

CONTINUING EDUCATION OF TEACHERS IN THE EARLY YEARS: THE RELEVANCE OF TEACHING KNOWLEDGE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH LITERACY PRACTICES



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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the knowledge necessary for teachers to effectively play their role in the literacy process, while at the same time reexamining the conditions of continuous training, with the purpose of cultivating a pedagogical practice that is an autonomous, critical, reflective and responsible practice. This research aims to discuss the impact of continuing education of teachers in the early years of literacy and teaching knowledge, investigating how this knowledge acquired in continuing education contributes to the meaningful learning of children. To this end, a qualitative, descriptive and bibliographic research was carried out used for the development of this work. The theoretical framework is based on authors such as: Arena, (2021), Gatti (2016), Imbernón (2011), Jolibert (1994), Paulo Freire (2005), Smolka (2012), among others. The results of this study reveal that continuing education can, in fact, have a significant impact on the quality of literacy education. Teachers who participate in continuing education programs have improved a greater mastery of practical teaching strategies and a deeper understanding of students' needs.

Keywords: Continuing Education. Literacy. Pedagogical Practice.

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INTRODUCTION

The continuing education of literacy teachers is an extremely important field for improving the quality of education and the development of pedagogical practices aimed at literacy. This, in turn, is a decisive stage in the educational development of children, being fundamental for their academic and social success throughout life. At this stage of elementary school, teachers who work in the early years play an important role in the formation of competent readers and writers, facing significant challenges in promoting quality teaching. In this sense, this cycle in the early years of basic education plays a decisive role in building the necessary foundations for meaningful and successful learning. The continuous training of teachers emerges as a valuable resource to improve their pedagogical practices and, thus, contribute to the advancement of literacy.

It is in this context that this article addresses the relevance of teacher training and its relationship with pedagogical practices in the early years of this literacy process, with the general objective of discussing the impact of continuing education of teachers in the early years of literacy and their knowledge, investigating how they are acquired in training and how they can contribute to the improvement of pedagogical practices and, consequently, in the development of children's reading and writing skills.

The research seeks to identify the main benefits of continuing education and point out guidelines that promote the professional improvement of teachers in this hard-hitting area of education. In this context, it is essential that we explore the role of the literacy teacher and his influence on the formation of children regarding the development of reading and writing skills, going beyond the simple decoding of letters or words, but adopting a more critical and emancipatory approach in the context of literacy.

Thus, the research will be directed from the following problem: How does the continuing education of literacy teachers influence their teaching knowledge and how can this acquired knowledge be effectively applied to improve pedagogical practices? How does this teaching knowledge impact the development of children's reading and writing skills?

To support this research, we approached authors such as: Arena, (2021), Jolibert (1994), Paulo Freire (2005), Smolka (2012), Gatti (2016), as they are authors of the dialectical critical current and address points of view regarding the historical-cultural approach.

This is a research with a qualitative, descriptive and bibliographic approach used for the development of this work. We seek support in the statement of Gil (2002, p. 17), who

defines research as "the rational and systematic procedure that aims to provide answers to the problems that are proposed". Bibliographic research is based on the review and analysis of secondary sources, such as books, scientific articles, academic documents and other materials already published on the subject of study.

The work is divided into the following structure: 1) Introduction, it has been addressing the relevance of continuing education for teacher improvement, highlighting the importance of an approach that considers language as a social practice and emphasizing the need to integrate theory and practice in teacher training, developing the collective construction of knowledge and the development of reflective teachers; 2) Continuing Education as a Resource for Teacher Improvement, emphasizing the relationship between teachers' knowledge and the development of children's reading and writing skills are addressed, highlighting the relevance of literacy as a basis for educational success and the discursive and humanizing perspective in education is highlighted as a path for the formation of conscious individuals capable of facing Challenges; 3) Discussions and 4) Final considerations.

CONTINUING EDUCATION AS A RESOURCE FOR TEACHER IMPROVEMENT

The continuing education of teachers plays a prominent role in professional development processes. Its importance is amplified when it is carefully planned and carried out constantly, taking into account the specific needs of education professionals and the educational and social contexts in which they work. This confirms the intrinsic professional nature of teaching work and the existence of opportunities to constantly improve their skills. Thus, teachers become social agents capable of planning and managing the teaching-learning process, as well as intervening in the systems that shape society and their own professionalization (Imbernón, 2011).

This continuing education is recognized as one of the fundamental pillars for the improvement of teaching practices. Through courses, workshops, lectures, and other capacity-building activities, teachers have the opportunity to update their knowledge, deepen their skills, and critically reflect on their practices.

According to Freire's view:

Continuing education is one of the factors that favors the professional development of teachers, presupposing constant learning based on knowledge linked to the individual practice of each teacher (Freire 2005, p. 39).

Continuing education offers space for the discussion of innovative theories and methodologies, contributing to the adaptation of pedagogical strategies to the specific needs of children. This training process seeks to update and improve the knowledge, skills and competencies of educators, so that they can effectively deal with the challenges of teaching reading and writing.

D'Ávila and Veiga (2014) contribute that in etymology, "the term formation originates from the Latin verb *formare*", that is, this term, which originates in Latin as a transitive verb, means the action of molding, while, as an intransitive verb, it indicates the process of organizing something in a defined structure. When used reflexively, the verb "formation" implies the gradual development of a person over time (D'Ávila and Veiga, 2014).

This multifaceted conception of the term "training" reveals its complexity and depth when applied to the context of education. In the context of continuing education for teachers, this complexity becomes especially relevant, as it is not only about acquiring knowledge, but also about transforming the way educators shape the learning process.

Jolibert (1996) contributes by stating that most of the time, traditional pedagogy, and even the so-called renewed pedagogy, submerges teaching: that the effective activity is carried out by the teacher, and the children are only responsible for "understanding", "responding" or "executing" the tasks idealized by him.

The author argues for the idea that, in the pedagogical approaches mentioned, children are often not encouraged to engage in the construction of knowledge or in the development of critical and creative thinking skills. Instead, they are seen as passive receivers of information and directives from the teacher, not taking into account real situations.

As the author Jolibert points out, in which she says: "To read is to question something written as such from a real expectation (need for pleasure) in a true life situation" (Jolibert, 1996, p. 15). In this way, reading is not only the passive comprehension of the text, but an active act of questioning what is read, relating it to personal experiences and seeking pleasure and meaning in reading. The author emphasizes that reading should be relevant and meaningful to the reader's life, beyond simply decoding words and phrases. She also points out that "reading is reading real writings ranging from a street name on a sign to a book, passing through a poster, a package, a newspaper, a pamphlet, etc." (Jolibert, 1996, p. 15). However, it implies that reading involves the interpretation of a wide range of real-world texts, ranging from simple elements. The importance of both reading

and writing will be given as a fundamental skill to understand and interact with the world around us. Reading is not just limited to books and long texts, but encompasses a wide variety of written materials that we encounter in our everyday lives.

Thus, this approach can be considered limiting, since it does not promote the development of autonomy, independent thinking and problem-solving skills on the part of children. Many educators have worked to overcome this more traditional approach, seeking pedagogical strategies that involve students more actively, stimulating critical thinking and encouraging active participation in the construction of knowledge. Therefore, the need to rethink pedagogical practices to ensure that they play a more active and meaningful role in their learning process, rather than simply following tasks and instructions predetermined by the teacher, is highlighted.

That is, the teacher must become familiar with the child, understand his limitations, skills, competencies, reading and writing levels. Therefore, Smolka (2012) broadly defends "literacy process in the discursive perspective", taking into account his writings that were explored in a research involving Basic Education teachers, who analyzed the pedagogical practices related to the initial phase of children's writing, in which it discriminates, among numerous analyses, how the child's discursivity is disregarded by the school, considering them as incapable subjects when it comes to working with language. The author resorts to the concepts of Vygotsky and Bakhtin to examine situations in which language plays a central role in the process of pedagogical mediation.

Also according to Smolka (2012), by adopting a perspective that conceives language as a social practice, resulting from human action and shaped by the interaction between subjects, she sought to understand, together with a work team involved in action and research projects at school, the intricate and dynamic process of collective construction of knowledge, involving aspects such as language, language, the world, reading, writing, literature, as well as the methods of teaching reading and writing.

Therefore, it is essential that training policies promote a closer integration between theory and practice in the classroom, considering the school daily life as a central point for the implementation of changes, this will contribute to creating a conducive environment so that any doubts and conflicts can be improved in a competitive way, since the improvement of literacy teaching depends on teacher training and commitment both at the level institutional as well as individual.

Corroborates Fontana and Fávero (2013, p.4).

The teacher as a reflective professional does not act as a mere transmitter of content, but, in his interaction with students, teachers, and the entire school community, he is able to think about his practice, confronting his actions and what he believes to be correct for his professional performance with the consequences to which they lead.

According to the same authors: "the professional should never feel completely satisfied with his work and with his attitudes towards it, so that, in this way, he can always be in search of improvements in his practice" (Fontana and Fávero, 2013, p.5). Thus, for the teacher's work to be carried out satisfactorily, it is necessary to have teacher training that allows the interrelationship between theory and practice to train professionals who are reflective about their pedagogical practice.

This continuous training of the teacher is the procedure of preparation of the educator for the teaching career. These are activities that aim to guide individuals who assume the role of educating, instructing, learning, conducting research and evaluating. Therefore, continuing education must cover theoretical foundations on how children learn to read and write. Theories such as constructivism, socioconstructivism, and cognitive theories are relevant to understanding the mental processes involved in literacy.

Smolka (2012) asserts that, at the moment when a conception of language as a social practice is assumed, as a production and product of human action, which is constituted by the subjects in interaction, he aimed to understand, with a work team that developed projects of action and investigation in the school space, the dynamic and complex process of collective elaboration of knowledge – of language, of language, of the world, of reading and writing, of literature, of the ways of teaching reading and writing.

The author expresses the idea that, by adopting an approach that considers language as a social practice, that is, something that emerges from human action and is both produced and influenced by the interaction between individuals. In addition, she emphasizes the importance of investigating and improving teaching and learning methods related to language, reiterating that these processes are equally dynamic and complex.

RELEVANCE OF TEACHING KNOWLEDGE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S READING AND WRITING SKILLS

When we consider teacher training as a fundamental process in the construction of the educational future, the importance of a key element becomes evident: the mastery of teaching knowledge.

From the epistemological perspective, it is essential that this mastery of teaching knowledge is fully present at each stage of the teacher training process, as it is what will enable the concealment of the historical process of development of the knowledge to be transmitted (Gatti, 2016).

In the context of education, professional knowledge transcends theory and becomes an entity experienced through practice. This means that the work of education professionals has a direct and significant impact on various educational and social scenarios where teaching is exercised. This intrinsic relationship between theory and practice plays a fundamental role in the continuing education and performance of educators.

Imbernón (2006, p. 67), corroborates, not insofar as:

It is in a specific context that professional knowledge is converted into knowledge experienced through practice, that is, work, intervening in the various educational and social frameworks in which teaching is produced.

This transformation occurs in a specific context, in which educators play a fundamental role by intervening in the various educational and social scenarios in which there is in this dynamic scenario, in this way, knowledge becomes an essential tool to guide actions and decisions, thus shaping the effectiveness of the educational process.

In this sense, acquiring proficiency in reading and writing is unquestionably the main challenge faced by all children in the first years of their education, especially during the literacy period. In this sense, a child needs to overcome these obstacles by developing these skills, which are considered the first fundamental step for any individual who attends a school. This is decisive so that, in the future, these individuals can become independent citizens in their studies.

Understanding reading and writing implies encompassing several dimensions. In different scenarios, we can conceive of these processes as: coding, which translates into the transformation of information into written symbols; decoding, which represents the interpretation of these symbols back into understandable information.

It is, therefore, important to emphasize the complexity of reading and writing comprehension, highlighting that these processes involve several layers of understanding.

The National Curriculum Parameters (2001, p. 53) thus define reading as:

A process in which the reader performs an active work of constructing the meaning of the text, based on its objectives, its knowledge about the subject, about the author, everything it knows about the language: characteristics of the genre, the bearer, the writing system, etc.

The act of reading and writing is not limited to a simple action, but rather to a set of interrelated elements. Literacy is not just about decoding words, it is also about understanding the world around you, the child's involvement in society. Children who read and understand information have a significant advantage when it comes to actively participating in society. They can comprehend news, political and social issues, as well as make informed decisions in their community.

Children who master basic skills have a solid foundation for learning other subjects, such as math, science, and social studies. In addition, the ability to read and write well are fundamental for academic tasks, as it influences the academic success of this child, such as writing essays, doing research and understanding complex texts, that is, the development of reading and writing skills in the early years of a child is a key indicator of their future academic success.

The learning developed during the literacy process should be an action that is integrated with human activities, with the aim of facilitating people's interaction with the world through language. It is at this point that the teacher who teaches reading and writing plays a crucial role, promoting practices that encourage their students to cultivate a love of reading and writing.

Therefore, it is important for parents and educators to recognize the importance of literacy and create environments that encourage the development of these skills. This involves regular reading with children, providing access to a variety of reading materials, supporting writing development, and encouraging intellectual curiosity. Education starts at home and at school, collaboration between parents and educators is key and this collaboration between teachers, parents and educators is essential for children's progress in this area. Society as a whole plays a key role in supporting literacy. This includes public policies that promote access to books and educational resources, as well as literacy programs and public libraries that are accessible to all children.

When one learns how human beings unite with culture and communicate through students' written expressions, these written expressions, which are the focus of teaching and learning, play a fundamental role in the humanization process. Literacy, therefore, does not represent the end point of this process. In the same way, the appropriation of ideological statements does not constitute the final destination either, since the constant horizon of the journey is the continuous formation of the human being. Written language is not merely a

means of communication, but rather a hybrid mediator, made up of verbal and non-verbal signs, which facilitates social interactions and knowledge exchanges (Arena, 2023).

Thus, the more society values literacy, the more opportunities children will have to develop these skills. Undoubtedly, society's appreciation of literacy plays a crucial role in the development of language and cognitive skills in children. As society regulates the importance of literacy, more opportunities and resources are created to ensure that children have access to quality education. The appreciation of literacy is not limited only to the act of learning to read and write, but also extends to the understanding of language as an essential tool for intellectual and social development.

When a society values literacy, it is reflected in: 1) Investment in education: Governments, educational institutions, and organizations devote more resources to improving the quality of education by delivering effective literacy programs and encouraging teacher training. 2) Equal Access: Valuing literacy promotes equity by ensuring that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have equal opportunities to learn to read and write. 3) Cognitive development: Literacy is not just the acquisition of technical skills, it is also the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and understanding of complex concepts. This benefits children's intellectual development. 4) Improved communication: Literacy broadens children's ability to express themselves and communicate, allowing them to share their ideas, feelings, and knowledge more effectively. 5) Empowerment: Literate children are more likely to become active and participatory citizens in their communities, contributing to social and political development.

Therefore, the more society values literacy, the broader the opportunities that children will have to acquire and improve these fundamental skills. Promoting literacy not only enriches the lives of individuals, strengthening society as a whole, driving progress, inclusion, and access to a brighter future for future generations.

In this context, the connection between the benefits of continuing education, the valorization of literacy and education in the humanizing discursive perspective pave the way for the rupture of paradigms and stereotypes, encompasses the development of individuals involved in the school environment and the promotion of the formation of conscious human beings, capable of reflecting on daily challenges and facing them, without, however, faltering in the face of adversity.

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the research problem presented, continuing education provides teachers with the opportunity to update their teaching methodologies according to best practices and the most recent educational research. This can lead to a significant change in pedagogical practices, making them more aligned with the individual needs of children, stimulating engagement and understanding and strengthening of teaching knowledge, as continuing education not only provides additional knowledge, but also enriches teachers' teaching knowledge.

Continuous teacher training in the early years of literacy can positively impact the development of children's reading and writing skills, providing educators with more effective tools and strategies for teaching these fundamental skills. In this way, the teaching knowledge acquired can be effectively applied to improve pedagogical practices, and impacting the level of proficiency of children in reading and writing over time.

The literacy teacher who has experienced an initial training to enter the job market, starts to experience a reality very different from that experienced in the academic environment. In the relationship between theory and practice in the school environment, specifically in literacy classrooms, she begins to observe how challenging it is to work on reading and writing from a humanizing perspective. It is necessary to experience the processes of continuing education so that he has knowledge about the conceptions of literacy and how to use them during pedagogical practices. This teacher training can take place within an education system offered by a municipal, state or federal network, as well as seek training opportunities in a particular way in search of new horizons of how to work on literacy today.

In a school network, the education departments can, in dialogue with school managers, coordinators and teachers of the literacy classrooms, emphasize the main needs and challenges faced in the school space with regard to children's proficiency in reading and writing, as well as know family relationships and how the family can contribute to the education of their children. Carrying out this moment of listening to the reality of children in the learning processes, it is necessary to systematize moments of continuous studies on the pedagogical practices of literacy, highlighting the main themes to be studied through professionals invited by the school network or by the pedagogical technical team working in the departments of education.

A continuous training on literacy, when carried out under the teacher's gaze and its dialogical and discursive relations, can provide children in this process, opportunities for reading and writing in relation to real life, the use of texts that bring as references, significant learning that is important for children during the human acts provided by the teacher, the valorization of the environment in which they are inserted, bringing into the school, their previous knowledge, their cultures and their social relations.

During the human relations of literacy between the student and the educator who had the opportunity to experience spaces of teacher training, he starts to carry out pedagogical practices bringing writing with meaning so that the student can have a look at the importance of learning to read and write in order to make them readers and producers of text, in search of understanding the textual genres presented by the educator, without the need to encode and decode syllables and words written in a decontextualized way.

As suggestions for future research that follow the effects of continuing education over several years can provide a more complete understanding of its long-term impact on teaching practices and student performance, compare different approaches to continuing education, such as face-to-face courses or training.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Continuing education is not limited to transmitting only information, it aims to transform the way educators approach teaching and learning. Teachers learn to apply new strategies and methodologies in their classrooms, effectively incorporating the knowledge gained into their daily practices.

Regarding the critical importance of continuing education in education, especially in the early years, where the foundations of learning are conditional, we call attention to the need for research to assess how continuing education is actually impacting teaching practices and student outcomes, in order to guide the development of more effective programs. However, the challenges in implementing continuing education cannot be underestimated.

The availability of financial resources, time, and adequate infrastructure remain a barrier for many educators. Therefore, it is imperative that educational institutions and education bodies invest not only in teacher training, but also in conditions that allow them to participate in these programs effectively.

As we move forward, it is imperative that educational research and policy continue to evolve. The goal should be to create continuing education programs that are adaptable, targeted to the specific needs of teachers, and based on solid evidence. In addition, collaboration between educators, schools and higher education institutions should be encouraged to ensure quality literacy education in the early years.

The results of the reviewed studies reveal that continuing education can, in fact, have a significant impact on the quality of literacy education. Teachers who participate in continuing education programs have a greater opportunity to acquire mastery of practical teaching strategies and a deeper understanding of children's needs. These improvements are reflected in their performance in reading and writing skills, evidencing the positive relationship between teacher training and educational success.

In the final analysis, this study reinforces the importance of continuing education in the promotion of effective teaching practices in the early years of literacy. The commitment to the constant training of teachers not only benefits the teaching staff, effectively improving their pedagogical practices, but, more importantly, it benefits future generations, preparing children for a life of academic and social success.

Reading and writing skills remain crucial throughout life. Adults who are proficient in these areas have more career opportunities and are better prepared to face the challenges of modern life, consequently becoming successful and informed adults. Being able to access information, communicate effectively at work and in personal life, as well as continue learning throughout life.

In summary, literacy is a decisive investment in children's futures, affecting not only their academic success but also their ability to become informed and successful citizens. It is a shared responsibility between parents, educators, and society as a whole to ensure that children have the opportunity to fully develop their reading and writing skills from an early age.

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