



Chilean deaf adolescents' experiences with reading: beliefs and practices associated to different types of reading activities

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ABSTRACT

Deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) students' difficulties with written language have been consistently reported, but there are few studies about deaf students' reading practices and experiences. This study aimed to characterize past and current reading experiences of Chilean D/HH adolescents. There were 46 participating students (7th–12th graders). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which addressed students' beliefs about reading, early experiences with books, preferred reading material, and perceptions of themselves as readers. The interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Results show that, for students, reading is an arduous and not much enjoyed activity; it becomes a task they try to avoid and which they circumscribe mostly to the school context. Some of them report enjoying interacting with other types of texts, especially when these include pictures, but they do not seem to consider them as true reading activities. Reading difficulties faced in their early school years are still present. Students tend to blame their difficulties on limited vocabulary knowledge and to ask for help from teachers and parents in order to understand text. Most of them are not independent readers, and having to rely on someone else to understand text perpetuates their view of themselves as non-readers. Results are interpreted within a sociocultural framework to understand learning and motivation; the discussion includes suggestions for improving teaching practices.

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KEYWORDS

Deaf students; reading practices; reading experiences; beliefs; motivation

Introduction

Deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) students' low levels of reading comprehension keep being reported by many authors (Kelly 2003, Albertini and Mayer 2011, Marschark *et al.* 2012).

This situation poses great challenges for our educational systems. After the first school years, one of the goals of instruction is that reading skills are developed well enough to support learning of new content in written formats; that is, the passage from learning to read to 'reading to learn' (Jitendra *et al.* 2011). But available data shows us that such goal is not being satisfactorily met when it comes to D/HH students. Studies carried out in Chile have also reported low levels of achievement with regard to literacy skills among deaf students (Lissi *et al.* 2003, Herrera 2010), which rises an important barrier to access higher education institutions, and even to complete their secondary education.

Reading difficulties faced by D/HH students are diverse in nature and comprise many levels of reading skills. While we will draw upon prior studies on the topic, our proposal considers a theoretical twist in the way reading is conceptualized, moving from an individual-centered perspective towards a cultural-historical one. The former understands reading

motivation and reading achievement as processes explained by individual resources. Instead, a cultural-historical view assumes that reading practices and motivation take different shapes depending on the context in which they develop and take place. We will review research regarding reading motivation and reading practices of deaf students, but interpreting them from this cultural-historical view. Adopting such perspective, we think, may be especially fruitful in understanding D/HH students' relation with reading.

Theoretical and empirical framework

Reading skills of deaf adolescents

Several studies have reported that deaf students, reading comprehension is considerably low compared to their hearing peers. As a consequence, in average, deaf adolescents end leaving school with reading comprehension achievements equivalent to a fourth grade level (Traxler 2000). Deaf students reading difficulties are evidenced at different levels, such as word recognition, decoding, knowledge of grammar sentence-level processing, and text comprehension (Kyle and Cain 2015). They also show lesser metacognitive awareness during reading than hearing students (Morrison *et al.* 2013).