

IN NEED OF A THESAURUS SPECIALIZED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT

In the development of research papers, it is important to use key words which describe a document such that a general grasp of the concepts can be attained. To support this statement, an example of the use of key words in studies related with first childhood is presented. It is also of interest that the analysis of information could be streamlined through key words and so researchers should establish parameters that increase their use.

Key words: *Key words, topic, childhood, state of art, CINDE, thesaurus.*

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** Research: State of the Art Early Childhood Cinde 1983-2005

INTRODUCTION

Colombia is going through an historical moment in many ways; however, in this article, I want to address the efforts that different government, non-government and academic entities are making around the *mobilization for early childhood*, in order to contribute to the formulation of a public policy that protects children from the time of gestation until they are six years old. This mobilization has an important antecedent, the *International Forum of Early Childhood and Development: the Challenge of the Decade*¹, held in the city of Bogotá, in February of 2003 (Acosta, 2003), coordinated by the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar² (ICBF), the Departamento Administrativo de Bienestar Social³ (Dabs), Save the Children, Unicef and the Centro Internacional de Educación y Desarrollo Humano (Cinde)⁴, among others.

Since the organization of this second forum, different components were defined; one of them being the *research mapping*, which has concentrated the efforts of prestigious researchers from twenty universities from several regions of Colombia. It pretends to be a first approach to the research on early childhood that has been conducted in these universities, and how this research can contribute to the formulation of public policies on this matter.

The research mapping commission determined the variables that each institution must take into account when collecting the information about the research; among them, they

¹ *Foro internacional primera infancia y desarrollo: el desafío de la década.*

² Colombian Institute of Family Welfare. Public institution run by Colombia's government.

³ Administrative Department of Social Welfare. Public entity attached to the office of the Mayor of Bogotá.

⁴ International Center of Education and Human Development. Private, non-for-profit institution that promotes research and development in order to create adequate environments for the healthy development of children.

included the descriptors or key words. This article constitutes an overview of how academia or the research field have used descriptors or key words, specifically how these are used in the production of the theses or dissertations for the master's programs at Cinde, on subjects related to early childhood.

DESCRIPTORS OR KEY WORDS

There is not a unique or finished enunciation of the term *descriptor* or *key word*; this is why it is possible to find many definitions, like the one proposed by Nieves Martínez, who says:

A descriptor or key word is a brief syntagm of the natural language that, being included in the Thesaurus (dictionary of terms used by documentalists in the corresponding data bases), makes part of the language used by the team of documentalists in order to classify the information. Descriptors are the product of language, which composed by important and meaningful words, are used by the team of documentalists that make up the source of information.

On its part, Barcelona's *Centro nacional de formación y documentación*, states the following:

The key word is a term for indexation made up of words or short phrases that represents, according to the indexer, the content of the documents. Key words are assigned freely and, in order to reflect the content of certain documents, in general it is necessary to use several of them. Usually the appropriate number is between three and six. Their first antecedent in documentation is found in the «Uniterm» by Mortimer Taube, introduced in 1953. On the other hand, a descriptor is a key word that is preferably used to designate a given concept.”

The previous definitions allow us to see that, even though the outlooks are different, in general the descriptors or key words are very important, because they characterize not only the content of the written creation, but, at the same time, they become tools that facilitate the processes of information search and categorization.

On a first approach to the use of descriptors, it is convenient to know the *Tesaurus*⁵, the most complete dictionary of synonyms and antonyms in the Spanish language. It accepts inflected words and presents the synonyms in the same way as the word that was used for the search; for example, for the term *librito*⁶ it includes the synonyms “obrita, tratadito, manualito, textito”⁷, among others. This dictionary includes approximately fifty thousand entries and more than five hundred thousand synonyms, antonyms and related expressions.

DESCRIPTORS IN RESEARCH PROJECTS OF MASTER’S PROGRAMS AT CINDE

As we have seen, the descriptors or key words allow us to get an approach to the main aspects covered by the theses or dissertations. In general, each of them included descriptors that were consistent with what the researchers considered to be key aspects. As a result we found in the *State of the Art of the Master’s Program in Educational and Social Development, Cinde-UPN 20* (Gaitán and Sánchez, 2004) 748 descriptors in 561 theses or dissertations. Based upon this report, and in order to facilitate the categorization and subsequent analysis of the information, it was recommended to limit the number of descriptors to seven, and to use the descriptors of Unesco’s *Thesaurus*.

The research on the theses or dissertations dealing with early childhood showed that for each research paper there are between five and seven descriptors, for a total of 205 descriptors or key words in a total of 64 research papers. Most of them are mentioned in one single thesis. In order to facilitate the information analysis, I created Chart 1, which shows the most frequent descriptors.

⁵ Thesaurus.

⁶ Little book.

⁷ “little work, little treatise, little handbook, little text.”

The use of descriptors allows us to find the aspects that are taken into account most frequently in research works on early childhood, and to establish basic guidelines in order to detect new issues or suggest more in-depth research on certain aspects. Also, the information on the production of theses or dissertations is classified using Unesco's *Thesaurus*, assigning each descriptor to one of the subject matters.

CHART 1. MOST FREQUENT DESCRIPTORS

THEME	NUMBER OF TIMES	COMMENTARY
Pre-school education	13	Descriptor that highlights the development of theses that benefit early childhood, specially at the formal pre-school education level, creating an interest in the research of the other environments that provide education.
Child	12	The main actor in the research processes. Here, it would be convenient to include the gender perspective.
Child development	9	From the point of view of human development, that wants to combine elements not only of educational development, but also of health, protection and participation processes.
Socialization	9	Essential element in the quest for integral development of children under six years of age.
Family	8	As fundamental axis in children's development, especially in early childhood.
Communication	5	Element that facilitates the healthy growth of children and strengthens the work of the different factors that affect early childhood development.
Play	4	Mechanism that guarantees the healthy development of children.
Parent-children relationships	4	Essential element for the integral development of children.
Authority	3	Refers to the change of roles between parents and children, and the variation in

		relationships.
Curriculum	3	Themes and educational focus that must ensure the human development of children under six years of age.
Development	3	Element to be attained in the processes conducted for the benefit of the children.
Education	3	Mechanism used in favor of the educational development of children.
Sexual Education	3	Knowledge that must be imparted since early childhood and in relationship with the future parents, especially during the teenage years.
Community homes	3	ICBF institutions in charge of young children, run by community mothers.
Breastfeeding	3	Mechanism that enriches the healthy development of children, especially during their first months.
Community mothers	3	Agents of education and care for young children.
Childhood	3	Concerning early childhood.
Nutrition	3	Essential element that contributes to the integral development of children.

Source: Cruz Yolima Sánchez.

The most common themes of the *Thesaurus* are related to social sciences and humanities, integral development of children, and are included 193 times in the different works; these are the results:

4. SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES		
4.05	Social sciences	27
4.10	Psychology	100
4.25	Policy and social welfare	28
4.40	Family	38

The second theme refers to education and the processes that take place in institutions that tend to these populations, for the human development of children. These descriptors are mentioned 82 times and include pedagogical processes in welfare homes,

kindergartens and the work performed in those places, as well as aspects related to the persons in charge of walking the children through this process. It is presented this way:

1. EDUCATION		
1.15	Education planning	10
1.20	Education administration	2
1.25	Education management	3
1.30	Systems and levels of teaching	38
1.35	Teaching institutions	7
1.40	Study plans	2
1.45	Subjects of basic and general teaching	13
1.55	Education professionals	5
1.65	Education evaluation	2

The third theme relates to the sciences, especially the projects in health services and medical areas, as essential tools that contribute to early childhood development. In this case, the descriptors are mentioned 18 times. The general results are:

2. SCIENCES		
2.80	Medical sciences	14
2.85	Pathologies	4

Other theme refers to aspects related to the culture and its contribution to the development of children. In this opportunity the descriptors are mentioned 13 times, in the following way:

3. CULTURE		
305	Culture	5
3.65	Leisure time	8

There is also reference to specific places where the projects are developed, resulting in:

7. COUNTRIES AND GROUPS OF COUNTRIES		
7.10	The Americas and the Caribbean	3

In general, although places or locations are not mentioned as descriptors, the theses or dissertations usually take place in isolated parts of the country or in communities with scarce resources and a low quality of life. This confirms that in the early childhood research projects by the alumni of the master's program at Cinde, the projects are conducted from a human development perspective; it is also important to combine different components for the benefit of this population group.

WHAT TO DO?

The development of research conducted from Cinde makes evident the importance of descriptors or key words in order to give account of general aspects of research processes. It is important that Colombia's academic and university communities keep mobilizing around early childhood and that they establish clear criteria regarding the use of descriptors, and the pertinence—or lack thereof—of setting up from research centers the guide for Unesco's *Thesaurus* or other similar mechanism; this, in order to have clarity about the key elements that describe the research related to early childhood and to the well-being of children from the time of gestation until six years of age. This will contribute to give this kind of research the importance that it deserves.

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