

**ENHANCING COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF ORAL
TRADITION AND PHONICS**

**REFORÇAR AS COMPETÊNCIAS COMUNICATIVAS NA EDUCAÇÃO
DE INFÂNCIA: O PAPEL DA TRADIÇÃO ORAL E DA FONÉTICA**

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Abstract

This article is based on the reflection of the oral tradition and phonics in the communicative experience in early childhood education. The communicative experience in early childhood education is enriched through the oral tradition. Children learn to listen actively, imagine vividly, and express themselves creatively using those communicative experiences: Oral tradition and phonics. This article also explores the importance of oral tradition and phonics, because oral tradition is the use of phonics in the process of learning communicative skills in children. Phonics is a method of teaching by understanding how letters sound, children can string them together to form words and communicate effectively. The article aims to conclude that cultural transmission is also enriched through oral tradition within educational practices, factors that strengthen oral and communicative skills in early childhood education, such as phonetic practices, should be taken into account.

Keywords: Oral tradition, early childhood education, phonics, communication

Resumo

Este artigo baseia-se na reflexão sobre a tradição oral e a fonética na experiência comunicativa na educação de infância. A experiência comunicativa na educação de infância é enriquecida pela tradição oral. As crianças aprendem a ouvir ativamente, a imaginar vividamente e a exprimir-se criativamente através dessas experiências comunicativas: a tradição oral e a fonética. Este artigo também explora a importância da tradição oral e da fonética, porque a tradição oral é a utilização da fonética no processo de aprendizagem das competências comunicativas das crianças. A fonética é um método de ensino que, ao compreender o som das letras, permite que as crianças se unam para formar palavras e comunicar eficazmente. O artigo pretende concluir que a transmissão cultural também é enriquecida através da tradição oral nas práticas educativas, devendo

ser tidos em conta os fatores que reforçam as competências orais e comunicativas na educação de infância, como as práticas fonéticas.

Palavras-chave: Tradição oral, educação da primeira infância, fonética, comunicação

Introduction

From the time the child is conceived, there is a profound interaction between emotional development, thought and language. Language development in early childhood education is a fascinating process that often occurs through a variety of activities as children are introduced to and explore their own social context.

Language is woven from the bosom of the home to which the child belongs, as stated by the American psychologist Bruner, who made important contributions to human cognitive learning and physiologically affirmed that (1986), negotiation and interpretation begin at the moment when children enter the human environment and try to use language to interact with their peers. The author states that "Language is the means of interpreting and regulating culture" (p. 24). That is, beyond learning a linguistic code, children learn the cultural ways of their language and their social environment as oral and communicative competence. Accordingly, it is worth bearing in mind that "the child reacts culturally with characteristic hypotheses about what is needed, and enters language with a readiness for order" (p. 29).

In early child education when kids are between 2 years old to five years old the communicative competence becomes the connection that enables infants to enter the "human scene" as described by Bruner, but it also enables them to access the different scenarios that allow them to be protagonists. In early childhood education in Colombian context, from Colombia's public policy there are four pillars mentioned in the Zero to Forever document, it is evident that communicative action enables children to enter the world of play to interact with their peers, to enrich themselves from the literary world to understand the world around them, to enjoy the spaces they inhabit and to express themselves through the artistic activities proposed to them.

It should be kept in mind that:

if environments are designed and interactions with others and with the world are enhanced, a child is ready to enter primary education eager to continue learning, which is the most important thing. But for this to be done satisfactorily, collegiality, the joint work of teachers, is indispensable. Few know and know more about the needs of children than teachers. Let us then allow their knowledge to become visible: let us reflect on it, let us enrich it (Fandiño, 2020, p. 88).

This is inadvertently connected through the mother tongue that accompanies the child from gestation. To the extent that educational spaces and intentional pedagogical projects in early childhood enable multiple learning and these are explicitly linked to the

communicative competence in which the child, his context and culture are involved. Therefore, from the perspective of linguistic action in early childhood education each one of the educational projects in early education has great value and impact on the formative processes in the present and future stages of the subjects (Montero, 2022).

In the educational practices carried out in the family and school context of children, the mother tongue plays a fundamental role in the configuration of their cultural and social context. It is not possible to ignore that from there all the representations that configure the identity of these children are made possible, so assuming the oral tradition within these practices in different countries or nations, makes it possible for all these ways of being to be re-signified from the school scenarios that work with children. The oral richness in different languages or dialects in early childhood education becomes the most representative thing that educational communities possess. These become the transversal axis of the culture that enables them to transmit knowledge, conceptions of the world, upbringing practices, culture and knowledge of their own communities (Montero, 2022), since children belong to these cultural groups and are immersed in this richness that is transmitted through oral competence.

Verbal communication has a communicative richness in the first years of schooling, since it is through the transmission of their culture that the oral tradition is enriched in the children's educational processes. In early childhood education, telling stories has always been an important tradition. The passing down of stories from generation to generation helps children learn about their culture and history. This tradition is known as the oral tradition. When children listen to stories told orally, they not only hear the words but also the emotions, expressions, and intonations of the storyteller. This immersive experience helps children develop their language skills and understand the nuances of communication.

Oral tradition goes in the same way of phonics teaching experiences, through this process phonics plays an important role in the learning environment kids are surrounded by. Phonics at its very main, is a method applied to teach kids how to read and write an alphabetic language using sounds. Phonics is one of the most recommended methods of teaching in different schools especially in childhood education (Marjorie, 1993). One key aspect of the oral tradition is the use of phonics. Phonics is a method of teaching reading and writing by focusing on the sounds that letters make. By understanding how letters sound, children can string them together to form words.

Phonics as an oral method helps educators develop reading skills in children since their early years. Kids start linking sounds in a language to the letters and words that represent oral language at first sight. Phonics instructions has a profound impact in kid's brain and is effectiveness over teaching methods. So Phonics teaches children to be fluent starting through their oral tongue being fluent learning letters through their own sounds, new vocabulary, spelling and learning for a well-rounded development.

Phonics is focused in help the first steps of the reading process, help kids to identify and comprehend how letter are linked to sounds (phonemes) to the system letter-sound correspondences and spelling forms and to help them learn how to apply this learning in the reading process. Looking at the phonics system and phonics instruction,

both produce significant benefits for students from their school experience and even for children with some difficulties in their reading learning experience. The ability to spell and read words was enhanced in kindergartens who received systematic beginning experience in phonics instruction. Some studies as Maddox and Feng (2013) tell that if first graders who were taught phonics systematically were better able to decode and spell and they showed significant improvement in their ability to comprehend text. Older kids that getting phonics instruction were better able to decode and spell and to read text orally, but their understanding reading written texts was not significantly improved.

Oral tradition and phonics method are connected in the learning process in childhood education, because both instructions improved the ability of good readers and writers. The impact is strongest since kindergartners and decreased in later grades. Some people don't realise the importance of these relation and how educators can take them into their educational practice in classrooms so we will navigate through this connection in order to establish the importance in the beginning learning process as an educational tool in childhood education.

Oral tradition

Children all around the world would gather around their elders to listen to stories passed down from generation to generation. These stories, filled with wisdom and wonder, were not only entertaining but also served an important purpose in the development of young minds. In childhood education, the oral tradition plays a crucial role in nurturing imagination, creativity, and cultural awareness. Through storytelling, children learn about their heritage, values, and beliefs in a way that is engaging and memorable. By listening to tales of bravery, kindness, and adventure, young learners begin to form their own understanding of the world around them.

One of the key benefits of oral tradition development in childhood education is the strengthening of language skills. As children listen to storytellers' weave captivating narratives, they absorb new vocabulary, sentence structures, and linguistic patterns. This exposure to rich and diverse language helps expand their communication abilities and fosters a love for storytelling and literature.

Oral tradition is defined by Nogueira as an

system of forms and modes of communication denominated by the syntagma "oral" tradition, which congregates knowledge, memories, values, and symbols generally configured in linguistic objects of non-literary or aesthetic-literary nature, objects with or without consignment in written testimonies, accomplished vocally and recognizable collectively and during consecutive generations in an anatomy built by the laws of traditionality (2003, p. 166).

Oral tradition stimulates multiple parts of children's brains: singing, chanting and storytelling often involve movement, calls or gestures. Oral tradition allows children to develop a muscle memory that not only stimulates their ability to communicate, but also

active learning. Oral traditions and expression realm incorporates the enormous variety of spoken methods including proverbs, riddles, nurseries, poems, prayers and more. Oral traditions are used to transfer on cultural, social, knowledge and values and collective memory. They play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive in different educational atmospheres.

This becomes the main element of cultural transmission from generation to generation, and turn in one of the pillars on which children are immersed in the world in which they are born. Through it, myths, stories, songs, legends are transmitted and in turn the cultural universe that surrounds them is built. Oral traditions are “expressions domain encompasses an enormous variety of spoken forms including proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, prayers, chants, songs, dramatic performances and more. Oral traditions and expressions are used to pass on knowledge, cultural and social values and collective memory. They play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive” (Unesco, 2021).

As Reyzábal states, “the anonymous discourses of the oral tradition are characterized by an uncontrolled, word-of-mouth transmission, in the course of which the form of the testimony may be lost and the content may vary” (2001, p. 312). It is necessary for such testimony to circulate orally for most of the time in early childhood in order to consolidate it in the collective consciousness as part of a country’s culture. Although numerous variations are made throughout the period of transmission, there are different degrees of permissibility of these variations that maintain the oral tradition in the culture.

In accordance with the ideas expressed by the author (2001), he also exposes two categories within the conceptualisation of oral tradition, the first refers to “curdled” oral traditions, which are learned by heart and repeated with a certain pretension of fidelity. And the “free” ones, in which rigorous memory does not participate, but only the image built on the original, on which the transmitter introduces numerous variants. The oral tradition makes possible a link with the past that is capable of being connected with the collective conscience of a country, its culture, and facilitates the practice with living oral testimonies, characterized by naturalness and spontaneity.

Similarly, the oral tradition occupies a fundamental place within this transmission of knowledge in early childhood, and of course is part of the formation as subjects that belong to a particular social and cultural context. Singing in early childhood education and in indigenous cultures is one of the most representative essences in educational practices, interactions and constructions of the world, since it enriches and transforms situations through the living voice and the interaction with movements, body, instruments, materials, but especially with the other. Singing is an experience that allows oral development with a sense and value that makes it possible to humanize and live this development, which allows the subject (child) to be part of a context that takes him/her into account and understands his/her subjectivities and identities.

The importance of oral tradition is that the culture is “passed on by word of mouth, oral traditions and expressions often vary significantly in their telling. Stories are a combination – differing from genre to genre, from context to context and from performer to performer – of reproduction, improvisation and creation.” (Unesco, 2021) As many

groups of people pass their culture through the oral tradition, in education environment is so important to contemplate in the education.

The oral tradition makes it possible through singing, besides summoning, integrating and uniting, to establish itself as a social practice that involves many dimensions of human activity (Rodríguez, 2006), that is to say that, as well as contributing to socialisation and interaction with the subjects, it also strengthens it from its particularity. Through it, aspects from the cognitive, intersubjective and cultural aspects are highlighted, which are enhanced from the everyday life itself that involves the life of the subjects through communicative events with their environment. Likewise, as mentioned by Ong 1987 (as cited in Rodríguez, 2006), orality is a natural act that constitutes the person as a member of the human species and through it makes it possible to understand and access culture, which in turn recognises him/her as a historical and social subject.

Singing makes sense within the culture when its meaning of community, relationship and living unfolds as an expression that is lived and shared, but above all, that is felt and that enables constant communication in educational practices in early childhood education. Singing is positioned, from this affective, social and cultural root within the educational practices of children, which is why it contains a cultural, social and linguistic charge within the development of orality in childhood.

In the educational contexts, it is evident that teachers sing in the morning routines, when taking food or while carrying out pedagogical activities in the classroom. Singing takes centre stage on a daily basis and allows these children to create, compose, imagine, dance, listen, ask questions and enjoy an oral development that makes them part of a social circle that admits and allows them to be who they are through their recognition and their peers. Bearing in mind that singing is one of the forms of expression that strengthens the oral tradition, it is necessary to emphasise that it enables recognition of the child as a subject, his or her history, family, contexts, realities and territories. When spaces are created and made possible where discussion, questions, knowledge and children's experiences are validated and accepted through the living word, history is also constructed, written and interwoven, a history from other perspectives and viewpoints.

Bernal assumes that "the living word is an irreplaceable element to know the real history of real life, that deep history that cannot be captured by statistics" (2000, p. 61). Life stories and the linking of families to oral processes and oral tradition through song are of great importance for the construction of children, since it is these experiences that enrich and sensitize the oral construction of each of them.

The linguistic experience that children share through singing with their peers, teachers and the adults around them is assumed to be a type of socialisation that mutually affects the individual and the society around them. Socialisation is assumed as

a continuous process that occurs throughout life, being highly significant, emotional and intense in early childhood, since the newcomer to the world needs to know, understand, apprehend and internalize the meanings constructed by the members of their social reality to adapt to the environment

and integrate into their social environment (Pérez, Sandoval, Delgadillo & Bonilla, 2009, p. 11).

One of the most representative experiences in the children's memory are the moments of singing through cooing, the collective singing shared in kindergarten, school, family moments, at the end of classes, during reading, playing, watching their mother and grandmother knit, or while running around the house. This becomes a crucial part within the educational practices, since "a teacher of literature [...] is a body that sings, a voice that counts, a hand that invents palaces and impossible architectures" (Reyes, 2016. p. 33).

All educators play an important role when kids are introduced into the literate world, because

teachers are skilful at using their understanding of language, learning, and putting this knowledge into practice. They might follow their observations of children with questions about how best to help that child, about whether to intervene or stay in the background, about what kinds of new experiences and demonstration would be helpful." (Marjorie, 1993. p. 25).

Oral tradition through phonics teaching methods

There is a connection between oral tradition and phonics. When kids listen to stories being told aloud, they hear the sounds of the words and how they come together to create meaning. This help to recognise patterns in language, which is key in phonics instruction. Just like how storytellers use rhythm and repetition in oral tradition to engage listeners, phonics lessons use rhymes and word families to help students remember letter sounds and spelling patterns. So when children listen to a tale from long ago, students are not just hearing a story, they are also strengthening their understanding of language and phonics.

Phonics is important in learning to read and write. Research supports the view that phonics is a key predictor of a later reading success. English is a phonetic language which means it has a sound that is attached by a written letter or combination. Learning English as a second language in childhood education is not an impossible work even though English is the most complex alphabetic languages to learn, because it's irregular, there can be many options for combining letters to create a specific sound or combining different sounds to make up words (Maddox & Feng, 2013).

Phonics comprehension may be characterised as an awareness, conscious or unconscious, that there is a relationship between letters and sounds in English. To read and write English proficiently, readers need to have developed at least rudimentary phonics knowledge and an ability to use that knowledge in reading: that is, functional know-how (Weaver, 1990). While reading is seen as decoding symbols into sounds rather than unlocking meaning, so children must to learn phonics before they start learning how to read and write.

Teaching phonics in childhood education provide those children understand the basic rules in the language following the rules to be successful decoders in the second language. Learning to read is complex and phonics is just one part of the code-related literacy development and becoming literate. As Marjorie explains,

the purpose of phonics instruction is to provide the reader with the ability to associate printed letters with the speech sounds that these letters represent. In 13 applying phonic skills to an unknown word the reader blends a series of sounds dictated by the order in which particular letters occur in the printed word (1993, pp. 12-13).

Oral language and phonological awareness play a key role in early childhood literacy development phonics knowledge is finite and can be learnt quickly, whereas comprehension and vocabulary knowledge continue to develop over a life time. This makes phonics learning easier to measure that comprehension and vocabulary development.

Phonics is understanding the structure of oral languages and it's the written representation for the language. It's a method for teaching children to read by helping them to connect sounds with letters or groups of letters. Phonics is just one part of learning to read. English as a second language in childhood education challenge kids to learn immense array of sounds and letter patterns what beginning to support children in developing an understanding of sounds, letters, and the alphabetic principle in the prior-to school years is important.

The study in phonics made by Marjorie establishes that

phonics can have an important role in teaching young children to read and write. When phonics knowledge is characterised as an awareness, there is functional know-how for readers to read and write English proficiently. Also, it has been shown that the whole word approach has relevance for young readers and writers (1993, p. 27).

When Phonics is taught since preschool, kids are able to develop phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the ability to detect and manipulate the larger of sound; for example, rhyme and syllables. Phonological awareness is important for children in the prior- to school years because it's easiest to understand a second language recognizing sounds, letters, pronunciations, etc. through phonics exercises. So, this is a possibility to open a bilingualism environment to kids where their knowledge is developed through different strategies that contributes their learning process.

Phonics teaches kids to be fluent in a language while they are learning to read and how to write. To be more competent, this instruction needs to effort hand-in-hand with vocabulary instruction and other types of knowledge for a well-rounded development. From an educational viewpoint, being able to calculate the pronunciation of words using letter-sound knowledge is healthier than repetition learning the pronunciation of all words.

The home environment is vital to progress holistic foundational skills, say experts. The role of parents in development their children's development is twin: they introduce kids to sound, and play a crucial part in strengthening teachers' instructions

Parents can be given a list of words and stories introduced in school, which they can repeat with the children during daily chores and activities. Parents can also ask questions about further letter sound knowledge, like 'What is the beginning sound of this word?' or 'What is the last letter in this word, and what sound does it make?' Parents unfamiliar with the language can listen to songs and rhymes in the language of instruction with their children, and encourage their little ones to sing along." (Medium blog, 2021).

Phonological awareness involves the larger units of sounds such as rhyme and syllables. Research suggests the phonological awareness is important to develop language in a second language. It's effortless for young children to attend to the larger units of sounds than phonemic awareness.

One of the best ways to introduce phonics in childhood classrooms is by picture books, reading poetry, sing rhyming songs, pronunciation of words and contextualised play-based learning. The contextualised play-based learning draw attention to letters when sharing picture books with children during small or large group times or they provide materials such as magnetic letters or alphabet puzzles. It also involves writing prompts in dramatic play areas or modelling print or names writing during an art or writing activity.

Alphabet books are the most common formats of picture books for young children. Children with learning letters of the alphabet support children in learning to read. When kids started to sounding words becomes easier the reading process as phonics breaks down words into their own components. Over time, children recognise the unique words patters and automatically learn to read them correctly. Classrooms from an increasing tradition stress genuineness of materials and methods in language instruction. Students are stimulated to search for meaning and to develop self-initiated learners. The intervening goal is that learning in such. Classrooms are not forced, but is more natural. "The reader brings the reading process understanding about the nature of language and the social uses to create meaning, using a variety of sources both in and out of text." (Keating, 2000, p. 13).

In preschool's classrooms you can see how teachers make links sounds and letters as they follow phonics method using sounds to link respective letter or letter groups, so that's exactly how children know precisely which sound should be create for each letter or letter group making the way to reading simpler and even cleaner as it

the purpose of phonics instruction is to provide the reader with the ability to associate printed letters with the speech sounds that these letters represent. In 13 applying phonic skills to an unknown word the reader blends a series of sounds dictated by the order in which particular letters occur in the printed word (Marjorie, 1993, pp. 12-13).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of oral tradition and phonics in early childhood education cannot be overstated. Together, they provide a strong foundation for language acquisition, literacy development, and cultural understanding in young learners. In early childhood education, oral tradition plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for language development. Through oral traditions, children learn to communicate, express themselves, and understand the world around them. Stories, songs, and conversations passed down orally from generation to generation help children grasp language patterns, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

Combining oral tradition with phonics instruction creates a balanced approach to language learning in early childhood education. Children not only engage in rich oral storytelling experiences but also develop the phonemic awareness necessary for reading and writing. This dual approach enhances literacy skills and fosters a deeper appreciation for language and communication. Phonics, on the other hand, focuses on the relationship between sounds and letters. By learning phonics, children acquire the fundamental skills needed to decode words, spell accurately, and read fluently. Phonics instruction helps young learners understand the alphabetic principle, which is the idea that letters represent sounds in words.

Oral tradition enables a link to a remote past, which connects with the collective consciousness of a nation, its culture, and facilitates the practice with living oral testimonies, characterised by spontaneity, freshness and naturalness. As stated by (2001, p. 312), "the anonymous discourses of the oral tradition are characterized by an uncontrolled, word-of-mouth transmission, in the course of which the form of the testimony may be lost and the content may vary".

Moreover, the oral tradition provides a sense of community and connection for young learners. Sitting together to listen to stories creates a shared experience that promotes social bonds and empathy. Children learn to respect different perspectives, appreciate cultural diversity, and develop a sense of belonging within their group. In today's modern world, where technology often dominates communication, the art of oral tradition development in childhood education remains a powerful and relevant tool. By preserving and celebrating the age-old practice of storytelling, educators can continue to ignite the imaginations of young listeners and instil valuable lessons that will shape their growth and development for years to come.

For this, it is necessary that such testimony has circulated orally for a long time and has become part of the collective consciousness as part of the culture of a country. On the other hand, although numerous variations are made throughout the period of transmission, there are different degrees in the permissibility of these variations. Reyzábal (2001) distinguishes between "curdled" oral traditions, which are learned by heart and repeated with a certain pretension of fidelity, and "free" ones, which do not intervene in the rigorous memory, but only the image built on the original, on which the transmitter introduces numerous variations.

Within the processes that are carried out in the tradition, it should be taken into account that the daily communication processes are materialised through oral discourses that are carried out in the daily pedagogical practice. In other words, it is essential that teachers put into practice different modalities that enhance the oral tradition in the educational experience of early childhood education.

Oral literature should be considered as an element that contributes to the general literary language and contributes others of its own. It maintains the linguistic or didactic and moral and archaic forms, since it is the reflection of the past. For a long time, it has been at the service of one of the most essential characteristics of the human being, the need of children to play and have fun, in this case, through listening and the exercise of speech.

Propp (1974) states that what is important in oral tradition tales is to know what the characters do, and not so much who does it and how they do it, that is, the teacher should focus on the way the narrative interweaves the different stories, songs, tales, games, among others. It was for this reason that this author studied an immense amount of fairy tales in terms of actions and concluded that the stories had a limited number of actions (specifically 31 stories). He also affirmed that their succession was always the same (although not all of them appeared in every tale) and that each set of actions (called by him "functions") was related to a character. Propp perceived that the number of characters that could appear in this type of story was also limited: the aggressor, the donor, the helper, the desired object or person, the agent, the hero and the false hero.

Having said this, it is necessary to take into account all those linguistic possibilities that enrich the oral tradition in the educational practice of children in early childhood; since unfortunately it is a subject that has been subordinated and underestimated in early childhood education; however, it is necessary to re-signify the oral tradition and make it visible in the practices of teachers in the education of children under five years of age.

Further all information said about oral tradition and phonics is needed on the precise effects of formal phonics teaching if we are to know what kinds of phonics will assist the beginning reader and writer. So even if you find different kind of practices in oral or phonics process teachers must know why is the importance to teach both of them and how they can do this process in kids according with their own levels.

This great debate may never end but perhaps it should not. The best way to continue with the conversation about the importance of oral tradition and phonics might be to take them into every school and very community where they can be conversed, debate and even argued about. It's indispensable to use phonics and the whole word styles in combination with the whole language philosophy to help young children become better readers and writer through both skills' phonics and oral tradition.

Oral language is the first bridge that introduce kids into their cultural environment that surround them so oral tradition and phonics help children to enjoy the learning process because oral language is the method used for spoken words to communicate with people. So that's why childhood is the most important age to strength the oral language. When kids are able to communicate in oral way with their pairs, adults, educators through

oral communication they learn how to express ideas, knowledge and emotions. At this point, oral tradition and phonics have a strong relationship to reading and writing process.

Oral tradition and phonics have been around for a long time and are the most recommended teaching methods, especially in early care and education, which improve many aspects of child development. Normally teachers do not relate them but treat them separately as if they were two different aspects of education. The invitation is to contemplate them in order to improve oral education practices to enrich educational experiences in early childhood education.

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Bionote

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