



## Reading projects: Readers group beyond the school limits

Wania Maria Previattelli<sup>1</sup> / Yara Maria Miguel<sup>2</sup>

Secretaria de Estado da Educação de São Paulo – Brasil

(wmariap@yahoo.com.br / ym.miguel@uol.com.br)

**Abstract:** This paper is a discussion on how school can contribute to the absorption of reading practices developed within the school by pupils' family members. We assume that it is a role of the School, associated with other social agents, to include the families in the community of readers. The purpose is to create, through Reading Projects, which include pupils, teachers, parents and staff, a community of readers who can give new sense to the reading practices outside the school premises. Beyond the utilitarian sense of reading, the projects are source of pleasure and access to mankind's cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Reading Practices, Reading Projects, Community of Readers.

In the last two decades we have had significant foment and investments on reading practices at Brazilian public schools. The status given to the practice of reading is due to its importance outside school. It is its institutional role to promote reader-citizens. For many children, the groundwork of the reading experience is laid within their families very early. Since reading is as important as playing, parents grant their children easy access to books at their earliest ages. In many cases the reading culture has been in the family for generations.

Reading experience is extremely significant for the success of children's basic schooling process. That means that success at school depends, among other factors, on the earliest as possible inclusion in the community of readers.

It is known that many families do not have the same opportunity of access to the written culture, which again, reiterates the commitment to make available at school, to all children, the possibility to participate of these reading social events that are part of the contemporary context.

Brazilian public school is responsible for the education of the majority of the population and has been performing its duties of making available to all its pupils the access to the written culture.

---

<sup>1</sup> Professional training coach of the Read and Write Program of the Ministry of Education of São Paulo. Pedagogue. Theacher of Basic Education.

<sup>2</sup> Professional training coach of the Read and Write Program of the Ministry of Education of São Paulo. Pedagogue. Theacher of Basic and Special Education.



In this context the Ministry of Education of the State of São Paulo – Brazil, aiming the advancement in levels of instruction in reading and writing, has adopted since 2007 a public policy that comprehends a body of measures among which we highlight the professional advancement of the different elements involved in the public education system of the State. This education system concerns the basic education of circa 1 million pupils from first to fifth grades, 40 thousand teachers, besides schools principals and pedagogical coordinators as well as the technical team responsible for developing and following up teaching and learning processes.

The Read and Write Program, as it is named, is based on three main lines:

1. Institutional follow up through two measures: mapping of pupils learning process implemented by the schools and supervised by the State Ministry of Education and an external system of annual evaluation;
2. Pedagogical material for pupils and teachers;
3. Professional training.

An important initiative of this Program has been the assembly of classroom libraries at all public schools.

### **Learning how to read: The reading routine in classroom**

Classrooms are provided with a collection of literature books as well as other kinds of publications such as newspapers, sciences magazines, comic books and others. The State Ministry Collection counts with more than 800 titles and each classroom receives a collection that ranges from 35 to 45 diversified titles. Besides the collection of books, the classroom libraries for children are provided with sciences publications such as “Science Today – For Children”, released by the “Brazilian Society for the Progress of Sciences” (SBPC), Brazilian comics “Monica”, “Picolé” crossword puzzles and riddles.

At the very first school days children receive what will become perhaps their most important book for both the affective aspect, “the first reading book”, as well as for being the responsible for the mediation school – home. The “Pupil’s Text Book” presents a collection of texts of different styles, oral tradition: children’s rhymes, tongue-twisters; literary: fairy tales, poems; sciences texts; and instruction texts:



recipes and games. We will further address this publication as we present the Reading Projects.

To cultivate readers, it is read at school to answer to the most diverse purposes: to obtain information, to follow instructions, for leisure, to review own writings or writings of others, to share the contents of a text with classmates, to practice reading aloud, among other social practices of reading.

These reading opportunities come the closest to the social version pointed out by Delia Lerner (2002:17):

To fulfill the purpose of upbringing all pupils as followers of the written culture it is mandatory to build a new concept of the object of instruction and develop it using as fundamental reference the practice of reading and writing. To stage a school version of these practices with a level of fidelity to the social version (non school version), requires the school to perform as a micro community of readers and writers.

Teachers use the practice of reading aloud as a powerful instrument to approach texts, either because pupils do not have yet reading autonomy or because they still need a scaffold for the construction of the sense and meaning of complex texts, requiring therefore teachers to be proficient readers, hence the greater task of providing them with continuing education.

### **To read: learn by doing – Reading Practices and Materials as Means of Continuing Education**

School principals and coordinators participating in Continuing Education Programs have pointed out that also teachers, in their majority, reach the schools with very limited familiarity with the social literature. Notwithstanding, for school to accomplish its duty of communicating Reading as a social practice, teachers must act as proficient readers. Another challenge comes up: to stimulate reading habits among teachers while they teach, since it is fundamental that teachers are readers themselves, not only during their academic studies but throughout their education.

The introduction of reading material into the classroom has required, in the context of Continuing Education of teachers, literature to be treated as object of knowledge.



For teachers to create learning situations that contemplated reading practices, it was essential to make of the Continuing Education a place of learning behaviors, procedures, modalities and habits of reading that concerned not only professional education but also personal. One strategy is to consider also the reading practice as a matter of Continuing Education. This is meant to intensify the participation of teachers in the community of readers. Another strategy is to use the theme of practice as a training tool. Concerning this Telma Weisz (2001: 123-125) explains:

We call this work thematization of the practice because it concerns viewing classroom practices as an object about which one can think (...). To be thematized, teachers' practices must be documented. (Notes, reports, video recordings.) (...) The proper use of this technical tool propitiates the construction of a practice of analysis of classroom situations that make possible to understand the ideas and hypothesis that guide teachers' acts even when they are not consciously aware of them. The work of thematizing the practice is precisely to bring up to the surface this consciousness, overcoming the dichotomy between right and wrong that usually marks the analysis during the teaching practice.

As one can see, Continuous Education is closely related to the different uses of a given material, taking printed materials and reading practices as tools of Continuous Education.

### **A Two-Way Road – A Dialogue Between School and Home**

If in the predominant culture it is the role of the family to introduce children into the community of readers, why can't children, in association with the School, do the same with family members who have little or no contact with the written culture?

The idea of the Reading Project is an answer to that question. Turning pupils into readers, users of the written language, implies the amplification of these practices beyond the limits of the school. It also implies the mobilization of the family to interact with reading practices, hence granting it the political and social right of being inserted into the community of readers.

While the most affluent families are the access to their children to written culture, at the Readers Projects children are the ones who make available to parents and family members a more intimate contact with reading.

We must bring to attention that most Brazilian regions do not have libraries, bookstores or newsstands, being school the only place with books and other printed



material available. Therefore, it makes all the sense that schools, in partnership with other social agents, actively participate in actions that result in the enlargement of the group of users of written culture.

Assuming that literarily cultivated families pass on to their children senses and meanings built throughout generations of readers, and that this readers' tradition is the accumulation of all experiences of a given family: taste, habits, likings, readers' behavior initiated within the family have been gradually amplified by experiences at school, the opposite way, that is, the participation of the school in the process of building up a readers' culture within the families is fundamental for the construction of readers' communities.

It can be observed that, throughout the activities proposed by Readers Project, a new signification gradually substitutes the one built by families in their initial contact with books.

Likewise, the sense initially attributed to reading is gradually modified, not only in the way families deal with printed materials but also in the way they relate to their children and the school. Departing from initial knowledge, each family builds more complex meanings, more coherent with the social use of Reading, especially literature that plays a privileged role in the projects.

That way, each family legitimize their place in the community of readers, sharing their readings and, especially experiencing, as says Colomer (2007:143), "literature as a socializer dimension". In reference to the acts of socializing and sharing literature, she comments:

Sharing the literary works with other people is important because it makes possible to beneficiate oneself of the competence of others in building the sense obtaining the pleasure of better understanding the books. It also permits experiencing literature in its' socializer dimension, making people to feel part of a community of readers with mutual complicities and references.

This entire process turns its' subjects (pupils, teachers, parents and staff) in such a manner enriched that it is possible to observe that they amplify their personal relationships according to their experiences, intentions, purposes and expectations. In this context, the inclusion of pupils in social practices of Reading ends up to create the opportunity for their families to come closer to these practices, too.



Beyond the utilitarian sense of reading, the projects are source of pleasure and of access to the cultural heritage of mankind.

### **The Reading Projects**

The Reading Projects that will be presented were already ongoing at some schools before the implantation of the Read and Write Program. It fell to the process of Continuing Education, introduced by the Program, to discuss with the school management (principals and pedagogical coordinators), the educational and social intentions of the proposals developed; how Continuing Education was placed within the context of the project; and what assessment tools were built to keep pace with it.

The Reading Project that most effectively represents in its' essence the concept of full integration of families in the community of readers is called "Mala Literária", or "The Literary Bag". Every week two pupils take home a package, or a bag, containing literature books. A possible variation is the inclusion of magazines or other publications of interest for the family. This material is either from the school's library's collection or found at newsstands such as magazines that teach cooking, knitting, carpentry, DIY and other daily activities.

The activity develops as follows: as soon as the children are familiarized with the available printed material and have read in classroom some texts of the "Pupils Text Book", they take the material home in the bag to share the readings with their families. Other publications of the classroom collection are added thereafter.

Besides the Literary Bag, other significant activities are developed such as:

**1. Literary Soiree** – An event that takes place either at the beginning or end of the school year. Besides pupils and teachers, parents and members of the school staff have participated in this activity, reading and reciting poetry. A variation of this activity can count with the participation of authors of children's literature for a conversation with the audience on their production and have some of their works selected to be read by pupils, parents or members of the staff.

**2. Literary Festival** – An event that includes the reading of literary texts. Important for highlighting talented writers of the community. This activity may also include sales and exchange of books as well as the participation of professional writers.



**3. Errant Words** – Book loans at home. Residents enrolled receive weekly visits from pupils who roam the streets of the neighborhood with the literary estate.

**4. Storytellers** – Though the name Storytellers, the activity consists of reading aloud from literary works at nursing homes, daycare centers and to other pupils of the school. Take part in this activity, pupils from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

**5. Reading Time** – This activity is a version of Mabel Condemarín’s proposed “Continuous Silent Reading”<sup>3</sup>. Every day at a time previously established, all interrupt their activities to read. This includes members of the staff and any adult who, perchance, comes to the school at the time of the activity.

**6. Open Library** – Consists of book loans from the library to the community.

### **Final Considerations**

The challenge for the school has been to prevent “school-like” reading practices in the family context. We understand that there is a subtlety in the intention of creating opportunities to families of pupils to enter the community of readers without having to give detailed answers about what and how they read at home, such as, for example, fill in forms, summarize, draw, answer questionnaires, procedures that, by the way, do not belong in the reading traditions of families with privileged access to written culture.

When treated this way, reading practices, introduced within the families, become a second-hand version, an imitation of the social version. Such procedures are, in fact, a very efficient attempt, we may say, of manipulating knowledge. What is offered is a partial representation of reality, which tends to be a form of control over what may or may not be communicated and, with no doubt, a way of perpetuating cultural and social inequalities. What is intended with Reading Projects is not to impose models of the hegemonic class but to affirm values attributed by all readers beyond the school walls.

### **References**

COLL, César Salvador (1994), *Aprendizagem escolar e construção do conhecimento*, Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas.

---

<sup>3</sup> From the original “Programa de Lectura Silenciosa Sostenida”.



COLOMER, Teresa (2007), *Andar entre livros – a leitura literária na escola*, São Paulo: Global Editora.

CONDEMARÍN, Mabel (1987), *O Programa de leitura silenciosa contínua*, São Paulo: Casa do Psicólogo.

LERNER, Delia (2002), *Ler e escrever na escola- o real o possível e o necessário*, Porto Alegre: Artmed.

WEISZ, Telma (2001), *O diálogo entre o ensino e a aprendizagem*, São Paulo: Editora Ática.



