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EPISTEMOLOGICAL LANDMARKS AND PARADIGMS OF THE FORMATION OF STUDENTS' LITERARY COMPETENCE

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The article examines the issue of developing students' literary competence from the perspective of epistemological benchmarks and relevant educational paradigms. The authors highlight the structuralist and hermeneutic paradigms, reception theories, and the sociocultural dimension, emphasizing the active role of the reader in generating literary meaning. The study underlines that literary competence goes beyond mere textual knowledge, involving the development of critical thinking, aesthetic sensitivity, and the capacity for reflection on the cultural context. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach that correlates individual and sociocultural factors and supports the teacher in their role as a mediator of learning. Literary competence is thus conceptualized as a complex, multidimensional construct that combines knowledge, critical analysis, and creative interpretation, contributing to the formation of a reflective and active reader.

Keywords: *literary competence, epistemological landmarks, paradigms, students, teacher.*

REPERE EPISTEMOLOGICE ȘI PARADIGME ALE FORMĂRII COMPETENȚEI LITERARE A ELEVILOR

Articolul analizează problema formării competenței literare a elevilor din perspectiva reperelor epistemologice și a paradigmelor educaționale relevante. Autorii scot în evidență paradigmele structuralistă, hermeneutică, teoriile receptării și dimensiunea socio-culturală, evidențiind rolul activ al cititorului în producerea sensului literar. Studiul subliniază că o competență literară depășește simpla cunoaștere textuală, implicând dezvoltarea gândirii critice, a sensibilității estetice și a capacității de reflecție asupra contextului cultural. În plus, se arată importanța unei abordări integrate, care să coreleze factorii individuali și socio-culturali și să sprijine profesorul în rolul său de mediator al învățării. Competența literară este astfel conceptualizată ca un construct complex, multidimensional, care combină cunoașterea, analiza critică și interpretarea creativă, contribuind la formarea unui cititor reflexiv și activ.

Cuvinte-cheie: *competență literară, repere epistemologice , paradigme, elevi, profesor.*

Introduction

In the context of contemporary education, marked by the transition from paradigms focused exclusively on the transmission of knowledge to models oriented towards the formation of skills, literary competence occupies a distinct place, through its epistemological complexity and specificity. However, the study of literature in school can no longer be conceived simply as an exercise in memorizing information about authors, currents or canonical works, but as a profound formative process, which engages the student in activities of understanding, interpreting, reflecting and aesthetically valorizing the literary text. In this sense, literary competence becomes an essential educational construct, located at the intersection of cultural knowledge, cognitive development and the formation of attitudes and values.

The reconfiguration of the status of literary reading within the school curriculum is determined, on the one hand, by the mutations produced in the knowledge society, and on the other hand, by the paradigm shifts in the field of educational sciences. The student is increasingly considered an active subject of learning, called to participate in the construction of meaning, to relate information, to formulate interpretative hypotheses and to assume responsibility for his own judgments. In this context, the formation of literary competence can no longer be reduced to the acquisition of established interpretations, but involves the de-

velopment of the capacity to operate with the plurality of meanings, to argue interpretations and to integrate literary reading into his own cultural and existential experience.

From an epistemological perspective, literary competence is based on a specific conception of knowledge, different from that of exact or empirical disciplines. The literary text does not transmit univocal information, verifiable through standardized procedures, but offers an open field of meanings, configured through artistic language, symbols and complex narrative structures. Consequently, literary knowledge is interpretative, reflexive and contextual, and the formation of literary competence involves the development of cognitive and hermeneutical tools appropriate to this type of knowledge. From this perspective, the analysis of literary competence requires a theoretical approach that goes beyond the descriptive or methodological level and investigates the epistemological foundations of the act of reading and interpretation.

The need for such an approach is accentuated by the tensions between official curricular requirements [10], which promote competences as the goals of education, and current teaching practices, often dominated by reproductive-analytic approaches. In many situations, literary competence is treated as a declarative objective, without being supported by a coherent theoretical reflection on the nature of literary knowledge and on how students come to construct meanings. In the absence of clear epistemological benchmarks, there is a risk that the formation of literary competence will be reduced to formal exercises or standardized assessments, which do not capture the complexity of the interpretive process.

In this context, the present approach aims to contribute to clarifying the concept of literary competence by relating it to the main epistemological paradigms relevant to the study of literature. The article starts from the premise that the formation of literary competence is inseparable from the way in which reading is understood as an act of knowledge and from the status attributed to the reader in the process of interpretation. The student is not a passive receiver of already established meanings, but an active participant in the construction of meanings, in dialogue with the text, the cultural context and their own experience.

Also, the epistemological approach to literary competence allows a better understanding of the relationship between the cognitive and axiological dimensions of literary reading. However, literature does not only provide the opportunity to develop interpretive skills, but also contributes significantly to the formation of aesthetic sensitivity, empathy and the capacity for reflection on the human condition. Therefore, literary competence must be analyzed as an integrative construct, which articulates the knowledge, interpretation and valorization of the literary text in a lasting formative process.

The main objective of this article is to identify and analyze the epistemological landmarks that underpin the formation of students' literary competence, in order to outline a coherent theoretical framework, useful for both didactic research and educational practice. Through this analysis, the aim is to highlight the specificity of literary knowledge, the role of the reader in the interpretative process and the implications of these aspects for the didactics of literature. At the same time, the article aims to provide a starting point for further reflections on how literary competence can be formed, assessed and valued in the context of contemporary pre-university education.

Epistemological foundations of literary competence

The analysis of literary competence from an epistemological perspective involves, first of all, clarifying the type of knowledge that reading and interpreting a literary text implies. Unlike disciplines with a high degree of conceptual formalization, literature operates with a symbolic, ambiguous and plurivocal language, which determines a specific way of relating to knowledge. The literary text does not offer demonstrable truths in a scientific sense, but configures possible meanings, dependent on the context, the cultural horizon of the reader and the interpretative act itself. In this framework, literary competence is based on an interpretative epistemology, in which understanding is the result of a dialogue between the text and the reader.

A fundamental epistemological landmark is the philosophical hermeneutics, especially in the formulation proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. In his work, "Truth and Method", Gadamer argues that understanding is not a purely cognitive act, but a historically, culturally and linguistically conditioned process. The meaning of the text does not exist independently of the reader, but is constituted within a "fusion of horizons" between the horizon of the work and that of the interpreter. [7]. Applied to literary education, this

perspective implies the recognition that the student cannot be reduced to a passive receiver of the "correct" meanings, but is a co-creator of the interpretation. He accesses the meaning of the text not in a neutral or objective way, but only through his own experiences, knowledge and values. In this sense, literary competence presupposes the student's capacity to assume his own interpretative position, to argue for it and to revise it in contact with other perspectives. From an epistemological point of view, literary truth is not unique and definitive, but plural, dialogical and open to reinterpretation. This characteristic fundamentally differentiates literary knowledge from strict scientific knowledge and justifies the need for teaching strategies that privilege dialogue, reflection, and problematization.

Another essential theoretical landmark is the aesthetics of reception, developed within the School of Konstanz. Hans Robert Jauss introduces the concept of the "horizon of expectation", highlighting the fact that each reading is conditioned by the aesthetic, cultural and historical norms of the era and of the reader. From this perspective, the meaning of the literary work is not fixed, but changes over time, depending on the communities of interpretation that receive it [9]. Wolfgang Iser, another representative of this orientation, emphasizes the active role of the reader in the reading process, speaking of the "free spaces" or textual "gaps" that require interpretive completion [8]. Literary competence thus implies the ability to identify these areas of indeterminacy and to capitalize on them through inference, imagination and critical reasoning. In educational terms, this perspective supports the idea that literary reading is an act of constructing meaning, not of mechanically decoding a pre-established message.

From an epistemological point of view, literary competence is configured at the intersection of declarative, procedural and metacognitive knowledge. The competent student has knowledge about textual structures, figurative language, conventions of literary genres and cultural context, but this knowledge becomes relevant only to the extent that it is activated in concrete reading situations. Moreover, literary competence presupposes the ability to reflect on one's own interpretation strategies, to evaluate the validity of formulated hypotheses and to accept the provisional nature of conclusions. In this framework, literary reading can be understood as a complex metacognitive process, in which the reader constantly monitors his/her understanding, adjusts his/her strategies and confronts his/her interpretations with the text and with other readers. This reflexive dimension gives literary competence a distinct epistemological status, close to critical thinking and interpretive reasoning.

A significant contribution to the epistemological foundation of literary competence is also brought by literary semiotics, especially through the contributions of Umberto Eco. In *Lector in fabula* [4], Eco introduces the concept of the "model reader", suggesting that the literary text anticipates a certain type of interpretive competence. However, real reading can deviate from this model, generating multiple interpretations, legitimate or excessive. Literary competence implies, in this sense, the ability to operate within the limits of a textually justified interpretation, avoiding both dogmatic rigidity and absolute relativism.

Epistemologically speaking, literary competence involves a balance between interpretative freedom and textual constraint. The competent student knows how to base his or her interpretations on textual elements, use appropriate concepts and construct coherent arguments. This argumentative capacity is essential for transforming reading into a valid act of knowledge, and not into a simple subjective expression of impressions. In addition, literary competence includes an axiological and cultural dimension, since literature is a privileged space for reflection on values, identity and the human condition. From this perspective, literary knowledge is not neutral, but involves evaluations, attitudes and ethical positions. The epistemology of literary competence must therefore integrate this value dimension, recognizing the role of literature in the formation of aesthetic sensitivity and cultural empathy.

In pedagogical terms, these epistemological foundations require a rethinking of the way in which the process of teaching and learning literature is conceived. First of all, as V. Fluieraș states, it should be taken into account that any type of competence „is a personal and individualized construct, which entails permanent reflexivity as a way of being and creativity" [5, p. 120]. The formation of literary competence cannot be achieved by transmitting canonical interpretations, but by creating learning situations that favor the exploration of meanings, interpretive dialogue and critical argumentation. The student must be placed in a situation to problematize the text, to formulate hypotheses and to support them with textual evidence.

Therefore, the epistemological foundations of literary competence to which we have referred highlight its complex, interpretative and reflexive character. Literary competence is constituted as a specific form of knowledge, distinct from factual or technical knowledge, but essential for the intellectual and cultural development of the student. By anchoring it in hermeneutics, semiotics, and the aesthetics of reception, literary competence offers a solid theoretical framework for understanding reading as an act of knowledge and for underpinning a didactic approach oriented towards the formation of an autonomous, critical and responsible reader.

Epistemological paradigms relevant in the formation of literary competence

The formation of literary competence is based on a set of epistemological paradigms that have influenced, over time, both literary theories and reading didactics.

The structuralist approach represents one of the fundamental paradigms that have decisively influenced both modern literary theory and reading didactics, providing a coherent epistemological framework for the analysis of literary text. Structuralism starts from the premise that the literary work constitutes an organized system of signs, within which the meaning is not the result of the author's intention or the reader's affective reaction, but of the relationships between the constitutive elements of the text. The text is thus conceived as an autonomous structure, governed by internal rules, which can be identified and analyzed objectively.

In this paradigm, literature is approached by analogy with language, being influenced by the developments of structural linguistics, especially by the Saussurean conception of language as a system of signs. Ferdinand de Saussure [3] demonstrated that meaning does not reside in isolated elements, but in the relationships between them, an idea that has been taken up and adapted by literary theorists. Applied to the literary text, this perspective assumes that the meaning of the work is constructed through oppositions, correlations and internal functions, and the analysis must target the narrative organization, thematic structure, character configuration and mechanisms of textual coherence.

A significant contribution to the consolidation of the structuralist approach is made by Roland Barthes, who, in his studies dedicated to narrative analysis [1], proposes investigating the text as a network of codes and functions. In his view, the narrative is organized on distinct levels – functional, actional and symbolic – that allow for a systematic and rigorous reading. This perspective has considerably influenced school practice, favoring the development of analytical skills such as identifying narrative sequences, analyzing relationships between characters, highlighting recurring motifs and dominant thematic structures.

From a didactic point of view, the structuralist approach contributed to the formation of literary competence by developing students' ability to operate with formal analysis tools and to recognize textual regularities. The student is taught to observe the internal structure of the work, to distinguish essential from secondary elements and to understand how they contribute to the production of global meaning. Thus, literary competence is associated, in this framework, with analytical rigor, conceptual precision and respect for literary conventions. However, the exclusive application of the structuralist paradigm in literary education also presents significant limits. Excessive emphasis on internal structures and mechanisms can lead to a rigid, formalistic reading, which reduces the literary work to an object of technical analysis, devoid of its experiential and axiological dimension. In such situations, interpretation risks becoming an exercise in mechanical identification of constitutive elements, and literary competence is confused with the ability to reproduce pre-established schemes and models. Criticisms of structuralism have highlighted the fact that literary meaning cannot be fully explained by the internal organization of the text alone, as reading is influenced by the cultural context, the reader's experience, and interpretive dynamics.

However, the formative value of the structuralist approach remains undeniable, especially in the initial stage of literary education, when the student needs clear landmarks to understand the architecture of the text. In an integrative perspective, structuralism can be used as a methodological foundation for the development of literary competence, provided that it is complemented by paradigms that recognize the role of the reader and the interpretative context. Structural analysis provides the necessary tools for understanding the organization of the text, but the training of the literary interpreter involves going beyond this level, by opening up to the plurality of meanings and to the dialogue between the text and the reader.

Hermeneutic perspectives represent a key moment in the evolution of literary theory, marking the transition from the analysis of the text as an autonomous structure to the understanding of interpretation as a dynamic process of mediation between text, author and reader. Hermeneutics shifts the emphasis from establishing a unique meaning, immanent to the text, to recognizing the open character of the literary work, whose meaning is constituted through the act of reading. From this perspective, literary competence is no longer conceived exclusively as a skill of formal analysis, but as a capacity for interpretive dialogue, contextualization and critical reflection.

The foundations of modern hermeneutics can be found in the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who proposes a vision of interpretation as a "fusion of horizons". According to this conception, the meaning of a literary work is not definitively fixed at the moment of creation, but is updated according to the reader's horizon of expectation, cultural experience and historical context. Interpretation thus becomes an act of mediation between the tradition of the text and the present of reading, in which the reader is not limited to deciphering the message, but actively participates in the construction of meaning. This approach implies a reconsideration of the relationship between author and text. The author's intention is no longer seen as the ultimate instance of meaning, but as one of the factors that can guide interpretation. The text acquires semantic autonomy, and reading is conceived as a process of negotiating meanings, in which the reader confronts the structure of the work with his or her own questions, values and experiences. In this framework, literary interpretation takes on a reflective and dialogical dimension, being influenced both by the internal elements of the text and by the socio-cultural context of reception.

Paul Ricoeur makes an important contribution to the development of literary hermeneutics through the concept of distancing, emphasizing the fact that the text detaches itself from its initial situation of production and becomes available for multiple interpretations [11]. The French researcher believes that reading involves a double approach: explaining the text, by analyzing its structures, and understanding, by integrating meanings into the reader's universe of experience. Thus, interpretation appears as a complex process, which mediates between objective analysis and the subjective assumption of meanings.

From an educational perspective, the hermeneutic approach offers a favorable framework for the formation of literary competence, as it encourages the active involvement of the student in the interpretative act. Literary competence is configured, in this context, as a mediation ability between the text and the self, between cultural tradition and personal experience. Hermeneutics also emphasizes the role of the question in the interpretation process. The literary text is viewed as a possible answer to fundamental questions of existence, and reading becomes an exercise in continuous interrogation. This problematizing dimension favors the development of critical thinking and the capacity for reflection, contributing to the formation of an autonomous and responsible reader. Interpretation no longer aims to validate a single "correct" reading, but to explore coherent meanings, supported by argumentation.

Like the structuralist approach, the hermeneutic approach also poses challenges in the didactic context. The risk of interpretative relativism or excessive subjectivism imposes the need for clear methodological guidelines, which ensure the coherence and rigor of the interpretative approach. In this sense, hermeneutics does not exclude structural analysis, but integrates it into a broader framework, in which explanation and understanding complement each other.

The socio-cultural dimension of literary competence is situated at the intersection of textual knowledge and its integration into social and cultural contexts. This perspective recognizes literature not only as an aesthetic object, but also as a social practice that contributes to the formation of identity, cultural sensitivity and civic responsibility of the individual. Literary competence, in this key, transcends knowledge about authors, genres or literary techniques, implying the student's ability to use reading as a tool for critical reflection on the world and for relating to cultural values and norms.

Pierre Bourdieu's work, "La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement" (1996), emphasizes the role of literature and cultural practices in the reproduction and transformation of cultural capital. According to P. Bourdieu, literary competence develops not only through contact with literary texts, but also through the social environment in which they are received, which determines access to cultural resources, interpretative models and norms for evaluating texts [2]. In this perspective, reading becomes a practice that reflects

and influences the social position of the individual, and the formation of literary competence presupposes sensitivity to the multiple cultural codes implicit in the text and in its context.

John Frow, in his work “Cultural Studies and Cultural Value” (1995), also emphasizes the performative and interactive dimension of reading [6]. The author shows that literary interpretation is always mediated by cultural frameworks and social conventions, so that literary competence presupposes an awareness of these structures and the ability to navigate between them. The literarily competent student not only decodes the meanings of a text, but relates them to the experiences and values of the community to which he belongs, integrating reading into a broader cultural dialogue.

The socio-cultural dimension of literary competence also involves the recognition of the cultural and historical diversity of texts. In the context of globalization and cultural migrations, literature becomes a tool for knowledge and intercultural dialogue, offering students the opportunity to compare different perspectives, to recognize the plurality of norms and values, and to develop cultural empathy. Thus, literary competence is constituted not only by the accumulation of canonical knowledge, but also by the integration of reading into complex social and cultural practices, in which interaction with others becomes an essential factor in validating and expanding meanings.

Pedagogically, this dimension requires a reconfiguration of teaching strategies. The literature teacher is no longer just a transmitter of knowledge, but a cultural mediator who facilitates students’ participation in communities of literary practice. Group activities, interpretive discussions, interdisciplinary projects and dialogues with contemporary authors are means by which literary competence develops in a social context. Through these practices, reading is transformed into a participatory experience, and the student becomes an active agent in the process of producing meaning, capable of correlating textual knowledge with social and cultural experience. Moreover, the socio-cultural dimension supports the formation of critical literary competence, oriented towards the evaluation and interpretation of social values and norms reflected in the text. This involves the development of critical thinking and the ability to formulate reasoned judgments, to identify stereotypes and prejudices, as well as to analyze the ethical and social implications of literary works. In this sense, literature becomes a laboratory for exploring social issues and for developing students’ civic responsibility.

To summarize, we note that the socio-cultural perspective gives literary competence a dynamic and contextualized dimension, in which reading is simultaneously an individual and social practice. The formation of the student as a competent reader involves not only the development of cognitive and aesthetic skills, but also the cultivation of cultural sensitivity, empathy and social awareness. By integrating this dimension into the educational process, literature becomes an essential tool in the global education of students, contributing to their development as active, critical and responsible members of society.

Conclusions

Literary competence, seen through the lens of the epistemological landmarks to which we have referred, is constituted as a complex construct, which integrates the student's knowledge, skills and cultural sensitivity. The formation of literary competence involves more than the acquisition of knowledge and interpretation techniques; it involves the development of a reflective framework, capable of mobilizing critical thinking and cultural sensitivity in relation to diverse texts and varied contexts. The competent reader is not just a passive receiver, but an active agent in the construction of meaning, integrating personal experiences and socio-cultural landmarks in the interpretation process.

Epistemological paradigms, from structuralist analysis to hermeneutic perspectives, reception theories and the socio-cultural dimension, constitute a solid theoretical foundation for the conceptualization and operationalization of literary competence. At the same time, these epistemological paradigms provide methodological and conceptual guidelines for the development of literary competence, highlighting the connection between textual knowledge, interpretive capacity and cultural sensitivity.

Educationally, this means that literary activities must stimulate critical reflection, creativity, and the ability to relate the text to cultural and social realities, strengthening both the intellectual autonomy and cultural responsibility of the student.

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