

## Didactic strategies around reading used in initial teacher training in Spain

### Estrategias didácticas en torno a la lectura empleadas en la formación inicial del profesorado en España

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#### Abstract

Didactic strategies around reading used in initial teacher training in Spain can have an impact on the teaching practices of future teachers in the Primary Education classrooms. This article presents a qualitative study in which 73 university professors have participated on the teaching strategies they follow when teaching subjects related to the teaching of reading and literature in the Primary Education Degree in the Spanish university. The analysis of the data has allowed identifying numerous teaching practices and organize them around three main categories: didactic strategies directed to the development of academic abilities, directed to know teaching abilities and directed to the development of reading practices in the students. It is possible to conclude that teachers employ a great diversity of methods and activities, which are complementary, with a strong innovative and practical component, which serve a dual purpose: to favour an affective approach of teaching students towards reading and literature and provide to this one of the theoretical-practical tools that help him to develop his work of reading mediation successfully.

#### Resumen

Las estrategias didácticas en torno a la lectura en la formación inicial del profesorado pueden repercutir en las prácticas docentes de los futuros maestros en las aulas de la Educación Primaria. En este artículo se presenta un estudio cualitativo en el que han participado 73 profesores universitarios sobre las estrategias didácticas que siguen al impartir materias relacionadas con la didáctica de la lectura y la literatura en el Grado de Educación Primaria en la universidad española. El análisis de los datos ha permitido identificar numerosas prácticas docentes y organizarlas en torno a tres grandes categorías: estrategias didácticas dirigidas al desarrollo de habilidades académicas, dirigidas a conocer habilidades docentes y dirigidas al desarrollo de prácticas lectoras en los estudiantes. Es posible concluir que los docentes emplean una gran diversidad de métodos y actividades, que resultan complementarios, con un fuerte componente innovador y práctico, que responden a una doble finalidad: favorecer una aproximación afectiva del alumnado de magisterio hacia la lectura y la literatura y dotar a este de las herramientas teórico-prácticas que le ayuden a desarrollar su labor de mediación lectora con éxito.

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## Introduction

In addition to teaching to read, future Primary School teachers should promote reading for pleasure and encourage literary reading (Bustos, Montenegro, Tapia & Calfual, 2017; Caride, Carballo & Gradaílle, 2018; Neira, 2015). This is especially difficult for fledging teachers because of their lack of experience when dealing with students, literary works and school libraries. Likewise, different studies have shown that teacher's training, resources and willingness to promote reading in Primary Education vary substantially and, in general terms, they have also shown that their reading experiences are limited (Felipe, 2016; Ferreyro & Stramiello, 2008; Munita, 2013).

Initial training in the subject becomes very important in order to act with teaching professionalism (Granado & Puig, 2014; Lockwood, 2011; Leland, 2013; Munita, 2013; Pascual-Gómez & Carril-Martínez, 2017; Serna, Rodríguez & Etxaniz, 2017). In the process of initial training of Primary School teachers, these functions are specifically addressed in the subjects of Language and Literature Didactics. Although this initial training has notable shortcomings (limited presence in the different curricula, excessively broad framework of action, unstable teaching staff, etc.), it is necessary to know the different didactic strategies used by university teaching staff in the context of reading training of future teachers. In the teaching-learning methodology at university, an integrative approach to reading can be developed providing a balance between an academic task and a leisure activity; one which can generate future teachers trained to promote reading mediation in Primary Education, removing "dualistic ways of thinking" (Rosenblatt, 2002, p.15).

Several studies conducted with university students have highlighted their important

reading limitations. For example, it is stressed that: (1) there is a growing number of students who declare themselves non-readers due to a lack of intrinsic motivation, (2) their reading habits are insufficient, and (3) university teachers regret the reading deficiencies junior students have as they interfere with their academic understanding (Felipe, 2016; Larrañaga, Yubero & Cerrillo, 2008; Vidal-Moscoso & Manríquez-López, 2016). The study conducted by Roldán & Zabaleta (2017) showed significant discrepancies between performance and self-perception in terms of reading and understanding academic texts. Likewise, the study conducted by Parodi, Moreno-de-León, Cristóbal & Burdiles (2019) shows a transition in reading habits (which they call the Gutenberg-Google transition), although they admit and attach great importance to paper support for academic purposes.

This situation is also shown in the Degree in Primary Education in Spain, as reflected in different works. We will focus on four recent ones: (1) The study conducted by Granado (2014) showed that a large proportion of students declare themselves non-readers or have many shortcomings in their reading habits (both in terms of academic reading and reading as a leisure activity). (2) Munita's research (2014) contributed to determine the existence of an illusory literary competence, since wide literary corpuses are not at stake and respondents normally read best-sellers on a discontinuous basis. (3) Felipe's study (2016) concludes that a troubling 67.8% of future teachers state that they do not like reading or that they read sporadically (they read occasionally or when they are on vacation) and only 6.9% of students self-qualify as a hardcore reader. (4) The study by Caride, Carballo & Gradaílle (2018), conducted with 733 students of the Degree in Teacher Training from the University of Santiago de Compostela, shows that 40.7% of students identify themselves as non-readers, 30.2% as occasional readers and only 29.1% as frequent readers.

These data are worrying and can negatively determine their professional practice as promoters of reading among future teachers. Action is required in three areas in order to revert these trends: public policies, educational institutions and personal appraisal of teachers towards reading (Ferreyro & Stramiello, 2008). Crucial to this change is the role of university teachers and rethinking university didactics, and more specifically Language and Literature Didactics (DLL, as per its Spanish acronym). According to Mendoza (2018), university education follows a routine practice; there is little incentive towards the reading process itself, as well as an absence of reading circles and a low use of didactic strategies that help to train efficient, competent readers. In order to train a teacher-reader, it is necessary to broaden the purpose of reading and the space-time scope of reading practices (Ferreyro & Stramiello, 2008).

Aguilar, Cruz & Aguilar (2014) demand that university teachers play a more important role in promoting the habit of reading among their students. They also demand that universities implement institutional policies to create spaces and opportunities for reading and leisure time, highlighting the importance of specifically developing these skills in the training of future teachers. In this line, Mendoza (2018) recommends using didactic strategies that allow students to discover and enjoy reading and writing, generating possibilities of success in the learning process.

In this article, we present a study that gathers the didactic approaches and reading practices that take place in the Degree in Primary Education, showing the multiple approaches and the attempts of university teachers to overcome some of their difficulties.

## Method

The overall objective of this work is to identify the various teaching practices put into practice

by expert teachers in DLL that teach DLL-related subjects in the Degree in Primary Education in Spain. Our specific objectives are: (1) having the participation of teachers from all the autonomous communities and from public and private universities, (2) taking evidence of their testimonies about the didactic strategies used by them in the teaching-learning process of DLL-related subjects they teach and (3) performing a content analysis that leads us to categorise the responses received. To this end, we designed a qualitative study following the steps of previous studies (Álvarez, 2018; Felipe, 2016).

We presume that there will be multiple teaching experiences, that we will be able to identify different models of teaching-learning practices and that a wide range of relevant didactic approaches will be known on the whole.

A questionnaire was designed for teachers who teach DLL in Spanish universities, consisting of several open-ended questions related to the methodology used in the didactics of reading and literature classes. A pilot questionnaire was previously presented to a small number of renowned expert teachers in the area of knowledge. Once their suggestions were collected, slight modifications were included and the final questionnaire was drafted.

In order to determine the target population, we had to analyse the teaching guides for each academic year of the studies of the Degree in Primary Education of all Spanish universities. The various denominations given to the subjects and, sometimes, the lack of coherence or rigour between the subject names and the contents included therein, forced us to check in detail whether the subject taught fit the purpose of this study. After identifying the subjects deemed to be relevant for our purpose, the responsible teachers were identified.

The questionnaire was sent via a tailored email to all teachers teaching DLL-related

subjects. The number of subjects in the participating sample exceeds 30% of the total number of teachers in the population. 73 responses were obtained from teachers belonging to 45 different universities, located in the 17 autonomous communities of Spain, with greater representation of those where there are more universities. The responses were obtained from public and private institutions, from men and women, and from more and less experienced teachers. The teachers who participated in this study are distributed as set forth in table 1.

After the information was collected, the data were organised and analysed, following the guidelines of content analysis, since all of them are of a qualitative nature, giving rise to a series of emerging categories, which structure the results heading.

In order to ensure that our research was rigorous and met all the usual ethical standards

(independence, confidentiality, anonymity, etc.) in this study: (1) we contacted each participant individually, (2) we contacted men and women from public and private universities of all the autonomous communities, without any discrimination, (3) we asked neutral questions, so that no positioning on the part of the researchers would be perceived, (4) and we analysed the answers maintaining confidentiality and anonymity.

## Results

The data analysis allowed us to group the teaching strategies of the participating teachers into three main categories: for the development of academic skills, teaching skills and reading practices. When presented, relevant testimonies of the participating teachers are inserted to help illustrate the different didactic strategies.

Table 1  
*Number of collaborators by autonomous community and universities involved*

| <b>Autonomous communities</b> | <b>Number of universities involved</b> | <b>Number of respondents Men</b> | <b>Number of respondents Women</b> | <b>Total number of respondents</b> |
|-------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Galicia                       | 4                                      | 3                                | 3                                  | 6                                  |
| Asturias                      | 1                                      | 0                                | 1                                  | 1                                  |
| Cantabria                     | 1                                      | 0                                | 1                                  | 1                                  |
| Basque Country                | 1                                      | 2                                | 1                                  | 3                                  |
| Castile and León              | 4                                      | 2                                | 4                                  | 6                                  |
| Madrid                        | 6                                      | 3                                | 3                                  | 6                                  |
| Navarre                       | 1                                      | 0                                | 1                                  | 1                                  |
| La Rioja                      | 1                                      | 0                                | 2                                  | 2                                  |
| Aragón                        | 1                                      | 4                                | 1                                  | 5                                  |
| Catalonia                     | 6                                      | 5                                | 4                                  | 9                                  |
| Valencian Community           | 6                                      | 4                                | 6                                  | 10                                 |
| Murcia                        | 2                                      | 2                                | 1                                  | 3                                  |
| Andalusia                     | 6                                      | 6                                | 4                                  | 10                                 |
| Castile-La Mancha             | 1                                      | 1                                | 3                                  | 4                                  |
| Extremadura                   | 1                                      | 1                                | 0                                  | 1                                  |
| Balearic Islands              | 1                                      | 0                                | 1                                  | 1                                  |
| Canary Islands                | 2                                      | 3                                | 1                                  | 4                                  |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>45</b>                              | <b>36</b>                        | <b>37</b>                          | <b>73</b>                          |

### **Teaching strategies aimed at the development of academic skills**

Many of the teachers participating in this study mentioned the need to work on texts and ideas coming from the field of research in Reading and Children's and Youth Literature (LIJ, as per its Spanish acronym) in their classes, on the elaboration of planning tasks (reading plans, didactic programmes, small research) and on the use of technological resources. The basic premise is that one cannot be a good Primary Education teacher without reflecting on the implications of the reading process, without knowing relevant DLL studies or without reading the works of academics and researchers. *"I try that the work performed in the classroom leads to reflect on the socio-educational processes and on reading learning, dealt with using succinct bibliographical references"* (Teacher 8).

The practices indicated in this regard are:

- Master classes in which the theoretical foundations of the subject are presented. *"I try to ensure that the theoretical framework is always articulated with practice and in the classroom we construct that framework based on the Socratic dialogue, on my contribution as a teacher and on shared knowledge at many levels"* (Teacher 17).
- Work with legal and standard-setting texts to know them and to implement practices according to the Law. *"We refer to regulations and legal requirements"* (Teacher 31).
- Development of activities that can be implemented in Primary Education classrooms based on works available in each educational centre's library. *"Among other things, in their practices, they have to prepare "real class sketches". They prepare activities, projects in small groups...for today's Primary School classroom. And they present their proposals to the big group. We comment on them, etc."* (Teacher 7).
- Preparation of didactic units. *"Developing didactic units in which the potentialities of the materials used in the classroom are addressed"* (Teacher 1).
- Reading of monographs or specific chapters/scientific papers/divulgarion articles, etc. *"In class, we comment on monographs and informative and/or research publications"* (Teacher 2).
- Use and dissemination of specific LIJ-related websites. *"The section of children's and youth literature of the Miguel de Cervantes Virtual Library is an essential resource that unfortunately is not sufficiently exploited. It has enough texts for the different stages, but above all it has a selection of academic texts (Mendoza, Colomer, Cerrillo, García Padrino, Rodríguez Almodóvar, Lluçh...) that is essential to train literary readers"* (Teacher 18).
- Reading of Reading Plans of the educational centre and performing a critical analysis in class following the guidelines provided by the teacher and/or developing a new one. *"We also access to reading promotion plans currently in place in schools, and an attempt is made to jointly design one of their own"* (Teacher 32).
- Preparation of Reading Promotion Plans. *"In groups, they prepare a plan for the promotion of reading on the basis of the guidelines which I propose to them"* (Teacher 22).
- Conducting research during internships in educational centres. *"We conduct small field research whenever possible and as a result of the Practicum"* (Teacher 2).
- Carrying out in-depth work by means of a Degree Final Project (TFG, as per its Spanish acronym). *"These aspects directly related to didactic approaches for the childhood or primary education classroom can be addressed when preparing the TFG"* (Teacher 10).
- Expert visits (librarians, researchers, etc.).
- Creation, use and/or exploitation of technological means and resources:
  - Moodle. *"The virtual classroom that organises and structures our work. Thanks to it, we have access to hypermodal and hypertextual materials of all kinds, access to hundreds of forums that supplement and expand the information we work on in the classroom with specific materials linked to each subject on the curriculum"* (Teacher 20).
  - Twitter. *"We create group accounts on Twitter used by them to follow writers, publishers, reading promotion platforms and, using a hashtag, the students also invited us to*

discover their reading promotion proposals. These accounts gave us the opportunity to contact renowned writers such as Agustín Fernández Paz or Leticia Costas, for example, who always answered our questions warmly and encouraged the students to keep encouraging their primary school students to read in the future" (Teacher 3).

- Youtube. "We developed a promotion project that this year will be about the creation of a Booktuber" (Teacher 22).
- Webs. "We created a web page with activities and resources aimed at reading promotion and literary education" (Teacher15).
- Blogs. "We propose activities and tasks related to the study websites/blogs of school libraries" (Teacher 22).

#### ***Didactic strategies aimed at the development of teaching skills for the development of the reading competence and promotion***

Most of the participants mentioned the need to deal -theoretically or practically- with the development of didactic strategies aimed at the development of teaching skills. Collaboration with institutions, teachers or experts and knowledge on experiences and innovative techniques is relevant. The basic approach is that one cannot be a good primary school teacher without knowing potential working techniques in the classroom. "They must know what strategies should be put in place when a child does not want to read and how to encourage them to read" (Teacher 21).

The practices indicated in this regard are:

- Deep reflection on one's own experience as a primary education student. "I ask them to reflect on their own reading experiences in their childhood and adolescence that were full of meaning in order to analyse and understand them. To that end, I usually ask them to present a book that they remember with special affection to their colleagues and give details of the reasons why they read it, how they read it, thanks to whom they read it, and so on. Thanks to these excerpts

of reading biographies, which are usually seen as 'anecdotes', they become aware of the successes and mistakes made in literary education during childhood and adolescence" (Teacher 24).

- Oral narration of stories by students or experts. "Storytellers visit us and share their techniques" (Teacher 35).
- Literary dialogues. "I would like to highlight the literary dialogues. They are very enriching and motivate students of all ages" (Teacher 6).<sup>1</sup>
- Reading clubs. "Reading clubs created in the different libraries are an excellent basis for didactic training" (Teacher 27).<sup>2</sup>
- Literary creation workshops. "Creation of a corner or a workshop for literary creation in childhood or primary education" (Teacher 15).
- Projects. "In our case, we work following the project-based learning methodology. Therefore, students are quite free to promote their own didactic initiatives, as long as they comply with the minimum requirements all projects must adhere to. A playful approach to the teaching process is also promoted" (Teacher 26).
- Role-playing. "My work is based on role-playing and orality to create teachers with resources in terms of voice and reading aloud and who are able to work on theatre and storytelling" (Teacher 35).
- Use of techniques such as Kamishibai and/or puppets. "I teach some material resources that are close to the students so that they know how to use them, such as Kamishibai theatres, puppets, etc." (Teacher 4).
- Development of ideas shown in specific books: "we use Pennac, Tonucci, Rodari - their strategies to promote fantasy through language" (Teacher 35).
- Collaboration with people and institutions:
  - Teachers. "We collaborate with teachers who present their real experiences on these subjects" (Teacher 6).
  - Children. "In addition, bringing to my classes children who like reading so that they can talk about their tastes and experiences" (Teacher 24).
  - Authors (whether prize-winning or not) and/or illustrators of LIJ. "I insist on approaching everything around the world of

books through talks with authors and illustrators, talks with librarians..." (Teacher 9).

- School libraries and regional or municipal public libraries. "I also plan to carry out one of the practice sessions in the children's room of the city's Public Library" (Teacher 8).
- Educational centres. "They also have to carry out practices in schools: study the school library; reading promotion sessions using the Sarto techniques; role-playing dynamics and dramatised reading of theatre plays, etc." (Teacher 32).
- Associations. "I am delighted to chair an association that performs activities such as reading aloud in hospitals, prisons, schools, shelters for battered women, associations of mental health users, associations of mothers and fathers, health centres..., which helps me to help them get out of the simplistic view of school reading and to broaden their awareness to understand reading in all its complexity" (Teacher 24).
- Foundations. "On the other hand, the House of the Reader of the Germán Sánchez Ruipérez Foundation offers us ten scholarships a year for courses and weekend workshops for students" (Teacher 35).
- Next relevant initiatives. "We try to keep abreast of the most innovative initiatives in our environment" (Teacher 14).
- Implementation of innovative projects. "We just celebrated the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading Promotion Day, with almost 90 children from the Grade 1 of Primary Education, in our university, where they came to visit us. We have thus articulated the whole subject around this project, in the context of which the students have worked, in teams, on nine books of children's and youth literature, some of them being great classics and others more up-to-date, which they choose from an extensive list" (Teacher 16).
- Pedagogic out-of-school activities. "We visit renowned public and school libraries" (Teacher 14).

### ***Didactic strategies aimed at the development of reading practices and experiences of literary creation***

All the teachers participating in this study mentioned the need for future teachers to know Children's and Youth Literature, to read it, to enjoy it, to share it, to reinvent it, to create it, etc. The basic approach is that one cannot be a good primary school teacher without knowing a canon of readings and without having read a large number of LIJ works that can be approached with children. "I guess this is the great challenge but I have not been able to give a definite answer for it: how can future teachers -so sceptical of reading themselves- transmit a faith they lack? If at least they were like the priest of Unamuno's novel... In conclusion, it is obvious that the rhetorical motto "read and make them read" is not enough" (Teacher 8).

The practices indicated in this regard are:

- Development of a reading plan. "We analyse the reading plans offered to teachers by a series of publishers, and they must develop a personal reading plan elaborated in group" (Teacher 22).
- Voluntary reading of LIJ works outside the classroom. "The basic idea is reading, understanding, enjoying, sharing and generating systematic, scheduled and broad extensive dynamics" (Teacher 26).
- Compulsory reading of LIJ works outside the classroom. "They read series of LIJ classics, combining compulsory readings with others reading of their choice" (Teacher 4).
- Specific reading of classics and/or adapted classics. "I persistently advocate for reading classics already in Primary Education and I recommend them not giving their students those adaptations aimed at childish minds, not infantile minds. I urge them to contextualise any presentation of a classic, to take into account its reception today and to approach literature teaching based on the topics that form the backbone of the entire history of universal literature" (Teacher 36).

- Presentation of the works read to their classmates. *"A presentation by groups is made for the reading of classics. Each group has a literary genre and fifty minutes to explain it to their classmates"* (Teacher 29).
- Literary analysis and criticism by genre. *"My classes are related to in-depth analysis of stories"* (Teacher 13).
- Leaving books in the classroom to read and exchange them. *"Free book: I "leave" some books in the classroom so that students can take them home, read them and pass them on"* (Teacher 37).
- Presentation of exciting books. *"I usually propose an activity to my students in order to work on oral expressions that is about making a 'youtube style' video presenting the ten childhood and youth books that marked their lives to a greater extent"* (Teacher 8).
- Creation of book trailers, reading guides, literary routes and training for library users. *"On the basis of book trailers, we develop reading guides, literary routes, training for library users (both readers and administrators), comments on texts..."* (Teacher 31).
- Creative writing after LIJ reading. *"One of the practices proposed this academic year is related to creative writing: after reading a series of stories by classic authors such as Julio Cortázar or Jorge Luis Borges, the student makes up a story based on the contemplation of a famous painting of art history or after listening to a musical motif carefully"* (Teacher 19).
- Writing LIJ works. *"In order to work on written expression, I ask them to write their own stories"* (Teacher 8).
- Digital writing using digital tools. *"In groups, students create their own story by mixing different literary texts using the Storyboard application"* (Teacher 16).

## Conclusions

First of all, the diversity of teaching strategies used by teachers is noteworthy. This may

be the result of multiple factors: the diversity of training contexts, of teaching plans and of the different configuration of the subjects linked to the DLL in Spanish universities; the importance of a didactic tradition that cannot respond to the needs of today's students, which demand new approaches, and to the demands of new methodological approaches, which demand that literary education includes both "knowledge, know-how, knowing how it is done, expressing opinions and feeling" (Ballester & Ibarra, 2009); the shortcomings in training of university teachers themselves, which leads them to explore alternative methodological possibilities, in which creative tasks and with technological means become increasingly important; limitations at the level of reading competence and reading habits (both academic and as a leisure activity) of a significant part of the students, as well as the surprisingly low levels of enthusiasm for reading found in future teachers (Applegate et al., 2009).

In second place, the difficulty of structuring or categorising the multiple strategies used by DLL teachers is obvious. Although it is true that some have a more marked theoretical or practical nature, or imply more specific activities or projects of greater or lesser scope, most of them normally share several common features. In this case, we chose a type of categorisation that responds to three lines of work that are complementary. With regard to didactics of training for future teachers, it is necessary to master: a) strategies aimed at the development of academic skills, emphasising knowledge on research and works of a more theoretical nature, in aspects of teacher planning and in the use of technological and other type of resources; b) didactic strategies aimed at the development of teaching skills that enhance progress in terms of reading competence of future schoolchildren and, in parallel, the work of reading mediation and c) didactic strategies aimed at the development of reading practices and tasks of literary creation that promote reading experiences among future



teachers personal that could later project on their lives and on the exercise of their profession.

In third place, it is noted that most of them believe that this broad range of activities serves a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it promotes an affective approach by students towards reading and literature, as a prerequisite for achieving the second objective, of a didactic nature: providing future teachers with a wide range of theoretical-practical tools to help them carry out their reading mediation work (Colomer & Munita, 2013). It does not seem possible to advocate for a didactic training that does not take into account the development of the reading and literary competence of future teachers and greater affective involvement by the latter towards reading.

Finally, highlighting the innovative approach and the attitude of searching for motivating strategies must be emphasised, with an eminently practical approach, which is found in the set of tasks indicated by the teachers participating in this work. Furthermore, these approaches are not exempt from the necessary reflection and analysis on the didactic value of the proposals, which prevents from having gimmicky approaches. Likewise, in many of their testimonies, teachers express concerns that students, in addition to acquiring knowledge or techniques, analyse and evaluate their didactic potential and their personal beliefs and attitudes towards reading. A large pool of university teachers endeavours to respond to their training needs by proposing a broad range of innovative practices and practical tasks. Obviously, the aim is to respond to today's approaches to reading and literary didactics, but also to make a friendlier vision of reading and a "reading and literary re-education" possible for many students, who need to detach themselves from a distorted vision of reading and literary education.

Nevertheless, it would be necessary to develop further research that analyse the students' own

vision regarding the strategies used at university or to conduct specific studies on the usefulness of specific didactic strategies.

## Notes

1. For further information, please refer to Álvarez, 2018.
2. For further information, please refer to Álvarez, 2018.

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