



## **Reading Out Loud: Perceptions and Practices of Primary School Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

*The reading competence has a determining influence on personal, social and academic success. To read aloud it is necessary that the child develops a fluency in reading. For Walker, Mokhtari and Sargent (2006, in Tristan, 2009)<sup>[1]</sup> there are three key attributes for fluent reading: performance attributes, which include aspects such as precision, speed, and prosody; competence attributes, namely phonological and morphological awareness, knowledge of syntax and structure of discourse, and metacognitive competence regarding reading; and, finally, dispositional attributes, that are, attitudes towards reading, self-perception as a reader and reading habits. Esteves (2013)<sup>[2]</sup> summarizes three dimensions of fluency in reading aloud: accuracy, speed and prosody. The precision refers to the correct decoding of the words of the text, that is, for correction in the reading. Speed, in turn, is related to the decoding of words, using the minimum of attention resources; finally, prosody corresponds to the rhythm and expressiveness used when reading a text, while extracting its meaning. From here it is possible to see the advantages that the practice of reading aloud can bring to the students, namely the development of questions related to the oral expression, the motivation to the reading; and reflection on the need to understand the text read, since this understanding (or lack thereof) will be mirrored in reading aloud (Silva, 2013)<sup>[3]</sup>. It is understood that reading aloud should, for the reasons given, take a prominent place in the classroom. The present study intends to know the perceptions of 1st CEB teachers regarding the importance they confer to the practices of reading aloud in the classroom, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to know the practices they develop, even in the sense of to see if they know changes due to the year of schooling taught.*

**Keywords:** *fluency, reading aloud, perceptions and practices of teachers*

### **1. Introduction**

The reading competence has a determining influence on personal, social and academic success. Several researchers and practitioners have demonstrated the significant impact of the read-aloud practice in different areas of reading development (Sipe, 2000)<sup>[4]</sup>. They also noted its potential to increase motivation to want to read while building the knowledge necessary for the successful acquisition of reading and writing. Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success. Decades of research highlight the instructional benefits of read-alouds. There is a direct causal relationship between reading to children at a young age and their future schooling outcomes. Read aloud to students has the power and promise to set students on a path of lifelong reading. When instructional time is devoted to these practices, we rouse students into embracing literacy as a perennial skill and practice (Ness, 2018)<sup>[5]</sup>. Reading aloud increases the accessibility of texts to students, who are unable to read the texts themselves (Ariail & Albright; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006)<sup>[6]</sup>. Also, when teachers read interesting texts out loud, some students (especially those who are able to read but choose not to) become more motivated to read themselves. Additionally, students find read-alouds an enjoyable activity and adopt positive attitudes toward reading (Cunningham, 2005)<sup>[7]</sup>. Unlike silent reading, which should be understood as the culmination of an initial reading learning process, which is done using reading aloud, reading aloud it is the key to achieving fluency in reading, representing a micro-ability of reading comprehension (Trapero, 2009)<sup>[8]</sup>.

Many teachers recommend reading aloud to students, but there is little awareness of the nature of the read-aloud practices they use. When teachers read aloud, their actions demonstrate that they value reading, a key component in motivating students to read is a teacher who uses the read-aloud to demonstrate enthusiasm for reading and to model reading practices. When teachers purposefully read aloud from texts that capitalize on students' interests and academic needs, students are more likely to embrace the authentic role of literacy (Ness, 2018)<sup>[5]</sup>.



## 2. Reading Out Loud: from theory to classroom practice

Read-aloud is an instructional practice where teachers, parents, and caregivers read texts aloud to children and it's known that reading aloud to children builds and supports their listening and speaking abilities and enhances their overall language development (Sipe, 2000)<sup>[4]</sup>. Reading aloud to young children has been a commonplace practice in homes and schools for years. Parents, educators, policymakers, and politicians have promoted read-alouds with the common belief that reading to children makes a difference in children's literacy development. From here it is possible to see the advantages that the practice of reading aloud can bring to the students, namely the development of questions related to the oral expression, the motivation to the reading; and reflection on the need to understand the text read, since this understanding (or lack thereof) will be mirrored in reading aloud (Silva, 2013)<sup>[3]</sup>.

That's why reading aloud has been the subject of definition by many authors. For some, the definition is based on a more constructivist perspective, presenting itself as a strategy that the teacher uses to create reading spaces where ideas can be shared, for others it comes from a more mechanistic perspective, where it is assumed as a method to evaluate the various learnings. We know reading aloud is a complex process, requiring an already automated reading that allows the writing to be almost real-time oral speech. When the reading has not yet reached this level of automation, reading aloud is not fluid, and reading with interruptions, word readings, word exchanges and even syllabus. Reading aloud therefore requires the child to develop the fluency of which involves various skills. For Walker, Mokhtari and Sargent (2006, in Tristan, 2009)<sup>[1]</sup> there are three key attributes for fluent reading: performance attributes, which include aspects such as precision, speed, and prosody; competence attributes, namely phonological and morphological awareness, knowledge of syntax and structure of discourse, and metacognitive competence regarding reading; and, finally, dispositional attributes, that are, attitudes towards reading, self-perception as a reader and reading habits. Esteves (2013)<sup>[2]</sup> summarizes three dimensions of fluency in reading aloud: accuracy, speed and prosody. The precision refers to the correct decoding of the words of the text, that is, for correction in the reading. Speed, in turn, is related to the decoding of words, using the minimum of attention resources; finally, prosody corresponds to the rhythm and expressiveness used when reading a text, while extracting its meaning. So, fluency is not just a goal of reading aloud, but a competence in itself is extremely pertinent and revealing of a good oral reading.

As such, reading aloud is a skill to develop in the classroom and should be the target of a specific learning which can only be successful if the students already know how to read (Belo & Sá, 2005)<sup>[9]</sup>. The same authors report that reading aloud by students in the classroom can serve several purposes: the practice of oral reading itself; aesthetic sharing and enjoyment; and constitute an evaluation instrument for the teacher.

In fact, read-alouds, the act of reading aloud to others, hold an important place in literacy instruction. Read alouds are powerful because they serve so many instructional purposes to motivate, encourage, excite, build background, develop comprehension, Preparing preservice teachers to approach read-alouds with knowledge, confidence, and a seriousness of purpose is a central responsibility of teacher educators. Fulfilling this responsibility includes making expressive reading expectations clear, selecting a wide variety of read-aloud texts, teaching strategies for choosing and reading informational texts, and reading aloud to preservice teachers to enhance their exposure to literature and model effective read-alouds (Belo & Sá, 2005)<sup>[9]</sup>. Researchers and classroom teachers advocate that engaging students in extension activities as part of a read-aloud is good practice because the read-aloud event provides a beneficial context for students to see how language works. Moreover, teacher reading can act as a model for students, provided that has quality. In addition, the fact that the teacher reads aloud in the classroom may constitute a motivation for reading by students. Ferreira, Ribeiro and Viana (2012)<sup>[10]</sup> gathered, from the studies of several authors, a set of procedures and strategies for the development of reading fluency, which highlight: (i) the use of models; (ii) hear a proficient adult read aloud; (iii) video recording of the reading made by the students with their visualization and subsequent analysis; (iv) repeated reading; (v) reading aloud for adults; (vi) providing clues during reading; (vii) the provision of corrective feedback using systematic error correction procedures; (viii) repeated reading until a predefined performance criterion is met; (ix) the definition of objectives, (x) the organization of graphical records that allow the visualization of progress; and (xi) the practice of reading word lists. These aspects can, and should, be operationalized in the classroom in a variety of ways, using playful activities. Belo and Sá (2005)<sup>[9]</sup> provide some suggestions for activities, such as the dramatized reading of a text with dialogues; self-reading and self-assessment peer reading; reading passages with different intonations (sad, happy, angry, sleepy, etc.); systematic reading



workshops in which students present texts whose reading was previously prepared; reading contests in loud voice; among other suggestions, are easily implemented and allow to work reading aloud in a motivating way and with good results.

### 3. The Study

In the present study participated 31 teachers involved in the project *JÁ SEI LER – Leitura em Voz Alta*. This project started in January 2019 and is intended for children attending the first year of school in 2018/2019, accompanying them along their four-year course in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education (CEB). It is developed over four academic years: 2018/2019; 2019/2020; 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. Fruit of a tripartite partnership, ISEC Lisboa, Municipality of Entroncamento and National Reading Plan (in Portugal), has as object of study the practice of reading aloud in three different contexts: classroom; family and 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.

The teachers involved in the study were given a questionnaire intended to gauge their perceptions of the importance they recognize to reading aloud, on the one hand, and, on the other, to understand which reading-alouds practices develop in class, trying to understand if these vary according to grade level.

Of the 31 teachers involved in the study, 31 are female, with an average age of 49 years. Of the 31 teachers, 9 teach to 1st grade; 9 to 2nd grade, 5 to 3rd grade and 8 to 4th grade.

When asked about the value of reading aloud in the classroom, 16 consider it to be *Indispensable*; 14 *Very Important* and 1 *Important*.

Regarding the aspects that most value in reading aloud, *Expressivity* appears as the most valued dimension (selected by 24 teachers), followed by *Clarity in reading* (chosen by 16) and *Precision* (pointed by 10). *Rhythm* and *Speed* are only referenced by 4 and 2 teachers, respectively. Such perceptions of the teachers involved in the study regarding the importance they attach to reading aloud clearly indicate that there is an appreciation of them in relation to what is one of the greatest predictors of reading comprehension: expressiveness. As pointed out by Esteves (2013)<sup>[3]</sup>, reading aloud with expressivity and rhythm builds a bridge with comprehension, and those who read without effortless and with an appropriate expression tend to understand better.

With regard to the textual typology that they understand best for the practice of reading aloud, 27 teachers choose the *Narrative* text; 13 point the *Poetic*; 11 the *Dramatic*; 6 the *Informative* and only 2 point the *Instructional*. Such a choice may be related to the fact that narrative text is the textual typology mostly found in 1st CEB textbooks that support teachers in their practice and perhaps allow students to follow events more easily, when reading aloud.

Regarding the support that they tend to select as the basis for reading aloud, it should be noted that the 31 teachers select the *Book* as the election support, with only 6 teachers referring to the *Interactive Whiteboard*, 5 *Magazines and/or Newspapers* and 1 the *Tablet*. This opinion finds its voice in recent studies that point to paper support as the elected, since it allows a greater understanding of what is read, especially in children. (Delgado, Vargas, Ackerman & Sálmeron, 2018)<sup>[11]</sup>.

Looking now at teachers' responses to their classroom read-alouds practices, it can be seen that in terms of attendance, and of the 31 teachers involved in the study, 24 reported reading *daily in class*, 6 did so *2 or 3 times a week* and 1 teacher *at least once a week*. Regarding the time they devote to this practice, when they carry it out, 17 teachers indicate that they take *10 to 15 minutes to spend reading practice aloud*; 7 report doing so at least 5 minutes and 6 more than 5 minutes. Regarding the time of day they preferentially adopt for the development of reading aloud practices, 18 teachers select the *morning / afternoon period* and 13 the *morning period*. The reading made by the teacher seems to be becoming a central activity in the classroom, occurring daily and, with this, the teachers have shown the students its importance (Belo & Sá, 2005)<sup>[9]</sup>. Such practice will surely lead to greater involvement with reading by students. Children should listen to read adult to appropriate reading models: reading aloud to children strengthens the emotional bonds between the reader and the listener, stimulates the pleasure of listening, the pleasure of imagining, facilitates acquisition and development language and gives rise to the desire to learn to read.

Regarding the purposes for which they use reading aloud, 27 teachers point to using it as *Motivation for reading*; 24 as *Support for the contents of the various curricular areas*; 17 as *Reading Training*; 13 *Development of reading comprehension*; 11 *Enjoyment of reading*; and only 5 for reading *Assessment purposes*. Jean (2000)<sup>[12]</sup> points out the reading of stories aloud as one of the most effective and simple ways to motivate children to read. Also, according to Guthrie and Knowels (2001, cit. by Mata,



2006)<sup>[3]</sup>, motivational attitudes towards reading, as feelings related to reading, lead the individual to seek or avoid reading situations, and personal experiences that each child lives in relation to this task, are directly related to the attitudes that he will develop in relation to this activity.

When asked about the main strategies for reading aloud that they use in the classroom, 30 teachers indicated that they preferred the *read aloud by the teacher* and *the read aloud by the student*, with 20 teachers selecting, equally, the *dramatized reading* and 10 the *peer reading*. *Choir reading* is only a practice of 3 of the 31 teachers in the study. Such strategies are crucial as the reader is a “mediator” who must know how to read, through reading techniques and sensitivity in order to be able to decipher the text. The teacher's intervention in the practice of reading aloud is understood as an intervention in which corrections for pronunciation, reading speed, intonation, rhythm and fidelity to the text.

It is also important to highlight that 28 out of 31 teachers report talking to students about what they read in the classroom, and 26 teachers point out that their students talk to each other about their readings. Now, it is well known that commenting on what you have read or heard helps to make sense of the text. When listening to read, the student interprets it based on his knowledge of the world and other texts and what he anticipated during reading. When he hears other interpretations of the same text, he considers different points of view and revises his own, modifying, broadening, or reinforcing them. Considering what a colleague understood, what path he took to reach that conclusion, and locating which part of the reading enabled his analysis, helps him to find meaning, better understand the content, and broaden his or her own interpretation of that text and other readings (Ness, 2018)<sup>[5]</sup>.

One last point to mention is the indication given by the teachers, regarding the differentiation of reading aloud practices in class according to the school year taught. In fact, 21 teachers assume that they use different practices depending on the year they teach, and only 10 do not.

#### 4. Final reflection

We are not born readers, we learn to read and to enjoy reading, if our learning and experiences allow it. Moreover, and as you know, who reads more read better and, if you read better, will want to read more.

A great ally of working fluently at school is reading aloud, as it allows students to prepare to read, understand, communicate, and express meaning to others. Reading to others requires skill, concentration and expressiveness, it involves intonation, rhythm and emphasis.

Working with reading fluency and reading aloud practices in school should gain a new look from teachers, aiming to promote moments and activities varied according to the year of school, reading experience and age of students. Clear and objective purposes must be relied upon. In general, reading activities should be present throughout schooling, with daily readings and conversations about these readings, in which students can establish relationships with other readings.

Working reading fluency at school is the challenge proposed to broaden students' experience with texts and to collaborate in understanding what they read.

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