# VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS LEARNING, SUPPORTING ELEMENTS FOR UNDERSTANDING LITERARY TEXTS

Raxiel Martínez Pedraza

raxielp@ucp.vc.rimed.cu

University of Pedagogical Sciences "Félix Varela Morales"

## ABSTRAC

Cuba is undergoing a series of transformations resulting from the economic model which requires improving the quality of education. The students who are in classrooms  were born in a digital era, with new codes of interpretation of reality, supported by  Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This presents new challenges for education, impacting personal and non-personal components of the educational process, giving way to virtual learning environments. The objective of this work is to address the use of these environments in the teaching-learning understanding of literary texts.

**Keywords:** *environments, virtual, learning, comprehension, literary texts.*

The current scientific-technical revolution puts man in the spotlight, to address the scientific problems related to the formation of personality, creating a worldview on the individual, the generation and acquisition of scientific knowledge, and the development of intellect and creativity in the teaching-learning process.

As a result of the scientific-technical revolution, there emerges information and communications technology (ICT), defined as "... *a set of tools, support and channels for the treatment and access to information, specifically the hardware, software, and communication (Internet, web, email). These tools record, store and disseminate informational content* "(Augusto: 2013, p.18).

This technological evolution has impacted education, with the appearance of different theoretical approaches associated with the use of ICT in teaching and learning. For example: Barron (1998) considers the "webs" created by teachers as resources to support learning; Ronteltap and Eurelings (2002) argue that these new technologies have made multiple materials available to the teachers for the self-assessment of their knowledge.

Moreover, Salinas (2004) believes that ICT has produced methodological changes in teaching-learning and Garcia (2012) evidences the process that despite the many actions developed in recent years, teachers integrate some technologies in their teaching.

The use of ICT enables the emergence of new spaces for the realization of educational processes, lacking spatiotemporal limitations, and therefore become another means by which the student acquires knowledge, thus guaranteeing more integral training.

## DEVELOPMENT

### General considerations on teaching literature to the pre-university student

The end of the pre-university education in Cuba focuses on achieving the integral formation of youth from the development of a comprehensive, policy and pre-professional culture, to ensure continuity of higher education careers as a territorial priority.

In analyzing the program of pre-university Spanish-Literature from a methodological point of view, it is suggested to take into account in each grade "... *the extent of the works under study and the time the course being studied and the importance of the historical-cultural aspects, indispensable for the understanding of information*" (Education, 2006, p.214).

In addition, different methodological variants for the study of literature are recommended such as the use of active method like varied and dynamic kinds of different forms of organization of teaching and independent work, where the student participates either individually or in a team, promoting the search for information and identifying problems. From the above it follows that the teaching of literature in this process cannot be enumerative information of works, authors and movements with consecutive character.

The teaching of literature at this level focuses on skills development and discursive skills, ensuring that the study of language and literature provides the student a greater ability to make speeches externally and to formalize their own material.

Moreover, it aims to raise the level of knowledge and thinking skills in students to consolidate literary competence through the study of works of world literature belonging to different periods of history, the characterization of these works and their authors, predominantly from the twentieth century which correspond to the three main genres: epic, lyric and dramatic.

The current model for the subject of Spanish-Literature is accurate to the teaching-learning process with a training, educational, instructive and developer character in order to meet the needs and demands of Cuban society, a comprehensive organization that conceived the knowledge, skills, feelings, values and attitudes of the literary text as a crosscutting curriculum design in the University.

Therefore, the teaching of literature occupies a major place in the curriculum of pre-university education, because it contributes to the development of communication skills in oral and written form and to the formation of an intelligent reader, able to perceive every time a wealth of literature and encourage the development of language skills, especially communication work.

### *The teaching-learning process of understanding of literary texts*

The teaching-learning process can be defined, according to Alvarez de Zayas (1989) as cited by Valiente (2001, p.25), as "*the activity aimed at completing the social custom that takes place in a conscious and planned manner. Its specificity lies in the interaction of two types of activity: teaching and learning, from where its fundamental contradiction arises*".

Seeing this process in a narrower sense, it leads to prepare students systematically and continuously for efficient text comprehension, which involves directing the process towards the strategic objectives and projections of education in Cuba generally , and in particular, compliance with the model of graduates of a particular school.

By directing the teaching and learning of understanding of literary texts, it is necessary to take into account the activity of the teacher, who teaches; and the student, who learns. "... *Teaching in its fully intrinsic state form part of the educational process and has as its basic core learning*" (Chavez, 2000, p.35).

A literary text without understanding is meaningless, therefore, an interaction between what the text says and what the person reading knows and looks for is necessary. Understanding a literary text is signaled by the development of skills and abilities to construct meaning through the teaching-learning process.

There are several researchers who bring their knowledge regarding this text. For example: Roméu (1987), cited by Báez (2006, p.138) considers that in the literary text, "the literal or explicit interest only momentarily gives way to the discovery of the intentional or implied. More than the word, it denotes, connotes what interests us".

This author refers that the reader must discover the meaning that lies between the words that make up a literary text, since it goes beyond what is seen or heard, leading to a higher level of mutual understanding with other texts. Sales (2007) understands that literary texts belong to the artistic functional style, where communication is oriented towards aesthetic effect; the author uses specific means of expression, and media can combine with belonging to other functional formations. In addition, each genre has its own characteristics that differentiate them from one another, even if it is sometimes integrated with each other (p.137).

This investigation coincides with other authors argue that the literary text is often inaccurate and imprecise, and it is full of creativity and expressiveness, from the aesthetic effect that manifests the author in the text, who uses literary resources based on each gender allowing a number of interpretations depending on the cultural level of the reader.

As expressed, it can be considered that the literary "… *text conveys an intentional reflective self-ambiguous and complex aesthetic message, projecting beyond its time and promoting the internal development of reader-listener in historically conditioned sociocultural contexts*". (Hernandez, Diaz, & Garcia, 2011, p.38)

Understanding this type of text creates an unlimited number of arguments, as reading becomes a dynamic, flexible and productive process for the student. Therefore, in the way that they build their ideas and personal rewriting, you can bring great wealth to its interpretation.

*The virtual learning environments as support for understanding literary texts*

According to McCormack & Jones (1998); cited by (Marcelo, 2002, p.25), virtual learning scenarios are currently recognized as:

> *...An environment created on the Web where students and teachers can perform learning tasks. It is not just a mechanism for distributing information to students, is also related to communication tasks, student assessment and classroom management.*

Other authors give different definitions to this new educational opportunity, including "virtual learning environments" (Mendoza, Alvaro & Galvis, 1999), "teaching and distance learning through the web" (Romiszowski, 1999), "training through Internet and distance learning "(Marcelo, 2002) and more recently "new scenarios for learning "(Espinoza, 2014).

Among the virtual learning environments, includes:

- The "e - learning" (Electronic Learning), aimed at improving the quality of learning through the Internet, accessing resources, services and long - distance collaborations.
- The "b- learning" (Blended learning), combines education and distance education or face to – face learning, considering the advantages of both methods, thus improving student learning.
- The "m- learning" (Mobile- learning), *is a methodology to learning based on wireless technologies where there*

*is an expansive relationship of a character of geography and time*" (Hernandez to, 2008, p.5).

The use of these environments impacts all the elements of the educational process (objectives, content, teachers, students, family), facilitating or hindering formal education.

In the study of its use in teaching and learning comprehension of literary texts, Rodriguez (2006, p. 161) outlines that "*modern information and communications technology have opened horizons that were unsuspected only a few decades ago. But modern knowledge society needs (…) a solid learning related to reading skills*" (Rodriguez, Lopez & Gayoso, 2010), an avocation of  the intelligent use of ICT as a special form of promoting the habit of reading.  Lozano (2014) presents a work related to the use of virtual learning scenarios, related to innovative teaching practices with ICT mediation, generating creative learning environments in teaching Spanish and literature, but which does not address the understanding of literary texts.

The revised bibliographies sufficiently address reading skills, however the use of virtual learning environments for understanding literary texts rests in the spontaneity of teachers and students.

The understanding of literary texts is an educational activity that is taught through different processes, from the three levels of understanding given by Roméu (1999) and cited by (Montano & Abello, 2010, p.89): "*Level of translation, level of interpretation and level of extrapolation or creative reading*".

These levels of understanding can be developed through the use of virtual learning environments, therefore the students that are in the classroom  are different from those of the last century in interests and peculiarities, because they were born in a digital age with skills developed for the management of these tools; the rate and amount of knowledge currently generated does not guarantee that the printing of books is topical and that the personal

elements involved in the teaching-learning (teacher and student) process are not analogous to those of the last century and therefore their roles in the classroom have changed.

In addition, from the use of virtual learning environments students acquire new knowledge of the text which includes developing skills individually or in groups; breaking with the conception of the traditional classroom, where time and distance are no longer a problem when using these technological means, becoming a precious resource in the collection, organization and management of information acquired from the text.

## DIAGNOSTIC OF THE CURRENT STATE OF THE PROBLEM

### *Pre university study unit "Osvaldo Herrera"*

The pre-university "Osvaldo Herrera" is a school that corresponds to  Higher Secondary Education (10th, 11th, 12th grade). It is located in the center of the city of Santa Clara with more than 600 students' enrolled. This center is chosen precisely because it is where the author works, allowing for systematic accompaniment during the investigative process. It is also is an institution that has Internet connectivity both within the institution and in their areas surrounding by Wifi.

### *Instruments used in the diagnosis and results*

Different instruments were applied in correspondence with empirical methods:

- *Educational testing* (*instrument input*) to ascertain the difficulties presented by students in understanding literary texts. (Appendix 1)

- Observation: For information on the conditions presented by the Pre University "Osvaldo Herrera" and its students in using virtual learning environments in understanding literary texts. (Annex 2)
- Interview: For information on the knowledge students have about virtual learning environments and their use in understanding literary texts. (Annex 3)

In reviewing the educational testing that was applied, it is found that students have difficulties at all three levels of reading comprehension, mainly in the level of interpretation. It is also generally seen that they do not know how to understand it creatively, which does not favor autonomy, and the flexible development of the meaning of these texts according to the level of demand that is required in  pre - university education. These difficulties are manifested concretely in the insufficient interpretation of written thought, and scarce evidence in the production of meaning.

It is noted that in the Pre University "Osvaldo Herrera, "students have the minimum technology to use virtual learning environments (computer labs, Intranet connectivity).  They demonstrate good conditions for using virtual learning environments,  present knowledge and skills to work with ICT, and a large percentage of students have surfed the Internet and have laptops in addition to cell phones and tablets with Android technology.

A total of 45 students of different grades from pre - university education (10th, 11th and 12th grade) obtaining that 15 students,(33.3%) responded that they always have difficulty understanding this type of text, 18 students (40%) say they sometimes have difficulties and (26.7%) acknowledge that they have difficulty understanding literary texts.

Mostly  have a vague idea of what are the virtual learning environments, and always link them with computer use.  It was inquired if they seek help in a virtual learning environment when they are oriented in activities to understand a literary text, 31.1%

of students, that is, 14 students answered yes, specifying that generally use Wiki or Encarta.

The absence of practical experiences in the methodological treatment of comprehension of literary texts using virtual learning environments was also noted, as well as a lack of knowledge by the student community of the role of the use of virtual learning environments in teaching and understanding of these texts.

In essence, this study has verified that there are difficulties with understanding literary texts and the use of virtual learning environments for its possible solution.

*Proposed activities for the development of understanding of literary texts through virtual learning environments*

Given the problems diagnosed in the previous section, a proposal for activities to develop understanding of literary texts from the use of virtual learning environments is used for the purpose of achieving an adequate level of development in reading comprehension, as constructed for students of pre - university education.

This proposal will apply during a school year to 10th graders at the Pre University of "Osvaldo Herrera"  precisely because of their greater difficulty in understanding literary texts and the resolving of the shortcomings identified in the diagnosis.

General objective: To contribute to the development of understanding of literary texts using virtual learning environments through a proposal of activities.

### Activity # 1- Web pages

**Objective:** To strengthen the acquired knowledge and involvement of students with the literary work, as understood from the use of virtual learning environments.

**Methodology:** To provide students with addresses of Web pages that are related to the literary text ; encourage discussion in the classroom about new information learned on the literary text, and the exchanging of experiences and different views of students.

### Activity # 2- chat and discussion forums

**Objective:** To strengthen the acquired knowledge and involvement of students with the literary work, from the use of chat and discussion forums.

**Methodology:** Rate, by the teacher and students, the views offered in virtual learning environments, based on the literary text.

### Activity # 3 Virtual libraries

**Objective:** Interact with the literary work in virtual libraries

**Methodology:** Provide the student the direction of virtual libraries where the literary text is understood, or create virtual libraries with the texts to be understood in this teaching; encourage debate on what is read.

### Activity # 4 Exchange via the Web

**Objective:** Exchange ideas and thoughts with the author or analyzed by literary text specialists.

**Methodology:** Develop, through videoconferencing or e - mail exchanges between the student and the author, or specialists in literary text.

## Activity # 5- The virtual classroom

**Objective:** To develop an understanding of literary texts from the use of the virtual classroom and virtual learning environment.

**Methodology:** Enroll students; observe the proper material content area being studied; exchanges among students regarding the work that includes interactive forums; solving guided activities based on literary works; evaluation, by the teacher, of the activities that are oriented in the guidelines; describe and evaluate the activities carried out in the virtual classroom.

These proposed activities are designed to contribute to the development of understanding of literary texts using virtual learning environments, thereby raising not only the amount of knowledge, but the quality to reach out more effectively to students.

## CONCLUSIONS

The use of ICT impacts education, providing multiple and diverse virtual learning environments that enrich the knowledge and skills of students in pre-university education.

In the Pre University Institute "Osvaldo Herrera" there are the minimum conditions to use virtual learning environments in order to develop the different levels through which passes a student to understand a literary text.

With the proper use of virtual learning environments, students will be motivated and will be empowered in their creative abilities, creating a cultural change through an interactive and participatory process, mediated by a shared social construction, influencing the correct understanding of literary texts.

The proposed activities designed here contribute to the development of the understanding of literary texts using virtual learning environments.

## —ANNEXES—

### Annex 1 - Educational Test (input)

**Objective:** To verify the difficulties presented by students in understanding literary texts.

Read the following story taken from "*Tell them not to kill me!*" a fragment from the Mexican writer Juan Rulfo.

"He walked among men silently with his arms folded. The morning was dark, starless. The wind was blowing slowly, carrying the dry land and brought forth that smell like urine that comes from dusty roads.

His eyes, which had fallen over the years, watched the land, here, under his feet, despite the darkness. There on the ground was all his life. Sixty years of living on her, imprisoning her between his hands, having tasted her as one tastes meat. Passing a long time crumbling it with his eyes, savoring each piece as if it were the last, knowing it would be the last.".

a) The characteristics of the character are given in the fragment. Identify them and through a text describe how you image them.

b) Interpret the underlined text in the fragment through a sentence.

c) From reading this passage, what do you imagine that could happen to this character? If you were in his place, how would you act?

### Annex 2 - Observation Guide

**Objective:** To observe the conditions that present the Pre University "Osvaldo Herrera" and the students who are studying at that institution for the use of virtual learning environments in understanding literary texts.

- The conditions at the Pre University to use virtual learning environments; knowledge and skills that students demonstrate to manage virtual learning environments.

### Annex 3 - Interview students

**Objective:** To obtain information on the knowledge that students have regarding the use of virtual learning environments in understanding literary texts.

Questions

1.  Do you present difficulties in understanding literary texts?

2.  Do you know what are virtual learning environments?

3.  Do you look for help in a virtual learning environment when you are guided in the activities to understand a literary text?

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