



Learning to Read and Write in Times of Pandemic: An Exploratory Study of Freely Accessible Video- Recorded Capsules

Aprendiendo a leer y a escribir en tiempos de pandemia: estudio exploratorio de cápsulas videograbadas de libre acceso

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Abstract

This study analyzes the characteristics of the episodes of *Aprendo TV*, prepared by the Chilean Ministry of Education to teach early literacy, in order to explore the assumptions, approaches, or didactic models to which they respond. In order to do this, we conducted an analysis of the first 10 episodes on language aimed at first-grade students. The methodology is qualitative through thematic analysis, with theoretical and emergent categories. The results of this study show that in the design of the episodes there is not a clear and progressive learning path. Learning is centered mainly around the code in a decontextualized manner, going from the smallest units of the language to the more complex units. In other words, from the perspective of the reader, the text-code relationship is not fully explained. Moreover, there are few teaching and learning situations that consider the integrality of the core curricular themes. Finally, the results indicate that the vernacular practices that children, along with their families, develop in their daily lives are ignored. This study contributes to a reconsideration of the guidelines of public policy to teach and approach the process of initial literacy in virtual contexts.

Key words: initial literacy, balanced approach, oral language, virtual learning

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Resumen

En este estudio se analizan las características de los capítulos de *Aprendo TV*, elaborados por el Ministerio de Educación de Chile para la enseñanza de la literacidad inicial, con el propósito de explorar los supuestos, enfoques o modelos didácticos a los que responden. Para ello, se analizaron los diez primeros capítulos de lenguaje dirigidos a estudiantes de primer año básico. La metodología empleada es cualitativa, mediante análisis temático, con categorías teóricas y emergentes. Los resultados muestran que en el diseño de los capítulos no se observa una ruta de aprendizaje clara y progresiva, y la enseñanza está mayormente centrada en el código de manera descontextualizada. Es decir, generalmente no se trabaja desde un contexto lector y se plantean escasas situaciones de enseñanza y aprendizaje que consideren la integralidad de los ejes curriculares. Finalmente, los resultados reflejan que se desconocen las prácticas vernáculas que niñas y niños, junto con sus familias, desarrollan en la cotidianidad. Este estudio contribuye a repensar las orientaciones de la política pública para enseñar y aproximarse al proceso de la literacidad inicial en contextos de virtualidad.

Palabras clave: literacidad inicial, modelo equilibrado, oralidad, aprendizaje en virtualidad

Introduction

The challenge of literacy in the early stages of education has been marked by teaching practices that have not moved past teaching approaches that are focused on development of the mechanical aspects of language, using directive formative perspectives (Lozano, 2017), centered on the transmission and reproduction of knowledge (Miras et al., 2013; Villalón & Mateos, 2009), with low levels of cognitive challenge for children from early ages (Medina et al., 2015) and which are continued throughout schooling. Indeed, these practices and notions conceive learning of reading almost exclusively as learning to decode, diverging from the paradigm of critical literacy that argues that reading and writing are situated social practices (Gee, 2014) and, therefore, always connected to discursive purposes and genres with a diversity of contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 2004). This difficulty to introduce practices that are consistent with new teaching approaches may be related to a lack of clear guidelines in educational policy. In the case of the curricular framework and study programs, in spite of the fact that they theoretically promote communicative approaches that are coherent with education for the 21st century (Mineduc, 2012), the progression of learning objectives addresses the learning of the code and, therefore, of skills, in a disjointed manner, neglecting to organize or clarify how they are involved in reading texts. This is also the case of other notions in the curricular framework, such as the use of the discursive genre, so “it is considered that this weakness could perpetuate a descriptive type of teaching in the classroom that is dissociated from contextualized communication,” (Espinosa & Concha, 2015, p. 343).

By ignoring the importance of context, the traditional notion of skill models perpetuates individual differences between subjects, as it neglects the disparity in opportunities to participate in literacy practices that affect the way of dealing with and participating in the world. Specifically, by focusing teaching and learning process on mastering the code, these models fail to pay attention to the multiple meanings, prior experiences, and situated purposes of all reading experiences, which is characteristic of sociocultural models (Zavala, 2009).

That said, recent research has shown that skill models are not effective in the process of teaching and learning early literacy (Bowers, 2020; Bowers & Bowers, 2018). Using a meta-analysis, Bowers (2020) contends that the skills approach is not superior to holistic or balanced approaches, but rather that its impact has been overstated. From another perspective, some studies highlight the importance of student motivation and engagement in their processes of beginning reading, rather than the emphasis on learning the code (Moses & Kelly, 2018).

Current research on literacy gives a central role to the vernacular practices that students experience with their families (Calderón, 2015; Susperreguy et al., 2007) and their communities (Thibaut & López, 2020), as well as to the development of orality in literacy practices in the home (Krijnen et al., 2020). This research underlines the need to connect school learning with the social practices of reading and writing that students experience on a daily basis, and which are amplified exponentially in the digital context (Thibaut & López, 2020).

In contrast, skills models continue social stratification by not providing situated and meaningful opportunities for the development of reading and writing (Gee, 2014). This phenomenon is critical in our country, given that there are high levels of school segregation (García-Huidobro, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2014). This segregation has increased markedly as a result of the current health crisis caused by COVID-19. Schools have had to suspend face-to-face classes and implement distance education, and teaching roles have been assumed by a family member. In this complex scenario, connectivity has been a persistent problem in maintaining distance education. Reports indicate that the gaps in coverage are abysmal, since the most vulnerable schools (poorest quintile) only have 27% coverage, which compares with 89% coverage for the schools in the richest quintile (Mineduc, 2020). In this respect, the dissemination of teaching materials for the early stages of reading and writing is of the utmost importance to guide pedagogical practices both in Chile and in Latin America.

Having simple, easily viewed materials, with clear didactic guidelines and recommendations, would ensure the establishment of minimum bases for children to learn to read and write despite the tremendous difficulties that confinement implies. Design of learning paths specifically for virtual contexts, which can be followed by teachers and responsible adults, would also allow formal learning of reading and writing in accordance with the social life of the learners (Meneses et al., 2020).

The Ministry of Education has made video capsules available to teachers and adults who are responsible for children, which can be accessed via the YouTube channel *Aprendo TV* (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, n.d.). This exploratory research seeks to analyze the characteristics of the chapters of *Aprendo TV*, which have been prepared for teaching early literacy, in order to examine the didactic assumptions, approaches, or models to which they respond. The identification of these characteristics will make it possible to establish clear didactic criteria that are consistent with new approaches to early literacy, as well as basic principles to promote the teaching of reading and writing from this perspective.

Conceptual notions for teaching and learning early reading and writing

Literacy

Reading and writing practices develop in a certain way in each society because they respond to a specific sociohistorical context. From this perspective, literacy is a cultural practice (Zavala, 2009; Zavala et al., 2004). This conception has gradually matured thanks to the evolution of language sciences and didactics, converging in a conceptualization that transcends (or which should transcend) the work done by teachers and schools, emphasizing what we do with oral and written language and the use of authentic texts that represent the reading communities in which people live (Zavala et al., 2004).

In spite of this, school institutions preserve certain conceptions of reading and writing, such as becoming literate (in Spanish, *alfabetización*)¹ and learning reading and writing (in Spanish, *lectoescritura*)², which differ from the concept of literacy. Opting for one or the other term implies developing certain pedagogical practices that reflect the conception of teaching and learning that lies behind it.

Alexopoulou (2014) carries out a comparative review of these concepts based on their purposes, limitations, or merits. In the school context, the term becoming literate has generally been related to teaching reading and writing to adults in order to integrate them into society more actively. Learning reading and writing, on the other hand, refers to a comprehensive education, but limits reading and writing to the school environment and favors the use of canonical texts. In contrast with these two concepts, the concept of literacy is a broader term as it considers reading and writing as situated practices that are essentially social (Gee, 2014), the objective of which is to develop critical awareness. In this vein, Barton and Hamilton (2004) argue that “in the same way as a text does not have autonomous meanings that are independent of its context of social use, neither does it have a set of functions that are independent of the social meanings that imbue it” (p. 119).

Balanced model and communicative approach

From a sociocultural perspective, the teaching of early literacy involves understanding this process not only as learning the written code, but also the interaction of readers and writers—and their skills, strategies, and experiences—with texts in the world (Madda et al., 2019). As a consequence, the teaching and learning model in accordance with this perspective is the balanced model, also known as the integrated model, which was created from the differences between the skills model and the holistic model. That is to say, those in favor of code-based teaching were pitted against those who proposed using a holistic approach to teach reading, focused exclusively on reading (Condemarán, 1991).

In this regard, Madda et al. (2019) consider the balanced model to be a complex and multidimensional construct that has to be orchestrated considering many facets of learning, because it requires the use of lower-level processes (e.g., phonological awareness, phonics) in the pursuit of higher-order goals (e.g., comprehension, composition). Solís et al. contend that “from the earliest stages of learning to read and write, the child constructs and communicates the meaning of what he or she reads, the skills of reading occur within a situation of meaningful reading and the texts relate to the oral culture of the learners, to their experiences, interests, and needs” (2016, p. 110).

The balanced model is based on three principles that must be clearly developed and made explicit: the authenticity of the texts, the discussion of the texts, and teacher control (Madda et al., 2019). Authenticity implies working with complete texts that are meaningful for the student (Solís et al., 2016). In point of fact, the tasks and objectives have to be authentic, that is, they must correspond to the purposes for which we, as a society, read and write: to communicate, learn, and enjoy (Madda et al., 2019). With regard to conversations about texts, Madda et al. (2019) point out that they offer students an invaluable opportunity to build prior knowledge, ideas, and experiences, so the teacher should promote dialogue and the joint construction of meanings.

1. Translator’s note: In Spanish the term *alfabetización* is usually translated as ‘literacy’; however, it is a narrower concept than the English term literacy, as it refers rather to the mechanics of learning the alphabet and to read and write letters and words. In order to attempt to convey this difference, here *alfabetización* has instead been translated as ‘becoming literate’.

2. Translator’s note: In Spanish the term *lectoescritura* is also usually translated as ‘literacy’, but can also be understood as learning to read and write. Here, to differentiate it from *alfabetización* (see previous note) and literacy, it will be translated as ‘learning to read and write’.

Finally, teacher control should fluctuate based on different pedagogical dimensions: explicit teaching, modeling, scaffolding, and participation. These roles reflect a gradual release of teacher responsibility, as each step requires greater activity on the part of the student.

The communicative approach is the teaching perspective that is present in the national curriculum, which emphasizes the development of skills that enable students to communicate in an effective manner that facilitates their participation in society (Mineduc, 2012). According to Lomas et al. (2015), in order to achieve communicative competency, students must have opportunities to participate in real situations of reading, writing, and oral interaction. Thus, the challenges in the process of teaching and learning early literacy include the creation of contextualized learning situations and the use of a variety of texts with the aim of providing opportunities to learn and generating instances of interaction in which students put into use their communicative and linguistic competencies (Castedo, 1999).

For that purpose, Tolchinsky (2008) coined the term ‘authentic tasks’ to refer to the immersion of students in the diverse practices required by a literate community, not created to teach reading and writing, but to transmit a message. He contends that “if the aim is to obtain active readers of newspapers or novels, learners must be involved in reading newspapers and novels, not manuals that explain the characteristics of a news item” (Tolchinsky, 2008, p. 44).

Importance of orality and the integration of the themes of language

The specialized literature has brought together a significant corpus of information regarding the necessary skills for learning to read (Villalón, 2014), among which oral language stands out. In this respect, Medina (2016) submits that “oral language constitutes the basis and support for the development of skills to become literate” (p. 223).

In an alphabetic system such as ours, there is a direct relationship between the spoken stream and the graphic signs, since each letter is associated with a unit of sound. In this regard, phonological awareness is a skill that has been studied extensively due to its predictive value (Bravo et al., 2006; Guardia, 2003). However, oral and written language contain different components, so not only the phonological aspect is linked to early reading. Vocabulary is related to learning to read and write (Bravo, 2016; Dickinson & Porche, 2011), given that recent studies underline the predictive value of vocabulary for reading comprehension (De la Calle Cabrera et al., 2019; Menti & Rosemberg, 2016).

On the other hand, the pragmatic component of language is related to the ability to use words appropriately in different contexts (Guarneros & Vega, 2014). Oral interaction also enables the comprehension of complex sentence structures. In short, the development of orality is closely linked to learning written language; therefore, the integration of oral communication, reading, and writing is vital for learning early literacy (Medina, 2016).

To conclude this conceptual overview, it is useful to consider the conceptions or representations of written language proposed by Cassany (2006), with the aim of differentiating between the various models and approaches to teaching and learning early literacy. He calls the first perspective *linguistic*, which considers that the meaning of a text is constructed from the words and sentences it contains, so its meaning is univocal and any reader can construct the same meaning. The second perspective identified by Cassany is *psycholinguistic*, which incorporates the reader in the process of constructing the meaning of the text, making use of their previous knowledge and experiences, as well as their context to create their interpretations of what they have read. Lastly, the *sociocultural* perspective involves constructing the meaning of the text constructed in interaction with other readers/writers in a certain context and historical moment; similarly, the texts reflect the ideology, perspectives, and worldview of the person behind them. Consequently, the concept of literacy implies adopting a sociocultural perspective in the process of teaching and learning reading, writing, and speaking. Likewise, this notion paves the way for

the understanding that language continues to develop throughout schooling (Berman & Ravid, 2009), through the participation of children in different communicative contexts in which they have to learn the language that is characteristic of the school, with increasing discursive and linguistic challenges (Grøver et al., 2019).

Methodology

This study has a methodological design that is qualitative and exploratory in nature, where the analysis focuses on the first 10 chapters on Language of *Aprendo TV*, broadcast on TV Educa Chile and available on open platforms such as YouTube or pay television. The capsules are aimed at first-grade students, in the context of confinement due to COVID-19. Each capsule has an approximate duration of 7-10 minutes.

Data analysis

The chapters were double coded by two researchers and then audited by a third researcher, in order to obtain 100% agreement on the analysis carried out. In order to meet the objectives of the study, an analysis of the audiovisual material was conducted with initial closed coding (based on theory) and emergent categories. The thematic analysis technique was used, which “offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77). This technique allows identification and analysis of relevant patterns or themes in the context of the data being studied, recognizing their meanings and interpreting them.

To process the information in the chapters, we proceeded to identify their structure and the thematic focuses of each of the moments in which they are organized. The structure of each chapter thus corresponds to an initial moment in which a hypothetical situation is presented to motivate the students, along with the statement of the purpose of the educational proposal; a development moment, which presents the central activity; and a closing moment in which what has been covered is recapitulated and an invitation is made to continue learning about the topic. The information was subsequently organized by frequencies of appearance in order to reveal the topics analyzed.

Table 1 shows the categories proposed for analysis of the chapters of *Aprendo TV* for the subject of Language and Communication, which is aimed at children in first grade.

Table 1
Description of categories

Thematic category		Definition
Design of teaching proposal	Path of learning	Pedagogical itinerary proposed in each chapter (within) and through the different chapters (between) for the construction of knowledge and the achievement of learning.
	Text code relationship	Refers to how the learning of reading and writing is approached to ensure that children acquire the alphabetic system from a reading context
	Integrality among curricular lines	Refers to how the three areas of language (oral communication, reading, and writing) are articulated and integrated in the different activities proposed
Conceptualization of written language acquisition		Refers to which concept of the process of teaching and learning written language is demonstrated through the pedagogical proposal. To do this, the reading and writing models to which they adhere are considered

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Results

Design of the didactic proposal

This section focuses on the analysis of the learning path, both within and between chapters. The relationship established in the use of the text and the code is then described and, finally, we also note how the integrality of the curriculum themes is carried out. Table 2 summarizes and exemplifies the aspects analyzed in order to contrast each of the themes with the categories used, and Table 3 shows the frequency analysis of the phenomena studied.

Table 2
Synoptic summary of the 10 Aprendo TV capsules analyzed

Capsule	Purpose	Main activity	Use of text (integrated use / accessory use) or code
1	Recognize letter sounds, number of sounds in a word, and identify initial and final sound	Recognition of letter sounds, number of sounds in a word, phoneme-grapheme association, and identification of initial and final sounds. Teaching strategy: use of elastic to emphasize the sound of the words	Code
2	Reading poem (through the teacher) and use of metacognitive reading strategies	Reading of a poem to answer questions. Reading strategies to understand the text: explicit questions and argumentative questions. Metacognitive reading strategies: What good readers do	Full integrated text. Poem <i>El burro enfermo</i>
3	Read texts respecting question marks and exclamation marks	Expressive reading of poem, riddle, and tongue twister, respecting question marks, exclamation marks and speed.	Full integrated text. Poem <i>El lagarto está llorando</i> . Riddle of book <i>Vamos a leer</i> . Tongue-twister.
4	Ordering syllables to form words and words to form sentences	Ordering syllables to form words with the letters l, m, p, s, d (e.g., map, steps, salami) and words to form sentences (e.g., pigeon, a Lili is). Strategy: use visual spelling cues (period and capitalization) to order words in a sentence.	Code
5	Identify the purposes of the texts based on the title and title page	Taking a variety of texts from a chest to indicate their purpose (letter, story, recipe, animal encyclopedia), without reading them. The activity ends with writing a message to the pirate Mala Pata, emphasizing spelling (capitalization and periods) and structural elements (signature of the letter).	Use of texts with an incidental purpose. Letter of pirate Mala Pata. Story: <i>Pollito Benito</i> . Cake recipe. Encyclopedia: <i>Pregúntale a un animal</i> .

6	Recognize the spatial directionality of the consonants m-n-b-d-p	<p>Writing similar spellings m-n and b-d-p, associated with different words and pictures. To corroborate that they are able to differentiate letters and can read words that are presented with a picture of what they represent.</p> <p>Recognize words that contain the letters covered in the chapter.</p> <p>Strategy: associate each letter with a word and a drawing.</p>	<p>Text with incidental use: Classified ads section of newspaper <i>El Mercurio</i>.</p> <p>Text: Invented brief classified ad (sale of a bed).</p> <p>Reading of individual words.</p>
7	Orally read news with expression, appropriate body posture, and clear pronunciation.	<p>Reading news orally, like presenters, understanding what they read to give appropriate emphasis and maintain the thematic thread.</p> <p>Focuses on oral reading of texts in an expressive manner, with appropriate modulation, posture, volume, and tone of voice.</p> <p>Strategy: reading aloud with appropriate modulation, posture, volume, and tone of voice.</p>	<p>Full integrated text.</p> <p>News <i>An elephant escapes from a circus in Providencia</i>.</p>
8	Put words in order to form meaningful sentences outside a reading context	<p>Put words in order to form sentences, respecting the use of commas and periods, in order to send tweets and pass levels in the context of a challenge.</p> <p>Strategy: use spelling clues to put words in order and form sentences: use of upper case</p> <p>Comma and period.</p>	Code
9	Knowing information about the life of Gabriela Mistral. Ask questions about what has been heard.	<p>Reading of informative texts, of the narrative discursive type, on the life of Gabriela Mistral, focusing the work on being familiar with anecdotes about the author's life.</p> <p>Strategy: modeled on how the reader can formulate questions from what he/she reads.</p>	<p>Full integrated text.</p> <p>Anecdotes of the life of Gabriela Mistral.</p> <p>Part of poem <i>Dame la mano</i> by Gabriela Mistral.</p>
10	Identify physical characteristics of the characters from cues in illustrations.	<p>Reading and observation of images to identify physical characteristics of characters from familiar stories, based on the descriptions given.</p> <p>Strategy: discovering characters from verbal clues.</p>	<p>Titles of texts with incidental use: <i>El Principito</i>, <i>Ricitos de oro</i>, <i>El increíble niño comelibros</i>, <i>El tigre y el ratón</i>, <i>Matilda</i>, <i>Los tres chanchitos</i>.</p>

Source: Prepared by the authors.

			Aprendo TV Chapters											
Category			C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	Total	
Design of didactic proposal	Learning path	Within Between	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	10	
	Text-code relationship	Code	x			x					x		3	
		Incidental use						x	x				x	3
		Integrated use		x	x					x		x		4
	Integrity between core curricular themes	Focused on one theme	OC										OC	2
		Considers two themes		OC/R	OC/R		R/W	R/W	OC/R	R/W	OC/R			7
Integration					OC/R/W								1	
Conceptualization of acquisition of written language	Linguistic		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	8	
	Psycholinguistic			x							x		2	
	Sociocultural												0	

Note: OC - oral communication, R - reading, W, writing

Table 3. *Frequency of appearance of phenomena*

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Learning paths

The within-chapter analysis shows that they are structured with initial, development, and closing moments. The initial moment seeks to attract interest in the activity to be carried out. Only some chapters address the activation of previous knowledge of the topic by means of a question. For example, Chapter 3 looks at what is needed to read with expression; in Chapter 7 the children are encouraged to think about what they know about how to be a good news presenter and then asked: “How do you think I should do it? Exactly, I should use a tone of voice in which everyone can hear me” (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, 2020a, 03:02); “And what about the posture, do you think it’s right? Because that’s how I talk to my sister when I’m at home” (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, 2020a,03:46).

In the development section, strategies on which to work are occasionally modeled, such as in Chapter 2, which explicitly addresses reading comprehension strategies, providing examples from the text *El burro enfermo*. The strategies modeled are asking questions before and while reading, imagining or visualizing what is read, relating what happens in the text to one’s own experiences, and answering questions to identify explicit information and give informed opinions.

In the closing section, the chapters recapitulate what has been carried out as part of an incipient metacognitive process. The chapters do not provide a specific task to be carried out later. This indicates a lack of relationship between what has been worked on and what a student could do autonomously at home. Some chapters suggest an extension of the activity. For example, in Chapter 5, the teacher says “And if you didn’t manage to write your message to the pirate Mala Pata, don’t hesitate to do it, and remember that if you want to continue practicing your writing you can do it on the website Aprendo en línea and in your Plan Leo Primero [I Read First] books” (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, 2020b, 06:13). However, there is no mediation regarding which elements to continue to look more deeply at or how to carry out the activity independently.

With the inter-chapter analysis, we note that each chapter operates with its own logic, without being linked to the next one (Table 3). Indeed, no contextualized account of the learning process is constructed throughout the chapters. Table 2 shows that Chapter 1 has the purpose of segmenting phonemes, while Chapter 2 addresses high-level metacognitive strategies without scaffolding or consolidating previous learning (from the previous chapter), and Chapter 3 focuses on expressive reading. Metacognitive reading strategies are explicitly addressed in C2, but are not taken up recursively with different levels of complexity. As a consequence, they lack a gradation referring to the development of thinking skills that progressively become more complex, so they do not constitute a learning path that broadens, deepens, or builds on the previous chapter.

Text-code relationship

The chapters of *Aprendo TV* analyzed indicate that the work is mostly focused on code skills outside a context of reading, given that only four of them include the use of texts, while the other six only use texts incidentally or not at all (Table 3). For example, in Chapter 1, work is done on phonological awareness and phoneme-grapheme association to promote decoding, but without a reading context that would give meaning to the process of learning to read.

Chapter 4 also demonstrates this, in which it is proposed that the child organizes syllables to form words and words to form sentences that are not related to a text read previously. This is a mechanical exercise in which certain orthographic cues are given, such as the use of capital letters and periods, to identify the appropriate order of words in the sentence, without focusing on the meaning of what is being read. A sentence makes sense insofar as it connects with previous and subsequent statements presented in a text. Sentences therefore make sense within a complete message (story, poem, etc.).

Chapters 5 and 6 present authentic texts such as stories, informational text, advertisements, or recipes, although they are only used as references to motivate the activity. Chapter 5 proposes that the child identify the purposes of the texts using the cover and the title, without considering that, when listening to or reading texts, children can determine their characteristics and purposes through the use of textual cues, their structure, or illustrations. There is consequently a need to encourage reflection on what is read, rather than focusing on a mechanical activity of association between the format and purpose.

Chapter 6 begins with the reading of an advertisement, where the teacher pretends to confuse the letters of the words, which changes the meaning of the text. The focus of the class is mainly on visual recognition of the spatial directionality of similar spelling, in this case, the letters m, n, d, b, and p. However, this learning can move away from being a purely mechanical task if children have the opportunity to access textual, linguistic, illustrative, or contextual cues to make sense of what they read and determine which is the correct letter according to the reading context.

Chapter 7 provides an opportunity to work on reading a news item, paying attention to its characteristics and comprehension; however, it is presented as an instance to be a good news presenter and read news fluently. The activity focuses on the skill of oral reading with expression, appropriate tone of voice, and good modulation. This experience would make it possible to articulate the core aspects and address more complex skills such as news writing, a task in which the children can plan, organize ideas, and reflect on what they write.

Chapter 10 proposes that the child identify the physical characteristics of story characters based on illustration cues. Despite the fact that it presents story characters that are apparently familiar to children, the texts only operate as isolated references and do not use the content of each story for the identification of their characteristics. Therefore, the examples allow us to characterize an incidental relationship between text and code, since the texts are not read or looked at in depth to carry out the main activity.

In contrast, only two chapters of the 10 analyzed focus on the development of reading comprehension skills. For this purpose, a poem (C2) and an informative-narrative text about the life of Gabriela Mistral (C9) are used. In both cases, a reading context is considered for development of cognitive reading strategies. For example, in Chapter 2, strategies are presented for predicting content: “What has happened to this donkey? I wonder if he has gone to the doctor. What do you think the doctor will prescribe for him to get better?” (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, 2020c, 00:57). In terms of strategies during the reading, the proposal is “I’m going to close my eyes and I’m going to imagine this donkey with a headache” (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, 2020c, 01:54). After reading, it says: “We’re going to answer questions about the text read. The question is: what do you think about what the doctor prescribed to the donkey? The important thing is that we support our opinion with a reason” (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, 2020c, 04:22). These two chapters discuss the importance of the reader activating prior knowledge, pausing to think about what they have read, asking questions, or forming visual images of what they have read. However, these reading skills are not addressed in other chapters.

Authentic books are not generally used, except in the Chapter 5 as mentioned previously. On the contrary, when working with texts, these are presented on a printed sheet, as in Chapter 3, when a poem, a riddle, and a tongue-twister are read expressively. This demonstrates decontextualized reading practice, ignoring the innumerable digital and specific resources that have been developed to promote learning at these crucial stages for the acquisition of reading and writing. One of the cornerstones of the balanced model is the use of complete and authentic texts (Madda et al., 2019; Solís et al., 2016).

In short, there is no systematic work in a close relationship between text and code, as proposed in a balanced model (Madda et al., 2019), since most of the chapters either do not use texts or only use them incidentally, even though they should be of central importance to give meaning to the work with the code. As a consequence, a skills model prevails, with an emphasis on lower-level skills. It would be expected that these skills would be used to acquire higher-level skills, as the balanced model indicates.

Integrity between core curricular themes

As the previous analysis shows, in the chapters analyzed, work is primarily done on the themes of oral communication and reading, using the strategy of reading through the teacher (Kaufmann, 2011). Only two of the 10 chapters examined make reading comprehension a central focus (chapters 2 and 9), in which the metacognitive strategies involved in the reading process are made explicit. Although writing appears in three chapters, only Chapter 5 proposes work on this theme as an activity with a purpose and a complete meaning (a message), while the other chapters look at isolated elements of the code, such as syntactic awareness or normative aspects (spelling). However, in Chapter 5 the activity lacks modeling and guidelines to carry it out, understanding that writing with a purpose is a complex and high-level skill. This is very distant from the balanced model, in which one of the principles is to work on reading and writing as interactive and mutually supportive processes (Madda et al., 2019).

As can be observed in Table 3, only one chapter (Chapter 4) integrates all three core themes. However, the integration of reading, writing, and oral communication is incidental and lacks a defined meaning, since emphasis is given to the acquisition of the code without inserting the activity into a context of reading and writing. Nevertheless, the Language and Communication curriculum underlines that, in order to develop communicative competency, the three core themes must be addressed in an integrated manner (Mineduc, 2012).

On the other hand, oral and written language favor each other, that is to say, there is a bidirectional relationship between them. Therefore, proposing teaching situations that do not consider the integrality between the core themes undermines the quality of the teaching and learning process of early literacy.

Conception of literacy

It appears that the predominant conception is a linguistic representation of reading (Cassany, 2006), given that it is present in eight of the chapters analyzed (Table 3). The analysis reveals that, in general, they consider oral and written language an object of study, which consists of learning the various constituent elements, which must be used in accordance with certain rules. The focus is on development of language skills, such as phonological awareness and phoneme-grapheme association, use of exclamation and question marks to exercise oral reading, ordering of syllables and words, and recognition and writing of similar spellings (m, n, d, b, and p), without connecting this knowledge with a reading context that would provide meaning to this knowledge. As a result, the chapters are not designed as literate events related to children's life experiences and the diverse contexts in which they develop. It can be inferred that literacy is not assumed as a social, cultural, and historically contextualized practice, based on interaction (Barton & Hamilton, 2004) and the co-construction of knowledge.

As stated, only two chapters (chapters 2 and 9) focus on comprehension strategies, which demonstrate a psycholinguistic conception of language teaching (Cassany, 2006), since they consider a reading context for development of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies. Similarly, the purpose of working on strategies used by good readers, such as asking questions before and during reading, visualizing what has been read, stopping reading to think, and connecting what has been read with previous experiences, can be perceived in these strategies. Although these strategies are of great value for the reading process, they cannot be addressed simultaneously in a single chapter and should be developed recursively in different chapters.

The results show a conception of learners that tends to ignore their previous experiences, either linguistic or in terms of knowledge of the world, thus disregarding their background as a reader. The vernacular practices that children develop in everyday life are consequently ignored too, and the infinite opportunities offered by the communicative contexts of the home to expand, deepen, and reflect on the language are therefore wasted. Teaching of early literacy in school should therefore create explicit bridges with vernacular practices so that students can give meaning to their learning of reading and writing by identifying with these practices, stimulating motivation and creativity (Navarro et al., 2021). This could certainly contribute to building a school path that provides room for students to find a voice in the language that is typical of the school (Uccelli et al., 2020).

Discussion

Early literacy as a formative stage is of great importance, as it is the cornerstone that underpins learning throughout schooling, since it is based on the reading and writing processes in the various disciplines (Navarro & Revel Chion, 2013; Tolchinsky & Simó, 2001). Recent studies contend that the development of oral language is the basis and precursor of vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension in later years (De la Calle Cabrera et al., 2019; Menti & Rosemberg, 2016). A close relationship is thus formed between the development of oral language, literacy, and learning, since reading and writing are an epistemic means for knowledge construction (Miras, 2000).

In light of the health crisis and the distance education that has emerged as a consequence, it is highly advisable to continue providing support for learning in the stage of early literacy. The pedagogical and didactic material produced by the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación, Gobierno de Chile, n.d.) is a crucial

support and should be continued over time. However, based on this exploratory analysis of the *Aprendo TV* capsules, we argue that this material should be thoroughly reviewed and improved in order to achieve the expected learning for students. The lack of articulation in learning the code does nothing but demotivate students and turn reading and writing skills into detached learning that is not connected to the authentic interests and needs of students to be integrated into a literate society that offers them multiple challenges. In the short term, students will have to deal with increasingly abstract and precise language in the various school disciplines, which has been called academic language (Snow & Uccelli, 2009), so this early learning is essential in order to connect and reflect on the different languages and their uses in this educational path.

Teachers, families, and policymakers alike should have the conviction that only with high expectations and by using situated literacy and oral learning will we have students embarking on the long journey of literacy. In the words of Madda et al. (2019), we need to leave behind the *conspiracy* of good intentions in which low-income or minority students tend to receive a great deal of instruction in lower-level skills and little instruction in reading comprehension and higher-level thinking. These students spend their entire education understanding the correct words and facts, but are never pushed towards higher-level thinking, which is typical of limited educational approaches that are rooted in low expectations for students. Low-level cognitive challenges are therefore reproduced from these early stages (Medina et al., 2015) and persist throughout schooling (Miras et al., 2013).

In light of these results, our aim is to highlight the principles in the balanced model and the communicative approach that, from our point of view, should be considered to create learning capsules in the context of distance education, for this crucial stage of children's learning. These principles are also the guidelines for teaching in general and should steer all educational policy documents, such as curricula, study programs, and initial teacher training standards. It therefore seems important to us to advance in terms of the coherence and alignment of all the inputs generated in order to support teachers' work to achieve more solid and lasting learning in students.

For this reason, we have highlighted principles or guidelines from the theory (Madda et al., 2019; Lomas et al., 2015; Solís et al., 2016; Tolchinsky, 2008) that should provide a framework for the work in these stages of school (Figure 1). These principles are: a) work on teaching the code in close relation to texts, b) and integrate the work on reading, writing, and orality in order to strengthen all these communicative competencies at the same time. With this in mind, c) the tasks given should be as authentic and similar as possible to those in the students' daily lives, and d) in the context of their culture, in order to motivate them towards the challenge of acquiring these tools that are so important for life. This can only be achieved if students are presented with e) complete, meaningful, and authentic texts to introduce them to the various purposes of reading and writing.

We also believe it is important to underline that distance education should ensure a coherent learning path that allows teachers (or responsible adults) to provide timely and clear guidance on the challenges that need to be tackled in this early stage. In this respect, care should be taken to promote learning objectives that become more complex and that recapitulate, expand, and connect the students' previous learning and experiences, without neglecting their own contexts and literacy practices.

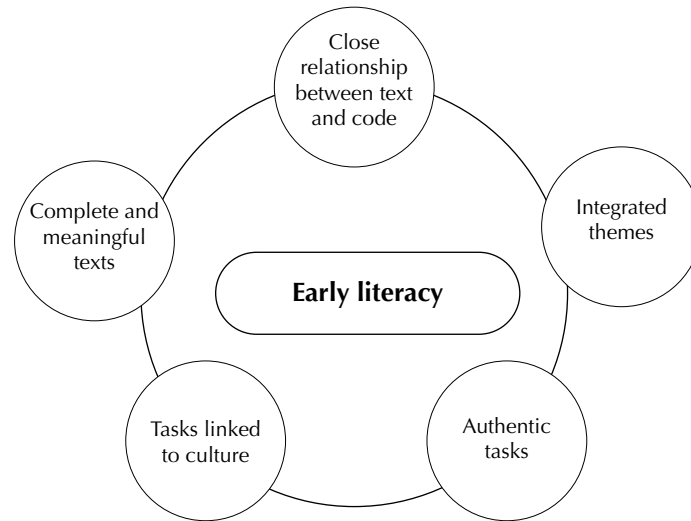


Figure 1. *Guiding principles of early literacy*

Source: Prepared by the authors.

It is essential that the capsules and the didactic material created are made more coherent, bearing in mind students' entire learning trajectory, in order to encourage children and their families (Susperreguy et al., 2007) to become actively involved in this challenging learning process. It is extremely important to create specific learning situations, so that students can use and connect with their own vernacular practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2004; Calderón, 2015; Thibaut & López, 2020) and can consequently give meaning to learning the code.

That said, these vernacular practices are increasingly likely to be digital, as Thibaut and López (2020) have already found in their research on fifth- and sixth-grade students in a rural area of Chile, who reported diverse vernacular practices such as watching videogames, writing YouTube songs, or reading Facebook stories, among others.

In the context of confinement measures, it is highly likely that these digital practices have grown exponentially and that students have developed a diversity of skills to search for information on different virtual platforms, which future research should certainly explore. It should not be forgotten that 21st century literacy requires students to learn to evaluate and think critically about information and its source/s, to select and manage information for a diverse set of purposes, as well as to communicate and collaborate with others using different digital tools (Madda et al., 2019). Therefore, the capsules should also focus on the comprehension and production of multimodal texts.

Finally, and given the exploratory nature of this study, it would be useful to extend the analysis of the didactic materials created by the ministerial bodies to investigate other possible contradictions or tensions in the processes of teaching and learning literacy. It would also be advisable to extend these studies to different school ages, with the aim of investigating the trajectory and path of learning and how the processes of reading, writing, and oral language are strengthened for the acquisition of learning and the different challenges that arise. We believe that the theoretical lenses of the concept of literacy are a propitious area to continue conducting more research, as well as to create more meaningful spaces for teaching.

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