



SEÇÃO: LITERATURA

What happens when the family reads to the children?

O que acontece quando a família lê para as crianças?

¿Qué sucede cuando la familia lee a los/as niños/niñas?

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Abstract: In this article, we focus on role of the family as promoters of reading and literary education among children. We will also pay attention to some training programs for families, which aim at equipping them with the knowledge and skills to foster reading and literary education. The objectives of this brief work are to understand the importance of the family in promoting, among their children, reading and literary education, and to know some training programs for families as reading mediators. The work methodology is based on a bibliographic research and a documentary research. The results presented point to a view of the family as a mediator and promoter of reading and literary education, and to the existence of training programs for the family at different levels, both public and private.

Keywords: Family. Literary education. Reading. Reading mediator. Training.

Resumo: Neste artigo, o nosso foco centra-se no papel da família, enquanto promotora da leitura e da educação literária, junto das crianças. Daremos também atenção a alguns programas de formação para a família, que visam dotá-la de conhecimentos e de competências para o fomento da leitura e da educação literária. Os objetivos deste breve trabalho são compreender a importância da família na promoção, junto das suas crianças, da leitura e da educação literária e conhecer alguns programas de formação para a família, enquanto mediadora de leitura. O trabalho assenta numa metodologia de pesquisa bibliográfica e de pesquisa documental. Os resultados da pesquisa bibliográfica e da pesquisa documental apontam para um entendimento, cada vez mais consistente, da família como mediadora e promotora da leitura e da educação literária e para a existência, no âmbito de distintas instâncias, do foro público e privado, de programas de formação para a família.

Palavras-chave: Família. Educação literária. Leitura. Mediador de leitura. Formação.

Resumen: En este artículo, nuestra atención se centra en el papel de la familia, como promotora de la lectura y de la educación literaria, con los/as niños/as. También prestaremos atención a algunos programas de formación para la familia, que pretenden dotarla de conocimientos y habilidades para promover la lectura y la educación literaria. Los objetivos de este breve trabajo son comprender la importancia de la familia en la promoción, entre sus niños/as, de la lectura y la educación literaria y conocer algunos programas de formación para la familia, como mediadora de lectura. El trabajo se basa en una metodología de análisis bibliográfico y de análisis documental. Los resultados presentados apuntan a una comprensión de la familia como mediadora y promotora de la lectura y de la educación literaria y a una existencia, en el ámbito de distintas instancias, tanto públicas como privadas, de programas de formación para la familia.

Palabras Clave: Familia. Educación literaria. Lectura. Mediador de lectura. Formación.



Introduction

Children don't develop and learn only in the school context. The family plays a vital role in children's development and learning, as a place of different social, educational and cultural practices. These practices are not only influenced by the school but also by the society the families are part of. And society, namely the cultural sector, has been realising that there is a vast family area to explore. Within this cultural sector, the book market is very active, with new children's books, authors and illustrators, and even publishing houses, emerging frequently. Bookshops, just like libraries, have their own spaces dedicated to books for younger people.

Other events, such as book fairs, sessions with authors and illustrators, exhibitions, theatre plays and musical shows are promoted by different cultural sectors with a younger audience in mind. It is therefore relevant for the family context to accompany the development of an immense activity around reading, books, children's and young people literature, readers' education and the stimulation of a literary education; it is also in the family that the incentive for an intimate, affective, pleasurable relationship between the child, reading, literature and books begins.

Manguel (2018, p. 17-18) highlights the relevance of the family and the community for the reader's education, evoking children's and youth libraries:

One of my earliest memories (I must have been two or three years old at the time) is that of a shelf full of books, on the wall above my cradle, from which my nanny would choose a bedtime story. It was my first library; when I learned to read by myself, more than a year later, the shelf, meanwhile moved to a safe level on the floor, became private property. I remember organising my books again and again according to secret rules I invented [...]. Then came the library of my adolescence which, built during my high school years, contained almost all the books I still value today. I was helped to create it by generous teachers, passionate booksellers and friends for whom offering a book was a supreme gesture of intimacy and trust.

Manguel's (2018) account takes us into the universe of books and reading that also exists beyond the school. The personal, intimate dimension contained in the bibliophile's narration

leads us to the importance and role of the family and the community in encouraging children's reading and literary education.

Therefore, the objectives of this brief work are to understand the importance of the family in promoting, among their children, reading and literary education, and to learn about some training programs for families as reading mediators.

For the preparation of this work, our methodology was focused on bibliographic research and documentary research. According to Sá-Silva, Almeida and Guindani (2009), both bibliographic research and documentary research are based on documents, these are the objects of investigation for the researcher. But there are different types of documents and researchers say that bibliographic research is based on secondary sources, that is, sources that have already been object of scientific treatment.

Documentary research focuses on documents that researchers classify as primary sources, that is, materials that have not yet been subject of analysis. The main purpose of using documents in an investigation is to obtain information from these documents, which will then be categorized and analysed. After these procedures, summaries will be prepared. Documentary research demands a much more attentive look from the investigator, since primary sources may be poorer in information, more incomplete, less precise. Naturally, the richness of the summaries, prepared by the researcher, will depend on these primary and/or secondary sources.

The results presented, based on a bibliographic research and a documentary research, point to an understanding of families as mediators and promoters of literary education and to the existence of training programs for these same families.

1 The family as a promoter of reading and literary education

Many researchers have studied the role of the family as a reading mediator and the importance of this mediation for children, as well as the connection it facilitates between the child and reading (BARROS, 2007, 2014, 2017, 2022; BARROS;

AZEVEDO, 2019; CERRILLO, 2006, 2009; GONZÁLEZ, 2009; TURIN, 2015; TUSSI; ROSING, 2009; VIANA; RIBEIRO, 2014). Cerrillo (2006, 2009) thus draws our attention to the fact that the family is the first reading mediator; the family is "el entorno más inmediato en que transcurren los primeros años de la vida y el lugar idóneo para el descubrimiento de la palabra por medio de la oralidad; un ámbito [...] en el que la responsabilidad es de los *padres*." (CERRILLO, 2009, p. 97).

It is therefore up to families to create rich and stimulating reading and writing environments, in which parents are literacy role models, enabling children to experience literacy habits and practices. Mata (2004, 2012), Cruz, Ribeiro, Viana and Azevedo (2012), and Viana and Ribeiro (2014), highlight the role of the family and family literacy practices, i.e., the literacy practices routinely used at home and in the community by parents and children, in developing oral language and the child's progressive appropriation of written language.

The creation of a family environment which encourages the child's attempts to write, where parents are reading and writing models, as they integrate these practices and routines into their daily lives, involving their children in them, will allow the child to gradually build knowledge about the functions of writing and foster curiosity, stimulus and motivation regarding reading. The frequency at which parents practice literacy involving their children, as well as the affective quality of these interactions, are factors that contribute to children's literacy development and show how relevant the family's role can be for these learnings.

Among these literacy habits and practices in families, researchers such as Cruz, Ribeiro, Viana and Azevedo (2012), Dionne (2013) or Mata (2004, 2012) state that reading stories is the most common activity in family literacy practices. The reasons why parents consider it essential to read to their children are advanced in Mata's study (2004); parents thought it was relevant to read to their children because this way they promoted learnings; because they fostered motivation and positive attitudes in their children towards reading; and because children requested and liked

for their parents to read to them.

Similarly, Dionne (2013, p. 3) puts forward that: "Les parents lisent avec leurs enfants pour deux principales raisons: passer un moment agréable ensemble et favoriser chez leur enfant un intérêt pour la lecture."

The family story reading practice is very important at various levels for the child's cognitive, linguistic and affective development. Cruz, Ribeiro, Viana and Azevedo (2012) further state that listening to reading brings many benefits. Thus, listening to read allows children to understand the relationship between oral and written language, enables knowledge about the rules of written language and the understanding of concepts about the printed word. On the other hand, listening to reading contributes to the learning of more complex linguistic structures, new vocabulary, allows for different ways of saying things and promotes knowledge about the world.

Viana and Ribeiro (2014) highlight the empathetic bond that is established between adult and child when sharing stories together. Reading to children, hearing read through the voice of parents, creates common moments of sharing and pleasure. These moments of joint reading promote the exchange of affection, allow experiences of discovery, bring children and parents closer, through emotion, to the world of the reading and the book.

The space and the way stories are read and shared with children are also relevant, as Turin (2015, n.p.) considers ideal that which they call

[...] una estructura de nido: el adulto acoge al niño en su regazo de tal manera que puedan ver al mismo tiempo lo que ocurre en el libro, el movimiento de nuestra boca o el rostro, así como de todas aquellas partes de nuestro cuerpo que intervienen en la lectura, y junto a nuestra propia entonación, se convierten en portavoz de las palabras escritas por el autor.

Similarly, Dionne (2013, p. 6) considers that:

L'un des aspects importants à considérer lorsque le parent fait la lecture avec son enfant est le contexte affectif qui imprègne cette activité. Nous croyons qu'une telle expérience doit avant tout être agréable pour l'enfant et pour le parent.

For this researcher, it is very important to create a favourable environment for reading with children, and several factors are presented to create this environment: establish a daily reading routine with the child; reread, whenever the child wants, his favourite books; read different types of books; pay attention to the signs shown by the child regarding reading; allow the connections between the text and the child's life experiences.

Strengthening affection and sharing emotions, "Planteando lecturas sin obligaciones, ni exigencias" (GONZÁLEZ, 2009, p. 159), is the main function of the family, especially when talking about reading stories; a quality interaction, in a pleasant reading situation, in a positive and warm atmosphere, leads to a closeness between parents and children and to an attentive posture and listening on the part of the child (CRUZ; RIBEIRO; VIANA; AZEVEDO, 2012), as "lire avec l'enfant doit être une activité axée sur le plaisir" (DIONNE, 2013, p. 9).

Thus being the case, according to Tussi and Rosing (2009), the role of families as reading mediators has two dimensions: the approximating role and the modelling role. With regard to the approximating role, these researchers consider that it will be the family that facilitates the child's first contacts with books, bringing them closer, in a pleasurable and affective way. As such, from the time the baby is born, the family can view the book as another toy, placing it within the child's reach, allowing access to reading behaviour in a recreational way through playing. As for the modelling role, it being centred on family habits and practices around books and reading, families would constitute themselves reading models for the children.

The Barros' work (2022) also focus on the importance of the relationship between the school and the family when it comes to the role of reading mediator. The titles of each of the parts of this work are very suggestive: "Nobody loves what they don't know", "When books become family" and "Readings for a pedagogy of happiness". In fact, the researcher reflects on the importance of the family understanding what reading means for the development of children and launches

guidelines for the family, questioning the school. In this work, we also find a commented selection of works of children's literature and testimonies arising from family reading experiences. In these latest essays, Barros (2022) states that the school has the responsibility of guiding the family in choosing books and sharing meaningful experiences for the family and the children. The role of reading mediator belongs to families, but also to schools and teachers.

2 Training programs for families as reading mediators

For the family to become an informed and competent mediator, some researchers (CERRILLO, 2006; CRUZ; RIBEIRO; VIANA; AZEVEDO, 2012; TUSSI; ROSING, 2009) consider it essential for them to be trained. Families don't always participate easily in training programs designed with them in mind, whether they are national, municipal or promoted by the school, and Barros (2014, 2022) reminds us that teachers are also reading mediators with their students' parents.

Cerrillo (2009, p. 100) points out some assumptions that families should keep in mind in their reading mediation task with children:

Ser un lector habitual, convencido de las bondades de la lectura. [...]

Poseer una mínima formación literaria, psicológica y didáctica, que le posibilite, entre otros conocimientos sobre:

El proceso lector y las habilidades que facilitan la lectura. [...]

La teoría y la práctica de técnicas y estrategias de animación lectora.

La Literatura Infantil y sus mecanismos editoriales.

La contextualización histórica de la Literatura Infantil.

La evolución psicológica del individuo en su relación con la lectura.

Cruz, Ribeiro, Viana and Azevedo (2012) point out other requirements for parents' reading mediation, such as the creation of a positive emotional environment, a pleasant situation at the story reading time, supporting children's active attitudes, encouraging them in the search for and

exploration of the book; the promotion of close physical contact that allows pleasant, pleasurable, fun moments while reading the story and the performance of other activities; and trying to know children's literary preferences and interests, "without undervaluing or forbidding the reading that they, almost always randomly, already do" (MENDES, 2020, p. 72).

These will thus be the starting conditions for the family to play its role as a reading mediator. Although apparently simple, these conditions do require working with families, so that they can understand that it is not at all fruitful to associate reading with punishment or even a waste of time; that it can be stimulating and motivating for children and for promoting their relationship with reading, to offer and buy books, even more so if the child shows a preference for them; that going to libraries and bookshops, many of which already have areas set aside for children, also contributes to their entry into the world of books and reading; and that reading stories should be synonymous with proximity, of affectionate conviviality around a story or a book that one likes and wants to hear reading and get to know.

However, training programs for families, such as those carried out by Barros (2007, 2017), in the academic field, also share a set of knowledge about literature, particularly in this case about child and youth literature, illustration, literary and aesthetic culture, the relationship between children and reading, techniques and strategies for approaching/animating books and reading for children.

This knowledge can only be acquired with more consistent training performed by specialists trained in these areas. Cruz, Ribeiro, Viana and Azevedo (2012) consider that these training programs for families make parents 'informed users', i.e., able to understand the potential of the book and design activities that contribute to children's literacy development.

In Portugal there have been constant programs to raise awareness/train families to promote books and reading and to foster literary education from the earliest ages. These programs may be

national or municipal, they may be promoted by publishers, bookshops or other types of associations, and may have different formats.

Below we will provide, as an example, a slightly more detailed note on some programs developed over the last few years, understanding the notion and relevance that society grants to the role played by families in promoting reading and literary education for younger generations. The summaries of these programs result from our documentary research. In the primary sources investigated, we found documents about programs, whose information was not very detailed; in others, the documentation was broader.

This aspect of our documentary research, as stated by Sá-Silva, Almeida and Guindani (2009), is reflected in the detail that we were able to put in, or not, in the presentation of the summaries of these family training programs. The criteria for choosing the programs presented here are related to the type of institution that promotes them. Thus we have national and municipal programs, programs promoted together with different associations and programs promoted by publishers. Although succinctly, we believe that in this way we can share the richness and diversity of this type of programs.

So we start at the beginning of the millennium. The establishment, in 2000, in Portugal, of the *National Book and Reading Year*, an initiative under the responsibility of the Portuguese Association of Publishers and Booksellers and the then Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Portuguese Institute of Books and Libraries, was the support for family training programs that took place in these first 20 years of the 21st century. From now on, we will present some examples of these training programs.

The project *Why read to my baby - My toy is a book* was created in 2005. The project resulted from a partnership between the Portuguese Language Teachers Association and the Association of Early Childhood Education Professionals, and had the collaboration of some municipalities. It consisted of giving newborn babies a book and a toy related to the book, and a guide to their

families explaining the importance of reading from an early age and providing some guidance on how to promote a taste for books and reading.

In relation to this project, we highlight the fact that the book is seen as a toy alongside others that populate childhood. In this way, for families the book object is no longer sacred, making it accessible to children, as can be seen in the following description of a baby playing with a book, provided by Salutto (2020, p. 11-12) as part of her research:

All put away. Parked. We are waiting for the moment to set the scene. While we talk about what we intend to do, the owner of a curious look moves over to the material. He takes a peek at the bag with the books. He slowly gets closer. He stops every now and then and looks around. Does he want to be found out? No? When in doubt, we make no comment. He got where he wanted: the bag. Takes a peek at its content. Is he sure of what he wants? Did he find it? He touches things, a little more, sinks his hands until his small arms almost disappear. Touches things some more. With some effort, from deep down, he takes out 'Gildo and his friends in the garden': he always goes for that one. [...] He walks away. Goes to a corner of the room. He seems to get quiet, there. It's him and the book. He does what he does every time he has that book in his hands: opens, turns, touches, closes, opens, turns, touches, closes, opens... Those look like the gestures of a delicious complicity: opens, turns, touches, closes, opens, turns, touches, closes, opens... Gestures repeated every time he has that book in his hands. Gestures that seem to give the baby intimacy, autonomy, authority over the object. He owns his gestures. And that seems to make him happy.

The guide for families seeks to answer objective questions that certainly correspond to parents' doubts (e.g. "Can babies learn to read?; When to start reading?; If I give books to my child, will he/she learn to read earlier?; What if my child doesn't like me reading to him/her?") [Associação de Professores de Português; Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância, 2005, n.p.] and indicates attitudes and practices that families may implement in this reading mediation; we highlight the recommendations provided with the future in mind, for when children are older, reminding parents that the task of training readers does not end in the first years of life and that their role remains very relevant in this endeavour:

When your child is autonomous in reading, promote that autonomy but don't "punish" him/her and don't say: "Now that you know how, read it yourself!" Keep reading with him/her and for him/her. Don't quickly disappear from the room. (Associação de Professores de Português; Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância, 2005, n.p.).

Indeed, Dionne (2013, p. 5) reminds us that: "Toutefois, bon nombre de parents cessent progressivement de faire la lecture à l'enfant au cours de ces années."

At municipal level, we highlight programs promoted by the António Ramos Rosa Municipal Library of Faro. This municipal library has created some brochures for babies' families who attend the *Bebeteca* (Baby Library). In the *Bebeteca* brochure, entitled *Bebeteca: Playing by Reading* (Biblioteca Municipal de Faro António Ramos Rosa, s.d.a) this space and its specificities are presented to the family: what the babies' corner is, how the bookshelves are organised, what activities are being developed, what the library rules are. This brochure also highlights the Parents' Library and the Parents' Club, two structures that are clearly aimed at family training. In the Parents' Library, a space next to the *Bebeteca*, the family can find a documentary collection at their disposal, whose central theme is the child, focusing on areas such as education, psychology and paediatrics. In turn, the Parents' Club aims to link the library to the family, regularly promoting different types of activities around books and reading.

Another leaflet that the library placed in the hands of the family is entitled *Bebeteca: Playing by Reading. Parents' Guide* (Biblioteca Municipal de Faro António Ramos Rosa, s.d.b), with suggested books, activities and explanations about the learnings that these books and activities can promote in children. In this brochure, we also highlight the activities to be carried out at home, in the 'At home...' section, such as 'Be seen READING, children imitate what they see' or 'Create a reading routine. Find a comfortable place, make reading a special moment of the day'.

Other entities that seek to reach out to families and help them promote reading and lite-

rary education among children are publishing houses. At this level, we emphasise the role of the Portuguese publisher Planeta Tangerina, which, on its web page, offers parents a number of suggestions on how to explore books with their children, in an attempt to help them better discover the books they publish.

This publisher presents, for some books, documents entitled *Exploitation proposals for parents and educators* (MARTINS, 2019; PROPOSTAS..., 2019). The objective of these documents is to help parents and educators to discover books with children. Care is taken to state that the presented proposals for exploring the books are open. These documents begin by presenting the book, its cover and other paratexts. Then there are clues, games, activities that aim to help parents and educators to play, through the book, with children. The publishing market has invested heavily in the area of children's books and literature, also feeling the need to dialogue and help in training families.

In the academic field, we mention the long-duration training programs for families on literary education, promoted by Barros (2007, 2017). As part of her research, at PhD level, Barros (2017) designed and implemented a family literary education program with a group of parents of 7-8 years old primary school children.

The program was composed of a set of eight sessions, with emerging themes in children's literature, and was supported by a literary *corpus* consisting of twenty-five works. These works were explored in a family environment, with proposals for approaching the texts, which were purposely designed for implementing this family training program.

The results of this research pointed to the added value for the family to know different literary works and be able to create favourable contexts for reading in the family environment, since a relationship of affection between the book, reading and the child was stimulated and family literacy practices were also enhanced, with a significant contribution to readers' education.

In 2006, the *National Reading Plan* (PNL) was

launched, whose second edition began in 2017, with a duration of 10 years. The *National Reading Plan 2027* (PNL2027) has small projects on the ground aimed at children's families, depending on their age and the level of education they attend, under the name *Family Reading Promotion Program*. Since the previous edition of the PNL, it has included programs and projects aimed at families and children, most notably the *Reading + as a Family* project. Some of these projects were relaunched in the PNL2027 edition.

These initiatives are allocated to the school, in an attempt to ensure that teachers, who are the privileged interlocutors of parents, work on promoting books and reading in an integrated manner with children and their families. This way, for families of children attending pre-school education, the PNL2027 relaunched the initiative *Reading Onwards and Backwards*; for the families of children attending primary school, it continued the project *I already know how to read*. Support material for both initiatives include leaflets or *powerpoints* entitled *Reading Onwards and Backwards* and *I already know how to read*; there is also a backpack with books that allows them to circulate between home and school, enabling teachers, children and parents to find ways to read as a family and share these readings with each other.

The project *Reading Onwards and Backwards* has two leaflets: one for families (AOS PAIS..., c2020) and another for pre-school teachers (AOS EDUCADORES..., c2020). The leaflet for parents seeks to make them aware of the importance of reading to and with their children, presenting both the reasons for this practice, 'Why read with children?', and the best way of doing it, 'How to read with children', as well as the ideal time for these readings, 'Read with children 10 minutes a day'. The indications highlight to parents the importance of reading for children's cognitive, linguistic, encyclopaedic and affective development. The leaflet reserved for pre-school teachers presents the master guidelines of this project; in it we emphasise the recommendations that these professionals should share with families:

[..] inform about the importance of reading aloud every day between adults and children and ways to implement it. Choose books appropriate to the age and interests of the children to be included in their backpacks, using the collections of the pre-school classrooms and/or periodic loans from School Libraries and Municipal Libraries. Use the titles recommended by PNL2027. Make children record the books read at home in the Reading Diary. Educators' monitoring of children's reading at home. Enrichment of the Project through regular reading in the classroom, the School Library and other school spaces, done by the teacher, families, older students, volunteers... (AOS EDUCADORES..., c2020, n.p.).

These guidelines for the family and the involvement of the pre-school teacher will certainly be vital conditions for the success of this project.

Regarding the *I already know how to read* initiative, aimed at the primary school, it also has a leaflet for teachers (AOS PROFESSORES..., c2020), with guidelines identical to the pre-school leaflet. For parents, a *powerpoint* (JÁ..., 2020) is provided with considerations on the importance of reading in today's society and a set of attitudes and practices that families can implement with children, under 'The family can and should help', 'What parents can do' or 'More appropriate books'. As with the leaflet for pre-school education, the main concerns are clearly focused on the reasons, the way and the time allocated to family reading.

Families' participation in these projects, their involvement in reading with their children, leads González (2009, p. 161) to state that parents move from a receptive attitude to a more participatory one:

Los padres aprenden otra forma de relacionarse con los libros, observan la evolución que van teniendo sus hijos a lo largo de los meses y valoran positivamente cómo se incrementa su capacidad para desenvolverse en un espacio diferente, para relacionarse con otros niños, para contar historias a su manera y como van manifestando progresivamente sus preferencias y exigencias.

In summary, we are therefore mainly dealing with awareness-raising programs for families, in order to make them aware of the importance of getting in contact and reading books with children, a vital step in promoting reading and literary education.

Conclusions

The role of the family in developing literacy practices and habits among children is very relevant for developing not only children's literacy learnings, but also reading, the love for books and literary education, namely by reading stories. This practice, which is vital in promoting literary education, is already seen by families as being very important and enhancing a relationship of affection and pleasure between the adult and the child, between the child, the book and reading.

For the family's role as reading mediator and in literary education to be effective with children, it will be essential to promote training programs for families that include relevant knowledge at least about the child, reading, literature and reading animation. In Portugal, these training programs already exist at public and private institutions. In addition to brief references on the relevance of early and frequent interaction with reading and writing, these programs seek to bring to families knowledge about the way, the time, the appropriate form of reading to and with children, in an attempt to answer the questions and even the anxieties of parents, who are certainly very interested but also hardly informed. The weight of the school institution in many of these training projects should be highlighted. The school is a relevant partner here, either because there are constant references to learning done in school or because the school takes the lead in guiding and promoting its own training programs.

In short, the results of these bibliographic research and documentary research, the methodology that permeated this brief work, point to an understanding of the family's action and role in promoting reading and literary education among children. The training projects for the family are present in Portuguese society, although we consider that this is a path that must be continued in an ongoing and effective manner.

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