responsible and committed global citizenship, on a personal and collective level, with the transformation of local and global reality to build a world that is more just, more equitable and more respectful of diversity and with the environment, in which all people can develop freely and satisfactorily (section 3, paragraph 2).

By citizenship they understand:

It refers to subjects of rights with criteria of critical and constructive analysis, empowe-

red people, who understand solidarity as co-responsibility [...] Global citizenship implies the empowerment and inclusion of all people for genuine participation in the promotion of justice and the fight against poverty (section 3, paragraph 5).

In this line, education for development has the following characteristics:

- It is a process because it is a permanent work in time, in the short, medium and long term, “the educational process for a global citizenship supposes a praxis of participation and inclusion in which people can experience and apprehend along the way for the Individual, the transformation of the reality that we try to promote for all “(section 3, paragraph 3).
- Actions are carried out through formal education, non-formal and informal education.
- Education for development “is a critical exercise in reading reality that leads to social commitment to the reality we are analyzing. So there is a continuum between the kind of people we want to form, the processes and experiences we promote and the societies we help build “(section 3, paragraph 4).
- It is an education oriented towards commitment and action.
- It promotes the transforming power of the small; this refers to the profound changes in the local realities. This does not neglect structural changes that “liberate economies, democracies and cultures so that they can be economies, democracies and cultures of life” (section 3, paragraph 6).
- A focus on rights, which means “to believe that all people without distinction are subjects of rights, and that development is not possible if the enjoyment of human rights for all is not guaranteed. The attainment of material well-being and integral human development has become an ethical imperative, it is the right to global justice. This right must be exercised in conditions of



freedom, dignity, economic security and access to the same opportunities in all areas of participation and development “(section 4, paragraph 2)..

Therefore, education for development is a process of actions and commitments, with a focus on rights. In this way it promotes training for the exercise of citizenship and the common well-being.

It is clear the place that the book has had as a resource for the education of citizens, however, there are now multiple ways to have access the reading, the digitization of the world allows the availability of millions sources for reading. It is in this sense that education can guide the readings, in front of the overwhelming supply of the internet. In this context, ways to reach relevant and quality content are required. Herrera (2011) says that:

Citizens of the 21st century must be seasoned readers ... Citizens' habits and ways of reading have been transformed by the emergence of ICTs, so that access to reading material has diversified and habits and behaviors of what is read, are easily imitated by other readers (p.164).

These changes in the formats and habits of reading necessarily lead to the issue of digital citizenship, to which Natal, Benítez and Ortiz (2014) define with the following characteristics:

1. Immediacy in the production, transmission and reception of messages.
2. The interactivity between receiver and producer.
3. The multi-authoring, which gives birth to “the prosumers”, that is, consumers or users who in parallel are producers of online content.
4. The accessibility of the medium is perhaps the most relevant factor. The low cost and multiple portable devices through which the internet can be accessed with the multiple tasks they fulfill, make it the most accessible and attractive medium.
5. Freedom of expression.

6. The democratization of access.
7. The appropriation of a public space

3. Method

The qualitative analysis by theorizing is a form of qualitative analysis oriented to inductively generate a theorization with respect to a cultural, social or psychological phenomenon, allowing a scheme that encompasses the actors, interactions and processes of a social saturation, and thus bring the phenomena to a new understanding (Muccielli, 2001). It is considered that the qualitative method by theorizing is convenient for the investigation because the objective is to approach the understanding of a socio-educational phenomenon, producing a descriptive and explanatory theory.

4. Analysis. New teaching for new readers

Digitization in general and of reading in particular, lead to new types of literacy. Different types of readers are defined, “hybrid, multi or polyphabetic ... capable of facilitating the coexistence of the different cultures of the 21st century, ranging from the classical reader, accustomed to the printed text, to the digital, cybernetic and hyperconnected reader” (Caride And Pose, 2015, p.71)

This has generated the basis for the organization of virtual spaces where you read and write about reading.

Gemma Lluch (2014, pp. 17-19), in her novel and purposeful research with adolescents and young people, refers to very interesting findings about virtual reading communities:

- a) The subjects create them, that is, they are no longer generated nor tutored from the school or library.
- b) They build their communication spaces from multiple platforms practicing virtual transhumance. The conversations create a “virtual space of communication”, that is to



say, a place constructed by the documents that write on the same subject but from different platforms.

- c) Readers create spaces, gaining prominence and visibility. Although the publisher or the author collaborate or intervene, the user is the one who produces the content adapting them to the rules and characteristics of each social network and each platform; as a consequence, the viral effect of the messages is much greater.
- d) The reader becomes a social conversation. In this new context, reading stops being a hobby that causes isolation to become a construct of conversations that allows the exchange, which gives them visibility and makes it possible to weave affective relationships.
- e) Young readers become experts and opinion leaders.
- f) Virtual space becomes a place of belonging and affection. The conversations create spaces where they form bonds of belonging to a group through affinities:
 - They are readers, they like creation and feel part of this universe that makes them feel special.
 - They share knowledge about the books they read, the publishers they follow, the authors they like, and the promotional campaigns that hook them up.
 - They help each other, resolve doubts about how to manage a blog or looking for books.
- g) They form a competitive community. Although there are spaces for collaboration, when they dispute the access to privileged information, competition or rivalry arises because, no matter how much they build trust frames to share information, they also compete to be the first to give a news, to read a book before anyone else or have privileged information ... But also, the kids use these spaces to position them-

ves, to make themselves known, to get from free books to a job in the publishing house.

All these changes in the ways of reading, interacting and sharing of the new generations, necessarily lead us to the question of how do teachers approach and integrate these changes? Granado and Puig (2015), in their article *The reading identity of teachers in formation as a component of their teaching identity*. A study of their autobiographies as readers, state that:

“The teaching identity is structured around three dimensions: a biographical, a contextual and another linked to the subject that is taught or will be taught, in our case, reading” (p.57). From these three dimensions, they analyze the reading trajectories of teachers.

Regarding the biographical dimension, each teacher has a very particular trajectory as a reader. It is important that each one recounts his or her autobiography with reading, from the moment of who, how and in what context they learned to read. If the process of learning to read when they were children was simple or complicated, with what texts were they started?, who read in their environment and what kind of literature did they prefer? What were the school readings and if the teachers were readers and inspired and motivated to read? In what places did they like to read and with what style of reading? Being aware of all this, allows them to recognize in what way they live and transmit to their students the habit of reading. This metacognitive work also facilitates the identification of failures in reading habits and therefore in teaching them. Today we know that we communicate from different codes: verbal, nonverbal, corporal, attitudinal, and affective, among others. Therefore, the aulic scene places the teacher in front of the challenge of communicating with everything that is and does, students record the interest and taste of their teachers for each of the themes, according to the guidelines with which they transmit them.

The context is important, each school has particular programs that prioritize specific com-



petencies. We can say that there are reading schools, that is, institutions that promote in their students the habit of reading through various media, from teaching subjects, to book fairs and events associated with reading and writing. The more reader a school is, the more it will favor reading teachers, the promotion of reading and in those who are not; it will boost the taste for reading and its inclusion in teaching.

As far as the subject that they impart, it is possible to say that it is an important variable, there are contents that favor the promotion of the reading and others do not. However, in those subjects where reading is not part of the priority teaching aids, teachers can supplement the subjects of their programs with reading materials.

The proposal is clear, as Basanta (2005) states:

Only if we are able to successfully approach the construction of a reading attitude - which, let us not forget, requires an initial effort - if we generate an action maintained in time - also reading is a cause whose fruits are achieved in the middle and long-term, a combination of diverse and continuous stimuli, enriched by the diversity of the proposals, animated by the adventure/excitement of discovery and attraction, subject to regulation and obligation and fruit more of contagion than dogma, the reading condition will be permanent heritage of our students. To reading, as to almost all the important things of life, we come by imitation (p.196).

On the whole this is called reading identity (Granado and Puig, 2015), which refers to the “way they see themselves and count themselves as readers ... in their life journey as readers” (p.58).

It is important that teachers also integrate digital learning resources into their learning activities, among which are:

- Blogs and wikis to generate learning platforms.
- Infographics as synthesis of readings.

- Collaboration tools for the construction and editing of texts.
- The web pages and sources of the resources with which they teach in class.
- Research work using digital tools.

5. Conclusions and discussion

The digital age has left behind any argument that implies a limitation of access to reading. The gratuitousness of millions of contents on the internet, makes reading today more accessible than ever. As mentioned before, it is no longer enough to be citizens, now it is necessary to add to the digital citizenship, since even if we do not want it, we are part of the global community of the network. We can be out of all social networks, do not use email, do not search in digital browsers, but even so, some of our information is on the network and we have the responsibility to follow up on it. On the other hand, social networks have become the main means of transmission of news, therefore, public opinion is now generated first in social networks and then taken to the streets, where we all feel the impact of what originated in the digital cloud.

Just a few decades ago, citizenship was built in face to face interactions, with predominance of oral transmission, now comes to us via reading. When we become aware of everything we read when sending and receiving messages, following social networks or reading content on the internet, we discover that perhaps we are the human generation that has so far read more in the history of humanity. That is why today it is not enough to teach to read, we must teach how to read and what to do with what is read.

This implies the training of teachers in the development of digital skills, so that their didactic planning includes the use of digital resources that favor the students' attachment to the habit of reading. The selection of content is also a fundamen-



tal factor: it must be according to the ages and characteristics of the students. In this sense the teacher fulfills the functions of compiler, which requires a careful exploration of resources and contents to select those that comply with the relevance of the subjects while favoring the reading of texts, their comprehension, their synthesis and their application.

This does not rule out reading printed content. My experience as a teacher at different levels of education, from basic education to post-graduate, shows me that whoever has the habit of carrying a book, reads more and relies less on electronic devices as an entertainment resource in times of waiting or journeys. In this sense a teacher should always carry a book with them and share with their students their appreciation of the reviewed content, in this way is an example, but also teaches them ways to organize information and apply it to specific contexts.

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