

**Paper: *Perceptions of Primary Education Students concerning their reading and writing practices supported by the Hypertext.***

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**Abstract:**

This particular study belongs to the research project: "Hypertext Didactics and its Incidence in Academic literacy during the Initial teaching formation in Primary General Education"<sup>1</sup>. The analysis which is described here includes the exploratory stage of the research and it describes from the qualitative perspective the perception of 40 students belonging to the second year of Primary Education concerning their reading and writing practices in the context of high school education and teaching formation supported by the hypertext. Data were collected by means of life stories with the purpose of discovering the cores of the studied subject matters. The resulting analysis categories characterize reading and writing practices; they define their peculiarities as well as the strategic dimension which is generated by their users. The scope of this particular research line is related to the

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improvement in the application of the teacher formation curriculum of the hypertext as a tool to empower the development of literacy competencies.

**Key words:**

Teaching formation,  
Hypertext,  
Reading and writing practices,  
Life stories.

**Abstract**

This study belongs to the research Project: "Hypertext Didactics and its Incidence in the Academic Literacy in the Initial Teaching Formation Incidence in Primary General Education".

The analysis of the exploratory stage of the research describes from a qualitative perspective the perception which forty students of second year of the career experience from their reading and writing practices in the context of secondary school and teaching formation supported by the hypertext. Data were collected using life stories with the purpose of discovering the cores of the studied subjects. Emerging categories of analysis characterize reading and writing processes, they establish their singularities and also the strategic dimension generated by their users. The research project scope is related to an improved use of hypertext as a tool to encourage the development of literacy skills in the teacher formation curriculum.

**Key words:**

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Life stories.

## Introduction

There is a certain degree of general consensus among teachers related to the potential didactics of Internet. Current empiric research on the use of TICs in the classroom in England (the one which was developed by the Oxford Internet Institute, for example), shows very clearly that the use of Internet does not automatically mean a deterioration in the production capacity of personal texts; on the contrary, during inspected lessons where primary school students used computers and interacted also with electronic blackboards and the speech of the teacher it was confirmed that they expressed in their own words what they had already understood related to the Internet collected material (Birmingham, 2005).

Unlike the already mentioned European research, our teaching practice at university level in Chile shows very distinct signals of an insufficient degree of academic literacy. There is no student faultfinding (critical) interaction during the development of the hypertext, the preparation of the traditional book, the speech practice in the classroom or the personal text production which can be either manual or electronic. From the speech practices of the students it is clear that information collected from Internet is not understood as part of a context and when it is copied and reproduced it should also be recreated into a different context. What is the new sense of those textbooks in the new contexts created by the students? This particular question is not currently analyzed neither by teachers nor by students. A relevant amount of this type of information is limited to the non-critical reproduction of material which is shown in Internet as it is stated by the writer Humberto Eco «... it is not just a matter of “cut & paste” semeiotics, but the semeiotics of the syntactic/stylistic result of the action of “cut & paste”» (Eco, 1996).

The concept of the hypertext – created by Theodore Nelson in `65 – was originally defined as “a written or pictorial matter which is interconnected in such a complex way that it cannot be represented in any convenient way using paper” (Nelson, 1965).

The prefix «hyper» has two meanings: for one hand it implies the idea of “excess” and for the other the idea of «going beyond» (Lamarca, 2007). In the

sense of the first meaning a hypertext is a piece of information which contains a large amount of textbooks; in the sense of “going beyond” it refers to the idea of interconnected documentation whose structure permits to go from one piece of documentation to another or from one text piece or information unit to another, “jumping” from one another instead of developing a sequential reading action. (Aarseth, 1997; Gómez-Martínez 2007; Lamarca, 2007; Landow, 1992; Nelson, 1973, 1992; Salinas, 1994).

## **I. Material and Methods**

### **1. Research Problem.**

Based on the exposed information the problem of the research is defined with the following questions: Up to what level information fragmentation caused by Internet influences low quality academic literacy? How do university students interact with the hypertext? What are the consequences of this interaction in the personal textbook production? What are the competencies which teachers should develop to encourage speech skills of university students? The answers to all these questions are critical to increase the quality of academic literacy of university students.

### **2. General purpose.**

To determine how the use of hypertext influences the quality of the academic literacy of students and from this piece of knowledge create suggestions for didactic work with the purpose of optimizing comprehension processes and text production.

### **3. Specific Purpose<sup>3</sup> :**

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<sup>3</sup> We consider in this particular situation only a specific purpose, the one which is related with the part of the research which is shown in the current article.

To determine and to describe the *events* and the relevant *reading and writing practices* experienced by the students during their academic formation both during high school and university level to identify starting from such practice their work with the hypertext.

#### 4. Research Design.

Data are phenomenographically processed. This is a theoretical approach created by the Swedish teacher Ference Marton (Marton and Säljö, 1976) in relation to studies in the area of reading comprehension. Phenomenography as a theoretical/methodological model describes from the learning perspective the changes of consciousness which occur in students when they experience the world which surrounds them (Marton, F. y Booth, S.1997).

The theory of the *phenomenographic variation* permits the description of the *common aspects* in the student perceptions during his/her interaction processes with the hypertext and at the same time it makes possible the detection of *variant aspects*. The variation in the ways of experiencing reality phenomena is considered from the phenomenographic point of view as a natural condition of quality learning. Consequently, we deal first with the determination of emerging categories of processes defined as "*common processes*" (*invariant*) of the studied group. Afterwards the description of the *variant aspects* is provided, with the identification of the quality learning elements related with the hypertext work. They will be finally turned into the raw material for the construction of the methodological principles planned as product of the current research.

#### 5. Units or studied subjects.

The studied subjects are 40 students belonging to the second year of the Career of Primary General Education (Educación General Básica) during the first six-month period of year 2007, in the Faculty of Education (Facultad de Educación) of the Universidad de Concepción, Concepción, Chile. The group has one year of experience and socialization in the events and practice of literacy for the teaching formation program.

## 6. Methods and techniques for information collection.

*Life stories* which were used for social research by Bertaux (1981) were used Ferrarotti (1990), Moen. (1996) et al. With all these data the exploratory stage of the general project was developed. Basic analysis cores were identified and first analysis categories were defined.

“For social scientists specific personal experiences collected through life stories mean the possibility of recovering the senses, related to past experiences which are hidden behind data homogeneity collected with quantitative techniques” (Kornblit, 2004)

*Life Stories*<sup>4</sup> are biographical accounts selected according to the study object of the researcher according to Bertaux (1981). In this particular case, the aim was to determine perceptions which students derive regarding their events, reading and writing practices in general and the use of the hypertext in particular. Such accounts were collected through half-structured interviews; even though they covered reading and writing practices as life experiences of the individuals they focused in the formation stage of the high school and university periods.

The methodology consisted in the performance of an exhaustive travel of the large number of situations which arose from the information of the individuals to map the study area. Data saturation was looked for. This means the moment in which new data do not supply more elements to what has already been reported.

## II. Results

The information collected in the life accounts was compiled in a matrix which was phenomenographically analyzed. From this information categories were organized in three units which are described as follows :

**Unit 1:** it gathers emerging categories concerning the questions *what is the purpose of reading or why do you read?* This category concentrates specifically in the functional aspects of reading and writing practices. Two groups

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<sup>4</sup> There is a difference among life stories and life accounts. The first ones imply a detailed tracking of someone's vital trajectory as it is done in a case study. Life accounts are biographical accounts selected according to the study object. Kornblit (2004).

are identified in this sample: one which focuses in the basic aspects of the competencies which is the largest group (34 students); and a second one (six students) which opens the *variation* spaces which includes aspects that are referring elements of learning of greater quality.

Students belonging to the first group submit themselves to the reading and writing practices generated from the curriculum as an obligation without any awareness of their functionality. They admit that their levels of development in such competencies are not enough for their requirements in their future professional performance.

The minority group identifies literacy competencies as basic tools in the construction of their professional profile. This particular group is aware of the meaning pertaining to the reading and writing practices with a level of independence from the academic context. It looks for an integral development with a connection to other social environments through them (religious, ideological or social solidarity).

**Unit 2:** it covers categories coming from the question *How do you read?* The first group focuses its descriptions in formal and material aspects of textbooks. As regard as the strategic feature of comprehension or text production they refer to general basic uncertain aspects and they do not supply concrete evidence of conscious and monitored usage of strategies; they do not show signals of connections with them or connections with cognitive type of processes either.

Group number two describes diverse strategies of comprehension and production related to the types of texts under analysis. It also integrates strategies with cognitive processes such as: associations, classifications, hierarchy arrangements, inferences, evaluations. It considers the reading process as an interaction between previous knowledge of the reader and the ideas suggested by the text.

Students feel they are participating in a creation process and a recreation of new ideas by means of the dialog generated by the author. They outline the importance of levels of critical analysis regarding their reading. In this level they

question themselves in an argumentative way; they work out value estimations concerning their appreciation of their readings or the opinion of others. They acknowledge that reading practices imply an intellectual effort, they feel they are a challenge for them and they self-monitor their execution.

**Unit Nº 3:** it organizes the information coming from the practices related to the question *How do you read and write from the hypertext?* The first column from the left side shows the basic categories which are afterwards defined in the next column considering their structural aspects. From the phenomenographic point of view they are classified in *invariant or variant aspects*.

*The invariant aspects* are the common aspects described by the majority of the group as essential features of the studied phenomenon. *The structural variant aspects*, on the other hand, refer to the features which are found in the individuals, which by opening the variation or the difference show unique aspects of the studied phenomenon showing greater quality in the learning process.

For extension reasons we only attach the table which collects data from Unit 3, that is specifically related with the hypertext.

*Table Nº 3. Question: How do you read and write from the hypertext?*

Categories	Structural Aspects	
<p><b>Category A. Search and Choice of Information</b></p>	<p>Invariant Aspects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Common Browser: Google.</li> <li>- Search by subject. The work is performed with the three first pages found.</li> <li>- The source is not relevant.</li> <li>- In the text information is selected according to titles, sub-titles or brief descriptions related to the subject. There is no extensive reading.</li> <li>- Information selection of lower semantic complexity.</li> <li>- Information selection which is “fun”, privilege of texts which have narrative discursive methods.</li> <li>- Perception that “everything is ready” in internet and that it is not necessary to re-write the material.</li> </ul>

	Variant aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Browsers Google, Wikipedia Encyclopedias, Encarta, Icarito.</li> <li>- Search in known and unknown sources.</li> <li>- Information selection from several sources.</li> <li>- Information selection considering common elements and different ones. Difference implies continuity in the searching process.</li> <li>- The larger amount of common elements in the information implies to value and to privilege such data.</li> <li>- Selective monitoring directed by the guidelines provided by the teacher.</li> </ul>
<b>Category B. Access to the text</b>	Invariant aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cut and paste the information. Then, print to access on paper the information.</li> </ul>
	Variant aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reading on line, directly from internet.</li> <li>- Individual work with several windows opened simultaneously. Information is compared from different sources.</li> <li>- Search, reading and collective selection on line through Messenger. .</li> </ul>
<b>Category C. Handling of types of texts.</b>	Invariant aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identification of the text which is read with textbooks which are exclusively literary.</li> <li>- There is no major awareness of the type of text which is being consulted.</li> </ul>
	Variant aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some notion about the type of text determined by its name: monographies and by its structural dimension (introduction, contents, conclusions).</li> </ul>

<b>Category D. Comprehension Construction</b>	Invariant aspects	- Short reading practices which emphasizes the literal dimension and reorganization of information.
	Variante aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information obtained from different sources is completed and ideas are re-written.</li> <li>- Comprehension of a concept is constructed comparing information from two, three or more versions. The version which contains more common elements in relation to the previous versions is selected.</li> <li>- A concept is recreated classifying collected ideas which are afterwards re-organized with their own words.</li> <li>- Collective construction of the meaning of the texts, on line consulting (messenger).</li> <li>- Common or collective work related to the construction of the sense of the text, use of graphic computing systems.</li> <li>- Comprehension monitoring starting from the guide line supplied by the teacher.</li> <li>- Hierarchical ordering of questions of the guideline considering the literal dimension, the application level and comprehension coming from inferences.</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
<b>Category E. Construction of textual production</b>	Invariant aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cut and paste with little personal re-generation or collective work in texts such as reports, power point presentations.</li> <li>-Uncertainty when writing, awareness of the fact of not handling production tools.</li> <li>- Scarce management of textual structures and speech methods related to expositive texts which are mostly required by teachers.</li> <li>- Some subjects provide reference material and specific guidelines to define the written work.</li> <li>- There is no space for feedback of written production.</li> </ul>
	Variante aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acknowledgement and management of stages in the production work: search of information, planning, writing and re-writing.</li> <li>- Awareness of production difficulties. Work is planned and systematically performed.</li> <li>- Interest and effort to be able to express personal ideas.</li> <li>- Management of some production tools related to expositive texts and/or essayist type of texts.</li> </ul>

Next categories summarized in the table are explained with more detail including quotations taken from *life accounts* which clarify their comprehension.

**Category A. Search and selection of information.** Most of the individuals when they work looking for information in internet, use *Google* as a Browser. Those students look for subject matters and as regard of work extension related to the number of pages they do not consider more than the three first ones. For information selection they read titles, sub-titles and short outlines or brief descriptions. They identify the paragraphs which are closer to the subject matter or to the questioned concept. Another criterion of choice is related to text selection which is less complex, that is to say, easier to understand because of its vocabulary or structural organization. Several individuals mention the need to find information which shows a narrative discursive type of speech altogether with the qualification "it should be fun".

Reading and writing practices in this category include short texts with special reference to the ones which require a minor effort when reading.

No interest is shown about sources or the authors with whom they are working with.

*"I needed to prepare a report (...) concerning "emotions", I wrote the subject matter in Google and I selected the information which was not too technical (...), I mean, were I could understand most of the words(...), when I looked for the information I did not read everything but I guided myself for the title and sub-titles ; when the subtitle included the subject I entered into that page (...), I compared afterwards with another page where information was complemented (...)" (Individual 4)*

Variant aspects of this particular category are described by the individuals who are familiar with several browsers; they work with information selection, they apply specific criteria, they compare data already found (such as common or different aspects). Among these individuals there is awareness concerning the importance of sources and consulted authors. References provided by the teacher who assigns this task are for these students an important indicator which they permanently refer to.

*"I search depending on the area, if it is related with education issues I go to the Mineduc web site (Ministry of Education in Chile); if it is something else I check different pages (...), I read summaries. If they are useful I enter into the corresponding page and I read more (...); if it is information which it doesn 't*

*depend on me: "cut and paste". If I need more I write, make a summary and then I adapt some words to give a certain structure to the work (...), in internet there is a lot of sites where people can download information; anyone can also upload them, that is the reason why I use reliable sources such as "Encarta", or "Mineduc." site (Individual 10)*

**Category B: Access to the text.** A relevant number of individuals even though they choose the information from internet, copy, paste and print it in such a way that the reading practice is not performed on line but on paper.

The variation dimension is provided by such individuals who directly read from the platform, with several windows opened simultaneously which have developed the skill of hypertextual reading process. The access to the text can be done in a personal way but also in a collective way, when, for example, a group is working connected through messenger. Each of the students then can look for his/her connections and find information which is simultaneously shared; selection decisions are taken by the group which keeps in touch ("on line").

*"To perform a team work on education our group needed some information concerning three paradigms: the ecological, the conductive and the cognitive ones (...), we agreed on the time hour and we used messenger (...) we went to Google, each one of us at home typed down the subject matter in our computers and all of us connected on line we shared what we found (...) we usually ask each other, we decide and we cut and paste (...) that day we started to work at eight and we finished at one approximately ...(...), well, the selection depends on the subject matter; if we have a guideline we stick to it if we only have the subject matter then it is more difficult to choose the information (...)" (Individual 4)*

**Category C: Management of types of texts.** The largest group does not show any evidence which shows a conscientious management of textual typology. They refer to the assigned reading material in the curriculum as *books or notes* when it deals with the reading action and *report* when it deals with the written dimension without including any other classification. When they are asked *What did you read in secondary school or what are you currently reading?* There is a general trend to locate their answers in the environment of literary texts. They are not aware of the use of functional texts or expositive texts or argumentative texts which are developed in the formation curriculum.

Individuals which open the variation have some notions regarding *monographies* because they are familiar with the site which shows them in Internet. As regard as them they express that monographies are structurally made up of *introduction, contents and conclusions*. It is clear that neither in their secondary formation nor in their university training they have had formal practices of comprehension or systematic production of academic texts.

*“When I was in high school I didn’t like to read either; I had to read “Pedro Páramo” in the last Grade (4º Medio), I didn’t like it at all .., I think I didn’t understand it; too many things were mixed and I got lost (...) Last year I read part of “Education is hiding a Treasure”, it has too much information and it is boring (...), ¿Is it a kind of report? , I don’t know (...), I made the effort to read it with a classmate and the teacher didn’t even ask about it in the test (...)” (Individual 26)*

**Category D: Comprehension Construction.** A significant number of individuals perform reading practices focused in titles, sub-titles and short outlines. In such cases comprehension levels are basic; they do not consider processes which imply elaboration, comparative readings or levels where a critical reading and personal production are obtained. . This particular group has not developed awareness regarding the use of reading and writing actions as a tool of professional formation. They use technology because it means time saving and less effort.

Variation is provided by the individuals who work using the hypertext, gather information from several windows at the time, compare ideas, class according to criteria extracted from the references provided by the guidelines of the teacher who is asking for the work. Then, they integrate information from different sources and prepare individually or in a team group versions of significant construction concerning the subject matter or concept which is being studied.

*“In Internet I first read large titles, if they don’t seem interesting I change the page (...) I love to look for information, I open several windows at a time (...) I can work with five or six windows at the same time and I jump from one to the other (...) Wikipedia has small links that are highlighted in blue, in such a way I can go back to the previous one (...), links attract me I cannot help opening them (...)” (Individual 7)*

**Category E. Construction of textual production:** invariant aspects belonging to this particular category are provided by cut and paste practices with no awareness of the type of text which should be produced. Some subjects of the curriculum supply elaboration guidelines for different tasks to be performed and remarks which specify bibliographic sources. In some other subjects the matter is only suggested and the search and production is performed with no clear reference elements. In general there is no feedback for productions, observations and corrections of tasks with larger value in the grade evaluation for the semester. They are received in an informal way after the semester has ended. Evaluation criteria depend on each teacher; there are no common referring elements concerning structures or formal basic discursive methods of texts to be produced by the students. Consequently, such learning cannot be transferred from one subject to another.

*“ The most important written reports are performed and handed out at the end of the semester; those ones are the most relevant concerning grade evaluation and that is why we care more (...), afterwards we are provided with the overall grade; then reports are delivered with some observations, corrections which are related to the handwriting or coherence, but it doesn't matter any more because the grade has already been assigned (...), those corrections or observations could be used for other tasks, but each one of the teachers has his/her own ideas. It is not of much use to apply the same criteria of work to all of them. For example, there are teachers who are more demanding and they force you to write a specific answers for a specific question or you must add some examples (...), yes, some of them. But with others we can write a long introduction saying nothing and then nothing happens (...)” (individual 19)*

Variation is introduced by individuals who have more experience with the types of texts which they should produce. They look to stick with more correctness to the types of texts they are supposed to produce and their aim is to respond with a larger exactness to the referring elements supplied by the teacher. They organize their production tasks in advance, they look for and select information from different sources already classified with specific criteria, they work with the basic structures corresponding to a report or an essay and show a conscious purpose to obtain personal productions where they can critically express themselves concerning a subject or a problem.

*“The text which I must create depends on what the teacher is asking; it also happens the same when I read, teachers ask specific questions (...), some other times comprehension is more complicated (...) I have to analyze the text and then adapt it; neither the question nor the answer are textual, afterwards I have to apply it to daily life (...). The same happens with the written work. I think that to be able to get good results I have to work in a research, and use that information to write my text (...), this is what I´m planning to do (...) The guiding work of the teacher is important, I would like them to be more demanding and that they respect such requirements, that they instruct us and make us obey, because sometimes they say they will do something and they don´t, and this causes laziness in us”.* (Individual 20)

### **III. Discussion and Conclusions.**

1. A relevant group of students pertaining to the sample acknowledges that their competencies in the reading and writing practices generated from their formation curriculum show insufficient levels of development.

This particular situation has already been pointed out in a number of research works<sup>6</sup>. Taking into consideration the fact that the aim of this particular study is to advance towards efficient ways of development of these competencies our position is assigned to the situated literacy line which considers in the first place the events and reading practices as social processes depending on communities which are generated in group historicity and on real emerging needs of their dynamics. Barton (1994); Barton et al (2000). In this sense, we think and we agree with Carlino (2005), “it is necessary to re-interpret the reading “problems” of many students. Their difficulties to understand what they read at the university it is not because they lack of a generalized skill or technique, but to the fact that when entering the university they must face new written cultures corresponding to different study fields”. Besides, in our case they are students which come in the majority of cases from a kind of culture where oral communication is preferred.

Students chosen for the sample are in the third semester of a career which includes 8; the formation plan counts with the timing to plan and perform compensatory processes on the line. It is necessary, nevertheless, that in the

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<sup>6</sup> -OECD (2000), *Literacy in the information AGE*.

-Figuerola, B. (2004), *The construction of the functional reading in future teachers of elementary school*.

medium and long term institutions study the formation curriculum of the primary school teacher to duly implement academic literacy competencies.

A way to empower academic literacy practices is to consider the perspective of “an inclusive teacher, which is aware that students are immigrants which are facing a new culture; it admits that this is intrinsically a challenge for anybody and it deals with an integration process to a community which is foreign and it is not a learning difficulty” (Carlino, 2005)

2. The advance status of the study suggests that in comparison to the previous group a lower number of students shows the right levels and they admit they are competent in their reading and writing practices. The observation, description and analysis of the construction of the reading and writing practices of whom have surpassed the barrier of accessing the academic culture in a formation program provides relevant hints for the formulation of the final methodological proposal of the project.

3. In the specific working area related to the hypertext the largest group is located in the level of working with half-elaborated information. Consequently, a methodological proposal should include accurate guidelines which permit that this particular information in its way to be processed is transformed into acquired knowledge. An important aspect of these guides should consider, for example, how to state a critical examination regarding sources or authorities in the matter concerning each discipline in the different subjects of the formation curriculum.

4. In the hypertextual work students, viewed as users, widen their connection route according to their interests and needs. Their requirement is to be more qualified and to obtain a higher level of autonomy to direct the creation of their routes of knowledge. Individuals perform a significant role when they are able to transform themselves into significant constructors of their formative and communicative itineraries. The challenge consists on how to prepare that individual, aware of his/her responsibility of self-formation.

5. On the other hand, from categories described in the analysis tables we emphasize that the interaction in the hypertextual work not only provides information but it also re-structures cognitive processes which are carried out by

the different symbolic systems. Thus, the hypertext tool in the teaching formation programs can be a significant device to empower different cognitive skills and facilitate an approximation among attitudes, the individuals skills and the information present through different codes.

6. Challenges which consider the students as referring element should in turn be understood and carried out by the team of teachers of the formation curriculum courses. The teachers, from the environment of each one of their corresponding courses, will have to empower innovation and creation capacities to open new roads which are adapted to hypertextual possibilities. The previous statement means, for example: question oneself and think on how to take advantage of the rupture of the usual coordination of temporal and space variables or how to employ the combination of synchronical and non-synchronical tools in the communication and construction of the disciplinary knowledge?

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