

Editorial

MONOGRAPH
Advances and challenges
in reading comprehension

“They don’t understand what they read”

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This seems to be a persistent claim originating in Latin America, following the dissemination of the Pisa 2022 results, which reveal the difficulties that middle school students have in understanding a text in a depth. The majority of students in the region perform at the minimum level and in many cases these results are strongly associated with the socio-economic level. However, even in the highest quartiles there are no good results.

UNESCO’s ERCE tests in 2019 showed that, on average, 46% of third graders did not reach the expected basic level of understanding for reading at that level. Even 26.3% of students in the highest tertile did not reach this basic level of comprehension (Tiramonti et al., 2023).*

So, the main dilemma we face as educators is to rephrase the statement “They don’t understand what they read,” and turn it into some uncomfortable questions.

Does the education system understand the current challenges of learning to read? Are we responding quickly and flexibly to the changes in learning? Do we identify the factors that produce low reading comprehension? Do we have the teaching competencies for the current transformation? What is the contribution of neuroeducation to the improving of reading skills?

Reading comprehensively involves discovering clues to reconstruct the world created in fiction, hypothesising about the thoughts and intentions that guide the characters’ actions, questioning the changes they undergo throughout the story, allowing for the development of empathy, and discovering the characteristics of these characters, using knowledge of reality to interpret the work and recognising how the text and the image intertwine to produce meaning. It is the key that allows us to connect with a world that is linked to knowledge and the future.

This monographic issue of JONED highlights the need to disseminate recent re-

* Tiramontii G, Nistal M, Orlick, E. Lectura y desigualdad. Comparaciones entre Argentina y América Latina. Observatorio de Argentinos por la Educación; 2023.

search on proposals, interventions and theoretical developments related to the acquisition of written language and reading comprehension that need to be disseminated at a time when it is necessary for them to impact the educational systems of the region in order to generate changes based on evidence.

There are currently movements in several countries in the region to propose new regional literacy plans taking into account scientific evidence and new contexts based on immigration and socio-economic inequalities. The number of books in the home, the involvement and commitment of parents in their children's education, the possibility of having a family meal at least once a day to talk about what has happened in school and what has been learnt, are some of the categories that should be mentioned in the groups and countries with the best academic performance, as shown by the analyses carried out basis of the Pisa tests, but they are rare in our region due to socio-economic deficiencies, the need to meet basic needs in the family and the importance given to work to the detriment of educational training as a motor for certain social advancement.

In this special issue, we will try to answer some of the questions raised, looking at educational interventions carried out in adverse contexts, the importance of the initial assessment to guide the process, reading and writing processes in the classroom, intervention in small groups to starting from intentional and graded teaching, and the current relationship between the processes of literacy, reading comprehension and artificial intelligence.

The research that we present in this issue of JONED provides us with important evidence for the development of possible strategies. In 2024, after decades of development of education systems in Latin America, we will once again face fundamental problems such as low levels mathematics, reading and text comprehension. But this time we have the power of evidence and the new contributions of the neuroscience of learning to confront old problems with new solutions.