

**The power of literary education: shaping critical readers and
transformative citizens – an interview with the portuguese professor
Fernando Azevedo¹**

**O poder da educação literária: formando leitores críticos e cidadãos transformadores –
uma entrevista com o professor Fernando Azevedo**

**El poder de la educación literaria: formando lectores críticos y transformando a los
ciudadanos – entrevista con el profesor Fernando Azevedo**

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Abstract

Among the field of national and international discussions about literary education, the studies of prof. Fernando Azevedo stand out. Thus, an interview was conducted with prof. Fernando Associate Professor with Aggregation at the Institute of Education of the University of Minho (Braga, Portugal), where he is responsible for conducting undergraduate and graduate curricular units in the areas of Portuguese Language Didactics and Reader Training. In the interview, the author points out different aspects that involve literary education, expanding the understanding of literary mediation, reading comprehension and literacy in the teaching of literature in schools.

Keywords: Literary education; Reading mediation; Reading comprehension; Literacy.

Resumo

Dentre o campo de discussões nacionais e internacionais acerca da educação literária, destaca-se os estudos do prof. Fernando Azevedo. Dessa forma, realizou-se uma entrevista com o prof. Fernando prof. Associado com Agregação do Instituto de Educação da Universidade do Minho (Braga, Portugal), onde é o responsável pela regência de unidades curriculares de graduação e de pós-graduação nas áreas da Didática da Língua Portuguesa e da Formação de Leitores. Na entrevista o autor aponta diferentes aspectos que envolvem a educação literária, ampliando a compreensão a respeito da mediação literária, da compreensão leitora e de literacia no ensino da literatura nas escolas.

Palavras-chave: Educação literária; Mediação da leitura; Compreensão leitora; Literacia.

Resumen

Entre el campo de las discusiones nacionales e internacionales sobre la educación literaria, se destacan los estudios del profesor Fernando Azevedo. Así, se realizó una entrevista al Prof. Fernando Profesor Asociado de Agregación en el Instituto de Educación de la Universidad de Minho (Braga, Portugal), donde es responsable de la conducción de unidades curriculares de

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pregrado y posgrado en las áreas de Didáctica de la Lengua Portuguesa y Formación del Lector. En la entrevista, la autora señala diferentes aspectos que involucran la educación literaria, ampliando la comprensión de la mediación literaria, la comprensión lectora y la lectoescritura en la enseñanza de la literatura en las escuelas.

Palabras clave: Educación literaria; Mediación lectora; Comprensión lectora; Alfabetismo.

The Center for Studies in Languages, Reading and Writing (Núcleo de Estudos em Linguagens Leitura e Escrita – NELLE/UFLA), created on October 20th of 2014, completes 10 years of operation at the Federal University of Lavras in 2024. By considering language as a way of being, existing and acting in the world, NELLE seeks, through discussions and research related to the field of language, to reflect on the multiple interfaces that make it possible to understand how the processes of interlocution, cognition, sociocultural interaction and aesthetic formation are constituted. It is dedicated to investigating the areas of languages, reading and writing, considered as practices of construction and production of meanings and their articulation in the teaching-learning process and in teacher's training.

Since its creation, it has brought together teachers, education professionals, researchers and undergraduate and graduate students interested in the areas of literary reading, storytelling, literary teacher training and writing. Studies and research also cover the theme of literacy and the training of literacy teachers. Linked to the undergraduate course in Pedagogy and the Postgraduate Program in Education (PPGE-UFLA), NELLE promotes periodic studies, courses, lectures, workshops, debates and scientific events, with the purpose of contributing to initial and continuing teacher's training.

NELLE's activities focus on offering theoretical insights articulated with reflection on pedagogical practices of reading and writing in school and non-school settings. It is understood that the training activities that integrate the academic dimension and the K-12 Education are essential requirements for the development of the teaching career, involving ongoing and initial training, in order to ensure the improvement of teachers' pedagogical practices.

In view of this, to compose the Thematic Dossier Commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Center for Studies in Languages, Reading and Writing - NELLE, we invited Professor Fernando Azevedo from the University of Minho - Portugal to participate with an interview.

To begin our conversation, we would like to learn a little bit more about Fernando Azevedo. Please, tell us about your academic career and what led you to research about reading.

My academic trajectory began with a deep immersion in Literary Studies, with a doctorate in Literary Sciences, and in Education, with an Aggregation Exam in Child Studies, field in which I found a privileged space to study the relationship between literature, education and society. From the beginning, I was interested in promoting literary reading as a pedagogical practice, motivated by the importance of training critical readers. During my career, which spans more than three decades of research and teaching, the central focus has always been the relationship between reading, the construction of meaning and the development of critical skills in students, from the elementary school to postgraduate studies. Although my focus, for professional reasons, is on reading in schools and teachers training, I share a much broader view of societal responsibility in training readers and promoting literacy education. My point of view is that it is everyone's responsibility, including schools, the stimulation and implementation of an education for literacy and, in this context, for reading. For several years, I was a member of the Expert Committee of the Portuguese National Reading Plan and, in this context, I had the opportunity to learn about practices and dynamics that are deeply relevant to the development of readers.

I am currently a member of the Honorary Committee of this organization and have been developing activities of coordination and of technical and scientific consultancy for Local Reading Plans, with a focus on Braga's plan. These activities, in conjunction with teaching and research carried out at the Institute of Education of the University of Minho (Portugal), have provided me with knowledge and a critical and proactive view of reading and strategies to promote it. The reading clubs, for example, have been for years an activity that I have been developing in Higher Education and that I highly recommend to encourage critical thinking and collective dialogue among students. These spaces provide a rich exchange of ideas, allowing participants to confront different perspectives on texts, which broadens their literary understanding and interpretation. In addition, they encourage the social practice of reading, transforming it into a collaborative and shared experience. Reading is, therefore, in my view, an essential tool for understanding the world, and that is what motivates me: literature's ability to question praxis and open up new possibilities for thought and transformation.

Regarding the concept of literary education, which has been accompanied by academic-scientific studies and research, which has been embraced by public policies for the Elementary and Middle School and has been formalized in Portuguese schools. With this, there has been much discussion about reading in the school context, but what can we understand when we talk about literary education?

Literary education, as I emphasize in my studies, is fundamental to the development of readers capable of dialoguing with texts and, consequently, with the world. It is not just about reading for the sake of reading, but about cultivating a reading style that involves critical reflection and the ability to question texts. This process, in addition to stimulating knowledge of a wide range of literary texts, helps to motivate students to read, by offering them tools that make them active and critical readers.

In the school context, literary education introduces students to the world of literature, awakening the pleasure of reading while developing their interpretative skills. Through this process, they learn to recognize symbols, themes, stylistic features and intertextual references that enrich their reading experience. This recognition becomes a motivational factor, as students begin to see reading as a meaningful and relevant practice.

Thus, literary education enables students to read between the lines, helping them to become sophisticated and comprehensive readers. This practice not only prepares them for active and conscious citizenship, but also ensures critical and in-depth reading, enabling them to be members of a “common space”, where literary dialogue is a way of understanding and interacting with the world around them.

Literary education, by encouraging the critical reading of texts, provides readers with a basis for expanding this capacity for analysis of the world around them. In this way, as Paulo Freire argues, reading literary texts helps to build a deeper understanding of social and cultural realities. When readers are able to interpret the hidden meaning of literary works, they transfer these skills to the critical reading of the world, questioning power structures and social injustice. In this way, literary education not only enriches the understanding of literary works, but also promotes active citizenship, capable of transforming society.

In your studies, we notice an emphasis on literature books as the first condition for promoting literary education. In relation to theoretical studies on literary education, what can we bring to the school context?

Theoretical studies on literary education emphasize several fundamental aspects for the development of reflective readers. All authors emphasize the importance of children's literature books as an essential tool for acquiring a taste for reading and for promoting critical skills. By recognizing intertextual references and cultural contexts, students not only expand their literary repertoire, but also become more critical and sensitive readers, capable of establishing connections between texts and the world around them.

This approach not only promotes an enriching aesthetic and interpretative experience, but also encourages more critical and informed reading, essential elements for the development of autonomous and reflective readers. In the school context, it is essential that teachers assume the role of literary mediators, promoting active mediation that respects the pleasure of reading. Such mediation should ensure that students experience reading as an act of enjoyment, which not only challenges them to think critically, but also nurtures their ability to interpret the world.

However, the challenge lies in training the reading mediators themselves. A good mediator must be a reader himself who reads in quantity and quality. In my opinion, this is where the greatest challenge lies. Therefore, in my classes and seminars, I strive to ensure that my students, future teachers and educators, become active readers, capable of transmitting to their own students the pleasure and importance of literary reading.

In your work “Literatura Infantil e Leitores. Da Teoria às Práticas” (Children's Literature and Readers. From Theory to Practice) we see a theoretical study about the potential of children's literature in the development of readers. Comment a little about the work and the relationship between children's literature and reading skills.

In this work, I want to demonstrate how children's literature is essential for the development of critical readers. Through stories that spark the imagination and introduce ethical and social issues, children's literature not only captivates younger readers but also prepares them for more complex reading. When methodologically well-guided, working with children's literature promotes the development of essential reading skills, such as the ability to interpret multiple levels of meaning and identify universal themes, such as justice, tolerance, equality, freedom, or the victory of good over evil.

Based on the discussion about literature as fundamental symbolic capital, how has this children's literature reached schools? In the dimension of literary reading in the classroom, specifically for children, how have teachers perceived this work with children's literature? Comment a little on the schooling of literary reading and the practices of promoting reading.

The schooling of literary reading is, above all, a matter of mediation, in which teachers play a central role. They mediate students' access to quality literary texts, helping to ensure that reading in the classroom is a formative experience. However, it is essential that this mediation goes beyond curricular fulfillment and allows students to experience the pleasure of reading for themselves and to critically reflect on what they read.

When we speak of literature as fundamental symbolic capital, we are referring to Pierre Bourdieu's idea that literature is not just a form of entertainment, but a powerful tool for constructing values, knowledge and cultural distinction. This symbolic capital, represented by children's literature in schools, must be treated in a way that fosters a taste for reading, and not as a technical dissection that distances students from literature. In this sense, the mediation of literary reading must respect the 10 rights of the reader proposed by Daniel Pennac, which defend, among others, the right to read what one likes, to reread, to not finish a book and to read aloud. This means that reading in the classroom should be an experience of enjoyment and pleasure, an act of love for the text. To promote this approach, the promotion of reading practices needs to be rethought and can be enriched through the methodology of reading clubs, where the sharing of opinions and feelings about a text creates an environment in which one can explore what makes a work worth reading and sharing. In this context, students learn to see reading as a social and enriching experience, where the main objective is to discover and discuss the reasons why a text resonates with each reader, rather than approaching it only from a technical-compositional or structuralist perspective.

The promotion of reading practices that I develop in my activities, such as workshops and seminars, focus precisely on training teachers so that they know how to mediate students' contact with texts that stimulate their interest and, at the same time, challenge their thinking.

In the work “Modelos e Práticas em Literacia” (Models and Practices in Literacy), we have discussions about the concept - which in Brazil we call *letramento* - and reading practices. How is this concept understood in the context of teacher training and the

implementation of reading practices? What would these models be? Could you comment on the discussion that the work presents?

The book “Models and Practices in Literacy” discusses the concept of literacy, which in Brazil is often referred to as *letramento*, in which the practice of reading is understood not only as a technical act, but as a social practice. The book explores literacy as a transformative process, capable of changing social and political reality and empowering the individual. In this sense, the concept goes beyond the deciphering of words, focusing on the ability to interpret, critically reflect and act on the world through reading and writing.

In the context of teacher training, literacy is approached as an essential practice that needs to be integrated in a critical and conscious way. Teachers are prepared to act as reading mediators who help students not only develop technical reading skills, but also understand the social and political context in which they are included, promoting literacy that enables them to transform reality. *Letramento*, in this case, is seen as a practice that empowers the individual, allowing them to actively participate in the construction of a more just and egalitarian society.

As for the literacy models discussed in the work, they stand out for focusing on critical literacy, a socially committed model that helps to transform the practice of reading and writing into a tool for action.

Therefore, the work emphasizes the importance of a critical approach to literacy, in which teachers not only teach how to read, but prepare students to be active citizens, capable of using literacy as a means of social transformation.

Regarding reading competence, how has this theoretical understanding been implemented in practice or even how is the mediation of literary reading understood in the classroom context?

In the educational context, reading competence refers to the student's ability to interpret, understand and interact with texts in a critical and reflective manner. In practice, this theoretical understanding has been applied through methodologies that promote active and meaningful reading, encouraging students to build meanings based on their own textual experience.

In the classroom, literary reading mediation happens when the teacher acts as a facilitator and literary mediator, assuming the role of reader with the students and promoting

discussions that challenge them to interpret literary works from different perspectives. This process includes activities that follow the pre-reading, reading and post-reading phases, as suggested by Yopp & Yopp in *Literature-Based Reading Activities*. These practices provide a critical immersion in the text, leading students to question and reflect on broader subjects, such as social and ethical values.

The methodologies adopted are active and engaging, allowing students to see reading as both a personal and collective experience, developing not only their linguistic skills, but also their critical thinking and argumentative ability.

To conclude our conversation, we would like you to comment on the discussion regarding educating literarily.

Literary education is an essential mission for any educator who is concerned with the formation of critical and conscious citizens. Literary education offers a window onto the world, providing students with the necessary tools to read not only literary texts, but also the reality that surrounds them. As I often say, literature has an emancipatory power, by allowing readers to question the status quo and develop their own critical vision. This is the type of reading that I want to promote: an active, transformative reading that forms not only competent readers, but also citizens committed to society.

Recebido: setembro/2024.
Publicado: novembro/2024.