

WHAT WILL NEW LITERACY CLASSROOMS IN COLOMBIA LOOK LIKE IN
THE NEAR FUTURE?

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TODAY'S LITERACY CLASSROOM AND TEACHER

How meaningful can it be for a little girl to read with her father? Some years ago, that experience was normal for many Colombian families, especially on Sunday mornings, when the newspaper came to their homes and both, father and daughter could share a good time reading it together, after breakfast. He obviously was concentrating on the news and the economy, but she was absorbed with cartoons and short articles about the simple situations of life, it would be better if they were accompanied by images. But, that moment was not just for enjoying reading together, but more to share and feel that they were a part of a big and united family that could talk about the latest events of the week. It could establish a special interaction between the family members. The reading could be discussed and unconsciously create an interest for more reading later, not just to read the newspaper but also some books that could be a mandatory for school.

However, what is happening today? Most of the families are not sharing time together and thus reading less. On the other hand, the U.S. newspaper industry has lost more than \$40 billion in ad revenue in the past decade-over half of that in the last four years alone-and Google's ad revenues are now more than twice what the industry pulls in. (Ingram, 2013). Fortunately we can say that phenomenon is happening in another country, it has not yet reached us, but for how long? Colombia cannot be indifferent of what is occurring around us. What will be the future for newspapers? Or what will be the future of books?

Today, in our classrooms, students read a lot, but what are they reading? Are they able to take advantage of the technological tools that this globalized world has to offer? And, if so, how are they doing that?

I interviewed Camila (anonymous name) and here we have her answers:

Margarita: What do you usually read?

Camila: literature and romantic Reading.

M: Which ones?

C: Bajo la misma estrella, tesoros en la nieve, la estación violenta.

M: Do you use eBook or physical book?

C: Physical

M: Why?

C: It is not the same feeling to be in front of a screen as the feeling of a physical book in my hands.

M: Why do you read?

C: Because I can learn many things...spelling, writing and also because it's my time to relax and think about other things, I absorb information about the author and the book.

M: How do you read?

C: I like to read alone in the peace of my bedroom.

These interviews were acquired by Facebook, with two of the school's students.

Another student was interviewed and here is her answer:

Margarita: What do you do with your cell phone?

Sandra: I read, chat, and listen to music.

M: What kind of books do you read?

S: Romantics like Romeo and Juliet, Eclipse, New Moon, Twilight, Breaking Dawn.

M: What do you prefer more, eBooks or hard copy books?



S: Both

M: But, what do you prefer most?

S: Hard copy books, because the flashing light of the screen is not good for my eyes.

M: Why do you read?

S: I like to use non common words when I speak or write. With reading I learn many new things, words, calligraphy, and new ways of expression my feelings. Also, I want to create a good habit of reading now, and not have problems later when I am studying in the University.

M: What is the main reason for reading?

S: To learn, see new ways of expression, understand about important people in history, and occupy my free time.

M: How do you read?

S: I like to read everywhere, especially outdoors, I always enjoy reading, especially in my room listening piano music.

Both interviews show a clear interest for reading, and also for what kind of books they read, one of them preferred to read physical books and liked both, physical and eBooks Regarding how they read, they use different modes of reading. Camila prefers do it in a quiet and peaceful setting, without any distractions, while Sandra is more comfortable reading in her bedroom listening music.

Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. Society and technology changes, so does literacy. (Committee, 2008)

A few years ago, imagining a world so dependent on technology was hard to



comprehend, and some of us teachers thought of technology as a threat to our profession, being replaced by eBooks or computer programs. However, the job of the

Illustration 1. Two students doing use of new technologies.

teacher remains intact, and more important than ever, even with the evolution of reading methods.

The defendants of eBook technologies argue that their product reduces environment damage, in contrast with the environmental damage caused paper production for print materials like newspapers, magazines and books.

Together, paper production for books and newspapers emit the equivalent of nearly 34.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide every year. (Levingston, 2002) While this seems to give motivation for the e- readers, not so fast says Green Press initiative program manager Todd Pollack:

“It is almost certain that e-readers have the potential to reduce the impacts associated with harvesting trees and forest conversion, but it does not guarantee that they are the better choice from an environmental standpoint” (Levingston,2002)

Also, some years ago, the idea of literacy was focused on adult teaching, it is defined as the ability to print and write information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential (white,2003). The young readers that I interviewed have a clear desire, and enjoy reading. However, the types of reading they like are different than that of adults. Also, their methods of reading are changing. Some of today’s youth have a preference to read eBooks, and use their

computer or smart phone to read. This is breaking tradition from the newspaper reading that their parents have done for years. Also, the content they read is more suited to their lifestyles and heroes of today.

An interview acquired from a colleague showed that there is a big interest for reading and it's changing the way that we sense the world.

Margarita: What do you read?

David: I read what makes sense for me, what helps support my lifestyle, and I believe that it's normal for my surroundings, because many people I associate with read Colombian literature, history, and technology.

Margarita: How do you select your readings?

David: I read about investigations, technology and that is something that surprises me that it interests me!

Margarita: What kind of reader do you consider yourself?

David: I consider myself a different type of reader, because I do not like to read what typical people read. The typical person tends to read literature or history. I prefer to read things that grab my attention, for example a good title of a book, can captivate me, only if it is of my personal interest, but this is not the only preference of mine. I also need to like the graphic designs, because I think pictures says more than words. And finally, the author of the book is important to consider when choosing my books. If I am familiar with the author, I know his writing style and it is easier for me to read.

Margarita: Do you read about self esteem?

David: no, definitely not, I have any preference for this kind of reading.

Margarita: So, do you prefer books according your interests?

David: Sure, that improves my knowledge, like biology, technology, medicine, also to listening to people, because listening is the best way to learn. A video, a movie teaches more than just a course.

Margarita: Have you noticed that value of listening in your students?

David: No, they do not want to listen, because most of them are reading about superficiality things of life, like pop stars, or movie stars unrealistic lifestyles.

Sometimes their minds are in what we may consider an unrealistic fantasy world, but in reality, they have different preferences. There are some exceptions, students that have real interests in important things like science and technology.

Margarita: How can we as teachers wake the interest for critical reading in our students?

David: More than interest, I think it is necessary to read about what they like to read. To motivate them to read, what they as students like to read. For example I like to read about technology and I can show them how to do it.

Margarita: Have you found a way to interest students to read with senses?

David: It is a complex issue, but for me it's easier to teach with visual tools that more motive my students than the traditional way of magisterial class.

The interviewed teacher shows the reality of our students reading preference. The way we read is changing not only how, but also what. The traditional paper is a dying traditional method of reading as evident by the trends ongoing in The United States. The children of today have different preferences of reading. Smart phones eBooks, tabloids etc. However, they still like to read. We as teachers must exploit their desire to read, and make them productive. Maybe it's time to utilize some of their preferences, and new technologies in our teaching methods to help motivate them to read more productive topics.

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