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Modern Reading Practices and Collaboration Between Schools, Family, and Community



Ana Patrícia Almeida and Sandrina Esteves

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Modern Reading Practices and Collaboration Between Schools, Family, and Community

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Chapter 1

Reading Aloud: Practices in School, Family, and Community – Reports From an Intervention Project

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ABSTRACT

We are not born readers. We learn to read and enjoy reading if our learning and experiences allow it. The school, family, and community have an essential role in promoting reading, contributing to the creation of proficient and motivated readers who share a taste for knowledge. Collaborative practices should therefore be created between teachers, family, and community to promote reading and thus the academic and personal success of students. This was the aim of the Project Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta (I Can Read: Reading Aloud), which seeks to operate on three fundamental axes: (1) the promotion of strategies that encourage reading aloud; (2) the development of shared reading habits in the family; and (3) the involvement with the community, leading to an awareness of the importance of reading in the construction of the individual and of future citizens. In this way, this chapter aims to present accounts of the implementation of this intervention project focused on reading, from the school, family, and community.

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INTRODUCTION

It is through reading that we can bring the student to enrichment through contact with other experiences and other worlds. Nowadays, reading is indispensable to life, as it is an essential skill for good personal, social, and academic performance.

However, and increasingly nowadays, we live in a society that moves away from books and reading, making it essential to awaken and motivate students to enjoy reading. It is up to all of us, therefore, to sow the taste for reading and show students everything that the act of reading makes possible. Therefore, they must come into contact with books, listen to reading aloud and practice reading every day. Here, the role that schools play in motivating and learning to read is undoubted. However, although schools play an important role, it is important to stress the role that the family and the community have in promoting reading, contributing to the creation of efficient and motivated readers who share a taste for knowledge. Therefore, moments of collaboration between teachers, family, and community should be created to stimulate reading and thus promote the school and personal success of students.

This chapter, entitled Reading aloud: Practices in school, family & community. Reports from an Intervention Project emerged in the context of the implementation of the project *Já Sei Ler - Leitura em Voz Alta*, the result of collaboration between ISEC Lisbon, the National Reading Plan (PNL2027) in Portugal, and the Municipality of Entroncamento. The project, which began in January 2019, is aimed at children who started the 1st year of primary school in 2018/2019 and accompanies them throughout their four-year journey, acting on three major axes: (i) the promotion of strategies that encourage reading aloud in the classroom, to develop fluent and comprehensive reading; (ii) the development of shared reading habits in the family, leading to personal and school success; and (iii) involvement with the community, leading to an awareness of the importance of reading in the construction of the individual and of future citizens.

Throughout this chapter, we will seek not only to highlight the theoretical and empirical dimensions that argue and ground a global action towards the promotion of reading and literacy but also to present, in particular, reports on the development of the *Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta* project, based on school, family and community practices.

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It is now undeniable that reading is indispensable to life, as it is an essential skill for the personal, social, and academic development of human beings. According to

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Ribeiro (2005), it is through reading that the human being acquires new knowledge, can achieve school and professional success, freedom, and social ascension.

Knowing how to read allows students the possibility to better understand the world around them and give answers to situations that arise both at school and in society. However, to feel like reading, the child needs to understand what reading is and what its functions are (Viana, 2002) because learning to read is not just a mechanical exercise of translating a graphic stain into a set of sounds, which is why, currently, the great challenges facing the teaching of reading are: teaching to read critically; teaching to enjoy reading; creating lifelong reading habits (Castanho, 2002).

In this sense, the encouragement of reading should be systematic and a priority goal in developing countries, and the search for new techniques and strategies for motivating reading should be the target of research aimed at bringing the book closer to the reader (Yunes, 1984).

In a particular way, reading aloud is a reading practice of extreme importance for the construction and improvement of students' reading habits, providing, also, the increase of skills at the level of textual comprehension. Several researchers point out the benefits of reading aloud for reading proficiency (Sipe, 2000; Lane & Wright, 2007; Roberts; Jurgens & Burchinal, 2002; Kalb and van Ours, 2014), as well as a privileged and decisive method in the promotion of reading habits from an early age, since reading to children is, to a large extent, their first contact with literature.

Indeed, as reinforced by Merga and Ledger (2018),

Reading aloud is associated with a range of literacy skills and cognitive benefits. Reading to children in the early years has been linked to related language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement (Bus et al., 1995). A recent analysis of 29 studies found "significant, positive effects for read-aloud interventions on children's language, phonological awareness, print concepts, comprehension, and vocabulary outcomes..." (Swanson et al, 2012, p. 13). (Ledger & Merga, 2018, p.125).

Reading aloud is an instructional practice in which teachers, parents, and caregivers read texts aloud to children and it is known that reading aloud to children builds and supports their listening and speaking skills and improves overall language development (Sipe, 2000). From this, it is possible to understand the advantages that the practice of reading aloud can bring to students, namely the development of issues related to oral expression, motivation for reading; and reflection on the need to understand the text read since this understanding (or lack of it) will be mirrored in reading aloud (Silva, 2013)

It is understood that reading aloud is a privileged and decisive method in the promotion of reading habits from an early age, as reading for children is, to a large extent, the first contact with literature. Pennac (1993, quoted by Nóbrega, 2014)

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“besides the role of the family in the valorization of reading habits, he also underlined that of the school, space where, many times, the reader learns to read and to enjoy listening to read” (p.91).

Mata (2008, cited by Costa, 2014) refers that with reading aloud it is possible to provide several advantages in the listener, such as:

i) To create the opportunity to listen to fluent reading, with appropriate intonation, facilitating understanding of what reading is and what it is for, arousing greater interest and willingness to participate in the activity.

ii) To provide models of involved readers because either the educator or a family member who reads with pleasure transmits that pleasure and that taste to the child.

iii) Broaden experiences, because books are great sources of knowledge and can motivate for future research and reading.

iv) Develop a curiosity for books, because exploring the story before, during, and after reading arouses curiosity and interest for books.

v) Initiate reading behaviors, by observing the reader the child when manipulating the books imitates the behaviors they have seen.

(vi) develop concepts of writing, leading to the learning of concepts such as its orientation, reflecting orality, punctuation issues, even before the formal teaching of writing (Mata, cited by Costa, 2014, p.32).

Gomes (2017), in turn, mentions that reading aloud training translates into improvements in different skills related to reading itself. For the author, students need to read aloud to become good readers. Regarding the improvements, he mentions that they occur in terms of diction, voice placement, which becomes increasingly audible, understandable, and respectful of the necessary pauses, fluency, intonation, and rhythm with respect for the tonic syllables and avoiding a monotone tone.

According to Leite (2013), reading aloud, especially when mediated by an adult, is essential to the extent that, in addition to “stimulating the appetite for reading [to the student]”, it will serve as a model for his/her readings. Thus, “if the adult makes a heartfelt and expressive reading, the child will internalize the idea that reading a text aloud presupposes the reader’s concern to confer vivacity to the text” (p. 3).

Finally, through reading aloud, the student, in addition to developing a taste for reading, developing comprehension of texts, and seeing their vocabulary expanded,

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also has the advantage of getting to know different types of text and beginning to internalize the structures of narratives. As Merga & Mason (2020) summarize well

Reading aloud to young people at school and in the home offers a range of literacy benefits, providing enriched language exposure and vocabulary development (Farrant & Zubrick, 2012; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002), spelling (Mol & Bus, 2011), and supporting the development of foundational literacy skills and related cognitive development (Duursma, Augustyn, & Zuckerman, 2008; High et al, 2014; Hutton et al., 2015; Kalb & Van Ours, 2014; Mol & Bus, 2011). Benefits persist beyond the early years, with recent research finding that the reading comprehension of struggling adolescent readers can be significantly enhanced through exposure to reading aloud opportunities (Westbrook, Sutherland, Oakhill, & Sullivan, 2018) (p. 136).

PROMOTING READING: THE PLACE OF THE SCHOOL, THE FAMILY, AND THE COMMUNITY

The inarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school. School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their successes (Epstein, 2002, p. 8)

There are many reasons to make the case for a partnership between school, family, and community. As Epstein (2002) points out,

partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and the community, and help teachers with their work" but above all, as he continues, "when parents, teachers, students, and others view each other as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work. (p. 8).

Now, as far as reading promotion programs are concerned, there is no doubt that one of the most significant dimensions is the fact that it can involve schools, families, and other reference adults in a focused interaction.

As far as the school is concerned, it has an increased responsibility in the teaching and practice of reading aloud texts. It is the school's responsibility, particularly the teachers' responsibility, to develop appropriate strategies according to the students'

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age level and interests, to enhance their interest and involvement in reading activities (Sabino, 2008).

In fact, and despite the growing importance assigned to the role of the student as an active agent in the learning process, it is known that the school, particularly the teacher, continues to play an extremely important role. Morais (2012b) reinforces the importance of the teacher's role as mediator, assigning him/her the responsibility of planning reading activities and reading to students when he/she states that reading aloud by adults is continuously remembered by most people as one of their first enjoyable associations with reading. Reading to students is one of the most effective methods of creating capable readers, who continue to choose to read throughout their lives. (Morais, 2012b, p.52).

In the same vein, Rigoletto and Di Giorgi (2009, cited by Dalla-Bona, 2017) state that the teacher, as a mediator, is the adult responsible for "introducing children to the world of books, capitalizing on their personal interests and motivations" (p. 231). The teacher should get children interested in reading, so that they become autonomous and independent, ceasing to be active listeners, and becoming fluent readers.

In addition, Leite (2013) adds to the teacher's role that of raising students' awareness of expressive reading using different models, namely audio or video recorded readings, readings by older children, more fluent readers such as parents or storytellers who come to their classrooms to serve as models. In addition, Leite (2013) highlights the teacher's role in motivating students, stating that the teacher should motivate students to make them want to read aloud, letting them choose some of the texts, inviting other classes/people to attend their readings, promoting competitions to select the best reading, and promoting collective readings, in which the best readers should help the most struggling readers.

Note that when children have already mastered the written code, Leite (2013) also adds that it is up to the teacher to empower them to read to others, which "will enable them to develop language and communication skills [through training and] (...) may contribute to increasing the child's self-esteem, self-confidence, and also their sensitivity to the importance of sharing" (p. 4-5).

Moreira (2014) gives greater focus to the role of the teacher relating it to that of the family, stating that, considering that the process of learning to read is crucial for academic success and that parents have a high concern about it, the teacher is responsible for keeping parents informed about the existing dynamics in the classroom and what they can do to collaborate with them. This is a point of view supported by Nunes (2015), when he explains that "for a school for all to be effective, the various members that constitute the educational community must collaborate in a perspective of focusing attention on children's learning" (p.24).

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Regarding parents as participatory agents in their children's learning, Moreira (2014) adds that it is also the teacher's responsibility to explain, in moments such as parents' meetings, the importance of reading to students, allowing students to read to them, providing them with routine contact with books, attending family libraries and participating in the activities proposed by the school, namely the exchange of correspondence. However, the author stresses that it is important that "well-intentioned parents do not turn reading to their children into an obsessive act" (Moreira, 2014, p. 34), i.e., that they lead their children to understand reading aloud as something pleasurable and not something that should be imposed on them, as this may cause them to lose interest in it. This practice, in itself, is seen by several authors as the ideal way to create lasting reading habits with children, being an activity of excellence that has countless potentialities. It is therefore essential to recognize the importance of storytelling.

One of the well-acknowledged factors related to reading literacy attainment is parental support of reading at home, as enacted through practices such as shared reading aloud, and provision of access to books. (Merga & Mason, 2020, p. 135)

Parents or guardians should therefore be involved in this whole process. It is important that reading is accompanied, from an early age, by the family, at home, namely reading aloud. The family is the primary context for child development, and the development of the taste and curiosity for reading is a fundamental strategy to be developed, namely through the first contacts with books appropriate to the child's age and interests, with the reading of stories, through the children's observation of their parents reading, among others, playing a role of preparation and stimulation for the formal learning of reading (Mata, 2006; Sabino, 2008).

On the other hand, it is important to underline that families share with children's affections and bonds that the school does not share. It is this link with the family that will allow the child to read meaningfully because it is full of affection. And it is the practice of reading aloud, as opposed to reading silently, that will foster this link.

As Leite (2011) points out

We can state, as a basic assumption, that the constitution of the reader is a socially constructed process, basically determined by the history of social mediations experienced by the subject, including from the family environment, through the various social situations, until, obviously, the school. And more: this history of mediation is determinant for the development of skills and personal conditions involved in the act of reading, including those of motivational nature. The process involves, therefore, the cognitive and affective dimensions simultaneously, and it is not possible to dissociate them. Therefore, reason and affect are closely related in the process of constitution of the reader, as well as in all human development,

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considered here as the process of appropriation, by the individual, of cultural elements and content. (p.27)

In fact, and especially when children are not yet able to read independently, it is reading aloud, in the voice of the adult, that will mediate access to the meaning of what is being read. Furthermore, and when the books are longer, it is this mediation that will help to continue reading and prevent the child from abandoning the book (Cova, 2004).

But these are not the only benefits of reading aloud in the family. There is unanimous recognition that an increase in vocabulary, the practice of active listening, the development of a positive attitude towards books, and closer bonds of affection can also be highlighted as significant advantages of reading aloud in the family (Cova, 2004).

On the other hand, we know that reading is the way forward for the formation of a society of equalities and is a driver for the social and cultural development of a country, as Sabino (2008) argues, stating that “some authors consider reading a foundation of the knowledge society given that it promotes the liberation of thought and the practice of citizenship exercise.” (p.1). Moreover, the inability to read is also a factor of social exclusion since it prevents the individual from participating critically and actively in society.

Books undoubtedly contribute to the development of democracy and the development of future citizens. Knowing how to read is a tool for freedom and helps to better understand the world. On the other hand, reading can also be a means of economic and social growth. Public policies for reading are therefore of the utmost importance.

To create a fairer and more balanced society, the promotion of reading should be a standard for a conscious and proactive society, guaranteeing for all and not a privilege only for some, because it is through the ability to read well that we will form conscious individuals involved in the exercise of citizenship.

It is in this field that the role of communities is central and if we take into account the role of the community in promoting effective practices of reading aloud, it is easy to assume that the greater the investment of governments and civil society in the organization and development of reading projects, the greater the likelihood of forming citizens competent in reading and, consequently, citizens fulfilled personally, professionally and socially (Almeida, 2007). This requires the integration of a policy to encourage reading and the inclusion of new readers,

for it is only by encouraging reading that effective results for education will be achieved. [...] policies must encourage reading to get away from the mere organization of fairs or the creation of libraries and reading rooms. The most urgent thing is to

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invest in human material, with the training of mediators and librarians capable of sowing the pleasure of reading throughout the country. Mediators are the most efficient instruments to make reading a social practice that is more widespread and taken advantage of. (Linard & Lima, 2008, p.9).

Reading is a decisive activity in the life of the student and future citizen. For this reason, we cannot treat it as something secondary in their training, since it is reading that will allow them to position themselves critically concerning reality and to fully exercise their citizenship.

Reading in several contexts, carried out by the school, family and community has, therefore, a prominent place in the promotion of reading, contributing to the creation of efficient and motivated readers who share a taste for knowledge. Therefore, moments of collaboration between teachers, family, and community should be created to promote reading and thus the academic and personal success of students.

Like other behaviors and values, children read when they see other people reading. It is therefore urgent to spread the reading process and make it a habit of daily life.

REPORTS FROM A PROJECT - JÁ SEI LER: LEITURA EM VOZ ALTA

The *Já sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta* project, which began in January 2019, is aimed at children attending the 1st year of schooling, accompanying them throughout their four-year journey in the primary education. It, therefore, takes place over four school years: between 2018/2019 and 2021/2022.

The project is promoted by ISEC Lisboa and is the result of a partnership established with the Municipality of Entroncamento and the National Reading Plan, which established a cooperation protocol aimed at the best performance of their respective missions, taking advantage of the potential of each and valuing the action of all, acting in three main areas: (i) promotion of strategies that encourage reading aloud in the classroom, to develop fluent and comprehensive reading; (ii) development of shared reading habits in the family, leading to personal and school success; (iii) involvement with the community, leading to an awareness of the importance of reading in the construction of the individual and the future citizen.

The project has as its object of study and intervention the practices of reading out loud performed in the classroom, in the family, and the community, based on the premise that the promotion of such practices will enhance the reading competence of the students involved in the project and, consequently, their academic, personal, and social success.

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At the start of the project's development, ISEC Lisboa, in conjunction with the Municipality of Entroncamento and the National Reading Plan (PNL2027), outlined the key guidelines of what was to become a joint intervention project on reading, intending to have a significant impact on the reading skills of the children involved in the project and on the reading practices of these children, their families, and the community. This was followed by the drafting of a tripartite protocol that would underpin all the work to be carried out over the four years of the project.

Participating in this intervention project, since its inception, are 185 students enrolled in the 1st year of schooling in the municipality of Entroncamento, in the 2018/2019 school year, totaling 8 classes (6 public network classes and 2 private network classes), the teachers of the classes involved and the children's families. Now (school year 2021/2022), due to the increase of students in the classes involved in the project, the number of children totals 210.

This intervention project seeks to develop a program to encourage reading in three contexts considered fundamental for the promotion of reading: school, family, and community. It is precisely to account for these three contexts of intervention that some of the results of the implementation of the project *Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta* are presented below.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL: TEACHERS' PRACTICES

As already underlined and highlighted here, the role of school and teachers is unquestionable when it comes to promoting reading and developing future readers. It is up to the school to formally teach reading at the start of schooling,

This requires considerable effort on the part of children, not always without difficulties, which may reduce their interest in books or even generate demotivation and rejection. It is therefore essential that, alongside the time dedicated to learning activities, time is set aside for reading aloud by the teacher and other activities designed to maintain or increase interest in the content of books, thus demonstrating that the learning effort is worthwhile, as they will soon be able to read the works they like so much on their own. (Alçada, 2021)

Based on this assumption, and during the initial phase of the intervention project, we sought to collect from the teachers involved in the project not only their perceptions regarding the importance they attach to the practice of reading aloud in the classroom but also the concrete practices they develop in this area.

Thus, and with the objectives of: a. knowing the importance given by teachers to reading aloud in the classroom; b. knowing the perceptions of teachers regarding the

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importance of practices promoting reading aloud in the classroom; and c. identifying practices promoting reading aloud in the classroom, a questionnaire was constructed and applied to all teachers who teach in the schools involved in the project. The response rate was 100%, allowing an overview of teachers' perceptions and practices regarding the promotion of reading and reading aloud, in particular.

The survey was answered by 31 teachers teaching in primary school, in the schools involved in the project *Já sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta*.

Of the 31 respondents, all were female, with an average age of 49 years. Nine of these teachers taught in the 1st year of schooling, 9 in the 2nd year of schooling, 5 in the 3rd year of schooling, and the remaining 8 in the 4th year of schooling.

Taking the objectives defined for the teachers' survey as a guideline, one of the first questions asked was about the value given by them to the act of reading in their practice and, in particular, to reading aloud. Thus, 16 (49.6%) teachers considered the act of reading aloud to be essential, 14 (43.4%) considered it very important and 1 teacher considered it important.

Following on from the previous question and when asked about the dimensions most valued in reading aloud, teachers identified Expressiveness as one of the most valued dimensions (selected by 24 - 74.4% of respondents), followed by Clarity in reading (selected by 16 - 49.6% of respondents) and Accuracy in reading (selected by 10 - 31% of teachers). As regards the Rhythm and Speed dimensions, these were selected by 4 and 2 teachers, respectively.

These perceptions of the teachers involved in the study and intervention project, concerning the importance they attach to reading aloud, clearly indicate the recognition that one of the predictors of reading comprehension is expressivity. As highlighted by Esteves (2013), reading aloud with expressiveness and rhythm allows for the construction of a bridge with comprehension and those who read effortlessly and expressively tend to better understand what they read.

Regarding the text typologies that teachers consider best suited for reading aloud, 27 (83.7%) teachers selected the Narrative text, followed by the Poetic text (13 - 40.3%), the Dramatic text (11 - 34.1%), the Informative text (6 - 18.6%) and finally, 2 (6.2%) teachers considered the Instructional text suitable for reading aloud. One of the reasons that may be associated with a greater propensity of the respondents for the narrative text, may be the fact that in the textbooks used as support and support for primary education, the narrative text prevails. Similarly, it may be related to the fact that this type of text allows children to follow events more easily when reading aloud.

As for the support they tend to select as a basis for reading aloud, it should be noted that the 31 teachers select the Book as the support of choice, with only 6 teachers referring to the Interactive Whiteboard, 5 to Magazines and/or Newspapers and 1 to the use of the Tablet. This opinion finds its voice in recent studies that point

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the paper support as the elected one, since it allows a greater understanding of what is read, especially in children (Delgado, Vargas, Ackerman & Sálmeron, 2018).

Analyzing the teachers' answers regarding their practices in the classroom context, we can highlight that of the total number of respondents, 24 (74.4%) stated that they read aloud daily, 6 (18.6%) that they read aloud two to three times a week and 1 who mentioned reading aloud at least once a week. Still, regarding reading aloud practices and, in particular, the time they dedicate to this activity, 17 (52.7%) teachers refer that they dedicate 10 to 15 minutes to this activity, 7 (21.7%) dedicate at least 5 minutes, and 6 (18.6%) teachers refer that they dedicate more than 5 minutes to this activity.

When questioned about the time of day when they prefer to develop reading aloud activities, 13 (40.3%) teachers chose the morning period and 18 (55.8%) stated that they developed them either in the morning or in the afternoon.

The answers obtained allow us to state that teachers consider reading aloud a central activity in the classroom. Reading aloud, if performed daily and constantly, allows the teacher to reinforce with the children the importance of this activity (Belo and Sá, 2005). This practice will certainly lead to greater involvement of children with reading. Children should listen to adults and adults should be appropriate reading models: reading aloud to children strengthens the emotional bond between reader and listener, stimulates listening pleasure, the pleasure of imagining facilitates language acquisition and development, and gives rise to the desire to learn to read.

Concerning the objectives with which they develop reading aloud activities, the respondents point out the Motivation to Read (27 teachers - 83.7%), the Reading Practice (24 teachers - 74.4%), the Development of reading comprehension (13 teachers - 40.3%), the Development of the Taste for Reading (11 teachers - 34.1%) and only 5 (15.5%) teachers identify as one of the objectives, the Evaluation of the reading competence.

Regarding the main strategies used by teachers in the classroom, almost all the respondents (93%) stated that they preferred reading aloud by the teacher or the student; 62% referred to dramatic reading and 31% to reading in pairs; reading in chorus was mentioned by only 3 of the 31 teachers. The literature supports these results, in that it identifies these strategies as fundamental since the reader is a "mediator" who must know how to read, through reading techniques and sensitivity, to decipher the text. As Dalla-Bona (2017) reinforces, reading aloud by the teacher is essential, stating that "it configures itself as a decisive strategy of reading mediation, fundamental to provoke in children and young people an interest in reading" (p. 114) and that through this reading strategy "students can be enchanted by the word, the sound and the image constructed by the mediator's voice" (p.115).

Finally, concerning teachers' strategies and practices, it is also important to underline that 28 (86.8%) teachers state that they talk about the material read with

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the students in the classroom and 26 (80.6%) also state that the students talk to each other about what they have read. It is well known that talking about what has been read or heard helps to give meaning to the text. When listening to a reading, the child interprets the text based on his knowledge of the world and other texts and what he has anticipated during the reading. When he hears other interpretations of the same text, he considers different points of view and revises his own, modifying, extending, or reinforcing them. Considering what a colleague has understood, what path he took to reach that conclusion, and locating which part of the reading enabled his analysis, helps him to find meaning, to understand the content better, and to extend his interpretation of that text and other readings (Ness, 2016).

As noted above, most of what children formally learn about reading and writing happens in primary school but laying the first foundations for literacy development is undoubtedly initiated in families, who play a key role (EU, 2012, p. 68).

Thus, after collecting the teachers' perceptions of reading aloud and their practices during the development of the intervention project *Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta*, the project also sought to find out about families' perceptions of reading and family practices, which will be presented below.

THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY: FAMILY PRACTICES

As highlighted in the European Commission's 2012 report on Literacy

The family is generally recognized as the most influential structure in society. It is no different when it comes to the literacy dimension. Motivating and supporting engagement with reading begins at home. Parents and carers are children's first teachers, and many of the most important steps towards good literacy throughout life are taken at home. Family structure is often neglected when it comes to literacy issues. Instead, the primary focus is on schools. However, for several reasons, no literacy approach can succeed without including a family dimension. It requires a change of mindset and the development of family programs that should be designed across generations, not just focused on a single age group. (EU, 2012, p.39)

As Merga and Lergler (2018) point out, despite the general knowledge that "children benefit from exposure to reading aloud at home," the truth is that "relatively little is known about parents' perceptions of the practice" (p. 177).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the *Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta* project seeks to act in three main areas. Firstly, the promotion of strategies to encourage reading aloud (in school, family, and community settings); secondly, the development of shared reading habits in the family; and finally, community

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involvement, raising awareness of the importance of reading in the construction of the individual and of future citizens.

As a result of these lines of action, the families of the children involved in the project were surveyed to: (i) report on the family reading practices of the children participating in the project, namely regarding the presence of books at home, acquisition of books and family reading activities, and (ii) understand to what extent families recognize the project as an added value, in terms of daily reading practices, activities to promote reading, supply of books, school/family/community involvement and children's motivation to read, right after the first year after its implementation.

It is understood that the existence of regular family reading practices facilitates the approximation between parents and children and promotes a taste for reading, as it allows "children to associate it with moments of enjoyment and establish good relationships with it" (Cruz et al., 2012, p.17). Moreover, for these interactions to be of quality, there must be interactive sharing, providing, and encouraging the child's participation before, during, and after reading the story. McGee (1998 cited by Mata, 2006), "concludes that children are not born with a natural taste for literature, they develop sophisticated strategies in understanding and interpreting literature through appropriate interactions" (p. 90).

It is known that regular reading, involving families, is seen by several authors (Sabino, 2008; Santos, 2000; Manzano, 1998) as the ideal way to create lasting reading habits with children, being an activity of excellence that has numerous potentialities. It is therefore essential to recognize the importance of reading in the family, namely what conditions in the family environment favor the creation of reading habits in children and what essential attitudes and behaviors adults can and should adopt to awaken a love of reading in children. It is also important to understand to what extent the motivation strategies for reading implemented by parents are significant in increasing children's reading skills.

In this way, and to survey the family reading practices of the children involved in the project and get to know their perceptions of the project and the activities related to it, a questionnaire was given to the families of the 185 children involved in the Project, structured into 5 thematic blocks, as follows:

Block I - Characterization of the participants: the aim was not only to get to know the household but also their perspective on the activity of reading aloud.

Block II - Presence of books at home: as underlined by Viana (2002), contact with diversified, stimulating and quality literature will play an important role in children's reading competence, assuming itself as a strong indicator for involvement with reading.

Block III - Acquisition of books: the aim was to find out the families' book acquisition habits, both in terms of quantity and periodicity, and in terms of the type of books acquired; this is because, according to Sénéchal (2000) and Viana (1998),

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cited by Mata (2004, p. 100), “a factor that has been shown in the literature to be quite associated with both story-reading practices and children’s achievements in literacy is the number of books in the home”.

Block IV - Family reading activities: intended to find out about family reading habits, since authors such as Jensen (s/d), cited by Marques (2013), argue that knowledge about reading and writing seems to increase when the child experiences family reading practices.

Block V - The experience of the Project *Já Sei Ler - Leitura em Voz Alta*: which sought to find out the families’ perceptions of the Project *Já Sei Ler - Leitura em Voz Alta*, namely in terms of the activities developed during the 1st year of its implementation.

Of the 185 questionnaires delivered, 130 were returned. From the analysis of the questionnaires, we chose to present those which we consider being the key aspects, namely the knowledge of the practices of the families involved in the project and their perceptions regarding its development.

Thus, and concerning family reading practices, we sought to find out about these practices by analyzing dimensions such as the presence of books in the home, book acquisition practices by families, and family reading activities developed by the participants.

Regarding the presence of books at home, the data shows that most families (54.7%) have more than 50 books at home, most of which are children’s and young people’s books (35.8%), followed by adult literature (19%).

Although the data shows that most families have more than 50 books at home, only 29% responded that they have more than 100 books at home and 18.8% responded that they have up to 20 books.

Also concerning the presence of books in the home, the answers to the questionnaires revealed that 68% of students have between 11 and 50 books, which is corroborated to some extent by the data obtained concerning the literary genre with the most significant presence in families’ homes. Most of the books that children own are books related to legends and fables (36.6%), followed by adventure books (16.8%) and comics (14.2%).

As stated by Mata (2006), the existence of a sufficient number of children’s books at home will contribute to the development of the practice of reading stories, allowing for the diversification of the choice of books and motivating children for this activity.

On the other hand, Mata (1999) also tells us that “one of the ways of analyzing... opportunities for interaction with writing is related to the existence of reading and writing supports/materials in the family environment” (p. 67) and, in this sense, one of the concerns was to find out how families provide opportunities for interaction with books and where they were mainly located. The data collected confirms previous

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studies (Amaral, 1999 cited by Mata, 1999) which show that, although books are found in several rooms of the house (living room - 29.3%; office - 18.9% or adults' bedroom - 8.6%), most of the books are in the children's bedroom (41.4%).

It is therefore important for families to acquire diversified books to have at their disposal at home if the child asks to read a particular book or wants to read it himself or browse through it, even if it is an adult book. 66.5% of the families of children involved in the study stated that children have access to adult books, which may be an important indicator of children's involvement with the activity of reading if we take into account that the books are available to them.

A second dimension that we sought to analyze concerning families' reading practices concerned the acquisition of books and family reading habits. Turning first to the questions associated with the acquisition of books, one of the first aspects to be noted concerns the frequency with which families acquire books and for whom they are intended.

According to the data collected, the frequency of purchasing books is greater when these are intended for children. Thus, there is a higher number of families answering that they purchase books monthly, of which 92 families state that they purchase books for children and only 48 families state that they purchase books for adults. The second-highest number of answers (72 families), however, reveals that families rarely buy books, either for themselves or for the children (30 families).

It happens, as Sobrino (2000) states, that, "the purchase of a book should not be something exceptional, a way of celebrating a date or an event, but should be considered as part of the expenses of education" (p. 88).

Another aspect that should be taken into account by families is children's interest and, as such, it is "necessary for parents to know what is being produced (and what exists) in terms of literature for different ages" (Cruz et al., 2012, p. 17), since "the type of book/story used should be appropriate to children's characteristics and development" (Mata, 2006, p. 92).

Cruz et al. (2012, pp. 17-18) reinforce that "public and municipal libraries have good children's sections and technical staff that will also support them in choosing the most appropriate works". Regarding this particular aspect, the families of the children involved in the project do not visit the public library as a regular practice. 48.8% mentioned that they rarely go to the library and 38.8% stated that they never go.

Curiously, when questioned about going to book fairs, 74.4% of the families assume that they go, and bookshops are also a recurring practice for 45.7% who say they go often and only 7.8% never go.

It should be noted in this respect that children should have the opportunity to come into contact with different books and explore them, even if they do not intend to take them home with them.

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On the other hand, when asked about how often they read with their children, most of the respondents stated that they read with their children daily (58.9%) and weekly (28.7%). Likewise, they refer that their children ask them to read frequently (66%). Bearing in mind that science and empirical observation have amply shown how contact with books and the regular practice of reading are indispensable for the development of the taste for reading, the consolidation of reading habits, and the increase in literacy skills and those who read will always read more and better and will be better prepared for life (PNL2027), the results obtained from the families' answers highlight the importance given to the daily practice of reading.

Focusing now on the intention to know the families' perceptions regarding the development of the project, it is pertinent to refer to the data that stood out the most from the families' answers.

As one of the fundamental axes is the development of shared reading habits, of which families are also an integral part, it was considered a relevant and legitimate objective to know the families' perspectives on the project and the activities developed within its scope.

The data presented here show that families gave a very positive assessment of the project, classifying it as Excellent (22.4% of families) and Very Good (57.6%). Among the most positive dimensions that families found in the Project *Já sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta*, are the activities Reading Aloud in the classroom, valued by 73.1% of families; and Reading Aloud at Home, valued by 59.2% of families. Families also mentioned the motivation of children to read as positive aspects, as mentioned by 73% of families, and the involvement of the school, family, and community in the project, as mentioned by 59.2% of respondents.

As pointed out by Viana (2002), parental involvement in projects related to the teaching and learning of reading, when developed throughout the 1st cycle of basic education, is of special importance if we take into account that, by assuming a regular character, reading consolidates the learning already acquired. Moreover, if this practice is carried out positively and the child feels that their reading competence increases, the results will be even better.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY: ENCOURAGING READING PRACTICES IN THE COMMUNITY

It is undeniable nowadays that reading should be seen as a social practice, enabling the formation of competent and critical readers. However, training good readers is a great challenge. Therefore, it is necessary to know all the aspects that permeate the act of reading, from the involvement with it to the construction of the meaning of the text.

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The promotion of reading should thus be assumed as a goal by governments, but also by the whole community, if we take into account the personal and social development of any child, future citizen, because “reading is ultimately not only a bridge to awareness, but also a way of existing in which the individual understands and interprets the expression recorded by writing and starts to understand himself in the world. (Silva, 2011, p.51).

We cannot achieve high-level learning if families and the community are not included in the process itself and if students’ experiences are not brought into the teaching and learning process itself. Scientific knowledge has evidence of the importance of the participation of families and the community in schools in true cooperation. There is, therefore, an intrinsic relationship between reading and citizenship. The moment an individual begins, through reading, to transform his relationship with the people around him, he is exercising citizenship. A citizen-reader is a citizen who is aware of his role in society, as well as his rights and duties. According to Jorge Wertheim: “Citizenship derives from the education process. The literate man and woman know their rights and duties, they will pass them on to their children and descendants. They will help to better choose the rulers and judge them at the appropriate times” (2008, p.47).

It is therefore thanks to a promotion of reading that more conscious participation in common life will be achieved, contributing to an improvement in the quality of human education and the skills possessed. However, it is not enough to have government guidelines in favor of reading if there is no serious commitment from the whole community to act along the same lines. The ultimate goal of reading communities is to provide an environment that allows children and young people to read and listen to a variety of texts individually and cooperatively while engaging in discussion and experience of these readings. In 1989, Jerome C. Harste described how to achieve true readers in this regard. In *New Policy Guidelines for Reading: Connecting Research and Practice*, Harste writes: “Schools that successfully build communities of readers do so by emphasizing the interactive, social, constructive, and dynamic nature of the reading process” (Harste, 1989).

However, the reading habits of a community are dependent on numerous factors. In Portugal, many circumstances have contributed to an improvement, although not expressive, namely: the improvement in the economic conditions of families; educational and cultural policy measures such as the progressive and longer schooling of the population; the launch of the public library network and the school library network. A significant set of initiatives aimed at stimulating encounters between books and readers, such as book fairs, debates with authors, or communities of readers, have also had positive effects. We must therefore recognize the importance of acting in this direction.

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In 2006, the Portuguese government decided to implement a set of measures leading to an improvement in the indicators in the field of reading and its proficiency: from the acquisition, broadening and deepening of reading habits, not only at school but also in family environments, public libraries, and other contexts. Thus emerges the National Reading Plan (PNL2027), an initiative that emerges as an institutional response to the concern for the literacy levels of the population in general and, in particular, young people. In the document, it emerges indelibly that reading should be programmed and not just relegated to free time because there is a great possibility of it not taking place; that the promotion of reading requires a gradual development which respects all the stages inherent to the process and that to stimulate a taste for reading we should always consider human diversity and develop various flexible models for reading projects. It is along these lines that the PNL2027 will gain the consistency and visibility necessary for the recognition of action in favor of reading, in particular by recommending and supporting the implementation of diverse and concrete activities, planned in such a way as to involve the largest number of agents who are in the field and directly involved in the whole process.

Along these lines and intending to promote an effective interconnection with a view to real involvement between the three main agents in favor of reading: school-family-community, the *Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta* Project has promoted, since its inception, a set of activities carried out/dynamized in a community context. Its action in the community was so impactful that it gave rise, on the part of the various actors involved, to the promotion of new activities and initiatives. These activities and initiatives originated in the different poles of this relationship and were closely related to the community. We describe some of the activities developed, which enabled the community to be strengthened around the *Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta* Project.

1. Reading Sponsorship Campaign to offer books to children (inviting institutions and companies to be godfathers or godmothers of reading), with a total of 5 godfathers or godmothers now.
2. Reading aloud sessions in partnership with school libraries over the four years of the project;
3. Reading Week (national, annual, in March) with activities chosen by the classes involved in the project over the 4 years of the project.
4. Commemoration of International Children's Book Day (annually, in April) celebrated in the first year of the project with staged readings (organized by the municipality of Entroncamento).
5. Reading through Art sessions («We also read with our body»), in the first year of the project, aimed at classes involved in the project (organized by the municipality of Entroncamento).

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6. Reading aloud workshop for families and children (open to the community), in the second year of the project (organized by the municipality of Entroncamento).
7. PNL2027 offer a collection of books to all schools involved in the project.
8. Organization of a Carnival parade, around children's books, for all pre-school and primary school students in the municipality of Entroncamento, as a transversal activity, organized by the Municipality of Entroncamento, ISEC Lisboa, and PNL2027, resulting later in a display of masks produced by the schools.
9. Dynamization of a Facebook page of the Project (created on 24 September 2019), which allowed the creation of various challenges during the pandemic (2020) with the offer of books to the winners and the participation of writers as judges
10. Participation in the online World Children's Day with the Dare to Read! (In the second year of the project, during the pandemic).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reading, understood as a primordial tool in the access to other learning, continues to represent, it seems to us, on the part of educational agents, but also of families and the community, a reason for care and investment, which is why, it is understood, projects of this nature assume themselves as an added value.

In the specific case of the Project *Já Sei Ler - Leitura em Voz Alta*, the first contributions indicate a strong involvement of the different actors in the promotion of reading and the promotion of the pleasure of reading, as well as the involvement of families. Furthermore, and as mentioned by Gouveia (2009), one of the crucial factors for involvement with reading is the fact that children watch their parents reading. Indeed, the family has a key role in the child's first contact with reading and in stimulating this activity. It is also important to bear in mind that "the type of experiences valued and provided, the frequency of experiences, the diversity, the quality and how they are developed depend on culture to culture, from community to community and from family to family" (Mata, 1999, p. 66).

In the continuation of the project and following on from what Lerger & Merga (2018) tell us, that

While there is a large body of research on the benefits of reading aloud in children's literacy development and several government reports highlighting the positive return on investment in early intervention strategies such as reading aloud, most of the literature is presented from an adult perspective. There is limited research on children's attitudes to reading at home or at school or the frequency of reading aloud practices that occur in these settings. (p.124)

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the project *Já Sei Ler: Leitura em Voz Alta* will focus its attention on the children involved in the project since 2019, to know and analyze their perceptions and attitudes towards the practices of reading aloud experienced in different contexts, throughout the development of the project.

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