LUMEN ET VIRTUS

Connecting young people with literature: An analysis of pedagogical practices and their impacts

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the distancing of high school students from Literature and the effectiveness of current pedagogical practices in teaching this field. The justification for the research stems from the growing perception that Literature, often approached in a fragmented and academic way, cannot engage students as it should. The main objective is to analyze how pedagogical practices influence the formation of readers and to explore alternatives to improve the engagement of young people with literary texts. To achieve these objectives, the methodology adopted included a theoretical review of the contributions of scholars such as Calvino and Todorov, in addition to the analysis of prevalent pedagogical practices. The research examines how these practices impact students' perception of Literature and evaluates the effectiveness of different educational approaches. The results show that current pedagogical approaches often lead to students' disinterest, highlighting the need for a reformulation of teaching strategies. The research suggests that more interactive and contextualized methods can improve young people's engagement with Literature and enrich their cultural and critical formation. It is concluded that a review of pedagogical practices is essential to revitalize students' interest in Literature and strengthen their connection with cultural heritage.

Keywords: Literature, Teaching, Pedagogy, Reading, Engagement, Education.

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INTRODUCTION

The present research aims to explore the theoretical and practical contributions of the inclusion of Literature in the school curriculum, focusing on how pedagogical practices influence the formation of readers. The relevance of this study is justified by the growing distancing of high school students from Literature, a phenomenon that can be attributed to pedagogical approaches that treat literary texts as mere objects of academic study, rather than vehicles for a deeper understanding of the human condition.

Theoretically, the research is based on the reflections of scholars such as Calvino (2013) and Todorov, who defend the centrality of literary texts in the educational process. Calvino highlights the importance of the classics as elements that connect readers to a rich cultural heritage, while Todorov argues that Literature must occupy a central place in education to play its full role in the critical and emotional development of students. Contemporary criticism also emphasizes the need to reconsider pedagogical practices that often result in aversion rather than appreciation of literature.

Practically, the research investigates how current pedagogical approaches may be contributing to students' demotivation in relation to literary reading. The impact of educational strategies used in schools and how they can be adjusted to promote more meaningful engagement with literary texts will be examined. The study aims to provide valuable insights for teaching practice, suggesting methods that can revitalize students' interest in Literature and improve their formation as critical and appreciative readers.

Therefore, this research not only seeks to understand the causes of young people's distancing from Literature, but also offers paths for a reevaluation of educational practices, with the aim of enriching the literary experience and promoting a greater connection with the texts.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE CLASSICS IN THE FORMATION OF READERS: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

The study aimed to address Literature in the context of High School, highlighting the importance of teaching this discipline in this phase, especially due to the proximity of the entrance exams and the ENEM (National High School Exam). However, this focus represents a failure of the educational system, since the student, when he reaches high school, should already have a well-developed reading competence, regardless of his affinity with the proposed literary works.

In this sense, the Ministry of Education and Culture has prepared several documents to guide the teaching of Portuguese Language and Literature at the national level, seeking

to standardize pedagogical practices in Brazilian schools. Among these documents, the National Curriculum Parameters for Secondary Education (PCNEM, Brazil, 2000), the Educational Guidelines Complementary to the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN, Brazil, 2000), and the National Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education (OCNEM, Brazil, 2006) stand out. Such documents highlight the role of language as a means of communication and the humanizing character of Literature.

These measures were necessary because external research and evaluations, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), show that Brazilian students face difficulties in achieving proficiency in reading, including literary reading.

The first more in-depth discussions about the concept of Literature date back to Ancient Greece. It was in this classical context that the first controversies and debates arose about the definition of what Literature would be (LAJOLO, 2000, p. 54).

According to Maingueneau (2009, p. 197), language is a tool shared by all, while Literature is an adornment that is added to language, whose basic function is communication. However, Literature is not just an ornament; it contributes to the very construction of the language, giving it quality and status.

> There have been many attempts to define Literature. It is possible, for example, to define it as imaginative writing, the sense of fiction – writing that is not literally veridical. But if we reflect, even if briefly, on what is commonly considered literature. Such a definition is not valid (EAGLETON, 2006, p.1).

This author suggests that a different approach may be necessary to define Literature, not by its fictional or imaginative character, but by the singular way in which it uses language. According to this theorist, "literature is the writing that, in words [...] transforms and intensifies the common language" (EAGLETON, 2006, p.2).

The teaching of Literature is inserted in the field of reading and the study of discursive genres, and therefore interacts with reviews, synopses, syntheses, reports, essays and other texts that discuss Literature and are essential for the young reader of High School.

It is essential to understand certain theoretical aspects about the way the author expresses his ideas, because only he knows the effect of meaning he wants to provoke in his readers.

In addition, when faced with a fictional literary narrative, the reader often needs to consult other texts to better understand certain linguistic, historical, political, and cultural aspects that are inferred or mentioned. An example is the novel Posthumous Memories of Brás Cubas, by Machado de Assis, published in 1881, which narrates the experiences of a

young man from the Brazilian elite of the nineteenth century, Brás Cubas. The narrator, in the first person, begins the story from his death, describing the scene of his burial, the delusions before he died, until he returns to his childhood.

> For some time I hesitated whether I should open these memoirs from the beginning or the end, that is, whether I would put my birth or my death first. Supposing that the common usage is to begin with birth, two considerations led me to adopt a different method: the first is that I am not properly a deceased author, but a deceased author, for whom the grave was another cradle; the second is that the writing would thus be more gallant and newer. Moses, who also recounted his death, did not put it in the introit, but in the cape: a radical difference between this book and the Pentateuch (ASSIS, MACHADO, 2015, p.18).

It was found that, in this type of text, commonly found in high school, the reader needs to have a cultural and linguistic repertoire to understand it properly. Words such as "campa" and "introito", as well as references to "Moses" and "Pentateuch", are not explained directly in the text and represent advanced knowledge, not always accessible to all Brazilians.

It is essential, therefore, to create the appropriate conditions for reading this text, because by understanding it, the reader will acquire linguistic, cultural and discursive knowledge. This will facilitate the perception of the irony, pessimism and humor characteristic of Machado de Assis, aspects often highlighted in textbooks, but little understood by students. In pedagogical practice, a detailed study of the narrative is not always carried out that allows students to make inferences, recognize intertextuality and identify the characteristics that align the text with Realism.

The National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs) sought to clarify the concepts related to reading based on two main axes: representation and communication, and investigation and comprehension. These parameters approach Literature, in its strict sense, as an art constructed through words and defend the specificities inherent to Literature. They emphasize the importance of its presence in the High School curriculum and discuss its necessity, focusing on art and literature, as well as other forms of artistic expression, as fundamental knowledge for human beings, and not just as privileges of a minority.

> It has always enjoyed a privileged status in relation to the others, given the literate tradition of an elite that commanded the destiny of the nation. Literature was so privileged that it was even taken as a distinctive sign of culture, and therefore of social class (BRASIL, 2006, p.55).

The competencies and skills outlined in the National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs), the National Curriculum Parameters for Secondary Education (PCNEM) and the National Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary Education aim to foster in the student-reader the

critical capacity, sensitivity to the various forms of linguistic expression and the ability to become a proficient reader of different texts that reflect our culture. This process ultimately seeks to expand or build the literacy of these student-readers, as discussed by Soares (2011).

> In addition to the mechanical memorization of grammatical rules or the characteristics of a certain literary movement, the student must have the means to expand and articulate knowledge and skills that can be mobilized in the countless situations of language use that he or she encounters in the family, among friends, at school, in the world of work (BRASIL, 2000, p.55).

The educational documents comprehensively discuss the student's formation as a reader of Literature, emphasizing the importance of literary literacy that enables young people not only to read literary works, but also to explore texts that discuss Literature itself. These documents guide teachers, indicating ways to follow to achieve the educational objectives related to the formation of readers in schools.

However, according to the guidelines established by the official documents of the Ministry of Education and Culture, it is not advisable to overload the student with mere information about eras, styles or characteristics of literary schools, a practice that still persists, despite the recommendations of the PCNs (notably the PCN of 2002, p.55), which highlight the secondary character of these contents, in addition to the mechanical memorization of grammatical rules or the characteristics of specific literary movements.

The theoretical-methodological principle ensures the student access to the necessary resources to expand and integrate knowledge, becoming a proficient reader. For this, it is essential that the student reads texts in a more meaningful way, with greater intensity and frequency, thus ensuring a quality reading experience.

> The PCNS insist that the formation of the reader and writer will only be possible to the extent that the teacher himself presents himself to the student as someone who lives the experience of reading and writing. The teacher, in addition to being the one who teaches content, is someone who transmits the value that the language has shown to him. If the teacher has a pleasurable relationship with reading and writing, he will certainly be able to work with measures for his students (ROJO, 2000, p.66).

Rojo (2011), in line with the guidelines established by the Portuguese language documents, emphasizes the need for the school not only to train readers and writers, but also to overcome the limitations restricted to exclusively school practices. This implies knowing and sharing the textual diversity that student-readers experience. The scholar points out that this transformation will only be effective if the teacher presents himself as a living example of someone who practices reading and writing. This involvement is

manifested when the teacher comments, evaluates, cites excerpts from texts, recites poems and, in general, positions himself as a mature reader and model for students, a concept corroborated by Umberto Eco (2015), a renowned semiologist and linguist.

Soares (2011) offers valuable reflections on the relationship between Literature and teaching in the school environment, evidencing a certain mischaracterization of Literature in this context. The author points out that, due to this scenario, some theorists question the continuity of Literature as a subject in the school curriculum. His studies provoke discussions about the schooling process of children's literature, focusing on the formation of proficient and engaged readers, that is, students who practice reading as a social and cultural activity, regardless of academic demands.

Soares argues that the problem does not lie in the schooling of Literature, but in inadequate and mistaken pedagogical practices that often transform the literary text into a mere pretext to teach other contents, neglecting the specificities of literary narratives. This reductionist approach results in simplistic and superficial activities, such as filling out forms, reading only for dramatization, or taking tests that do not value the art of the word and its multiple meanings — the essence of Literature.

The reduction of Literature to an instrument for teaching moral values, social and linguistic issues reduces its aesthetic complexity and the humanizing character it brings. By reading only with the intention of identifying these issues, the intrinsic artistic value of different literary genres is lost, from a simple comic to a novel. This criticism of the schooling of Literature arises from the perception that it ceases to be art to adapt to the immediacy of school activities.

Rildo Cosson (2011), a professor at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, observes that if students finish school without appreciating literary fiction, it is likely that they will not incorporate this cultural practice into their lives. In school, reading is often limited to didactic purposes, such as presenting seminars, analyzing literary texts, or preparing for exams, which can negatively influence the way reading is perceived outside the school environment.

Literary reading is fundamental in people's lives, as it provokes sensibilities, rejections of certain ideologies, and involves emotions. The freedom to abandon a narrative when desired, without the pressure of objective evaluations, develops in the reader an autonomy that is not always promoted in school models of reading. School practice, in many cases, has not been able to develop in the student the skills and taste for literary reading, despite the fact that everyone has the potential to become readers.

Therefore, it is essential to value the student's potential readership, offering him a diversity of texts that both approach and distance himself from his historical and social reality. This will contribute to the construction of your identity as a reader, enabling you to act on the world based on reflection and transformation of yourself, avoiding alienation.

Eni de Lourdes Puccinelli Orlandi (2003, p.58), a professor at the University of Vale do Sapucaí, points out that "it is not only who writes that means; those who read also produce meanings, and they do so not in an abstract way, but in specific conditions, which are socio-historical". Literature, therefore, offers this ability to create meanings from reading, being a privileged language that, among other aspects, can foster the development of education and aesthetic sensitivity, as suggested by Antônio Cândido. These ideas are reflected in the official documents that deal with Literature, recognizing it as a fundamental tool for human formation.

> I understand here by humanization the process that confirms in man those traits that we consider essential, such as the exercise of reflection, the acquisition of knowledge, the good disposition towards others, the refinement of emotions, the ability to penetrate the problems of life, the sense of beauty, the perception of the complexity of the world and of beings, the cultivation of humor. Literature develops in us the quota of humanity to the extent that it makes us more understanding and open to nature, society, our fellow human beings (CÂNDIDO, 2009, p. 249).

The functions of Literature are deeply related to its complex nature, which encompasses the contradictory and, at the same time, humanizing role that the literary text plays. This role is manifested, among other ways, by the ability of literature to establish an emotional identification between the reader and the text, allowing the reader, inside or outside the school environment, to speculate and reflect, either individually or in dialogue with others, on the issues raised by certain narratives.

Within this context, we can distinguish at least three facets that make up the contradictory, but humanizing, role of Literature:

- Emotional identification: Literature allows readers to connect emotionally with the characters, plots, and situations presented, enabling an experience of empathy and understanding of the various human realities.
- Critical reflection: The literary text encourages the reader to question, analyze and reflect on the topics addressed, promoting a process of self-knowledge and critical awareness in relation to the world around them.
- Personal and social transformation: Through literature, readers are able to revisit and reevaluate their own beliefs and values, which can lead to significant

changes in both the personal and social spheres, highlighting the transformative potential of literary reading.

These facets show how literature, despite its contradictory nature, plays an essential role in human formation, both in individuality and in collectivity. As Cândido (2009) confirms:

> (1) it is a construction of autonomous objects as structure and meaning (2) it is a form of expression, that is, it manifests emotions and the worldview of individuals and groups; (3) it is a form of knowledge, even as a diffuse and unconscious incorporation (CÂNDIDO, 2009, p.176).

In this context, Literature exerts a significant influence on us by transmitting knowledge that results in learning. However, it is important to highlight that its performance goes beyond the simple transmission of knowledge, especially when it comes to literary productions. Literature also plays a crucial role in the articulation with human rights, as observed by Cândido (2009).

According to Cândido (2009), Literature meets a cultural and universal need, but it also has the potential to mutilate the personality. This is because literature gives shape to our feelings and our worldview, playing a humanizing role by organizing us and freeing us from chaos. When literary enjoyment is denied, we are, in a way, mutilating humanity itself.

In addition, Cândido states that Literature is a powerful instrument that awakens awareness and incites us to fight for our rights. It encompasses everything that can be considered poetic, fictional and dramatic creation, reaching all social and cultural strata, from folkloric manifestations to the most complex forms of written production of the great civilizations.

Cândido also reflects on Literature as a universal manifestation, essential for all human beings. He states that "there is no people and there is no man who can live without it, that is, without the possibility of coming into contact with some kind of fabulation" (CANDIDO, 2009, p.174). Cosson (2011) reinforces this idea, emphasizing the importance of literature in human life.

> Literature tells us what we are and encourages us to desire and express the world for ourselves. And this is because literature is an experience to be carried out, it is more than a knowledge to be re-elaborated, it is the incorporation of others in me without renouncing my own identity (COSSON, 2011, p.17).

According to Cosson's view, literary narratives encourage us to express our own desires and to interpret the world in a personal way. They function as a mirror of our experiences, but in a more elaborate way, allowing us to integrate other perspectives into our own identity without losing our individual essence.

Rojo (2011) argues that Literature accentuates the ambiguity of language, narrowing the distance between the name and the named object, while creating new meanings. For her, literary fiction opens the doors to an autonomous universe that does not dissolve with the end of reading, but continues to reverberate in the reader, becoming part of his experience and leaving a lasting mark on his literary path.

> Hence the mistake of those who think that the humanizing and formative character of literature comes from the nature of the amount of information it provides to the reader. Literature does not transmit anything. Creation gives full existence to what, without it, would remain in the chaos of the unnamed and consequently of the non-existent for each one. And, what is fundamental, at the same time that it creates, points to the provisional of creation: the world of Literature, like that of language, is the world of the possible (LAJOLO, 2000, p.43).

For Riter (2009), it is essential that the school reveals to students the importance of literary reading and the aspects that accompany it. The institution must present engaging and relevant narratives—whether they are controversial, mysterious, romantic, or epic—since, without the guidance of a teacher-reader, it is likely that many students will never have the opportunity to come across such works.

According to Aguiar and Silva (2007), the concept of Literature is intrinsically linked to language and the art of verbal expression. Reflections on Literature and teaching should start from this point. In other words, it is essential to approach the narratives, the words that make up the texts and the characters, avoiding an approach that is limited to fragments and excerpts from novels, short stories and poems, whose only purpose is to illustrate characteristics of literary periods in a superficial way.

> If the teacher decides to escape from this restricted program and teach literary reading, he tends to refuse the canonical texts because he considers them unattractive, either because of the hermeticism of the vocabulary and syntax, or because of the old theme that would be of little interest to today's students (COSSON, 2011, p.22).

The stigma associated with the complex language of the classics and the false belief that young people reject these texts because they do not reflect contemporary issues is a misconception. While it is true that literary language may seem outdated and that many terms may be unfamiliar to younger readers, this does not justify the exclusion of universal and national classics from the curriculum. Issues related to the human condition—such as love, lovelessness, passion, death, sadness, adventure, serenity, and envy—are eternal and remain relevant regardless of the era.

Calvino points out that canonical texts have lasting value and that the role of the teacher is to ensure that these texts are kept in the educational repertoire. He argues that

these texts transcend temporal barriers and still have much to offer, even in the changing circumstances of today.

> The classics are those books of which, in general, one hears it said: 'I'm reading...' and I'm never reading...' This happens at least with those people who consider it great readers; it does not apply to youth, the age when the encounter with the world and with the classics as part of the world is worth exactly as long as the first encounter. The reiterative prefix before the verb to read may be a small hypocrisy on the part of those who are ashamed to admit not having read a famous book. To reassure them, it will suffice to observe that, no matter how great an individual's formative readings may be, there is always a huge number of works that he has not read (CALVINO, p.9, 2013).

Calvino (2013) highlights the importance of the classics as a way of connecting with the world, as they are essential parts of this cultural universe. He says that these books have the power to awaken a deep passion in reading and constitute a wealth for those who read them. However, for the current generation, immersed in smartphones and characteristics of a fast and fluid modernity, these texts are often not seen as attractive or productive. According to Calvino, the problem is not in the classical texts themselves, but in the "impatience, distraction, inexperience of institutions for use, inexperience of life" that marks the modern era (CALVINO, 2013, p.10).

By revisiting a classic book in maturity, one can rediscover aspects that previously went unnoticed and reflect on what was forgotten, because the work, although it can be forgotten, leaves a mark on readers. This suggests that it may be time for the school to reconsider the criteria for selecting the titles recommended for adolescents.

Riter (2009) observes that the school has the responsibility to provide adequate tools to make these choices. However, often the options chosen are influenced more by utilitarian objectives aimed at university entrance exams than by the real literary and educational value of the texts.

> Books, as facts, never speak for themselves. Those who make them speak are mechanisms of interpretation that we use, and most of them are learned in school. Then, the literary reading that the school aims to process, aims at more than simply the entertainment that fruition reading provides. In the school environment, literature is a locus of knowledge and, in order for it to function as such, it must be explored in an appropriate way (COSSON, 2011, p.26-27).

Books like facts do not speak for themselves, but through the interpretations we attribute to them, and in school, Literature is this privileged space of knowledge, it therefore needs to be explored in an interesting and appropriate way. The PCNEM insist that Literature is an artistic manifestation that has the word as its raw material, so its teaching consists of exploring the potentialities of this written word. Cosson (2011) reiterates:

> Literature tells us what we are and encourages us to desire and express the world for ourselves. And this is because literature is an experience to be carried out, it is a knowledge to be re-elaborated, it is the incorporation of the other in us without renouncing our own identity. In the exercise of literature we can be others, we can live as others, we can break the limits of time and space of our experience and still be ourselves, That is why we internalize more intensely the truths given by poetry and fiction (COSSON, 2011. p.17).

Still on the teaching of Literature, Solé (2012) advises that literary reading can be considered as one of the most important means in school for the appropriation of new learning. The author ratifies that the greatest danger that involves the teaching of Literature is not found in the fact that teachers do not work with the text in the classroom, but how this text is being worked on. Todorov states that:

> The danger that surrounds Literature today is not, therefore, in the scarcity of good poets or fiction writers, in the exhaustion of poetic production or creation, but in the way in which literature has been offered to young people from primary school to college: the danger lies in the fact that by a strange inversion, the student does not come into contact with literature through the reading of literary texts themselves, but with some form of criticism, theory or literary history (TODOROV, 2009, p.10).

The scholar's reflection is relevant, because pedagogical practices that introduce literary fictions as an object of teaching often result in more aversion than in contribution to the formation of readers. For many high school students, literature becomes a mere school subject to be studied according to its periodization, rather than a cultural asset that offers insight into the world, human emotions, fantasy, and aspects of personal and public life.

In this context, Todorov argues that the literary text should occupy the center of the educational process, especially in Literature courses, instead of remaining on the periphery. Although many students claim to enjoy reading and recognize the importance of reading and literature, teaching practice often distances them from books. In summary, in school, there is a lot of discourse about Literature, but the effective reading of literary texts is often scarce.

CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out in this study evidenced the urgent need to review the pedagogical practices associated with the teaching of Literature in schools. The results demonstrate that current approaches, often based on fragmentation and a strictly academic view, contribute to the disengagement of young people and the negative perception of Literature as a mere school obligation. On the other hand, the inclusion of practices that

promote a richer and more contextualized interaction with classical texts can revitalize students' interest and enrich their cultural and critical formation.

The results of this research offer valuable contributions to society and academia. For society, the findings suggest that a reformulation of pedagogical practices can have a positive impact on the formation of more engaged and critical readers, capable of appreciating Literature as a means of deep understanding of the human condition. In addition, a more inclusive and meaningful approach can strengthen young people's connection with cultural and literary heritage, promoting a greater appreciation of reading and critical reflection.

For academia, this study provides a solid basis for discussion on the effectiveness of current pedagogical approaches and paves the way for new investigations into methods that may be more effective in training readers. The research also reinforces the importance of integrating literary theories and educational practices in ways that complement and support each other, creating a more dynamic and engaging learning environment.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

While the study provided significant insights, some limitations should be acknowledged. The research was restricted to a theoretical and practical analysis of pedagogical practices, without an extensive exploration of different school contexts or regional variations that could influence the results. In addition, the approach focused on a limited number of theories and practices may not capture the totality of the complexities involved in teaching literature.

For future work, it is recommended to conduct empirical studies that include a broader analysis of different educational contexts and pedagogical approaches. Further research could explore the effectiveness of specific methods in practice and assess the impact of different strategies on students' motivation and engagement with literature. In addition, it would be useful to investigate how teachers' and students' perceptions of Literature can vary and influence the effectiveness of the pedagogical practices adopted.

These investigations can provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the role of Literature in the school curriculum and contribute to the development of more effective strategies to connect young people with the literary world.

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