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Beginning Literacy as the Object of Study of Language and Literature Teaching Research, from an Ethnographic Perspective: Contributions to Teacher Training and the Teaching Work

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Abstract- This article presents the concepts and fundamentals of the lines of research on Language and Literature teaching from an ethnographic perspective, which we have been conducting in Argentina. Currently, these lines of research are being carried out at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional and focus on continuous teacher training distance learning, specifically addressing the challenges that affect Beginning Literacy in our country. The article explores how teachers describe their teaching experiences regarding the reproduction of educational slogans from the approaches that have guided curriculum designs and teacher training over the last four decades. It also presents how teachers produce other meanings regarding specific aspects overlooked by such reproduction. In this regard, the meanings through which teachers describe the challenges that their students face in mastering written language are defined and analyzed. Teachers sometimes do not know how to address these difficulties, as they have not been introduced to linguistic perspectives related to the distinctive features of Beginning Literacy.

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BEGINNINGLITERACYASTHEOBJECTOFSTUDYOFLANGUAGEANDLITERATURETEACHINGRESEARCHFROMANETHNOGRAPHICPERSPECTIVECONTRIBUTIONSTOTEACHERTRAININGANDTHETEACHINGWORK

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Keywords: beginning literacy – language and literature - teaching research – ethnographic perspective – teacher training - distance learning in university.

I. Why Researching Language and Literature Teaching from an Ethnographic Perspective

Our research developments are settled in the Language and Literature teaching area, as it is called in Argentina and other Latin American countries.[1] The history of the constitution and institutionalization of these studies in our universities, which are too complex and extensive, has already been examined in other works (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019). We now highlight some aspects that we believe are central to characterizing and presenting the context of the scientific production in which the Language and Literature teaching research from an ethnographic perspective is inscribed and, in this way, how it defines itself.[2] One of these aspects is the close relation, straightforward in many cases, between the type of legitimate knowledge in the scientific systems and those required by educational policies, more precisely, the schools' curriculum and syllabus, the teaching practice, the reading promotion programs, or different state actions. Also from the private sphere, such as compensatory or remedial literacy programs, among others. These relations were enclosed in international organizations' guidelines for educational policies, with records from 1970 (Perla, 2021a) but consolidated in 1980 and reinforced up to the present (Perla, 2021b). They involve a type of specific knowledge about Language and Literature teaching and about Beginning Literacy[3], whose objectives relate more to the standardization of the teaching work rather than

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[1] This term is also used in Spain. Actually, in Spanish, the term is not *enseñanza* (teaching) but *didáctica* (didactics). Our lines of research began in the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences from the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, where we were in charge as professor and researcher until 2022 of the subject *Didáctica de la Lengua y la Literatura I* (Didactics of Language and Literature I) from the Letters Department and, also, in charge of directing research projects in the Center for Linguistic Studies and Research belonging to the Research Institute in Humanities and Social Sciences. In 2013, the Humanities and Arts Department of the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional called us to work on teaching and research in the Area of Beginning Literacy and Language and Literature teaching in which we are currently.

[2] In this article, we cannot account for all the dimensions involved developing this perspective. We are talking about a long path that not only includes our training in ethnographic studies but also the significant number of examinations of the epistemological and methodological problems in the social sciences in general, also educational and teaching research in particular. All theoretical references in this regard are found in our already mentioned works (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019), and others that we will indicate throughout the article according to the most recently published (Cuesta, 2022a and b; Cuesta, 2023). Concerning the ethnographic studies themselves, we only cite the most significant ones for our current developments that to date we had not reported in any publication.

[3] As we explained in in another work (Cuesta, 2022b), at present the Spanish term *Alfabetización inicial* (Beginning Literacy) is mainly used by teachers in Argentina. In local curricular designs, even in scientific production, the use of the term is usually imprecise or does not exist at all, since it is replaced by reading and writing. Furthermore, all these uses do not necessarily mean the teaching and learning of the written language or of the writing system. This topic will be developed in detail as we move forward in this article.

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attending to the reality of education in our countries, its distinctive features, and needs. These processes established strictly normative conceptual frameworks that are linked to the restructuring of the Latin American Educational Systems, which were intensified because of "the implementation, since 1990, of policies that are related to teacher formation and the teaching work, which come from international organizations."[4] (Mercado and Espinosa, 2022, p. 184). Currently, as we will explain in this article, these normative frameworks continue although in local versions.

When we started with our research at the end of 1990 at Universidad Nacional de La Plata and nowadays at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, both Argentine universities, the development of the research into the Language and Literature teaching was limited to a series of debates that focused on the objects and contents to be taught and learned. The way language, on the one hand, and literature, on the other, were defined expressed different interests from the academic communities involved. These communities include some areas of Linguistics and Literary Studies (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019), especially for children and young adult Literature (Dubin, 2019; Cuesta, 2023), and with the strong presence of the Educational Sciences' trend known as Psychogenesis of Written Language (Cuesta, 2019; Dubin, 2019; Perla, 2021a and b; Oviedo, 2021 and 2023), more commonly known as *Constructivismo* (Constructivism) in Latin America. This trend fully determines the theoretical orientations of teaching training (Fonseca de Carvalho, 2001 and 2020; Sawaya, 2018 and 2020) and especially Beginning Literacy in the entire region (Mortatti, 2010; Schwartz and Correa, 2011; Soares, 2017a and b; Vaca Uribe, 2020; Mercado and Espinosa, 2022)[5].

By 1990, what once was a conceptual dispute stopped being so when different theoretical approaches started to consolidate and unite as pedagogical technicism in educational policies took root in region's countries. Thus, as it has already been explained in previous works (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019), Language and Literature teaching in Argentina is reconfigured with significant effects on the teachers' training and work: it is no longer about teaching Language and Literature or Beginning Literacy, but rather about reading and writing as part of the curriculum and syllabus designs defined as *know-how knowledge*. In this way, the educational knowledge related to the "traditional" way of teaching is marginalized and treated as obsolete knowledge, both in scientific production and in the curriculum and syllabus designs. Such is the case of Grammar teaching and Literary Historiography, to name just a few. Moreover, it has been claimed that these school disciplinary knowledge would mainly attempt against "the construction of knowledge" by the students, "the processes of reading and writing texts," or "the pleasure of reading literature," among other similar claims. The possible sources of these claims are no longer quoted, or the exact quotes are used repeatedly, even if we refer to publications dated 30 or 40 years ago.[6] This why, together with other Argentinian researchers have particularly paid attention to a phenomenon that is usually omitted, maybe because it shows the tight and direct relations and alliances before mentioned. We are referring to the institutionalization of specialists in reading and writing who work in Universities and state and private institutions in charge of the design of educational policies. These specialists appear as messengers and spokespeople carrying the only proper, legitimate knowledge. It is knowledge that is not questioned regarding its conceptual and empirical foundations on how teachers should do work daily (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019; Dubin, 2019; Perla, 2021a and b; Oviedo, 2021 and 2023).

As a result, the educational reforms in the region around 1990 meant two things. On the one hand, it meant a reorganization of the Educational Systems and the teaching working conditions. On the other hand, as it was studied than twenty years ago by José Fonseca de Carvalho (2001) in Brazil, it meant the appearance of a pedagogical technicism program for teacher training and work, based on the implementation of contents presented as "new and innovative." However, as the author explains, they are *educational slogans*. This category has been used mainly for the research on Literature teaching in the context of Argentina (Dubin, 2019). But, this category is also helpful to summarize previous studies that were carried

[4] From now on, all the translations made from the original publication in Spanish and Portuguese into English are our responsibility.

[5] It is essential to mention that we constantly support our research with those of our Brazilian and Mexican colleagues, mainly dated from the end of 1980 to the present, concerning the critical reviews about Constructivism in the Beginning Literacy field. Because these reviews also apply to Argentina, especially in relation to the current approach known as *Prácticas del lenguaje* (Language Practices). We will list some of the works that have been fundamental to our current lines of research.

[6] Once more, we cannot mention all the dimensions involved. When referring to the approaches taken into account by educational policies, we are addressing three main approaches that we have studied within the context of Argentina. Briefly summarized, these are Psychogenesis or Constructivism, now called *Prácticas del lenguaje* (Language Practices) and predominant in the country, the *Textualismo cognitivista approach* (in English it could be translated Cognitivist Textualism), which integrates cognitive models of textual analysis with definitions of the Competency-Based Education and *Sociocultural approach* with definitions focused on the impact of Literature on students in the construction of subjectivities (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019). Over the past few decades, these three approaches started to intertwine, resulting in definitions of reading and writing, which originally came from one approach or the other but are replicated by those who adopt any of them. Therefore, due to space constraints, we chose not to include quotes from their specialists to validate our categorization and analysis of the approaches, which have already been studied, as we explain below.

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out in the field of Language and Literature teaching and Beginning Literacy regarding the constant repetition of educational slogans used in the curriculum and other documents belonging to Argentinian educational policies in different levels of the national and jurisdictional Educational System. Some examples of these slogans include "one learns to read by reading, and to write by writing," "children/student construct their knowledge/meaning," "it is necessary to develop reading/writing/linguistic competencies," "reading comprehension must be developed," "reading behavior must be developed," or "the tasks of the reader and the writer," "reading literature constructs subjectivities," "it is necessary to take pleasure in reading literature," "literature takes us to possible worlds," "to create reading and writing situations is necessary," "putting students in contact with books is necessary," "creating a literacy environment is necessary," "introducing children/young people/adults to written culture is necessary," among others (Cuesta, 2011, 2019, 2022a and b; 2023; Dubin, 2019; Perla, 2021a and b; Oviedo, 2021 and 2023; Morini, 2021). In fact, among these educational slogans, there is one with a particularly impactful role in beginning literacy: *One learns to read by reading and to write by writing*, which "was gradually incorporated into curricular reforms to teach children in the early stages of schooling. This tendency was strengthened by sociocultural studies and their conception of reading and writing as situated social practices." (Mercado and Espinosa, 2022, p. 193). We will get back to this topic later on.

Therefore, Fonseca de Carvalho (2001) defines educational slogans as "a set of expressions, rhetorical figures, and phrases which carry a big effect, whose reproduction generates an apparent consensus, broad but vague, regarding their meanings or their consequences for educational practice."[7] (p. 96). In this way, educational slogans can come from different trends and coexist harmoniously in the pedagogical discourses of educational policies, as their purpose is not to guide teaching work in a reflective sense, understanding teaching and learning. Fonseca de Carvalho (2020) explains in another recently published article:

> (…) in the same way Constructivism does, most discourses related to Competency-Based Pedagogy present a prescriptive rhetoric equally forged in the abstraction of school culture (pedagogical practices, values, and principles historically linked to the ideals of literate culture and schooling), indicating rather an uncritical continuity than an overcoming of preceding models. (p. 97).

To sum up, this issue of the *uncritical continuity based on the abstraction of school culture and pedagogical practices* has persisted to the present day in an accumulation of educational slogans reproduced by curriculum-related educational policies and other areas, endorsed by specialists, for at least the past four decades in Argentina. They have fueled an interest in the developing of research on language and literature teaching, as well as beginning literacy, from an ethnographic perspective. Unlike the mere reproduction of slogans, our career in teaching and research, especially in university degrees and continuing education programs for teachers, has revealed that when we pay attention to the everyday work that teachers carry out in schools, which includes their interactions with students, there is no mechanical application of these slogans. In ethnographic terms, the fieldwork in this area can be done only by accessing to how teachers at different levels and modalities of the educational system refer to their own work experiences with the task of literacy and teaching language and literature. In other words, this means how teachers put into words and give meaning to the difficulties they face every day, how they resolve them, or not, and what their achievements are, or not.

II. How to Study the Meanings of the Teachers' Descriptions of their Daily Work: Navigating between the *Reproduction* of Educational Slogans and the *Production* of what is Omitted in Teaching

In connection to what we talked about before, the ethnographic perspective enables the exploration of a broad universe of meanings through which teachers point out the problems they face in their lessons when trying to apply what is required by the syllabus and curriculum and the lack of specific helpful knowledge to explain the distinctive features of language and literature teaching and which dimensions are relevant for beginning literacy and the students' learning. Concerning the students, teachers try to consider the singularities of the social, cultural, and linguistic communities, which are very diverse in our country, and how these singularities are expressed in reading and writing. These meanings, which are repeated with different variations, often refer to the *reproduction* of educational slogans in the form of questions: "How can I ensure that my students learn to read by reading/ develop writing skills/construct knowledge/experience the pleasure of reading, etc.?" Moreover, teachers use expressions of discomfort or self-blame: "Don't tell me there are other forms of knowledge to explain what happens in my classes, I must stick to the curriculum design/we teachers fail because we cannot interpret the curriculum design, etc." In some cases, the discomfort or blame can also be directed towards the students and their families: "Since they were never read to at home,

[7] Fonseca de Carvalho takes the definition from Scheffler, Israel (1978). *A linguagem da educação*. São Paulo: Saraiva, EDUSP.

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they have had no contact with books/written culture," and therefore, "they are not literate," "they don't understand texts," "they lack the necessary reading/ writing/linguistic skills." Sometimes, the responsibility is attributed to the levels of the educational system preceding those where teachers are currently working: "Since Primary Education did not teach students to read and write, now in Secondary School, we cannot do anything," etc. We will clarify this point. From our ethnographic perspective, these meanings are not understood as a means to verify teachers' thoughts or ideologies, as if in this way, one could validate that they "think in that way" because they "lack a commitment to the task," "are not interested in professional development," or "are discriminatory." The point is not to speculate about their personalities and beliefs as a justification for why approaches are not successfully implemented. In any case, these interests are of another type of research that is not interested in reviewing ethical problems (Restrepo, 2015 and 2022). These meanings, for us and in reality, indicate teaching problems that, logically, do not find explanations in educational slogans, as we explained before, especially when control agencies insist on their mere application for the implementation of curriculum policies' approaches (Oviedo, 2021 and 2023).

However, while the reproduction of meanings happens, other significancies emerge in the teachers' comments. These meanings raise questions about the validity of making conceptual and methodological decisions regarding language and literature teaching and how to approach beginning literacy. In many cases, these meanings do not necessarily negate educational slogans but instead reveal the possibility of making changes and variations in their teaching proposals. In various cases refers to reinstating disciplinary knowledge that was omitted or resorting to other theoretical frameworks that offer more accurate and relevant explanations for everyday teaching work. Thus, some teachers report "I work with the syllables even though it is prohibited," or "with the relation between sounds and letters," or "with orthography" in the face of difficulties with their students' beginning literacy. Some express "I work with notions of traditional grammar," regarding the difficulties students face when writing texts, or "I work with canonical literature because it gives results," concerning the students' lack of interest in the latest trends in children or teenage literature. These meanings also highlight the students' particularities regarding their social, cultural, and linguistic diversity across Argentina, which is becoming increasingly complex. Many teachers mention that they do not know how to work in classrooms with students who speak Spanish and other languages from our country and neighboring ones, such as Guarani and Quechua (Dubin, 2023). Spanish is not even the vehicular language of some social groups. "Spanish" itself does not encompass all the Creole varieties present in Argentina, from its historical migrations (Bolivia, Paraguay, Perú) to the current ones (Venezuela and Colombia). We are providing a very brief and incomplete illustration of a broader outlook, as it would take an entire article to explain this diversity that teachers refer to in our fieldwork[8]. These meanings repeatedly mention the constant "not knowing how" or "not knowing very well how," acknowledging that these are teaching problems, as we already pointed out, which are systematically omitted in official guidelines for teacher training. These meanings are often expressed with concern or even anguish, as they show the absences in teacher training: "Why were we not taught anything about this in the course of studies or teacher training?", is a question that is repeated with frustration. However, for many teachers the possibility of accessing other knowledge that is relevant to the problems they constantly point out regarding their daily work is encouraging. In our terms, the teachers' meanings are the ones of the *production* that disrupt with its systematicity those meanings belonging to the reproduction of educational slogans, and they are the ones through which teachers generate doubts, questions, and observations about what they do not know but should know to carry out their work. In the following section, we present the current progress of our research regarding these logics of reproduction and production, specifically in the context of Beginning Literacy.

When asserting the adoption of an ethnographic perspective instead of doing ethnography, it is evident in our understanding that a fundamental distinction is highlighted. Our theoretical and methodological frameworks are a particular construction that ethnography sees as a research style that deals with the investigated realities, also the methodologies employed for data collection, analysis, interpretation, and subsequent written exposition (Cuesta, 2011, 2019 and 2022a). Our research focuses on the *trabajo docente cotidiano* (everyday teaching work) and specifically in how the teachers describe concerning to teach reading and writing, Language and Literature, at the different levels and modalities of the Argentine Educational System. These educators also bring forth the voices of their students and respective communities. We believe that constitutes a relevant problem for research on teaching that must be addressed.

[8] This diversity, as we briefly mentioned, is also cultural and social. It is expressed in the classrooms through oral narrative and cultural consumptions of the students, especially in Literature classes (Dubin, 2019; López Corral, 2020). At the same time, they involve different notions of reality, of what is considered fiction, true or false, in the appeal to different social discourses that we have deeply studied in other works about the reading materials of our students (Cuesta, 2011, 2019 and 2023).

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Concerning ethnography, we adopt current developments that allow us to justify our fieldwork methodologies. We face the practical limitation of being unable to be present in every school nationwide for an extended duration, but we believe that this is not the only way to carry out developments from an ethnographic perspective; otherwise, we would be reviving classical epistemological debates on the understanding of the investigated realities. In other words, represents a perpetuation of objectivist perspectives that do not apply to educational institutions today, as access to educational institutions is not easy for different reasons, such as schools being guarded against the entry of unfamiliar adults and the advance of regulations on students' physical well-being and identity preservation. Additionally, evaluative scrutiny imposed on teachers does not give any certainty that they will readily participate in the research. These objectivist perspectives ultimately fail to acknowledge that, in essence, we are constantly dealing with discourses and meanings mediated by others. The mere presence of the researcher in the classroom does not guarantee access to these discourses, as any conversation within the school occurs under surveillance on what can be said and what is not permitted to be said. At the same time, these perspectives involve particularisms that do not allow observation on which meanings are reproduced and which are produced within the diversity of the extensive National territory and its Educational System.

Consequently, it is not a question of the researchers being present physically inside the school and the classroom just to verify the truth of the collected data. It is not just about gathering data but interpreting them according to their validity. Validity is achieved once the recurrence of meanings becomes visible, therefore allows for confirmation. They are interpreted with the support of the conceptual framework that explains their reasons for existence, and the meanings are socialized with the same teachers who make sense to them. In this way, they contribute to their everyday teaching work. In response to the teachers' observations regarding the lack of knowledge concerning the specificities of Beginning Literacy in their workplaces, reiterated in our interactions with them, we have progressed in the study and search of research on the topic that addresses this need. This is research are not recognized in the local academic spheres, sometimes not even known.

May seem obvious, but it is not so evident within the framework of the reproduction of the educational slogans that we previously mentioned, which has solidified in the technicist conception of teacher training and work and does not allow teachers' suggestions that imply the possible discussion of these slogans. As opposed to this, our perspective tries to develop knowledge for teachers, assuming that "the ethical question in ethnographic research of who speaks for whom, from where and for what purpose, can no longer be evaded in the name of contributing to a supposed neutral knowledge." (Restrepo, 2015, p. 177). In our case, it is about wondering for whom and for what purpose the knowledge we develop contributes to Beginning Literacy and Language and Literature teaching. The ethnographic perspective provides answers to these questions that we understand are unavoidable and fundamental to the current research about teaching.

As we said before, the meanings of both reproduction and production appear in exchanges with teachers and do not happen inside the educational institutions where they work. Since 2017, we have been in charge of courses in the Licenciatura en Enseñanza de la Lectura y la Escritura para la Educación Primaria (Bachelor's Degree in Reading and Writing Teaching for Primary Education) with distance learning modality[9] in Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Argentina. It belongs to the Ciclos de Complementación Curricular (Curricular Complementation Cycles) offered by Universities in our country, Public University in our case, free of charge, destined to graduate teachers from Institutos de Formación Docente[10] (Teacher Training Institutes) to get a University degree in specific areas. This course of studies allows us be online with teachers from all over the country who work not only in Primary School but also in other educational levels and different modalities. At the same time, other professionals work in education, such as librarians, psychologists, educational psychologists, teachers of other areas such as English (a foreign language taught officially and compulsory from Primary School onward), and people in manager positions such as headmasters and headmistresses who carry out teacher training governmental programs, especially provincial ones. In a brief numerical representation: in 2017, 250 students began their studies and by 2024, 2.500 enrolled. It is a beneficial complementary course of studies for people with a college or University degree. In our teacher students' words, it is essential because it gives access to knowledge that is not present in their training and careers. In this context, Beginning Literacy is the most required one, as it will be explained in the following section.

[9] From 2006 to 2011, we were in charge of teacher training courses with distance learning modality in Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina). This background is relevant to the research developments presented in this article (Cuesta 2011 and 2019).

[10] In Argentina, most teachers of different levels and modalities of the Educational System pursue a course of studies in *Institutos de Formación Docente*. These institutes are part of *educación superior*, higher non-university education, dependent on the provincial governments. They belong mainly to state management, but there are also privately managed ones.

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In essence, from an ethnographic perspective in its *multi-sited or multi-local* developments (Marcus, 2001; Restrepo, 2015 and 2022), which also includes the so-called *virtual ethnography* (Hine, 2004 and 2017; Ruiz Méndez and Aguirre Aguilar, 2015; Winocur, 2013) with those who study practices and relationships in virtual contexts, we conceptualize our fieldwork as researchers in conjunction with our active role as educators shaping the curriculum and engaging in its virtual environment. Because "multi-local research is structured around chains, paths, plots, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations" that do not align with postmodern anthropology, as it seeks to debate and re-conceptualize how it is understood empirically when "the ethnographer establishes some form of literal or physical presence with an explicit logic of association or connection between sites that indeed define the argument of ethnography" (Marcus, 2001, p. 118). In methodological terms, therefore, it involves "bringing together multiple sites within the same study context" because "the persuasiveness of the expansive field that any ethnography constructs and maps lies in its ability to generate connections through the translation and tracking of distinctive discourses from site to site" (Marcus, 2001, p. 119). Our research progress, then, reveals that teachers who work in different locations, in various sites across Argentina, find in the courses of studies of the Bachelor's degree, within their virtual classrooms, a space for exchanging ideas about their teaching concerns, the particular realities in which they work, the stories of their professional development, the educational and curricular policies of their provinces, and the possibility of digitally sharing teaching materials and students' written work, among other classroom records, through a constant recognition of their similarities or singularities. In this way, discussion forums, chat, and internal messaging serve as the spaces where exchanges occur, referring to experiences with beginning literacy and the teaching of language and literature, constituting what virtual ethnography calls *communities* (Ruiz Méndez and Aguirre Aguilar, 2015). They are specific forms of socialization carried out by teachers, with the purpose of what brings them together in the virtual environment of the course: accessing a type of continuous training in the field of literacy and language and literature teaching, which values their own territorially contextualized teaching experiences in different parts of the country, and can be shared as common aspects or differences. Thus, it is a form of socialization expressed through constant exchanges of common interests, which cannot occur in a face-to-face context. Only in the virtual environment of the course of studies teachers of different provinces of the country can gather outside their workplaces to talk about the interests that make them a community with other education professionals and who are part of all of the National Educational System. Therefore, it is not a matter of engaging in the debate on "the dualism between ethnography of the real and ethnography of the virtual" (Winocur, 2013, p. 16) as if virtual communities were fictitious in the sense of mere socialization simulations. Individuals who participate in virtual communities, particularly the type presented here, do not acknowledge the supposed separation between online and offline spheres because "even though they recognize the differences between both worlds and their ways of communication, the experience subjectively integrates them and gives them a meaning which transcends these differences" (Winocur, 2013, p. 20).

III. What it Means to *Know Nothing*, or *Very Little*, about Beginning Literacy in Argentina: The Effects of its *Reinvention* in Social Practices of Reading and Writing

We will summarize as clearly as possible some of the most relevant aspects of the current problems of Beginning literacy in Argentina, related to what was discussed in the first section of article. These aspects also explain why teachers of different levels and modalities of the National Educational System seek training in the perspectives of Beginning Literacy that we explore in this course of study.

The reconfiguration of Language and Literature teaching in reading and writing education has particularly affected Beginning Literacy, which historically in our country was added to Language teaching in the first three years of Primary School (Perla 2021a; Oviedo, 2021). Magda Soares (2017a) refers to this as the *reinvention of literacy*. This reinvention is explained as a displacement or a replacement of the term through the invention of others, motivated by the "necessity to recognize and name more advanced and complex social practices of reading and writing resulting from learning the writing system" (Soares, 2017a, p. 31). From a historical perspective, as the author explains, this "necessity" goes back to the academic debates in the USA, England, and France between the decades of 1970 and 1980. These debates were adopted and spread particularly in Latin America, to generate scientific arguments to define the "problems in mastering the abilities of the use of reading and writing," expressed at the same time as "precarious mastering of the abilities of reading and writing necessary to participate in literate social practices" (Soares, 2017a, p. 32). In the specific case of Argentina, the reinvention of literacy meant progressive neglect, which continues up to the present, of the term *beginning literacy* or the change of its historical reference as the "initial stage of written language learning" (Soares, 2017a, p. 31) concerning the correct mastery of the Spanish writing system. Whether one case or the other, and not being

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able to fully develop them here, drawing on other works (Cuesta, 2011, 2019 and 2022b), the definition that has been imposed throughout the National Educational System is the one that *students must engage in social practices of reading and writing*. Everything previously explained has had significant consequences for teacher training and work at all levels and modalities within the Educational System.

In the first section of this paper, we mentioned that reading and writing become teaching content. It involves reading and writing texts as know-how that will allow students in Primary School "to learn by themselves," "with autonomy," "discover or construct knowledge" about something we do not know. We are not being imprecise or unscientific in the expression "something we do not know." This expression summarizes the meanings derived from the production we have been examining in our fieldwork, as mentioned by teachers in different ways. However, they show the same emptiness of academic knowledge and erasure of the object of study brought about by the reinvention of literacy in our country. For instance, an observation repeated by teachers who work in the first two years of Primary School is that "they bring different types of texts to their classrooms and children cannot read or write." It can be seen that in this explanation there is no reference to Beginning Literacy: What is omitted between "bringing texts to the classroom" and having "children read and write"? Indeed, based on the definitions of reading and writing as social practices, coming back to educational slogans, teachers must "create reading and writing situations for children to enter the written culture" because, as we explained, "children learn to read by reading and to write by writing" has been become a dominant methodological premise in teaching. Once more, what do we teach? We have noticed that most teachers do not use the word *enseñanza* (teaching) or some use the word *intervención* (intervention) without explicit references to how it differs from the word teaching in terms of meaning. There is no mention of the concept of *language* in the sense of *written language*; instead, the emphasis is on the broader term language. Therefore, written language is not taught as something to be read and written but rather "promotes reflection on the language." Teachers often associate the definitions of reading and writing to "the development of competencies/capabilities/skills in understanding and producing texts." It is not that teachers are "confused," but instead that all these premises converge in the official guidelines on Beginning Literacy, which paradoxically denies, and thereby omits, that the specificity of Beginning Literacy implies the teaching and learning of the progressive mastery of the writing system. In Argentina, we are talking about the writing system of its official language, Spanish, which is also the common language of all the linguistic communities. In other words, it is the *political language* whose mastery is necessary for citizen participation in a graphocentric society (Soares, 2017b).

Magda Soares (2017a and b) and Luiz Cagliari (2011 and 2022) insist on how problematic all these omissions are for the teaching training and the curricular designs in Brazil. We find identical problems in Argentina. In this case, the approach is called *Prácticas del lenguaje* (Language Practices), whose constitution and reworking, always in harmony with the guidelines of international organizations, have an extensive history of cycles of policies at both jurisdictional and national levels (Perla, 2021a and b). Therefore, when we talk to teachers to discuss what is being taught and learned, when we claim that students "learn to read by reading and to write by writing," they answer "*las prácticas del lenguaje.*"[11] We will not reiterate because we have already studied this in-depth alongside other Argentine researchers mentioned earlier, concerning how *Prácticas del lenguaje* have impacted the entire National Educational System, and not just in Primary Education (Cuesta, 2011, 2019, 2022a and b; 2023; Dubin, 2019; Perla, 2021a and b; Oviedo, 2021 and 2023; Morini, 2021). What is important to point out is that the concision of the content and the teaching methodologies within this construct of *Prácticas del lenguaje* as a reinvention of literacy poses a succession of texts ranging from legends to cooking recipes. These texts are characterized by a series of *properties* that supposedly demand specific *behaviors* from students. Thus, the legend, presented as a literary text[12], should elicit enjoyment or pleasure from the text, while the cooking recipe should be followed step by step as an instructional guide. The *reflection on language* implies that students understand for themselves that legends use verbs in the past tense. In contrast, cooking recipes use infinitives, so then students proceed to write either a legend or a cooking recipe. In this way, classes unfold through *the creation of reading and writing situations* related to various texts, which are repeated since they are specified in the curriculum designs for the subsequent years of schooling. If, in the first grade of

[11] Not all curricular designs of the country's jurisdictions, as it occurs in the national one, have adopted the name *Prácticas del lenguaje* to designate this scholar area. Some still call it *Lengua* (Language) or *Lengua y Literatura* (Language and Literature), and in the last three years of Secondary School, the term *Literature* is used. However, the guidelines, contents and objectives reproduce the definitions of this approach or at least they use them connected to other approaches. On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify that in Spanish *lenguaje* does not have the same meaning as *lengua*. The use of the first term instead of the second one refers to the act of erasure of the language, in the sense of the *tongue* you speak or the *Spanish language*, as an object of teaching and learning and is replaced by *lenguaje* defined as the cognitive capacity of human development (Cuesta, 2019; Perla, 2021a and b).

[12] The conceptual mistake of curricular designs when presenting legends as if they were literary texts, without discriminating whether they are versions of authors, is studied in-depth by Mariano Dubin (2019).

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Primary School, reading and writing situations were created for the legend of *Yerba mate* and the cooking recipe for soup, in the second grade, it is done for the legend of the *Ceibo* flower and the cooking recipe for pizza. Honestly, there is not much more than this in the didactic sequences or official projects that teachers of the first three years of Primary School must work with, and nothing different is added when working with fairy tales or myths.

The above-mentioned reflects a situation of complete circularity to which teachers refer when they claim that, ultimately, they comply with these guidelines and students fail to read and write without being able to express with precision what exactly is not achieved in reading and writing. They often agree that in oral exchanges, students demonstrate an understanding of the storyline, what happens with each character of the legend or that, when preparing pizza, first we make the dough with flour, water, salt and yeast. In this way, the teachers begin to focus on the problem, and they start generating or feel confident in communicating descriptions of what they repeatedly observe in their courses, year after year. Some students, even in higher education, "especially struggle with reading aloud," and "almost the majority face various difficulties with writing, with the most concerning issues at the level of individual words." Because "many students do not write the words with all their letters, they do not just have orthographic mistakes," "they also often string words together," or "they cannot construct a syntactically correct sentence or short text." Consequently, many teachers label these recurrently observed difficulties as consequences of *not being literate* or *failures in beginning literacy.*

Thus, another line of meaning production regarding this everyday reality referred to by teachers is the debate on beginning literacy methods, which, as we have already examined (Cuesta, 2022b), is constantly evolving in Argentina. We cannot address now all the dimensions of the debate[13], but what we can recover from analyzing the meanings produced by teachers is how it manifests in their daily teaching practices. The discussion revolves around whether one should teach or should not teach letter-sound relationships, in some cases expressed as graphemes-phonemes or, in fewer instances, as "phonological consciousness", or if these relationships should be taught on demand, relying on students to discover them on their own; or, if it is accepted that they should be taught, the debate centers on how to teach them.

The reinvention of literacy in Argentina has particular effects because of the omission of specific linguistic knowledge about the teaching and learning of the written system, and this also explains why a university degree course designed for continuous training of teachers from Primary Education receives, as mentioned earlier, teachers from different levels and modalities of the Educational System. Furthermore, in conversations with teachers, it is not very clear what the writing system is as a segment of written language, even though the term has some usage in the curriculum policy documents that they must use for class planning. Therefore, our task has been to teach teachers what the writing system is, the principles that govern it when dealing with alphabetic and orthographic languages like Spanish, what it means for it to be graphophonemic, and, in this sense, what the grapheme and phoneme are, along with their relationships. We also cover what the letter is, as a graphic category, and why they identify that reading and writing words pose the main challenges in beginning literacy. Regarding the latter, we teach them that words, as distinct units in spoken language (phonological words) and written language (orthographic words), express the arbitrariness of the writing system, as their relationships are not natural. These linguistic insights have been addressed for decades by studies on Beginning Literacy by authors such as Soares and Cagliari. These studies share a linguistic perspective grounded in the extensive history of teacher training in Brazil that both researchers have consistently pursued. This background is crucial for our development because it goes beyond recovering historical knowledge from linguistic studies.

For example, Soares (2017b) demonstrates the impracticality of perspectives proposing the manipulation of the phoneme as if it could be delimited from the word and pronounced independently of the syllable. These studies not only draw on linguistic knowledge but also put it to work as relevant explanations for teachers regarding the problems they observe in their students. With detailed analyses of Portuguese in its different varieties, these studies allow us to address and systematize similar cases concerning

[13] We also cannot account for all its dimensions because we are still conducting surveys on the specific characteristics of the approach that currently opposes *Prácticas del lenguaje* in Argentina. This approach has reached some teachers in the country through compensatory programs that use the term "*lectoescritura.*" For now, we can only report that teachers familiar with these programs refer to them as *phonological consciousness* programs (the term used is not *awareness*). However, our initial analyses lead us to the characterization made by Soares (2017b) for similar lines in Brazil, which she identifies as particular developments of the *phonological paradigm*. In reality, inspired by research in English, postulate the possibility of manipulating phonemes in writing activities to reinforce their relationships with graphemes, such as lengthening sounds, among other techniques. This concept is debatable for Portuguese due to the characteristics of its syllabic structures, and we can also extend this discussion to Spanish. For instance, Spanish consonant phonemes are not pronounceable or audible separately in speech. It involves a conception of the phoneme that is not linguistic (Soares, 2017b). Similarly, Cagliari (2022) analyzes this problem of omitting the linguistic nature in the conception of the syllable in the psychogenesis of written language. It involves overlooking or misunderstanding that the syllable is not the same as the phoneme.

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to Spanish as both languages belong to the same alphabetic family, closely related, and with orthographic depth closer to transparency (Soares, 2017b). Therefore, it is not about supporting today's debates on the methods and approaches but rather about training teachers in the linguistic knowledge of Beginning Literacy that will allow them, in the case of Argentina, to understand why many children write in Spanish *PLO* and not *PELO* (HAIR), without speculations from a cognitive view that may categorize them. Rather, the question is what specific linguistic knowledge is at stake and which the student has not yet fully mastered. An explanation involves transferring the syllable as a phonological unit from the spoken word *PE* to the letter *P* once the alphabetic principle of the writing system is mastered: letters (graphemes) represent sounds (phonemes). Alternatively, a child may follow the acrophonic or iconic principle: the child thinks that the name of the letter is its sound. The name of the letter *P* is *PE* in Spanish. However, these principles are not the only ones. The orthographic principle, which supports why the spelling of the word in our example is *PELO* and not *PLO*, is the one that requires teaching: the phoneme of *P*, /p/, is a complete abstraction in Spanish, not pronounceable. It is different from the phoneme of the vowel *E*, /e/, which also coincides with the pronunciation of the letter's name. Therefore, the presence of the letter *E* in the written word must be made visible. For the authors, this represents an initial step for those learning to teach these dimensions strictly related to the writing system. It can be explained as the disunity of the phonological word from the orthographic word, revealing specific modalities of reading and writing that have been heavily questioned in the long history of methodological debates and current approaches. These modalities involve decipherment or decoding (reading) and cipher or encoding (writing), which, according to Soares (2017b), are reciprocally related, and according to Cagliari (2011 and 2022), are related in terms of implicature, as the modality of reading through decipherment is the one that initially enables the mastery of the principles that result positively in writing. Actually, the concepts used by the authors are *ciframento* (cipher) and *deciframento* (decipherment), not *codificação* (encoding) and *decodificação* (decoding) because, from the linguistic perspective and studies about the history of writing systems, written language is not a code in itself but a system of representation of spoken language.

We are briefly describing how we work alongside teacher students of the course of studies who, while displaying some differences, as previously mentioned, share a linguistic perspective regarding the specificity to master the writing system, such as reading and writing modalities that belong to Beginning Literacy and that require instruction. When one observes the characteristics of the written languages and their writing systems, it is impossible to say that people in the process of being literate will "naturally" discover the governing principles solely by being exposed to written materials in reading and writing situations, as mentioned earlier. Likewise, it is impossible to learn through exercises involving sound prolongation, in which sounds are thought to be isolated and manipulated concerning words, and consequently, the graphemes representing them will not be omitted in their writing. As the word is the unit of meaning, it will always guide its reading and writing. That being so, any artificial methodology applied to its development, understood as immersion or as reinforcement, will always lead to partial, incomplete, or misguided learning experiences that persist throughout a student's entire schooling (Soares, 2017a and b; Cagliari, 2011; 2022). As a result, many teachers Secondary and Higher Education observe these problems in reading and student writing. In numerous cases, these challenges do not involve serious comprehension issues or an absolute inability to write; instead, they manifest as being halfway between the mastery of various levels of written language. As we have already studied (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019) student's reading and writing are guided in social discursive terms, as social discourses always provide orientations of meanings that collaborate with understanding the meaning of the written text intends to transmit. However, these meaning orientations that support literary texts, as their specificity lies in the different possible interpretations (Cuesta, 2023), are not enough in the case of scientific texts organized through particular rhetorics and whose meanings, the way they are developed, may either lack broad social circulation or conflict with how they can be understood in various public disclosures, such as in the vast area of social media and the web.[14]

IV. Conclusions

In conclusion, especially in the last two years we have been studying, along with other teachers

[14] In our doctoral thesis (Cuesta, 2011) we study cases of instructions for reading and writing tasks, along with student-written texts, ranging from the first years of Primary Education up to University education. Concerning this last educational level, even though the literary texts contribute to the students reading and writing, it is impossible to affirm that its modalities are transferable to texts of, for instance, contemporary sociology, as a particular case we address in our thesis. In the case of these texts, the modalities of decipherment reading and cipher writing are determining factors. For instance, in the mentioned thesis, we examined a text written by beginning university student whose task required producing an argumentative text about Eastern European immigration to Argentina. At the beginning of the text, the student writes that the problem of Argentinians with immigration is their "indiosincrasia" (as if in English it were written "indiansyncrasy") instead of *idiosincrasia* (*idiosyncrasy*), thereby going back to the times of the conquest of America, showing knowledge in this field. The text was not completely misspelled, but this pseudo-word or non-existent neologism in Spanish leads to the student failing the task since it was not the topic the student was supposed to argue about.

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currently taking the course of studies, research about Beginning Literacy. Our research shows the omissions and gaps in language knowledge operated in the region through teacher training and educational reforms perpetuating the definitions of reading and writing that we previously presented with the concept of reinvention of literacy proposed by Soares (2017a). It is a reinvention that has been giving structure for more than forty years to the pedagogical project based on hegemonic perspectives about the teaching work that insist it is merely a *mediator for individual development* (Sawaya, 2020). This hegemonic perspective, often highlighted by researchers in the context of Beginning Literacy, began with integrating Constructivism into schools' curriculum policies and teacher training within the field. Nowadays, it has been trying to control the teachers' work with very negative results for students and teachers. Our advances in the research from an ethnographic perspective allow us to show and conceptualize them to study their singularities. As we said before, it is not enough to study the educational policy documents to point out their inconsistencies, the materials produced by specialists in the field, the official didactic materials, or those of big publishers that replicate its guidelines (Cuesta, 2019). From our point of view, it is relevant for the student teacher of the course to share concrete examples of the difficulties they face so that they can describe them, name them, and understand them with specific linguistic knowledge of the Spanish written system. The aim is for them to be able to develop their teaching proposals according to the language varieties spoken by their students. Within this context, the graphophonemic level presents a linguistic diversity concerning phoneme-grapheme relationships that extend beyond cases of neutrality, such as the previously mentioned example of the word *PELO*. However, it is more than just a neutral case. The following question becomes significant: Why are occurrences like *PLO* instead of *PELO* or *PLOTA* instead of *PELOTA* (BALL) recurrent in the writings of school-going children when these words are pronounced the same way in all varieties of Spanish?[15]

Based on what we have presented throughout the entire article, it is clear that we are developing a perspective on Language and Literature teaching, as well as Beginning Literacy, that allows us to train teachers in the states of affairs regarding educational policy approaches as historical processes and in terms of how they affect their daily teaching work. In this dimension, changes can occur that have positive results in the teaching and students learning. It is no longer about waiting for a new miraculous approach from specialists who, as Soares (2017b) argues, they continue to clash between Constructivism and the Phonological approach. It is about providing teachers with knowledge that is not in their training because it was omitted or neutralized. As Sandra Sawaya (2020) explains in the context of teacher training and work concerning Beginning Literacy, in the case of Brazil, as can also be seen in Argentina:

> We are witnessing the resurgence, with full vigor, of psychological assessment measures for each student and the revival of behavioral categorization of skills, abilities, and human competencies based on the analysis of their cognitive and linguistic processes and types of reasoning [...] This involves not only sharing theoretical concepts rooted in the subject's psychogenetic-based psychology, which has been part of the teacher training courses since the 1980s, but also a new kind of investment in their training (p. 3).

It is means that any current initiative to change approaches in the educational policies of the area under study does not imply changes in the matrix of ideals aimed at modifying behaviors, in students and teachers, regardless of the paradigm they claim to support. Moreover, it is always in the pursuit of withdrawing specific disciplinary knowledge in the name of the know-how knowledge that is supposed to overcome teaching problems. However, it is clear that the more this pedagogical project is affirmed and reworked under its technocratic and control mechanisms, the more it fails. Or it only remains successful in perpetuating a state of affairs in which failure is helpful because it allows all those interested, mainly specialists, to continue an educational market based on the constant demand for their expertise to solve the problems that they continue to promote (Cuesta, 2011 and 2019).

Finally, it is worth asking, then, what exactly has happened for a teacher not to be able and not be authorized to teach a student what letter is missing in a word they are writing, which words are written separately, or which word is missing in a sentence, or how to read a particular word and what meaning it assumes in the text. In other words, what has happened for their daily work to be a constant dilemma based on complying with the directives of one approach or another or on making decisions regarding the knowledge their students need to master the written language? One explanation for this could be the discourses of power, which articulate the analyzed definitions of reading and writing, that deliberately exclude "those who could speak about education as an experience that is theirs: the teachers and students" (Chauí, 2016, p. 249 in Sawaya, 2020, p. 6). We insist,

[15] It should be noted that *PELOTA* is not necessarily found in the vocabulary of all varieties of Spanish, as it could be *BALÓN*. However, if any of its speakers pronounced it, they would do the same concerning the syllable *PE* just like so many other words in Spanish that begin with the same syllable. In addition, it is made clear that there are several pronunciation variations in the different varieties of Latin American Spanish. We cannot explain in this moment all the cases of these variations that our research is observing in the written texts of children, young people as adults about the progressive mastery of the writing system.

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regardless of the previous or current approach since 1980 in the field of Beginning Literacy, there has been a search to "develop a rationality of teaching action by establishing certain ways of organizing their thinking and the meanings of their own experiences." Because it is presupposed that "the problems of teaching practice arise from an alleged lack of rationality, planning, and competence," so each approach proclaims itself as the solution "by proposing actions guided by objectives, specific purposes, modes of thought, and predetermined actions to achieve them" (Sawaya, 2020, p. 7).

To conclude, there is still a large amount of research development that is ongoing with the genuine intention of understanding, together with teachers, what the specific problems of Beginning Literacy are that they identify in their daily teaching work. We do not know if this is "the solution". Still, we do know that it is not possible to start to think about alternatives in the continuity and increasing sophistication of the standardization and the emptying of disciplinary knowledge in teacher training.

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