

Célestin Freinet's active pedagogy in the strengthening of reading and writing in sixth-grade students of 20 de Julio industrial school.

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Abstract

This article presents the research work carried out with sixth grade students of "20 de Julio" industrial school of the municipality of Puerto Wilches, Santander. The objective is to strengthen reading and writing through the implementation of Célestin Freinet's active pedagogy. This research arises from the different problems observed in the classroom and that influence the adequate development of the teaching and learning processes of reading and writing. In this case, three conceptual axes are defined: reading, writing and Célestin Freinet's active pedagogy, which are taken as a reference for the consolidation of the categories of analysis: reading levels, textual characteristics and Freinet's techniques. Likewise, this article has a qualitative approach that contributes to a broad interpretative panorama, and the method is action-research, which provides a direct vision of the reality of study and a subsequent reflection on it, allowing us to solve problems of the educational reality, in this case reading and writing. In this sense, five teachers of the Spanish Language area and 11 sixth-grade students were taken as key informants, to whom an interview and a diagnostic test were applied, respectively. The research reported in this article is intended to include new pedagogical and didactic methodologies that enable teachers to generate favorable educational environments for students to improve their difficulties.

Keywords: reading, writing, reading comprehension, active pedagogy, Célestin Freinet's techniques.

Introduction

Reading and writing are two important communicative skills in the educational field

as well as in other spheres of life. With them, human beings have been able to transmit their ideas, thoughts, feelings, as well as to build knowledge itself. For this reason, society focuses its interest in the learning of reading and writing in school classrooms. In this sense, Solé et al. (2000) postulate that:

Reading and writing are not only means to express or reproduce the ideas of others; they are instruments linked to the revision and construction of one's own knowledge, indispensable in the society of information and continuous learning. It is not surprising, then, that teaching them constitutes a challenge not only for schools, but for society as a whole. Consistently, instructional processes designed to promote the acquisition of reading and writing continue to claim the attention of numerous researchers. (p.1)

In other words, the use of these tools is indispensable for the construction of information societies where learning is continuous and their teaching is strengthened. In this case, the concepts of reading and writing are defined below:

In the first place, reading is conceived, as mentioned by Solé (1998), as "a process of interaction between the reader and the text,

a process through which the former tries to satisfy [obtain relevant information for] the objectives that guide his/her reading” (p.19). Accordingly, reading implies an active reader who has a specific purpose for accessing a text, i.e., wants to achieve an end by reading, such as making a recipe, learning about an event, being entertained, among others. When teaching reading, it is essential to take into account the reading objectives, because from them and through the student’s prior knowledge and the chosen text, an understanding is built by the reader. In this specific case, the reading comprehension levels adopted by the MEN (1988) are taken into account, which are: the literal level, the inferential level and the critical-intertextual level. These are conceived as a method to characterize the reading skills of elementary and high school students, which are evaluated by the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (ICFES).

Secondly, writing is conceived, according to Cassany (1999) as:

“A process of achieving objectives in literate communities. Learning to write only makes sense if it serves purposes that cannot be achieved through orality. Among other things, writing is about learning to use words to make them mean what one intends them to mean in each context.” (p.26)

In this sense, writing involves achieving a certain purpose in which the author communicates effectively and clearly with the reader of his/her text, who, in turn, is able to understand the message transmitted; for this, he/she must master the written signs and know the context in which he/she subscribes. Thus, writing is a valuable tool in our society and in all those that have passed since each of its products has left a mark in the course of history.



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Similarly, in the written text, a series of linguistic characteristics are taken into account which, as the author states, refer to “the characteristics that differentiate a meaningful text (a piece of writing that the members of the community identify as such), from a non-text (a handful of sentences, a disjointed fragment), not recognized by the community” (p.80), that is, the linguistic aspects that characterize an effective text in a real communicative situation. In the present research work, those related to coherence, cohesion, adequacy and correctness will be taken into account; in the latter, spelling will be covered.

Therefore, reading and writing are two essential skills for human beings, since they allow for a series of mental processes that favor the communication and transmission of ideas, feelings and emotions, of vital importance for them, as well as the constant search for knowledge. According to Miras, Solé, & Castells (2013) these two activities “are among the most powerful technologies available for learning and thinking” (p. 438). In this sense, reading and writing are two tools of great relevance for the development of thinking and learning, and that is why the school subscribes them as one of the main activities to be performed.

Based on this, this article intends to show the contributions of the active pedagogy of the Frenchman Célestin Freinet in the strengthening of reading and writing through a didactic strategy that focuses on the active participation of children and on the generation of instruments that make their own development possible. Accordingly, Élise Freinet (1975) points out that:

This is the renewal: the child thirsts for life and activity. We use this aspiration by putting at its service the “instruments” of instruction and education that we believe useful for its elevation and by working for the realization of the conditions that will make it possible. (p. 94)

In relation to the research context, the research takes place in a public educational establishment located in the urban area of the municipality of Puerto Wilches, Santander, Colombia, whose community is characterized in most cases by low socioeconomic conditions; the most common occupations of the parents or guardians of the schoolchildren are agriculture, fishing, palm plantation and motorcycle taxi driver. Likewise, the families have various social difficulties such as dysfunctional homes and pregnancies at an early age. In this regard, teachers have observed difficulties related to low academic performance and the results of internal and external tests that have repercussions on dropout and academic failure. These problems are due to factors such as apathy on the part of the students; lack of parental support; low levels of comprehension and interpretation of texts; management of emotions; lack of reading habits; the deep-rooted presence of orality in writing and poor command of grammatical, lexical, semantic and pragmatic norms.

Due to the above, the implementation of new forms of teaching such as Freinet’s active theory will make it possible to improve literacy in students. This pedagogy is characterized by giving great relevance to the active participation of children through the use of liberating work techniques, based on their own needs, since children have always brought with them the ability to question and explore the world. These techniques show the pedagogue’s constant interest in improving pedagogical practices in the classroom, and thus fostering a favorable learning environment. According to Freinetian pedagogical concepts, a distinction is made between technique (practice) and method (ideal); the former refers to the procedures that satisfy the needs and interests of the child, among which the most outstanding are the free text, the printing press, the school newspaper and school correspondence. In relation to the method, this refers to the best

way to apply these new techniques. In this sense, the purpose of her active school lies in the search for means, which, according to the time, allow for adequate learning and constant renewal, which do not occur with the methods but with the techniques. Based on the above, Élise Freinet (1975) argues:

The greatest contribution, from which better results can be expected, that our technique supposes for pedagogy lies in the possibility of modernizing our teaching by using in the school the means of communication that civilization puts within our reach. It is necessary to suppress what is conventional, what is moribund, in the present school system and to form the citizens of the new society. (p.69).

In other words, with the development of these techniques it is possible to elevate the individual through the collaboration of the environment and the adult, in which the most convenient instruments for such purposes are found.

Methodology

The research we are conducting and presented in this article has a qualitative approach which, according to Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado, & Baptista Lucio (2014), provides "depth to the data, dispersion, interpretative richness, contextualization of the environment or setting, details and unique experiences. Also, it provides a "fresh, natural and holistic" point of view of the phenomena, as well as flexibility" (p. 16). This means that this type of approach provides a broad overview for the understanding and interpretation of the research phenomenon and brings a wealth of data to its study. As for the research method, Action Research is used, which, as mentioned by Elliot, J. (2000) is a: "reflection related to diagnosis". (p.4). That is to say, action-research starts with a previous observation of the problems that afflict teachers in their work, in order to later make a reflection on it. It should be noted that the key informants are five teachers of Spanish Language and 11

sixth-grade students to whom the pertinent instruments and/or strategies will be applied.

Thus, the phases of the research were defined according to Hernández Sampieri et al. (2014) who refer to four phases, namely: identifying the problem, developing the plan, implementing and evaluating the plan and feedback.

In the first phase, through the application of an interview to teachers and a diagnostic test to students, the aim is to identify the students' deficiencies in reading and writing, as well as to refer to the teaching processes of these skills in Spanish Language.

In the second phase, a didactic strategy will be designed incorporating the didactic techniques proposed by Célestin Freinet in order to improve reading and writing in sixth-grade students.

In the third phase, the didactic strategy designed under Freinet's techniques will be implemented, in which information will be collected to review the students' progress in the reading and writing processes, as well as to adjust some elements in the course of their execution, in order to make decisions about its operation.

In the fourth phase, the action plan and the adjustments that were made will be inspected again to show the results obtained during the process, make new decisions and outline the pertinent modifications to the didactic strategy. And finally, the diagnostic evaluation will be applied again to compare the initial and final process of the students through the application of the strategy based on the didactic postulates of Célestin Freinet.

Results

With the implementation of Célestin Freinet's techniques, the reformulation of teaching and learning strategies in the reading and writing processes of the sixth-grade students of "20 de



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Julio" industrial school is expected in the future. It is intended to generate a positive impact on the written production and reading levels of the students, who have various difficulties that have caused serious academic failure and dropout rates.

In this sense, we seek to motivate students in the reading and writing processes, since many of them show no interest and apathy towards these skills. As a result, many of the students do not participate in the activities developed in the classroom. According to the ideas of Tapia and Montero cited by Montealegre and Forero (2006), motivation is a determining factor in this process, and is therefore described by the authors as follows:

[...] a determining element in the processes of learning to read and write, by reinforcing the child's learning goals and focusing attention on the improvement of his or her own skills, which promote the experience of autonomy and participation, and generate greater confidence in his or her performance. (p. 35)

In other words, motivation is a key element in the strengthening of literacy because it promotes in students an interest in the development of their skills and abilities; however, in this precise case, it is one of the most transcendental difficulties to be faced in the classroom. In addition, motivation is closely linked to the meaning it has for those who carry out the activities. Because of this, Freinet's pedagogical theory is presented as a possibility to stimulate learning for life in which techniques and strategies use immediate reality to generate meaning in what is developed. According to this, the DIDACTEX GROUP (2003) considers that:

Meaningful learning is in itself motivating because the subject enjoys performing the task or working on the new content (as opposed to mechanical or rote learning), because he/she understands what is proposed as a learning object and finds meaning in it. When the task is enjoyed, an intrinsic motivation is generated

through which a variety of positive emotions can emerge that contribute to sustain the persistence and effort required to complete it effectively and with quality. (p. 89- 90)

According to this idea, motivation occurs when activities are functional and acquire a meaning for life, and not simply as a transmission of information that will be evaluated later. In it, students enjoy their tasks because they are useful in their daily lives and in terms of society. For this reason, active pedagogy is important because it provides guidelines to guide the processes of reading and writing, where the learner takes a more active role in their education. According to these, Freinet, C. (2002) points out that:

The school of tomorrow will focus on the child, a member of the community. The manual and intellectual techniques to be mastered, the subjects of teaching, the system of acquisition, the modalities of education will be derived from the fundamental needs of the child according to the needs of the society to which he belongs. It is a real change of pedagogical approach, rational, efficient and humane, which must allow the child to reach his/her destiny as a man with maximum power. (p. 23-24)

That is to say, the teaching and learning processes are based on the needs of the students and those that society poses to them. Therefore, it is the students who are responsible for assuming their formative processes, since the teacher is in charge of generating a favorable environment where the techniques and resources are the most convenient for their objectives. Freinet's pedagogy stands out for its interest in the changes in the ways of assuming education, an aspect that makes it possible to improve the reading and writing practices of children and young people.

On the other hand, this research is of great importance for the educational community because it takes a different approach to teaching and learning, focusing its attention



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on the students, an element that contributes to the autonomy and responsibility of the subjects inside and outside the classroom. Likewise, the strengthening of reading and writing brings with it the improvement of academic processes not only in the area of Spanish Language, but also in the other subjects, allowing the results in internal and external tests to be optimal. Likewise, pedagogical practices are renewed and the work of teachers is facilitated, who will continue to be professionally trained in the exercise of their work, and will have new tools and techniques to achieve their objectives.

Conclusions

One of the first conclusions we have reached in this ongoing research has to do with the application of the pedagogical theory of Célestin Freinet, in terms of his techniques, as it enables the formation of active beings,

autonomous in their academic, personal and social processes, leading to forge individuals who adapt to the new societies and the challenges it imposes on them.

In the same way, these didactic instruments seek to foster a favorable school environment for the learning of each student through motivation based on meaningful activities that are based on their tastes and needs. Likewise, the application of these theories renews the teaching methods, which facilitates the teaching work and students' learning.

In addition, the incorporation of new pedagogical models in the classroom, brings with it contributions to achieve results that go beyond academic aspects, focusing on the integral formation of the person who is able to adapt to the constant changes in the world.

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