COMMUNITIES AND TRAJECTORIES OF READING IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

An Ethnographic Study in the Municipality of Chalco, Estado de México

FLORENCIA PATRICIA ORTEGA CORTEZ

Florencia Patricia Ortega is a teacher/researcher at Instituto Superior de Ciencias de la Educación del Estado de México. División Chalco. Tizapa s/n, Colonia La Bomba, Chalco, Estado de México, 56600 Mexico. E-MAIL: florenciapatricia@yahoo.com.mx

Abstract:
This article is part of a study on the practices, communities and trajectories of reading in public libraries. A series of elements is proposed for intervening in the configuration of reading trajectories in communities of learning, such as: social contexts and reading institutions, mediators and communities of reading.

Key words: libraries, reading habits, communities of learning, social factors, Mexico.

Introduction

This project[1] utilizes an ethnographic perspective. Predominant in the perspective was the researcher's ongoing reflective process in the theoretical elaboration, study design, and obtaining of information. The data were compiled from forty observation logs of reading practices involving two ways to access books: consulting collected books, and attending reading workshops. Semi-structured interviews were held with ten librarians and twenty-five users. Most of the interviews were carried out to supplement the observation logs, and especially to research a specific point of interest or to determine the meanings and reader conceptions of reading processes and practices. At the end of the reading workshops, questionnaires were distributed to discover the participants' opinions of the workshops, as well as their experiences, preferences, and practices in reading.

The project is conducted within a field of research known as "New Studies of Literacy", which analyzes reading activities as social practices. Such studies go beyond individuals to include the social and cultural contexts that provide a background to their lives and give meaning to their reading activities.

The study presents some of the results of research carried out for four years (2001-2005) in the municipality of Chalco, Estado de México, in its ten municipal libraries. These libraries are public because of their collections. And since they tend to be the only libraries of their communities, the population identifies them as "the town library". Each establishment, in addition, has a degree of independence in its traditions and customs, and is usually a certain distance away from the other communities in the municipality.

Thus Chalco, the municipal seat, has ten "towns" or communities with libraries that are named according to their location: Hutzilzingo, Chimalpa, Xico, San Pablo, Ayotzingo, Huexoculco, San Marcos, Miraflores, Coatzingo and of course, Chalco.

In order to have points of contrast and comparison in aspects such as the type of population (urban, semi-urban and rural), the size of the collection and demand, the services offered, the development of programs that encourage reading, and librarians' work in forming readers and communities of readers, systematic follow-up was carried out in four libraries:

Coatzingo, San Pablo, Huexoculco, and Chalco. The first two are located in a semi-urban context, the third in a rural zone, and the last in an urban area.

The municipal public libraries are characterized by having a general, basic collection to serve the small surrounding population. The towns have at least a secondary school. The libraries open with 1,500 volumes and are small in comparison with the central libraries of large cities, whose collections reach 10,000 volumes.

The research centered on analyzing the reading practices of users who visit public libraries. My initial idea was to try to determine how a reader is formed. On approaching readers and learning part of their reading background, I found certain characteristics in common in their trajectories. Based on these trajectories, considered to be a social process configured by the articulation of a series of elements—such as access to books and their availability in libraries, the demand and need for information, communities of learning and reading, and mediators of reading—I present in this paper a series of reflections and findings on reading practices that are promoted in public libraries in the context of Chalco, as well as some suggestions and conclusions.

Public libraries[2] are historically considered to be a democratic institution that offers services to all social groups, with no type of distinction. Public libraries are supported by the state, and their services are free. In this sense, the population recognizes them as an institution that can meet a need for information without requiring expenditure. Therefore, public libraries are a place for accessing reading materials and books without having to buy them. Library loans permit users to appropriate books for a few days at no cost.[3]

Thus a public library that is "open to everyone" and located in a central area of the community, generates an environment that favors the entire population's access, including the most disadvantaged social sectors. Such is the case of the libraries in Chalco. The most visits and highest demand are in communities where inhabitants do not have books at home and have "fewer possibilities to buy a book"—the description some librarians use to refer to library users.

Such populations also have fewer cultural possibilities to access books. This is the case of most of the mothers (we found only one case involving a father) who accompany their small children to the library; most of them are illiterate or have attended only elementary school, sometimes without finishing; a smaller proportion has attended secondary school. According to our observations, the women initially go to the library with a degree of shyness and "shame": they feel incompetent in the presence of a book, and have the feeling that books are a privilege that corresponds to people with more education. However, their children's need to do homework and the possibility of consulting with a librarian who is willing to help (perhaps the only place where they can find "help") generate their "new encounter" with books.

This encounter offers both mothers and their children the opportunity to access books without fear, sure that they will always find help if needed. Such an experience can give them the idea that other types of relationships with books are possible, especially if the librarian is a person who loves books and can play the role of "initiator", or "someone who can recommend books".

For users, the public library is a place where librarians promote reading with consideration for the user's time, preferences, demands and interests. The librarian's friendly, supporting and understanding attitude allows users to access books without feeling afraid or embarrassed about their limitations or lack of knowledge regarding the library's functioning.

On the other hand, the open access to shelves characteristic of public libraries gives users the possibility of reading without fear of social pressure or criticism because of the books they consult; they are free from control or supervision of their reading. The librarians in Chalco, for example, make constant reference to the demands of teenagers, who look for books about sexuality and development, topics they cannot find in other contexts such as the home or school.

The thematic preferences and literary genres in public libraries are closely linked to readers' identities. Teenagers, for example, in addition to demanding topics related to sexual education and development, are attracted by poetry, an explicit preference of the girls. The teenaged boys, on the other hand, usually read poetry in a clandestine manner and are able to do so in the library without fear of criticism or prejudice. Such is the case of a boy who guardedly removed a book of poetry, *Cien poesías escogidas de literatura universal*, from his backpack; he turned around to make sure no one from his classroom was watching, and hastily told me in justification, "A girl loaned it to me." When I asked him if he liked poetry, he answered with a bit of embarrassment that he did, as if his choice were not completely in agreement with his gender (Reading Workshop—TFL—Chalco, Reg. 1, October 3, 2003).

In this sense, a library can be the place that helps to deconstruct such fear, overcome obstacles, and promote contact with books. Familiarity and relaxation are generated by having open access to shelves, in addition to help from the librarian.

What type of readers visit the public libraries of Chalco and what do they read?
The users of these libraries are mainly elementary students, especially from the upper grades (4th, 5th, and 6th) and secondary school students. A smaller proportion is students from other public and private institutions, of the high school level. Most users live in the town where the library is located, although their schools may be in other towns.

In general, the reason users visit these libraries is to meet their school needs and do homework. Therefore, the relationship between the book and the reader is configured by such demands.

Elementary and secondary school students go to the library to do the homework assigned by their teachers. Such activities include researching a topic, answering questions, and preparing summaries and drawings.[4] A smaller proportion goes to the library to apply for library cards[5] or request guided visits to learn about the library's function and services. Students' tasks are usually related to the activities suggested by their school programs. Such programs promote libraries more indirectly than the campaigns carried out through the media (which were carried out systematically only when the National Library Network began operating).[6] One of the librarians commented on the users from elementary school:

> Schools now assign them research projects, and the children have to come to a library. If not research projects […], the children are required (I believe in sixth grade) to come and get a library card. We tell them, "You have to realize that you have to come to the library to borrow a book to take home. You have to realize that you have to meet certain requirements with the library." And the children answer, "Yes, I'm going to borrow from my library" (Librarian from municipal seat).

Like the elementary and secondary school students, high school students visit the library to meet school needs or on the request of their teachers. In contrast with the younger students, however, high school students occasionally go to the library on their own. They may be accompanied by a friend or classmate of the same sex to look for information related to their class notes, to further their understanding of a topic, to research a topic they will present in class, or to study for examinations, including college entrance exams.

Thus as previously mentioned, the reader/book relationship is configured primarily by the needs of the school context. In practice, the public library is a "permanent prolongation of the educational work of the school" (SEP-DGB, 1988:9), especially elementary school, since the municipal libraries' collections concentrate on the content of the elementary level.

On the other hand, users who visit the library as part of the school experience identify a series of contrasts between the two spaces, in terms of reading. Most of the participants in the reading workshops offered in Chalco's libraries identify the library's advantages over schools as an educational institution and a place for reading. One student referred to the possibilities of free access to the shelves at the public library,[7] without having to follow a school's program, suggestions, determinations, controls or requirements; only the reader's desires and needs rule at libraries. The participants also referred to the amount and diversity of reading materials. The children find major differences between books at school and at the library. Some comment the following:

> Reading at school is bad because they don't have many pictures and they are full of letters and I don't understand them (BrenVi, 9 years old, Huexoculco).

> At school the books are ugly and silly, because sometimes they talk about many things and I don't understand them. And the books at the library are great and amazing. I understand them and they are fun. The books are exciting [...] (AlLe, 9 years old, Huexoculco).

> In the library there are more books to read (GaCruz, 11 years old, San Pablo).

> The books are very different. At school they have activities and reading. They are about boring information and at the library they are about people's stories (JaDe, 9 years old, Cuautzingo).

> At the library there are many books of different sizes and at school there aren't so many (IdaCue, 9 years old. Cuatzingo).

> At school you read a book and there's not another one. And at the library you can read any book, any one you want (LiHue 8 years old, Cuatzingo).

> At school it's reading out of obligation and at the library it's like an extracurricular activity (Student, 14 years old).

An evident negative predisposition exists towards reading at school. Most students refer to their difficulties in understanding books, especially in elementary school. And their understanding is reflected in their like or dislike of reading. Frequent reference is made to

informative books and their quantitative predominance at school. The students recognize, however, the importance and function of school and reading as mediators of knowledge:

> Reading at school is very important… to learn things I don't know (NaSan, 9 years old, San Pablo).

> Reading is learning about many things (AleRo, 12 years old, San Pablo).

> Reading at school is learning from books (MonRo, 11 years old, San Pablo).

> Reading is learning more, broadening our knowledge (EdiMe, 16 years old, San Pablo).

> At school they teach us to read, spelling and punctuation (AbiRo, 9 years old, San Pablo).

> Reading at school is doing projects and homework, and studying … (MarRuiz, 17 years old, Cuautzingo).

When the students were asked for suggestions to make reading at school more attractive, we discovered that many of their proposals were linked to the amount, variety and characteristics of books, unrestricted access to books, and especially, the promotion of a certain type of books:

> Fun books that you can look at whenever you want (DiaLom, 8 years old, Cuautzingo).

> Children's books, because they have more pictures... being able to read any book you want (GiHue, 8 years old, Cuautzingo).

> Children's books, I like their fantasies (GilL, 10 years old, Cuautzingo).

> Starting with pleasant books, like stories (MarRui, 17 years old, Cuautzingo).

Personal interests are a fundamental element in encouraging reading. Thus book selection is basic for guaranteeing the reader's "full participation". This idea implies considering "the individual as a totality acting in the world" as sustained by Lave and Wenger (2003:23); in other words, interest must be taken in the person, his interests, actions and experiences in the social world.

Experiences go hand in hand with emotions and feelings. "Living strong emotions by reading books," commented Alle, a nine-year-old boy who said he likes books that are "scary, with suspense and terror, because they make me very afraid and I like that because it is very dangerous."[8] We also documented the case of Brenvi, a shy, introverted and somewhat insecure eight-year-old girl who stated that she likes books that "make me laugh"; she also likes the "Willi books" (a children's collection) because she identifies with the character, who alludes to personal growth and how to overcome obstacles. In such situations, we can affirm that certain reading experiences contribute to self-discovery and self-help in overcoming personal or personality problems, while "becoming somewhat more the authors of their life", as expressed by Michéle Petit (2001:31).

With regard to their reading practices (ways of reading) and their interaction with the librarian and other participants, the children commented:

I like the books in the library because we read them faster [in reference to recreational texts] and because we are the ones who read the books [in reference to reading out loud as a group activity] (JaDe, 9 years old, Cuautzingo).

At the library, the way they tell [and read] the stories is nice and interesting [in reference to the intonation and performance of the characters] (NuElías, 12 years old, Cuatzingo).

At school, they just read and they don't ask about what we understood, and here [in the library], Adi [the librarian] explains it to us and we talk about it. The kids [readers] express themselves more and write important things about the reading in detail (ClauRa, 13 years old, Cuautzingo).

At school, everything is very fast [the reading process] and at the library, I understand them better [...] and we answer all our questions and we talk with our friends (Ero, 12 years old, San Pablo).

At school, we read very fast. At the library, I read slower, and I understand it much better [...] We learn to use commas and periods. Reading at school should have a schedule (AbiRo, 9 years old, San Pablo).

Several children referred to the form of reading at the library, where a time and a place exist for developing reading, where there is no competition to read and *all students* have the possibility of reading with their limitations—especially as beginning readers–while sharing their viewpoints on what they read, asking questions, and attaining a better understanding of the text. Most of the students alluded to the need to have a defined time and place (with sufficient recreational or literary books and not only informative books): "special books to read" at school, marked by interaction and connections with their daily lives. Books, as one teenaged girl commented, should "teach us more about life and the world where we live" (EdiMe, 16 years old, San Pablo).

The trajectories of reading are constructed in social contexts.
Trajectories refer to movements in space that utilize the elements of the place and context—long-term investments that affect individuals' trajectories and learning. The temporality of trajectories is more complex than a linear notion of time, and is characterized as profoundly mobile and changeable in unforeseen situations or variable circumstances. Therefore, reading trajectories are constructed in social contexts, making them "evolving", as indicated by Martine Poulain, rather than linear. Poulain paraphrased Peroni in referring to readers' trajectories: "Not one of them continued being a reader his whole life; not one kept the same gestures, the same choices, the same expectations about writing for his whole life; not one evidenced during his whole life the same uses of writing" (Peroni, 2003:13).
    While carrying out my fieldwork in the public libraries of Chalco, I discovered a large school-age population at the libraries, especially children and teenagers at the elementary and secondary school levels, and to a lesser degree, students at the high school level. Adults were in

the minority, and usually visited the library with their children in the afternoon, often to help their younger children do homework.

Some library users, especially the youngest (in the early years of elementary school), considered visiting the library an experience of great novelty. They felt nervous and out of place, yet the need to do homework represented for both the child and his mother[9] an opportunity to become familiar with the library setting.

The task assigned by the child's teacher is often completed with the joint participation of people from the family and library context. Mothers take their children to the library when they are small, and accompany them as they do their work. They may offer help when the task is time-consuming, or may transcribe information, taking into account children's difficulties in writing during the early years of elementary school. Once the material is found, transcribing is one of the most common activities carried out in the libraries of Chalco.[10]

Most library users invest considerable time in locating the required books. Requesting the librarian's help in finding material is an important strategy in completing the assigned work or research, especially if the user is inexperienced in library functioning. The librarian is an important aid in obtaining materials; her experience and knowledge are fundamental in solving the problem at hand. On many occasions, as required by the situation, the librarian gives students the exact page number where the necessary information can be located. If the library is somewhat empty and demand is low, the librarian may help users in their research.

In this case, homework is a collective process involving more than the teacher and student: the mother and librarian also participate.

Users already experienced in doing homework in the library turn to teamwork, especially for extensive research. They distribute tasks among the participants and put into practice the economy of effort. Joint participation contributes to facilitating the task's completion. This type of organization is more frequent among secondary and high school students.

Thus each experience related to reading is shared with the stories of an "Other" or various others in a determined social context. When users of the public library spoke of their reading experiences, they always referred to a concrete social context and interaction with others. Their memories, whether pleasant or unpleasant, shared with teachers, parents, relatives and librarians, are sources of continuity or discontinuity in their reading trajectories. Such moments and places can be influenced, positively or negatively, in the evolution of reading practice and trajectories.

All reading trajectories are constructed socially, and can be understood only within a social place and in terms of interactions with others. The social context as a whole conditions the tastes, practices and trajectories of reading. In this respect, Poulain indicated:

An attentive reading [of readers' histories] shows the importance and diversity of [social] factors that stimulate or discourage reading. Reading is reactive [and active] and always inserted into the need to construct one's self, always considered a form of coming and going between one's self and the other. Therefore, life stories always make the other's experience intervene, particularly that of close relatives. They always make them intervene in modes of encounters with written language, places, circumstances, and endings. Although made real by the individual, reading is eminently social, and described always as something that is situated in relation to the exterior (quoted in Peroni, 2003:13).

The social setting may or may not contribute to generating positive attitudes toward reading. The participants (children, teenagers, and adults) refer to significant experiences in their encounters with books in three social settings: the family, school and library.

For example, in the libraries of Chalco, the parents motivate their young children and teenagers to attend the summer workshops and reading workshops. They accompany them and at times even participate with them in workshop activities. Similarly, teachers "send" their students to the libraries to do research, and occasionally take them on a guided tour of the community library.

In addition to the family, school is a place where significant experiences are generated, although perhaps not as frequently as hoped, in pleasant encounters with books. This observation was made by a fifteen-year-old girl, who especially remembered one of the books proposed by her first-year Spanish teacher:

> It's a story about a knight who would rather wear his armor and rescue damsels than be with his wife and daughter. That book helped me a lot because with it I have done better at school. It teaches you to love yourself and to value what your parents do (Laor,TFL, Reg. 3, Library at San Pablo).

One of the librarians also reflected on the origin of her love of reading and her desire to become a librarian: "I like to read books, like my father. He has a library with many books that he used to read to me when I was young. I did a lot of my homework with his books" (Mira,[11] librarian at Chalco).

Reading as a social act is born and develops in an *intersubjective space,* as Chartier (1996, 1999) would say. Readers share a series of attitudes, behaviors, and meanings with regard to the act of reading. Thus the social context of literacy and reading plays an important role in readers' encounters with books. Such experiences configure readers' trajectories, and are unique and meaningful for each individual; they are not stereotyped, permanent or equal experiences for all people and generations; they are linked to multiple meanings in accordance with individuals' identities and interpersonal interactions; they are not limited to the participants in the social context of reading, but are also found in the encounter between the world of books and the reader's world.

Larrosa (2003:40) sustains that "the reading experience is also an event of plurality, but a plurality that cannot be reduced to a concept". Thus the interpretations of a book and reading experiences are multiple and plural according to the reader, the time, and the place. The linking of different experiences in the contexts of family, school and library enriches the reader's trajectory, which changes according to the diverse experiences of learning. Such trajectories are configured by the different experiences of reading—not only because of the representations promoted by reading, but also because of the implication of new readings that require other interpretations and innumerable relations between readers and books. Also of influence are the various contexts and communities of reading.

Communities of Learning

All learning processes take place in a continual context of social exchange. The work of Lave and Wenger (2003) emphasizes the idea that learning is located precisely in the process of joint participation, and not in individuals' minds. Their proposal shows that "learning is a process that takes place in a framework of participation, not in an individual mind. This statement

means that learning is mediated by the different perspectives of co-participants" (Lave and Wenger 2003:XIX).

From that point of view, the appropriate social contexts are those that can guarantee learning, implying an important interactive and productive role. The communities of learning in the proposal by Lave and Wenger emphasize the role of exchange and interaction among participants, and refer to a "peripheral participation" in which the relations between "beginning" and "expert" readers provide certain exchanges that permit access to learning.

In this sense, "expert" or "veteran" mediators, who may be librarians, teachers, or readers, play an important role in the experiences of reading as they "connect sociocultural transformations with changing relations among the new arrivals [or beginners] in the context of shared, changing practice" (Lave and Wenger, 2003:22). Such exchange between the beginner and expert is very relevant, and not only among beginners and specialists or experts, like the librarian or teacher. Exchange also acquires relevance among beginners, who vary in age, gender, experience, interests, stages of reading, sociocultural contexts and reading communities.

In this regard, Rockwell suggests that one of the most notable structures of participation in the classroom is constructed among the students themselves:

> In Mexican schools, children generally have a broad and constant margin of horizontal interaction. They explain to each other and comment on the curriculum the school is attempting to transmit, and thus make learning more of a social and collective activity than an individual activity (Rockwell, 1995:24).

To illustrate the concept of the community of practice, we turn to the reading workshops in Chalco's libraries. The participants in these workshops are children and teenagers of different ages. One of their activities is collective reading, which enables each participant to read a fragment of the text in turn. The pace of the reading changes since some children read more slowly than others. The librarian, however, generates a setting of trust, understanding, respect and patience, especially for those in the initial stages of reading. Since the setting provides the students with confidence, they come enjoy reading while their classmates, attentive and respectful, follow the text with their eyesight. On occasions, some of the older, more skillful students help the reader with a word that is difficult to read or pronounce. Thus a learning setting of joint participation is generated, to create an enjoyable, valued, and utilized participant activity.

At the library in Huexoculco, where this type of practice of collective reading is commonly generated, and where all children participate by reading aloud, those who are "good readers" help the smaller children with the "long and hard words" (T.F.L., Reg. 10, Nov. 27, 2003.) Their relation is not precisely that of a beginner and expert, since both children are new participants in the activity. Rather, having different ages (7 and 11 years old, for example) and belonging to different stages of reading "beginners" and "good or better readers,"[12] present the possibility of interaction and exchange, with the generation of situated learning; i.e., learning that changes according to the situation or shared experience of reading. According to Lave and Wanger, this type of *situated learning*,[13] is inseparable from social practice:

> A situated activity has the central defining characteristic of being a process that is called legitimate peripheral participation. This means calling attention to the exchange and

communication among participants, who inevitably play the roles of beginners who participate in communities of learning; the beginners' mastery of knowledge and skill requires moving towards full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community (2003:1).

In the context of the municipal libraries of Chalco, interest in participating fully in the reading workshops is determined by a series of elements such as readers' identities, their desire to learn, the reading activities, the mediator's characteristics, the circulation of certain texts and their materiality, the social contexts of reading (interaction and spaces for promoting reading) and the communities of practice. As a whole, these elements explain the process through which the individual participates fully and with commitment in the activity of reading—an activity that can become a meaningful experience.

Learning in the communities of reading occurs in an interactive social context of joint participation. Participation is a fundamental element since a beginner can change considerably by increasing his participation in a productive process.

This type of learning of joint participation takes place in the public libraries of Chalco, where the relative, librarian, and teacher, in a direct or indirect manner, in addition to the reader, participate in carrying out the reading activity. The process is an opportunity to put into practice previous knowledge of reading, or to access new experiences in reading.

From such a perspective, reading in the library is a social practice that promotes the individual's possibilities of transformation, to the degree that he participates fully in the reading workshops. Such participation implies the person's total involvement, interest and commitment to the reading activity, in terms of the reader and his social world. In other words, the person, activity and world are mutually formed. This process occurs because of an existing relationship and interaction among participants, surpassing the individual, and including knowledge of the reader's personal life, his experiences, family and community. As a result, there is knowledge of the reader's interests, needs, tastes and reading preferences. The situation implies a social approach and a friendly relation in which the promoter of reading— in our case, the librarian—plays an important role.

Most of the participants refer to the librarian's work and the different modes of reading the librarian promotes: oral, collective, or discussed reading, as well as informal chats on a topic of collective interest that is promoted by new readings. The participants also mention with great enthusiasm the various activities that supplement reading, such as illustrations, writing new endings, memory games involving the characters, theatrical representations, songs, riddles, and arts and crafts.

The reader belongs to different communities of reading, such as family, school, or library. In each community, certain texts, practices, conceptions and mediators of reading predominate. Each social context and community of reading where a reader develops can be an important space that promotes reading, similar to the trajectories during a reader's formation.

The Mediators of Reading

The social setting in which readers develop is extremely important in generating favorable attitudes toward reading. However, circulating books and promoting reading in the library and at school are not sufficient; something more is necessary, something only researchers can define.

Reading experiences can be pleasant or unpleasant. In pleasant experiences, something special stands out in the person's encounters with books—something that has to do with the meaning of interpersonal exchanges in the act of reading, something that is related to mediators and their vision of reading, and is linked to the meaning and purpose of reading. What attracts the attention of a child, teenager, or even an adult is the interest the other person shows in books: the other person's desire and real pleasure in reading. In summary, the love for books is contagious, to paraphrase Martine Poulain: "Exercising reading is something that takes shape socially" (quoted in Peroni, 2003:12).

In the interviews, the users made frequent allusions to the relevant role of mediators, parents, teachers, or librarians, in forming readers. Those who visit the library most, and not only while in school, are generally those who have had a meaningful shared experience with a mediator in their history as a reader. In various cases, the person's relationship with the librarian determines the continuity in his demand for the library's services, even when such interest no longer has any relationship with scholastic needs, and even when the user is no longer a student. Those who commonly visit the library and attend the reading workshops in the public libraries of Chalco have participated frequently in such spaces because they like the workshop activities as well as the librarian's work. Especially emphasized are the librarian's personality and leadership in reading.

In reading experiences, the librarian's attitudes are very important. Her understanding and patience generate a setting of trust, willingness and cooperation, which stimulates the learning and personal development of readers in the workshops. In such a setting, the participants' human qualities and favorable behaviors in reading are emphasized. Attitudes are implied in the processes of learning and exchange, and allude to "human qualities and final states of existence; i.e., they refer to that which is considered positive or desirable" (Gómez, 1986:42).

The mediators' promotion of positive reading experiences generates particular, special events for readers that influence and determine their reading trajectory. Such experiences refer to actions, activities and learning carried out in interpersonal contexts where the social exchange and relations (face-to-face) among participants are relevant. Generating meaningful experiences in addition to reading activities implies involving the person as a whole and not only as a "receptor".

During our research, three of the ten librarians of the municipality of Chalco were outstanding. They were considered to be "the best", and were preferred by the children in the reading workshops. These librarians were flexible and creative in planning their workshops, taking into account the participants' needs, interests and proposals. They also showed great interest in the readers as persons, an interest that was reflected in their work and relationships with the children. They used the activities, games and texts the children liked the most. In essence, they made reading experiences truly pleasurable in a social setting of respect for their readers' uniqueness (limitations and preferences). These librarians were known especially as mediators and "promoters" who transmitted their love for books and reading, rather than working simply as implementers of a program. They did not consider their work or the reading workshops an obligation or requirement; on the contrary, they were totally convinced and committed to working with the community. At all times, they attempted to transmit their enthusiasm to readers.

Conclusions

Visiting the library is commonly promoted at school through a series of needs for information. This situation is utilized by librarians to attract participants to the reading programs and generate communities of learning and reading. Users' participation in workshops contributes significantly to configuring and transforming their trajectories to create pleasure in reading.

The reader's experience at the workshops is meaningful. Once he becomes familiar with the functioning and services of the library, as well as the possibilities it offers for reading, he will continue to visit the library. He will participate fully and systematically in workshops during the school year, followed by the annual summer workshops, and thus form part of a community of readers.

Due to the above, these spaces generate meaningful reading experiences among participants as communities of learning, with a predominant exchange of knowledge, reading practices, forms of communication (oral, written), and the circulation and use of diverse texts, as well as different types of writing, oral tradition, local history, riddles, jingles, informative texts, descriptive texts, maps, drawings and images. In addition, the participants become familiarized with the use of reference services due to their needs for information, which have more to do with their personal interests than with scholastic requirements.

One of the aspects most valued by readers is the ability to select what they want to read. In this sense, the public library has various elements that schools, because of their characteristics, cannot have: a wider variety of books and texts with different types of writing, open access to the shelves to select from a wide diversity of topics, including those not easily available at school or at home. Such topics tend to be sexual development for the teenagers, and individual development through "stories of people with strong feelings" for the children.

The formation of readers and reading habits in childhood and adolescence can be encouraged and coordinated by the school and library, with the purpose of strengthening students' trajectories and love of reading. The activities carried out at libraries through homework or research can continue at school, with a didactic focus. Schools can also promote reading workshops in the library and exchange experiences in order to enrich classroom work.

Negative attitudes toward reading at school are closely linked to the predominant circulation of texts of an informative nature. It is important for schools to promote the circulation of recreational literature and not solely reading of a scientific type.[14] Readers, and especially beginning readers, always express the need to have a specific place and time for recreational texts, especially since they are a window to other types of reading. Many of the children and teenagers who participate in the workshops continue enthusiastically with their reading trajectory and become avid readers who participate in most of the reading workshops year after year. Libraries, as social reading places, generate certain experiences that are believed to attract the reader, including the practice of beginning with recreational texts. Such texts can lead to other types of reading once the reader becomes familiar with the benefits of reading.

Considering readers' interests, preferences and tastes is extremely important. The activities readers find most pleasant are related to their personal interests; readers like texts with characteristics and meanings that agree with their personal identity. Thus reading experiences, and especially in the formative stage, must emphasize not only "necessary" texts, but also texts that are "desired" by readers. If the goal is to develop a willingness to read, most of the texts will be recreational literary texts.

The variety of texts is an important aspect in encouraging reading. Most of the participants referred to the limited collections and reading experiences at school. They emphasized the positive experiences aimed at more than the passive consumption of text, experiences that

promote appropriations, and interpretations that modify meaning, while stimulating their fantasy, desire, anxiety and emotions. Such texts consider their identities, tastes and reading preferences. On referring to the diversity of texts, the participants also included their materiality, the quality of books, color, illustrations, and the size and type of print. Thus book selection must consider these aspects in addition to the protocols of reading, which contribute to further understanding and permit anticipating the text as well as "catching" the readers' attention.

The different practices or forms of reading a text can be relevant for making readers interested in reading; they tend to reject the routine and promote novelty and variety. They like diversity in reading activities: they like for the librarian to read to them, while emphasizing the intonation and actions of the characters; they also appreciate the librarian's promotion of collective oral activities or direction of discussions on reading. Most of the participants expressed the desire to read without haste, and to pause at unknown words or ideas, in order to further their reading comprehension. Such preferences do not mean, however, that reading programs should not be pre-established; rather, they mean that mediators should avoid the use of rigid, inflexible programs that do not take group differences and interests into account. The purpose is to generate experiences and not simply reading activities, which must be varied and not routine.

In this sense, both the context and mediator of reading play a fundamental role in forming a community of reading that is dynamic, active, flexible and plural, where participation is promoted not only in activities but also in events that transform the reading trajectory. The reading experience is unique for each reader.

Consideration for the differences of readers and communities of reading is relevant since practices change according to the reader's identity, the context of his reading, and the text read, including its materiality. As a whole, these elements permit identifying the practices of a reading community, without failing to recognize that their interests can change. Not all readers act in the same manner. Their reading also depends on their abilities, trajectories, tastes or preferences.

The experiences of reading are linked to the personal histories of readers, and therefore, to their own, personal space. Once a reader finds meaning in his activity, and to the degree that the activity is linked to his social and personal world, he will make the activity a daily practice that serves his preferences, likes, and needs.

A reader should never be confined to a box. Rather, he should be offered bridges, or even better, he should be given the opportunity to build his own bridges, his own metaphors [in his encounter with the world of reading]. Readers should be given multiple occasions for encounters and findings, unexpected, unforeseen encounters, with a bit of chance—chance that sometimes does things so well" (Petit, 2001:26).

Notes

[1] This article is part of a doctoral thesis in science, with a specialty in educational research, at Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados del Instituto Politécnico Nacional.

[2] When implemented in 1983, the Public Library Program and Network had 351 libraries, then considered insufficient to serve 77 million inhabitants; at present, there are more than 6,000 libraries (DGB, 1988:7).

[3] Just as in the 1920s in Mexico's bookstores, where readers could access books, including the new arrivals, by paying a modest monthly fee (Zahar, 1995:78).

4 Some of the secondary students' drawings are related to the subject of natural science, such as drawings of the layers of the earth and the water cycle.

5 One of the persons in charge comments that teachers send children solely to request her signature on the library card that comes in the Spanish book.

6 Magaloni, *et al.,* 1987:97-145.

7 Several children mentioned the limitations for accessing books in the reading corner, where books are commonly kept under lock and key. They also referred to the difficulty of taking books home to read "at ease".

8 Interview, Huexoculco, October 13, 2003.

9 Mothers are usually the adults who accompany the children and help them meet their scholastic needs. In numerous events, the mothers' presence is outstanding, in contrast with the fathers, who accompany or take their children to the library to do homework.

10 Perhaps because they do not have photocopying.

11 The name has been changed to protect the person's identity. Other names consist of the first syllables of the first and last names.

12 The classification of readers' stages was taken from the proposal by the General Director of Libraries (2003:17).

13 Being situated is linked to the idea that a person's thoughts and actions, in interaction with others, are located in a concrete space and time (Lave and Wenger 2003:6).

14 Larrosa (2003:38) quotes Rorty to refer to two types of written cultures—scientific and literary—while mentioning that the texts that predominate at school belong to the first type. The circulation of literary texts is limited; such texts "suggest new vocabularies for self-description [and] contribute to transforming people's lives."

Bibliographic References

Chartier, R. (1996). *El mundo como representación. Historia cultural: entre práctica y representación,* Barcelona: Gedisa.

Chartier, R. (1999). *Cultura escrita, literatura e historia. Conversaciones con Roger Chartier*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Dirección General de Bibliotecas (1988). *Programa Nacional de Bibliotecas 1983-1988 y el Centro Bibliotecario Nacional. Biblioteca Pública de México,* México: Secretaría de Educación Pública.

Dirección General de Bibliotecas (1989). *Bibliotecas públicas y conducta lectora*, Investigaciones 2, México: DGB/ Conaculta.

Dirección General de Bibliotecas (2003). *Hacia la formación de lectores en la biblioteca pública. Ideas y estrategias para el bibliotecario,* México: Conaculta.

Gómez, I. (1986). "Actitudes", *Cuadernos de pedagogía,* núm. 139*,* Madrid: Fontalba.

Larrosa, J. (2003). *La experiencia de la lectura. Estudios sobre literatura y formación*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Lave, J. y Wenger E. (2003). *Aprendizaje situado. Participación periférica legítima,* México: UNAM.

Magaloni, M. *et al.* (1987). "Evaluación de la campaña de difusión de las bibliotecas públicas", en DGB (1989). *Bibliotecas públicas y conducta lectora. Investigaciones 2*, México: DGB/CNCA.

Peroni, M. (2003). *Historias de lectura. Trayectorias de vida y lectura*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Petit, M. (2001). *Lecturas: del espacio íntimo al espacio público*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Rockwell, E. (coord.) (1995). *La escuela cotidiana*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica. Secretaría de Educación Pública-DGB (1988). *Ley general de Bibliotecas*, México: Secretaría de Educación Pública.

Zahar, J. (1995). *Historia de las librerías de la ciudad de México una evocación*, México: CUIB-UNAM.