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NON-ACADEMIC READING AS COMPLEMENTARY TRAINING FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to survey, by sampling, the reading of books that are not directly linked to the academic area, among six-year students of Medicine at São Leopoldo Mandic. The hypothesis defended, with the support of researchers in language and cognition, is that the transversal reading of non-fiction and fiction works enhances the academic capacity, creativity and empathy of higher education students, with positive results for the future professional and personal lives of these students. With the results obtained through questionnaires and interviews, and also by comparing this type of additional reading and the academic performance of the research subjects, the researcher will test the validity of her hypothesis which, if confirmed, could lead to the creation of a reading club within the Medicine Course at São Leopoldo Mandic.

Keywords: Reading, academic performance, creativity, empathy.

INTRODUCTION

We all know the role of formal education in our lives. It is made up of two obligatory stages that include primary and secondary education. After these stages, those who decide to continue their studies opt for a higher education course, according to their vocations and possibilities. From elementary school to university and even throughout our lives, we can also seek what is called non-formal education, which includes, for example, courses in English, computers, music, dance, etc.

But, alongside formal and non-formal education, we also have the so-called informal education, which is provided by living with the family and, above all, by the habit of reading, both fiction and non-fiction works. This reading is strongly integrated into formal and non-formal education, in an invisible way, but no less important, composing what

educators call the hidden curriculum. It has a strong impact on both our professional and personal lives. This was the reason that led me to propose this scientific initiation research on the impact of non-academic reading on medical students' lives and its consequences on their future professional lives.

Non-fiction reading, especially in areas such as History, Politics and Philosophy, has the function of providing any professional with an important background both to place him in the world in which he lives, and to compose a critical mass, crucial for the future. creative thinking. This is the opinion of researchers in language and cognition, such as Abreu (2013), Bergen (2012), Coulson (2001), Turner (1996; 2013) and, mainly, Fauconnier and Turner (2002), who demonstrate co- If our mind is capable of "connecting the dots" between facts of different nature, this is establishing creative "blends". This transversality is also defended by Epstein (2019) who, in his recent book *Range: How Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, shows us how professionals from different areas, including researchers in very specific areas, manage to enhance their work from experiences and readings in different areas of knowledge. Also, in this field, the ideas of Hofstadter and Sander (2013) are important who, in their book *Surfaces and essences: analogy as the fuel and fire of thinking*, show us the ability of our mind to establish creative analogies between information from diverse sources. Tomasello (2014) and Oakley (2020) emphasize that this ability to relate different sources to obtain results in specific areas is grounded in both our phylogenesis and our ontogenesis.

Fiction reading has two important functions. The first of these is linked to the development of the imagination. According to Damásio (2018, p. 132): "Every mind is composed of images, from the representation of objects and events to their corresponding

concepts and verbal translations. Images are the universal currency of the mind.” When we read a fiction text, we have to recreate, in our minds, scenarios, characters and events during the entire reading time, which does not occur in other textual genres.

In an article published on the website *Iniciativa Educação*¹ – from a study carried out in 2019 with data from PISA – Magalhães (2019) shows us that young people who read fiction obtain the highest scores on this test, compared to those who read only other textual genres.

The second important function of fiction reading is that it induces in human beings the feeling of empathy. According to Pinker (2011, pos. Kindle 4868 – 4875):

Around the time that Uncle Tom’s Cabin mobilized abolitionist sentiments in the United States, Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838) and Nicholas Nickleby (1839) opened people’s eyes to the mistreatment of children in British poorhouses and orphanages, and Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years at the Bottom of the Mast* (1840) and Herman Melville’s *White Jacket* helped to end the flogging of sailors. In the last century, *Nothing new on the front*, by Erich Maria Remarque, 1984, by George Orwell, *Zero and infinity*, by Arthur Koestler, *A day in the life of Ivan Denisovitch*, by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The sun is for everyone*, by Harper Lee, *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *Slaughterhouse 5* by Kurt Vonnegut, *Roots* by Alex Haley, *Red Azalea* by Anchee Min, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi, and *Possessing the secret of a joy*, by Alice Walker (a novel that focuses on female genital mutilation), were books that brought to the public’s knowledge the sufferings of people who, without them, could have remained ignored.

In conclusion, we can say that, in today’s world and especially in the future world of a knowledge society, any professional has to

enhance his/her skills and be creative, and this obviously includes medical professionals. Another important characteristic, especially in the training and practice of medicine, is empathy. Reading, both non-fiction and fiction works, is able to provide, with great success, all these important subsidies.

PROPOSITION

This research has two objectives. The first is to investigate the extent to which students at the Faculty of Medicine of São Leopoldo Mandic have the habit of reading texts that go beyond textbooks and scientific articles linked to the study of Medicine. For this, a survey will be carried out, by sampling, among the Faculty’s undergraduate students, involving questionnaires and interviews.

The second objective will be to compare the academic performance of students who have this external habit of reading and those who do not. The researcher’s hypothesis is that medical students with external reading habits, both fiction and non-fiction, will have better performance in their studies and greater empathy, which will also result in better professional and personal perspectives for the future.

If this hypothesis is confirmed, a proposal will be made to create, within the Faculty of Medicine of São Leopoldo Mandic, a reading club, with book choices made by students, and monthly meetings to discuss the readings carried out.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

FIRST STEP

In this first stage, 10 questionnaires must be distributed to each of the Medicine Course classes, totaling 60 questionnaires. These questionnaires will involve questions related to the amount of fiction and non-fiction read by the student in the last year. These students

¹ <https://www.iniciativaeducacao.org/pt/ed-on/ed-on-artigos/o-efeito-de-ficcao-na-leitura-juvenil>

must also list the titles read during the last three years.

SECOND STEP

With the questionnaires answered, the researcher must separate two from each group of 10. One of them will be the one with the highest number of readings done and the other, the lowest number of them. With these 12 questionnaires in hand, the researcher must proceed with the following actions:

1. Personally interview each of these students, both those with the highest and lowest number of readings, seeking to identify their motivations and perceptions of academic and extra-academic gains.
2. Compare the academic performance between students who have presented a greater number of readings and those who have presented a smaller number.

THIRD STEP

At this stage, the researcher must, together with the advisor, analyze the data obtained, aiming to verify whether the research hypothesis is supported or not.

FOURTH STEP

Writing of the final research report.

SCHEDULE

First month	Elaboration and analysis, together with the advisor, of the questionnaires to be presented to the research subject students. At this stage, the researcher must also carry out some additional readings and discuss them with the advisor.
Second month	Distribution of ten questionnaires to students in each year of the Medicine course.
Third and fourth month	Collection of questionnaires and analysis and tabulation of results.
Fifth and sixth month	Interviews of 12 students who answered the questionnaires of each of the grades, divided into 2 per grade, according to the proposal of item 1 of the second stage of the research that appears in Materials and Methods

Seventh and eighth month	Analysis, together with the advisor, of data obtained from questionnaires and interviews.
Ninth and tenth month	Discussion, with the advisor, of the results of the data analysis.
Eleventh and twelfth month	Final writing of the research report.

EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE STUDENT IN THE PROJECT

The student researcher must prepare the questionnaire used in the first stage of the research. After being reviewed by the advisor, she must distribute them to the student-subjects of the research and collect them. After that, she must tabulate the data, listing the number of readings performed by the students and their titles, within each of the series of the medical course. After a preliminary analysis of these data, she must interview 12 students (2 from each of the Medicine Course series), preparing a flash report of each of these interviews. After this step, she and the advisor will jointly analyze the data from the questionnaire, tabulations and interviews, also taking into account the comparison between the academic performance of reading students and non-reading students, as established in item 2 of the second stage of the item Materials and Methods. After this stage, the teaching researcher must write the final research report.

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