

LITERARY READING IN TIMES OF GLOBALISATION AND DIVERSITY

EN TORNO A LA LECTURA LITERARIA EN TIEMPOS DE GLOBALIZACIÓN Y DIVERSIDAD(ES)

A CERCA DA LEITURA LITERÁRIA EM TEMPOS DE GLOBALIZAÇÃO E DIVERSIDADE(S)

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KEY WORDS: literary education reading diversity literary competence literacy reader training	ABSTRACT: Authors analyse the place of reading, especially literary reading, in our times and reflect on its necessity for the critical reading of the world, proximity to the other and denunciation of prejudices regarding diversity naturalised as valid. In this respect, they point out the possibilities of literary reading for the committed exercise of citizenship and social commitment. They also explore the relationship between reading habits and the canon of future education professionals as a key strategy in reader training. Finally, they advocate the intersection of literary reading education and social education at different educational stages.
PALABRAS CLAVE: educación literaria lectura diversidad competencia literaria alfabetización formación del lector	RESUMEN: Los autores analizan el lugar de la lectura, en especial, la lectura literaria en nuestros días y reflexionan en torno a su necesidad en la lectura crítica del mundo, la aproximación al otro y la denuncia de prejuicios en torno a la diversidad naturalizados como válidos. En este sentido, apuntan las posibilidades de la lectura literaria en el ejercicio comprometido de la ciudadanía y el compromiso social. Asimismo, exploran la relación entre hábitos lectores y canon de los futuros profesionales de la educación como estrategia clave en la formación de lectores. Por último, defienden la intersección entre educación lectolitearia y social en los diferentes niveles educativos.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: educação literária leitura diversidade competência literária alfabetização formação do leitor	RESUMO: Os autores analisam o lugar da leitura, em especial, da leitura literária na atualidade e refletem sobre a sua necessidade para uma leitura crítica do mundo, para a aproximação do outro e para a denúncia da naturalização dos preconceitos em relação à diversidade. Nesse sentido, apontam as possibilidades da leitura literária no exercício comprometido da cidadania e do compromisso social. Da mesma forma, exploram a relação entre hábitos leitores e os cânones que guiam os futuros profissionais da educação como estratégia fundamental na formação de leitores. Por último, definem a interseção entre educação lecto-literária e social em seus diferentes níveis educativos.

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We come into the world as reading animals.

A. Manguel.

1. Some notes on reading in the 21st century

Since the 19th century, we have defined reading as a necessary and irreplaceable condition for learning, and consequently, we equated illiteracy with ignorance, as Chartier (2008) points out, because in no way can it be reduced to the mere translation of phonemes or written symbols into signifiers, requiring as it does a dialogue between the text and the recipient for the construction and understanding of its meaning. In this regard, Cassany (2008) defines reading as a historical event, given the evolution experienced in its conception throughout history and different contexts. Let us consider the changes that the invention of printing represented at a certain time for reading and writing or the interrelations between communicative processes and information and communication technologies.

In the face of traditional conceptions and classifications that place reading within the framework of passive or receptive activities in contrast to other so-called active or productive ones such as writing, we prefer the notion of a communicative process in which the participation of the recipient is essential (Ballester, 2015), and we emphasise its role as a basic tool for both accessing knowledge and achieving curricular objectives in different subjects at all educational stages, and for lifelong learning. Thus, in addition to its undeniable role in the educational context, as the nucleus through which most teaching/learning processes pass, and its outstanding function in the acquisition and development of different basic competences (Carlino, 2013; Cassany, 2006), it also plays an important role in the comprehensive training of human beings through the different facets of their existence (Ibarra & Ballester, 2016a).

Although acceptance of its importance seems to be almost commonplace in most democratic societies, evidenced, among other factors, by concern over statistics on its frequency and consideration among different population groups, and the repeated appearance in media outlets of voices extolling its virtues and advocating its necessity for society, as well as an extensive bibliography with different degrees of specialisation in the subject, different studies warn of the complexity of this activity and the need for a reading education that can equip recipients with the strategies, capabilities and skills necessary to interpret different kinds of text. For example, in higher education, different works on

so-called academic literacy (Carlino, 2006, 2013; Cassany, 2006) show that university students in their academic lives regularly face reading-based learning challenges that require reading skills for which they have not received specific instruction beyond that of compulsory schooling. Indeed, a quick glance at the teaching of reading at school reveals that it essentially only takes place in nursery and primary school and that, by secondary school, the focus shifts towards literary reading and, to a large extent, the transmission of knowledge through printed books and canonical works (Ballester & Ibarra, 2015).

Furthermore, the reading practices encouraged in the school context very often neglect the necessary link between reading competence and communicative competence in relation to the exponential development of information and communication technologies. We refer to how its progressive introduction into everyday life affects the forms, supports, strategies, skills and communication modalities of citizens in contemporary democratic societies, but they do not find their place in many classrooms. Indeed, reading and writing practices have undergone such significant change and faced such important challenges that Ferreira (2011) summarised them with the term *revolution*, in much the same way as Chartier's use of the term 'digital revolution' to explain the simultaneous change that 'writing supports, reproduction and dissemination techniques and the way to read' represent. Adding that 'such simultaneity is unprecedented in the history of mankind' (2008: 34).

However, despite the apparent consensus regarding its importance in any teaching/learning process, its role in the comprehensive education of human beings and contemporary communicative needs, reading is not among the preferred habits of a large portion of the Spanish population (Ballester & Ibarra, 2016), nor does it seem to enjoy sufficient prestige for it to be subject to major funding in government policies, so much so that any budgets allocated are usually the first to be cut in times of recession. And reading education does not have a prominent place in higher education either, that is, once we have ensured that students have a certain mastery of the written word, which does not signify a reading habit or the discovery of aesthetic and recreational pleasure. For this reason, Villanueva (2016) advocates the need to rescue reading in teaching and therefore recover a competence that is being lost in contemporary societies: literary reading:

Perhaps the immediate and urgent method that needs to be rescued for teaching is that of reading:

learning to read literarily again. Because paradoxically, this competence may be being lost, and there is the contradiction that, in our societies, if we look a little deeper under the surface, we find that the ability of citizens to understand complex texts after leaving the educational system is becoming reduced (2016: 31)

2. Literary reading in the reading of the cosmos

Indeed, despite the widespread assumption of the importance of reading as a social activity and the need to perform constant and different literate practices in everyday life (Cassany, 2008, 2012), as well as the importance of literary reading in the education of the individual, a study of the panorama of university degrees following the implementation of the European Higher Education Area reveals the progressive loss of prominence of literature in terms of curricular subjects and credits in relation to the total percentages of a degree (Ibarra & Ballester, 2016a).

Among the different reasons that explain the change in the social perception of literary reading, there is an underlying neoliberal perspective of education that has been conceived according to capitalist criteria and mercantilist values for which reading, and especially literary reading, is not a valued asset given that it does not produce direct benefits and, therefore, cannot occupy the same place as disciplines of a scientific nature or be placed in the axis of qualifications capable of generating substantial job offers for its students. Among other effects of globalisation, a restrictive conception of education constructed in accordance with market values is manifested here and focused on the achievement of progress measured through economic growth, in an attempt to eliminate any public sphere that may generate opposition to policies, institutions, ideologies and market values (Giroux, 2016). This construction of the educational curriculum according to criteria of profit, explains, according to Nussbaum, the tendency of eliminating humanities and arts from primary, secondary, technical and university education in many nations of the world due to their reduction to 'ornaments that are useless at a time when nations must cut all useless things in order to maintain their competitiveness in the global market' (2016: 14).

Why then continue to advocate reading, especially literary, in contemporary times and societies and why champion its significance in current educational curricula? The reasons that explain its necessity are multiple and varied, but we could

begin with the summary made in the argument of Compagnon (2006). In the first place, this researcher points out mimesis as a cognitive and pedagogical means, not to mention the inherent recreational aspect, since it allows human beings to learn through fiction. Thus, literature presents different spaces, cultures, realities, characters and plots through whose reading the recipient can approach, identify or contrast models, practices, opinions, values and ways of thinking. It can therefore become an instrument of great value for the interpretation of the surrounding reality, since the exercise of reading not only contributes to the creation and development of reading and literary competence, but also enables knowledge, models, referents and sociocultural patterns to be comprehended.

Although it is not a novel argument regarding the description of the functions of literature - Aristotle had already championed its role as a means of knowledge thanks to its privileged capacity for mimesis - it does highlight one of the essential notes of its uniqueness: literary reading allows the reader to enter a cosmos of fiction from which to contemplate, inhabit and experience a whole gallery of places, spaces, behaviours and vital portraits and, in doing so, expand the limits of our gaze, and therefore, of our existence.

In this regard, Todorov condenses his appreciation of literature through a brief but dense statement: 'because it helps me live' (2009: 15), since 'it provides us with irreplaceable sensations that make the real world more beautiful and more meaningful. Far from being a simple addition, a distraction reserved for educated people, it allows everyone to respond better to their vocation of being human' (2009: 15).

For this reason, the literary text is a powerful agent of socialisation, presentation and representation of different realities and groups. Literary reading extends the boundaries of our universe by allowing us to learn about realities that are different from our own and enriches personal life experience. It not only contributes to the 'creation of oneself' but also delves into the 'path to the other' in the words of Compagnon (2006: 68). As explained by Nussbaum (1995: 11): 'Literature focuses on the possible, inviting readers to wonder about themselves,' or, in the words of Piglia on a story by Borges which can be perfectly extrapolated, because: 'reading is both the construction of a universe and a refuge from the hostility of the world' (2005: 29).

Thanks to literature, in particular children's and young people's literature in the case of the child or young person of school age as a model recipient, readers can learn about and recognise

themselves and, in doing so, contribute to the process of building individual and social identity through identification and recognition of the different possessions that run through the human being, as Maalouf (1999) points out. On the one hand, literary reading allows us to create a space of our own, that own room that Virginia Woolf advocated, but also to combine the different cultural universes to which the human being belongs, as Petit points out in his research (1999). Literary reading thus participates in the different maturing processes that progressively shape the identity of each individual, of each reader.

This way, not only is it a fundamental tool for accessing learning, the ordering, acquisition and reflection of different knowledge, it also provides its reader with the keys to understanding the surrounding reality and reading the universe. It places us, therefore, in the cosmos by expanding the borders of our known environment, and, in this sense, 'literature, in its aspect of logos, is a series of windows and even doors' (Lewis, 2000: 137).

Secondly, it provides the individual with an irreplaceable tool in the face of abuse of power or the perpetuation of stereotypes, we refer to the critical development of the reader. On the one hand, it allows the reader to enter into the world view of a certain author and make contact with patterns or cultural, affective sexual or gender models that are transmitted from his writing, and enables the identification, reflection and denunciation of discriminatory, xenophobic, classist or sexist attitudes, among others (Ballester and Ibarra, 2015). Nussbaum explains in these terms the experience of the literary reader because, for her, the text:

provides considerations that should play a role (though not as foundations unrelated to any criticism) in the construction of an adequate moral and political theory: second, that it develops moral capabilities without which citizens would not succeed in achieving the results of any political/moral theory, however excellent it may be (1995: 47-48).

In the face of the attempts to impose unique thought as a pillar of globalisation denounced among others by Chomsky and Ramonet (1996) or Estefanía (2003) and the increase in migrations as one of the most dramatic consequences of its extension, literary reading allows us to raise questions, recognise the different diversities that contemporary societies go through and question the construction of social inequality based on difference. In this respect, different research has pointed out the need to analyse, understand, reflect and reveal the underlying ideology in literary

texts, especially those that are preferentially assigned to school-age generations as a strategy to understand the different inequalities that underpin the curriculum and denounce the interested construction of difference and otherness as a negative element of the Manichaean binomial we-them (Aguilar, 2015; Ballester & Ibarra, 2015).

Finally, Compagnon focuses on its potential for the development of the aesthetic aspect of language, since its power lies in the fact that it also 'supplements the defects of language' (2006: 43). Within this same line, Lewis states: 'reading well is not a mere additional pleasure - although it can be too - but an aspect of the power that words exert on us, and therefore, an aspect of their meaning' (2000: 93).

In this sense, we can read, for example, the letters of Primo Levi as a way to name the horror experienced in the Nazi extermination camp and an attempt to exorcise the demons through literary language or Semprún's need for distance just before being able to begin to verbalise it. Literary reading thus allows the human being not only to name the world, but to comprehend the most frightening aspects of reality through its designation, to face the atrocity and its limits, to shape and fix it for the collective memory of humanity.

Thanks to reading, the human being appropriates the cultural legacy of a community, builds history and immerses himself in the cosmos created by literary fiction through the word and its aesthetic enjoyment, as García Márquez gives us, for example, at the beginning of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: 'Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice.'

3. The transformative role of reading

The pernicious effects of reading and literary reading have been pointed out in different historical periods and contexts. From the words of Voltaire's ironic pamphlet of December 1764 published a year later in which he advocates the prohibition of reading by mothers and fathers to their children with the aim of 'avoiding the diabolical temptation of receiving instruction' (in Ballester, 2015: 105) to the different prohibitions to groups, as for example to the slaves during the 18th and 19th centuries, with the purpose of disallowing any possibility of thought contrary to the interests of the dominant class and censorship of texts, in the form of expurgations, prohibitions or destruction of copies and unique volumes of which we have different examples throughout history.

Thus, among others, we can cite different lists of texts condemned by the Inquisition, but also during different dictatorial regimes, recall scenes from the burning of books in Berlin and other German cities during the Nazi regime or the destruction of libraries with the resultant loss of thousands of manuscripts such as those in Alexandria and Sarajevo, among others. Significant examples similar to the previous ones can be traced to our times, such as the list of books published periodically by the American Library Association (ALA) containing works that receive complaints for being considered harmful to the general public, very often from parents and teachers who warn of the risks contained within certain titles. Among the main reasons for requesting the removal of works from libraries is the use of offensive language and the appearance of topics considered inappropriate for a certain age group, but also those that are contentious or controversial, especially issues related to diversity, immigration, sexuality, racism, religion or ideology.

After this censorship, there is a common note: the comprehension of literature as a material whose sole purpose is to transmit a pedagogical message to its recipient, especially in the case of children's literature to the child or young person as model recipients. This utilitarian notion masks a conception of adolescence and childhood as stages in need of protection at all costs, but also of the reader as a permeable recipient to the different dangers that the text embodies.

Although literature has been labelled as mere ornament and branded unnecessary because of its low direct profitability, understood in terms of neoliberal capitalism, the different attempts at suppression and elimination cannot be explained simply by the lack of a direct application, but rather they allude to an undeniable and irreplaceable power, to its 'potential to contribute in a definitive way to our public life' (Nussbaum, 1995: 49), because 'as centuries of dictators have known, an illiterate crowd is easier to rule [...] books, more than any other human creation, have been the bane of dictatorships' (Manguel, 2006: 316). In this respect, the power of literary reading is not diluted by the personal exploration and knowledge of readers and the configuration of their identity, but extends its tentacles to the public sphere to the extent that it can contribute to the transformation processes of human beings.

The necessary dialogue that the reader establishes with the literary text for the construction of meaning involves interpretation, reflection and critical appropriation of plots and characters that are close to or different from their surrounding reality through those experiencing the vicissitudes

of the fiction. In this way, the recipient recognises and identifies elements of his world and delves into the choice of other possibilities for action and exercise of his citizenship, without relinquishing a valuable aesthetic experience. Hence the possible dangers that it represents, for example, for authoritarian or dictatorial regimes and the various attempts to forbid access to texts that may contain the germ of subversion by proposing alternatives or stoking the questioning of the established order.

Literary literature itself gives us a gallery of characters in which reading has exercised a powerful transformation, from the universal knight Alonso Quijano, through Ana Karenina, Ana Ozores and Enma Bovary, among other characters, its power generates mutations in the life trajectories of these characters. Bollman (2006) also denounces it in her journey through the history of female reading from the metamorphosis of women in danger, as explained in the paratext on the flap:

But from the moment they conceived reading as a possibility to change the narrowness of the domestic world through the limited space of thought, imagination, but also of knowledge, women became dangerous. By reading, they appropriated knowledge, learning and experiences that had been out of reach and only reserved for men (2006: n. pag.)

Indeed, reading represents dangers for the recipient, such as the loss of certainty, the collapse of prejudices considered until that moment as the only possibility of approaching a reality, the possibility of living other lives and creating the universe itself, the need for critical reflection and active participation in the cosmos as pillars of the conscious exercise of citizenship. This explains the underlying rebellion in literary reading and its power against authoritarian regimes, the dehumanising effects of economic neoliberalism and neoconservative discourses or attempts to assign ourselves to a single and immutable identity and belonging.

Literary reading therefore has the magical ability to transform, exorcise demons, ward off madness, build a space for human beings and, above all, make them dream of the possibility of transforming reality to improve it, although sometimes it is limited to an inconspicuous change. In this respect, Manguel (2006: 70-71) reflects on the real possibilities of intervention for a literary text, for example, on the reality of those suffering from AIDS in South Africa and notes that perhaps 'there is no poem either, however badly written, that cannot contain, for its secret and chosen reader, a consolation, a call to arms, a radiance of happiness, an epiphany.'

In this regard, Cabré (1999: 27) considers fiction as 'the immediate response to power, regardless of the age in which we are living,' as it proposes alternatives to the singular vision that dictators, totalitarians or fundamentalists wish to impose. If each character owns his own truth, the reader can access the relativism that different perspectives and truths offer him and, thus, question the prevailing ideology. Literature reading represents a contravention of current norms because, through the reader's identification with its plots and knowledge of the life trajectory of a gallery of characters, it can turn all prevailing values upside down and incite us to disobedience, rebellion or critical thinking, different from the hegemonic. Precisely for expressing ideas or emotions that differ from the dominant ones at a given time or the questioning of pious beliefs, Lurie (1990) describes as subversive a large number of works of children's literature such as *Tom Sawyer*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan* and *The Wind in the Willows*, just as Manguel does in relation to Don Quixote, but his words could perfectly be extrapolated to literary reading and its defence:

against the arbitrary authority of the nobles and the rich, against the selfishness and infidelity of the townspeople, against the arrogant misunderstanding of the lawyers and university students, Don Quixote insists that the main duty of a reader is to act in the world with moral and intellectual honesty, without being persuaded by tempting slogans and emotional outbursts, or believing without examination seemingly truthful news. Perhaps that modest principle of his can make us, as readers in this chaotic society in which we live, more tolerant and less unhappy (2016: 22-23).

In this sense, literary reading allows us to conquer some contemporary educational goals, since it fosters access to knowledge, values and social relationships from which to promote commitment, social involvement, critical thinking and literacy, hence that 'acting in the world with moral and intellectual honesty' postulated by Manguel above for his readers and from which to contribute to the conception of the cosmos as a democratic space for all of its inhabitants.

4. Reading habits and reading education

Research on the reading profile and reading habits of the Spanish population is based on two basic sources: the *Study of Reading Habits and Book Purchases in Spain*, carried out between 2000 and 2012 by the Spanish Publishers' Federation (FGEE) with the collaboration of the Ministry of

Culture's General Directorate of Books, Archives and Libraries and, after the execution of this project was suspended, the *Survey of Cultural Habits and Practices* produced by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport approximately every four years, whose last edition corresponds to the years 2014-2015, until the new edition of the FGEE study with figures from 2017 (FGEE, 2018).

However, we often find the analysis of reading habits, especially of generations of school age, and more particularly, in the case of the presentation of the results of their reading comprehension obtained through international reports such as PISA, raised in terms similar to the famous apocalyptic versus integrated dichotomy. Thus, we have already witnessed on several occasions the death of reading or the prediction of the disappearance of readers as a kind of species in extinction, especially linked to the emergence of certain technological practices.

We often forget, however, that many of those practices that are supposed to lead to the death of reading require precisely that to be carried out and that they pose different challenges for the reader to understand (Cassany, 2008). In these considerations, there is perhaps an underlying reductionist conception of reading strictly linked to the paper format and focused on learning the most elementary decoding mechanisms, since it does not address the diversity of practices related to the reception and production of messages that we frequently carry out in our everyday lives.

In this respect, we can find notable divergences between the way of proposing the teaching of reading and literary reading and the literate practices that can be carried out within the school institution. We refer to how in a large number of Spanish classrooms reading education still fuses with the teaching of literature in a conception of the literary text reduced to the memorisation of information relating to works, movements, authors and works described as exemplary or canonical. This positivist model, focused on the construction of a national literary history based on a chronological progression, in which literature and its reading lose prominence in the face of an accumulation of memory as the only way of checking student learning, also coexists with the textual model as an approach to literary work and its identification of the literary elements that define a text to the detriment of the current postulates of literary education (Ballester, 2015; Cerrillo, 2007; Equipo Peonza, 2001; Ibarra & Ballester, 2016a and b; Mendoza, 2012).

Notable among the most dangerous effects of these divergences, in our opinion, is the creation of prejudices in students at different educational

stages regarding reading, since it is often equated with a school subject and the prescription of texts that have little to do with their leisure habits and, moreover, focuses exclusively on printed works selected by the teacher according to a restrictive interpretation of the curriculum as a presentation of national literary history in accordance with a chronological perspective in which movements, authors and works occur in time. Furthermore, on many occasions, classroom timetables tend to follow a temporal progression from the first works considered canonical in a given literature, meaning that the closest texts in space and time are neglected until the final stages of the course.

Similarly, we have noted how, despite the differences between the various models that currently coexist in the classroom, many of them coalesce in a common practice: the linking of reading experiences to the accomplishment of a school task and assessment of the completion or not of reading the text in question. Reading thus becomes the mechanism for the achievement of another purpose and, in this way, loses for its recipient any possible pleasurable, recreational or aesthetic enjoyment component, key aspects in its consideration as an activity worthy of repetition beyond the classroom and, therefore, in the forming of regular reading habits.

This problem is compounded if we examine the training of future education professionals, since, especially in the case of teachers, their professional practice will involve mediation between the child and the literary text and their reading and literary education originates from the models that we have just described. Various studies have investigated the reading habits of Spanish university students, many of whom are destined to become future educators and educational and sociocultural mediators, and revealed a scarce interest in voluntary reading among this group (Ballester & Ibarra, 2016; Cerrillo, Larrañaga & Yubero, 2002; Díaz Armas, 2008; Granado & Puig, 2014; Larrañaga, Yubero & Cerrillo, 2008).

In this regard, it is essential to address the relationship between the poor reading habits of this population, whose profile is described by Granado and Puig (2014) as weak or immature, given their marked preference for books of media impact or focused on prescriptive reading and the performance of their future professional practice. Different works have pointed out the importance of literary education in schooling, with special attention on early educational stages, as well as the importance of the role of the mediator for the acquisition and development of reading and literary competence, the creation of regular reading habits beyond the classroom and the construction

of the meaning of the text (Ballester, 2015; Cerrillo, 2007; Benevides & Peterson, 2010; Duszynski, 2006; Ibarra & Ballester, 2016b, 2017; Machado, 2002; Mendoza, 2004; Munita, 2016).

The personal relationship established by each teacher with reading, as well as his reading and literary competence and even his reading habit, will undoubtedly affect the configuration of the classroom canon and the conception that different texts will convey to future school age generations (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Ballester & Ibarra, 2016; Cerrillo, 2013; Colomer & Munita, 2013; Cremin, et al. 2009; Duszynski, 2006; Granado and Puig, 2014; Lockwood, 2011; Munita, 2013; Nathanson et al., 2008). In this regard, different researchers (Díaz-Plaja & Prats, 2013; Ibarra & Ballester, 2016b; Colomer & Munita, 2013; & Contreras & Prats, 2015, among others) point out the need to strengthen reading and literary education in initial teacher training since 'didactic practices in literary reading would have a strong foothold in the personal baggage of literature and in identification with a reading identity, which, in the best of cases, is intended to be directed towards students' (Munita, 2017).

Although we are aware of the difficulty of being able to unreservedly accept direct identifications between a good reader and good mediator, we believe it is essential to champion the importance of the figure of the future education professional, teacher and mediator as readers and their role in the fostering of reading habits. Hence also the importance of their reading and literary education, and the need for their interdisciplinary and cross-cutting conception, which enables them to overcome the compartmental limits of subjects in the educational context in pursuit of the development of personal identity, the ability to read themselves and read the world and reflect to transform it and exercise citizenship actively.

5. Regarding the canon of works

In the complex task that we have just described, the formative canon of the professional who will exercise the task of mediator in the future represents a key aspect for the forming of regular reading habits in students. This assertion in no way aims to advocate a mechanistic conception of learning, or rely on a rhetorical discourse focused on praising the virtues of the literary text in light of its conversion into a utilitarian tool at the service of a particular ideology or advocating a selection of reductionist texts centred on the presence of a specific topic or curricular quota to which to respond.

On the contrary, our position is part of a line of research within literary education championed

by different researchers concerning the need to open a school canon, often built from a historicist model, articulated around works, authors and periods of a specific literature (Ballester & Ibarra, 2015; Cerrillo, 2007; Martos & Martos, 2016; Mendoza, 2004). Nor should the will to transcend the frontiers of a canon exclusively articulated around the works considered model for a particular literature become the fulfilment of a pedagogical quota or the response to work on a certain value, competence or cross-cutting theme. Focusing the recommendation of readings of a class or building a list of compulsory readings for a term from the manifest will to find a certain teaching regarding, for example, immigration or diversity, would signify a utilitarian conception of literature and a reduction exclusive to its pedagogical, moral and political function to the detriment of its potential for critical reading of the cosmos and the committed exercise of citizenship in contemporary societies.

For this reason, as a key element for mediation, we point to knowledge of a range of literary readings in which difference, diversity and otherness are represented from different perspectives because, obviously, the creation of a canon requires knowledge of works eligible for selection and of the critical capacity to reflect on the underlying ideology behind them. Critical analysis of the literary discourse of each work will not only constitute an aspect prior to selection, but may also become the essential activity of the practice of reading, since, from the analysis, debate, comment and, above all, interaction between the literary text and the recipient, it will be possible to foster the construction of interpretive frameworks of the world from a much more open and critical perspective.

We therefore advocate a literary reading education capable of responding to different social transformations from the construction of a plural canon in which otherness and diversity are reflected, from the point of view of themes as well as voices, genres, origins, discourses and, ultimately, as a configuration strategy. In this way, students, as model readers of this selection, will be able to generate processes of identification, understanding and approach to different realities and establish a dialogue with the surrounding reality from which to question the transmission of stereotypes of all kinds.

6. Literary reading education and social education: by way of conclusion

Among the challenges of contemporary literary reading education, we have highlighted the forming of regular reading habits and training of competent readers. To achieve this goal, restricted mediation is not sufficient to strengthen access to literature; what is necessary is pursuing the development of habits of critical reflection and allowing students to deal autonomously with the construction of the meaning of a text and to understand the ideology underlying its discourse. At this point lies the intersection between the nuclei of interest of literary reading and social education, since they converge in the 'determination to awaken critical consciences,' given that both 'are in a position to interrogate the world and reveal in what aspects this has to be cooperatively improved' (Caride & Pose, 2015).

For the conquest of critical thinking and social responsibility that citizenship represents, from our perspective, a reconciliation between the teaching of reading and literature, the reader and the education system is essential, with the aim of changing widespread prejudices with respect to literary reading as an activity of little social consideration, reserved for cultural elites or of very low profitability in the current neoliberal market logic. In this respect, we advocate the urgent need to conceive reading and literary reading as an educational responsibility not exclusive to teachers of linguistic subjects, but as the key to teaching students to read the world, think critically and act in a committed manner in the societies that they inhabit in the face of different forms of social inequality, prejudices and xenophobic, discriminatory, racist or sexist attitudes.

Faced with the fallacy of monoculturalism, denial and attempts to control the inherent diversity of all human groups and the extension of the consideration of difference as the basis of economic inequality, literary reading constitutes an irreplaceable pedagogical opportunity to open up a space that transcends the boundaries of the classroom and delves into the field of construction of multiple and mutable identities that shape the human being from the connection between the personal and public sphere by offering on its pages an alternative and critical view of the cosmos, history and memory of humanity and fostering processes of change, personal and social transformation and action as part of the exercise of citizenship.

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