



Shared reading aloud as a tool to improve integration: an experiment in Porta Palazzo (Turin, Italy)

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Abstract

The integration of minors with a migrant background is certainly a crucial challenge for our school system. In relation to the linguistic difficulties detected by international student assessment programme results, it is necessary to plan educational activities and policies aimed at strengthening students' ability to understand texts and socialise them in order to promote academic success and the inclusion of first- and second-generation children and their families. This article presents the exploration of a case study in a context with a high rate of migration, namely the Porta Palazzo district in Turin in the northwest of Italy, where the project “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” verified the effects of shared reading aloud on a sample of classes from kindergarten to primary and secondary school. The results demonstrate a statistically significant increase in text comprehension and linguistic skills but also a beneficial impact on the well-being of the students by improving the classroom climate while turning the school environment into a more welcoming space. Hence, the linguistic benefits obtained by shared reading aloud, according to the method presented, not only contribute to the educational success of students and to effectively counter early school leaving, but they also provide students and their families with the tools to orient themselves in the country of arrival.

Keywords: Shared Reading Aloud, Linguistic Benefits, Text Comprehension, Cross-Cultural Integration

1. Introduction

Over the past twenty years, the importance of identifying educational policies that promote the inclusion of children and young people from migrant backgrounds in European schools and facilitate their integration into society through education has become particularly evident. Despite the various policy initiatives developed by the European Union in this regard, the results

of surveys reveal that student support in most countries tends to focus more on the educational than on the social and emotional needs of the students. Thus, the research identifies several difficulties that can negatively affect learning and development and that are linked to the experience of people with a migrant background, including the process of migration (leaving the country of origin, learning a new language and new rules at school), the socio-economic and

political context (e.g. policies on the availability of resources for schools aimed at inclusion) and secondary aspects, such as inclusion in the right school year, the different language of instruction and, finally, the lack of adequate teacher training to help deal with diversity and the difficult engagement of families (Eurydice, 2019). These difficulties make it more challenging to achieve positive results as learning problems are accompanied by strong demotivation and a sense of unhappiness (Wang, 2021). Since language barriers are also a major obstacle to the expression of these students' discomfort, it would be important to promote practices which are aimed not only at overcoming language difficulties but which are also attentive to the socio-emotional development and diversity of students in a way that is helpful to all students, including those with a migrant background.

2. Linguistic disadvantages of students with a migrant background in Italy

The increase in the number of immigrant children in the Italian school system has been accompanied by a growth in scholarly interest in analysing their actual chances of learning skills and making school choices on a par with native peers. While school undoubtedly represents an arena of primary importance in the process of minority integration (Colombo and Santagati, 2010, 2014), studies and statistics show that the linguistic disadvantages of the children of immigrants continue to be significant and make this segment of the school population particularly susceptible to early school leaving.

PISA 2018 results show that regarding the perception of reading skills, immigrant students in 21 countries, including Italy, were more likely than non-immigrant students to report reading difficulties. Family background represents a decisive factor in this: on average across OECD countries, immigrant students who speak the language of instruction at home reported that they both felt competent and had little difficulty in reading, compared with immigrant students who mainly spoke another language at home (OECD, 2019). A greater perceived sense of efficacy is associated with a greater share of responsibility assumed and a greater level of commitment to future gratification: while this

consideration particularly concerns adolescents (Bandura, 1993, 1995), it is equally important to take into account the factor of motivation in the lower grades of education as well. Moreover, this perception of experiencing difficulty is confirmed by OECD data on reading skills, which shows that the scores obtained by Italian pupils with a migrant background are significantly lower when compared with non-immigrant pupils (OECD, 2022).

According to the INVALSI 2022 data report, first-generation foreign students attending primary school realise on average a lower achievement than the typical student, showing that the gap in text comprehension is greater than “what is learned on average in half a school year”. Second-generation foreign students also achieve on average a lower outcome than the typical student but with a smaller gap in text comprehension than is observed for first-generation foreigners. Furthermore, the gap between students with an immigrant background and natives increases from sixth to eighth grade, whereas for second-generation students the aforementioned distance is smaller. “This narrowing of the gap leads to support and confirm the hypothesis of the compensatory effect of school on language disadvantage” (INVALSI, 2022).

As far as decoding the text is concerned, the difficulties encountered by foreign students may be the result of socio-cultural disadvantage and reduced knowledge of the language and vocabulary. Other problems may be related to the difference between the Italian writing system and the system of origin.

One of the difficulties most encountered by foreign students is precisely that in understanding and studying the text: this may result from said difficulty decoding the text. Furthermore, they may have problems in understanding the specific lexicon, the microlanguages belonging to each specific subject and the syntactic organisation of the text. Moreover, factors such as demotivation, low self-esteem, inadequate approaches to reading activity and unsuitable strategies implemented by teachers contribute to poor performance both in understanding and studying. Hence, it is common for immigrant boys to have negative feelings towards school and to lack motivation and interest in school, which contribute to

exacerbating difficulties such as those described above (Murineddu et al., 2006).

The learning difficulties observed represent a major obstacle to the integration of these students. In particular, primary school students who do not speak the language of instruction at home report “a lower sense of belonging” and are more exposed to peer bullying (Eurydice, 2019). Also among the other indicators, children of immigrants in this country have one of the highest percentages of early leaving from education and training (Gabrielli and Impacciatore, 2021): the dropout rate reaches 36.5% (Openpolis, 2020), a significant percentage within an already discouraging picture. In fact, despite the progress made, the incidence of early school leavers even among natives in Italy stands at 12.7%, one of the highest ever after Romania (15.3%) and Spain (13.3 %), which is far from the target of 9% by 2030 set by the EU (Openpolis 2022).

3. Shared reading aloud in school: practice to ensure equity

As previously described, in text comprehension first- and second-generation foreign students obtain significantly lower scores than natives (INVALSI, 2022), and low levels of text comprehension translate into difficulties in accessing information, understanding instructions and reading more complex written texts. Considering these aspects, daily shared reading aloud in class represents a strategic and decisive practice to ensure equity in school and promote the educational success of all students (Batini, 2021), allowing to combat disparities and sociocultural disadvantage (Batini, 2022; Brokamp et al., 2019; Scierra et al., 2018; Balfanz et al., 2010; Duncan et al., 2007).

In fact, shared reading aloud is a practice capable of acting on the initial socio-cultural differences in an equitable way, increasing the chances of academic success with long-term effects (Batini and Giusti, 2022). The effects of shared reading aloud on linguistic dimensions and literacy skills make intensive interventions necessary not only in the 3–6 age group but also in primary and secondary schools (Batini, 2021; Batini et al., 2018). Daily practice of reading

aloud in the school timetable represents an action of “cognitive democracy” capable of responding to the social differences that some children carry on their shoulders. The introduction of shared reading aloud is a real action in the direction of a learning democracy capable of supporting and legitimising the achievement and strengthening of fundamental skills for life and school success (Scierra et al., 2018).

4. Linguistic and comprehension benefits of shared reading aloud

The benefits of shared reading aloud are numerous and concern the most varied and vast domains: cognitive, attentive, mnemonic, emotional-relational, interpersonal skills, etc. In this study, the focus is placed on language and comprehension skills.

The results of various studies show that it's possible to obtain benefits in the whole linguistic area with the practice of shared book reading mediated by an adult. The skills that benefit more from reading aloud are receptive vocabulary (Kotaman, 2020; Chao et al., 2015) expressive vocabulary (Zhang et al., 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2010), lexical skills (Wright and Dunsmuir, 2019; Ionescu and Ilie, 2018), narrative production (Baker et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2012), vocabulary depth (Van Druuten-Frietman et al., 2016; Damhuis et al., 2015), mathematical and scientific language (Nevo and Vaknin Nusbaum, 2018; Hojniski et al., 2014), and adult-child verbal and communicative interactions (Kozminsky and Asher-Sadon, 2013; Brannon and Dauksas, 2012).

Among the linguistic benefits of reading aloud, there is the improvement of the vocabulary relating to the words, the concepts expressed, the knowledge of the contents and the genre of the informative text (Neuman et al., 2016) as well as greater linguistic skills (Liu, 2014). The effects on vocabulary development are evident already in the earliest years of life (Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2017; Blamey et al., 2012) and continue throughout the school age (Makumbila and Rowland, 2016; Baker et al., 2013). Joint attention and shared book reading are important facilitators of children's early vocabulary development (Farrant and Zubrick,

2012). Through reading aloud, children are able to learn new words with extraordinary speed, inserting up to 3,000 terms a year into their vocabulary (Nagy and Anderson, 1984). Basically, reading aloud exposes children to a richer vocabulary, linguistic forms and varieties that are not part of everyday speech.

Further benefits of reading aloud that have been demonstrated concern the expansion of newborns' receptive vocabulary (Richman and Colombo, 2007) and the improvement of literal and inferential comprehension skills (Çetinkaya et al., 2019). Shared reading aloud appears to have a particular impact on text comprehension from an early age and children's exposure to books plays an important indirect role in the development of future reading skills. Shared book reading supports receptive language development, and receptive language development shows a strong link with reading performance once reading becomes autonomous (Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2002). In this sense, exposure to reading is crucial for lexical expansion; in turn, vocabulary expansion is a fundamental condition for developing autonomous reading skills and reading comprehension.

Again, shared reading-aloud intervention can improve a large number of linguistic skills (Batini et al., 2020) in addition to those just described, such as word decoding, reading speed and accuracy (Hemphill et al., 2015). The evidence underlines how the school, through the use of this practice, can play a decisive role in avoiding the crystallisation of disadvantaged conditions.

5. Method and fundamental principles of shared reading aloud

Shared reading aloud is an innovative teaching practice, which if introduced into the educational and school system, facilitates the development of different types of skills. In order for the didactic action to be effective, it is necessary to follow the correct protocol. The method of reading aloud here proposed was developed by Prof. Federico Batini and his working group (University of Perugia – Department of Experimental Pedagogy) through field research and experiences of local, regional

and national projects for the inclusion of reading aloud as a daily practice in every school order and level (Batini, 2021).

Several fundamental principles of the method must be taken into consideration to ensure the success of the practice. The method requires that reading aloud is carried out by the teachers every day (quotidianity). Reading sessions must become part of the school setting: reading must therefore take place in an organised framework (systematicity). The duration of individual reading sessions must be gradually increased, starting from the attention level of students up to an hour of daily reading in order to lengthen attention spans (intensity). Reading aloud starts with illustrated, short, simple stories with accessible language and content close to the experiences of children and then continues with longer, more complex stories with fewer images, more articulated language and content. Not necessarily linked to the immediate experience of the students (progressiveness). Especially in this context, which is characterised by high levels of multiculturalism, it is necessary to start with the very frequent use of picture books, which act as linguistic mediators. Exposure to images and the progressive connection between words and pictures is a very powerful support to comprehension. The illustrated books have an inclusive nature, as they facilitate access to the words: through the use of images, they play a linguistic support function. Furthermore, the choice of books must offer a plurality of points of view, of languages, of publishing houses and of geographies, related to the targeted classes with which one works (bibliovariety). The variety of reading choices, which should include a large number of genres, themes, cultures, types of characters and narrated events (Batini and Giusti, 2021, 2022), is essential to ensure the inclusion of each participant. In choosing the books, it is necessary to think specifically about the groups in which the project is implemented to make sure that everyone feels in some way represented by the stories, but it is also necessary to go further. Therefore, attention must be paid to differences in appearance, personal characteristics, skills and abilities, culture and geographical origin and the temperament and values of the characters of the stories that are proposed.

The practice of reading aloud involves

moments of discussion during or at the end of the reading session. Initially, open stimulus questions are proposed that are able to act on imaginative and metacognitive skills, which over time will favour autonomous and spontaneous interactions and reflections (socialisation). It is necessary to always take into account the students' point of view: they have the right to choose, to ask not to complete a reading, to express themselves freely and to provide an interpretation (focusing on children and students). Furthermore, this practice is considered an autonomous didactic: the pleasure of reading must not be understood as a moment linked to school evaluation but in its own right and independent. It also requires the participation of all teachers: precisely because reading should not be superimposed on literature and is not the responsibility of a specific teacher, the practice of reading aloud involves the entire class staff.

With this method, experimented in several contexts and with important results concerning natives, we have decided to intervene in the peculiar context of Porta Palazzo. The aim was to introduce the practice of reading aloud in a systematic, intensive, progressive and bibliodiversity-oriented way in school and to motivate and train teachers of all disciplines and levels to integrate reading aloud into their own curricular teaching for preventive, indicative, inclusive and democratic purposes.

6. The experiment of Porta Palazzo: the area and the school

Porta Palazzo is one of the most vital central districts of Turin, historically characterised by the presence of one of the largest open-air markets in Europe and by a rate of immigrant presence historically among the highest in the city. Located between the cathedral and the archaeological area dating back to the Roman period of the Porta Palatina, Porta Palazzo is an urban area in which integration and complex urban coexistence mix.

The project takes place at the Istituto Comprensivo 2 of Turin, which includes 4 complexes intended for classes for the 3–6 age group and for primary and secondary school.

The institute is attended by 1,033 pupils of 35 nationalities, of which 71.6% are of other nationalities. Of these, 56% were born in Italy.

The decision to participate in the activation of a shared reading-aloud project at Porta Palazzo was taken by the school management with the aim of training new citizens to ensure the educational success of students and to help students discover their inclinations and talents. At the same time, the intention was to preside over the territory, a particularly complex area due to the socio-economic difficulties of the families who live there, the linguistic and cultural barriers they experience and the high territorial mobility. In the years in which the project has been active, the institute has demonstrated some important requisites that have contributed to its realisation: human resources made up of motivated teachers, an economic investment in the renewal of the institute libraries, the verticality useful for carrying out scientific surveys and timely external and internal monitoring of activities and results.

The hypothesis that supported our intervention in such a specific context is related to the benefits that shared reading aloud could bring regarding the lexical heritage and understanding that constituted the main areas of difficulty regarding normal communicative interaction in the learning context.

7. “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” project: aims and phases

Fondazione per la Scuola is an institution of the Compagnia di San Paolo which aims to contribute, also through the development and promotion of research activities, to raising the quality and effectiveness of the educational system, drawing on the best experiences in terms of innovation of learning processes, facilitating their transfer and assisting schools to acquire, adapt and use them. “Riconessioni – Educazione al futuro” is a Compagnia di San Paolo's programme created by the Fondazione per la Scuola, which experiments with primary and secondary schools of first grade using an innovative educational system model and accompanies them in the process of

technological, organisational and didactic innovation. The goal is to make the school the central hub of social transformation by building a solid community with all the subjects involved.

The project “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” was carried out thanks to Compagnia di San Paolo’s “Riconessioni – Educazione al futuro”, Fondazione per la scuola and FISSUF Department (Philosophy, Social, Human and Educational Sciences – Department of Experimental Pedagogy) of the University of Perugia with the scientific coordination of Professor Federico Batini. The “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” project has been taking place since 2020 and is currently underway at the Istituto Comprensivo 2 in Turin.

The project aims to include daily and intensive shared reading-aloud activities practised by teachers of children and teenagers with the following objectives: to promote inclusion and integration in the school and social environment; to promote the learning of the Italian language through exposure to stories; to facilitate cognitive, emotional, psychological and identity development processes; and to improve relational skills and the overall well-being of children.

The project has seen different phases and actions. The design phase of “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” began in 2020. In a first phase, between June and July 2021, the staff involved in the project (educators, teachers, school referents) were trained. Specific training has been provided for each school level (classes for the 3–6 age group, primary and secondary schools) relating to the following: the motivations and effects of reading aloud; practices, techniques and operational strategies for reading aloud; evidence of connection with the ministerial objectives; evidence of connection with autonomous reading attitude; and age-specific bibliographies. The tool of teacher training has had a dual function of motivation and empowerment. The involvement did not concern only teachers of literature or of languages but the greatest number of teachers possible because the reading practices concern the entire teaching staff. As a support tool, between July 2021 and June 2022, bibliographies dedicated to the project were drawn up, updated continually and given to the

teaching staff. Online monthly monitoring meetings have been scheduled since November 2021, in which the research group supported the project actors by responding to any difficulties encountered and providing practical tools on reading aloud. Since November 2021, LaAV (Lecture ad Alta Voce) has been involved, a voluntary movement that supported the project with online and face-to-face meetings on reading aloud.

The phase of measuring reading-aloud effects involved two different moments. Between 11 and 15 October 2021, before introducing the narrative training activity into the classes, the students involved in the project participated in *ex ante* measurements carried out by the research group in schools. Some abilities (cognitive, attentive, linguistic, emotional, etc.) were investigated through the use of standardised tools specific to the reference age in each school grade. The aim in this first phase was to investigate the average starting level of the classes that joined the project. Since the beginning of the reading activity, educators and teachers have sent the diaries (weekly semi-structured ongoing tools) to the research group, with the aim of reflecting on the activities carried out, on the progress of the practice of reading aloud and keeping track of the development path of children and adolescents. The *ex post* measurements were carried out between 28 and 31 March 2022, when the classes were again subjected to the skills assessment using the same standardised tools to verify any improvements after 5 months of daily reading aloud.

8. Linguistic and comprehension tests

The main standardised tools used to investigate the linguistic and comprehension effects of shared reading-aloud training are the following. For the 3–6 age group, the Oral Text Comprehension Test – TOR (Levorato et al., 2007) was used. It is a standardised tool that evaluates the ability to understand narrative texts in children aged between 3 and 8 and allows to identify the presence of possible difficulties in the cognitive-linguistic area. The assessment of oral text comprehension is not influenced by expressive skills, and therefore the test can also

be used with children who have difficulties in language production and an atypical linguistic and/or cognitive development. Structurally, this tool consists of 3 forms (A,B,C), each appropriate, in terms of length and difficulty, for a specific age range. Each form includes 2 stories, for each of which 10 comprehension questions are asked.

For the primary school students, an individually administered intelligence test was used: WISC-IV, Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Fourth Edition (Orsini et al., 2012; Wechsler, 2003). It is an instrument used to assess the cognitive abilities of children aged between 6 years and 0 months and 16 years and 11 months. With this tool, it is possible to calculate 5 composite scores useful for describing children's behaviour in distinct cognitive areas. For the present study, the Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI), a measurement of verbal concept formation, was used to investigate the effectiveness of narrative reading-aloud training. This index evaluates the ability of children to listen to a question or request, retrieve information previously learned from both formal and informal education, reflect and reason, give an answer and express thoughts verbally. It is a good predictor of academic readiness and achievement orientation but can be influenced by background, education and cultural conditions.

9. Data analysis

The data collected within the classes involved in the project were analysed by comparing the trend of the sample responses with the available data of Italian standardised normative samples relating to the single tests used. The aim was to verify if there were any variations over time in the positioning of the group exposed to reading-aloud training with respect to the average scores expected by age and to the performance ranges provided by the qualitative descriptive classifications of the single test.

Furthermore, the effect of narrative training was calculated by comparing the average variation over time of the results obtained in the individual tests for the group subjected to reading aloud with the average variation over

time for selected control groups (classes not subjected to any intervention reading who continued with their normal educational-didactic activities). A mixed model with a 2x2 design was used to verify the effect of the narrative training, where the variable "time" (with two levels: time 0 and time 1) constitutes the within-subjects factor, while the variable "group" (with two levels: control and experimental) represents the between-subjects factor. The group-time interaction provided the measure of the significance of the intervention's impact in the experimental classes compared to the control. The results shown below highlight the increases (and possible decreases) of the two groups, experimental and control, between the first and second test administration.

10. Results for the 3–6 age group

The results obtained for the 3–6 age group on narrative text comprehension skills using the TOR are presented below. On a sample of 60 children aged between 3 and 6, an analysis was carried out to compare the trend in the answers obtained with the data available from the Italian standardised normative sample (composed of 967 children). The aim was to verify if there were variations over time in the positioning of the reading-aloud group with respect to the average scores expected by reference age. We previously knew that the sample would be below the expected average for the corresponding age; however, the purpose was to verify how much it was possible to reduce the gap between scores after shared reading-aloud training.

Figure 1 shows the increase over time of the positioning of the sample exposed to the reading-aloud training compared to the expected average score for the reference age according to the test norms. Before the narrative training intervention, the sample was on average 2.4 points below the expected performance for the age; at the end of the daily reading-aloud activity, the average result of the sample classes is close to the normative average, positioning itself only 0.4 points below it. The average increase in the classes is therefore 2 points on a total scale of 10 (Table 1). It can be easily hypothesised that if 2 points were earned in 5 months of training (using the normative

averages aligned to the different pre- and post-training ages), continuation of this activity would be able to completely eliminate the gap.

were not subjected to any reading-aloud training and continued with the normal educational-didactic activities.

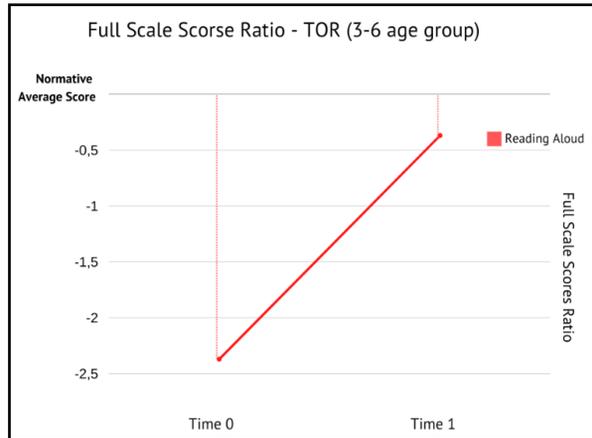


Figure 1. Increase in the positioning of the reading-aloud sample compared to the expected average score for the corresponding age.

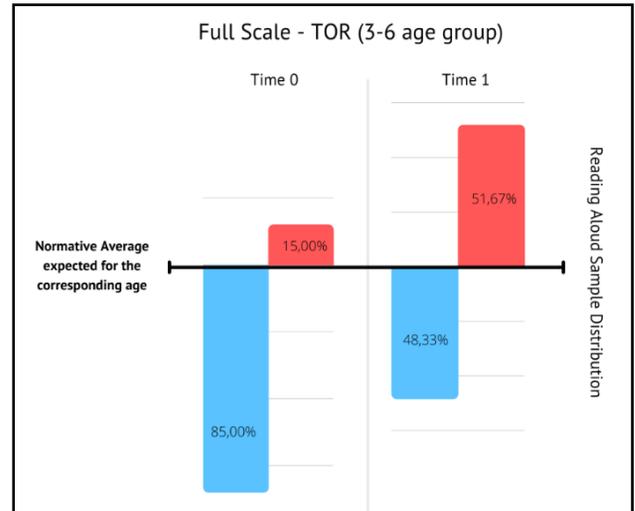


Figure 2. Different distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the normative average before and after narrative training.

Ratio between sample average and normative average – Full Scale TOR (3–6 Age Group)	
Time 0 Score	2.4-
Time 1 Score	0.4-
Increase Score	2.0

Table 1. Ratio between reading-aloud sample average and normative average before and after narrative training, and related increase score.

Full Scale – TOR	Time 0	Time 1
< Normative Average	85.00%	48.33%
> Normative Average	15.00%	51.67%

Table 2. Distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the normative average at time 0 and at time 1.

Figure 2 instead shows the different distribution of the sample before and after the narrative training. At time 0 (pre-training), 85% of the sample has a performance on oral text comprehension that is below the normative average expected for the corresponding age, at time 1 (post-training); 51.67% of the sample is above it (Table 2).

Further investigation was conducted calculating the effect of narrative training by comparing the average variation over time of the results obtained for the reading-aloud (experimental) group with the average variation over time for a control group (consisting of 60 children aged between 3 and 6). As a control group, classes from different Italian territories and from different socio-cultural contexts were selected (group randomly selected from a large sample of the Tuscany region). These classes

From the baselines analysis, it is possible to observe a significant difference in the average starting scores of the two groups considered. The reading-aloud group shows a much lower performance than the control group at time 0 (before narrative training). The experimental group obtains an average starting score of 2.55 against a score of 5.23 for the control sample (on a total scale of 10 points). This result can be read considering the type of test used, developed in Italy and with a standardised normative sample made up of subjects of Italian nationality. It is not difficult to understand the positioning of the experimental sample if one takes into consideration the socio-cultural context described above and the plurality of nationalities of origin of the subjects making up the experimental group. On the other hand, as already mentioned above, the selected control group is made up of children aged 3 to 6 with an

almost clear majority being of Italian nationality and coming from different Italian territories. Despite this, the meaning of this measurement, albeit carried out with culturally calibrated tools that don't take into account the different nationalities of origin, lies in the schooling processes that see the children of the project attend the educational school system in Italy, with Italian as their language of learning.

Despite this, what emerges from the analyses conducted using a 2x2 mixed model is a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$; observed power = 0.982) in the increase of oral comprehension skills between the two groups. The experimental group, despite starting from an initial score of 2.55, reaches a final mean score of 4.68, showing an increase of more than 2 points after narrative training. Instead, the final mean score of the control group is 5.70, with an increase of 0.47 (Table 3). Figure 3a shows how the reading-aloud group, although starting from an average score lower than the control group, at time 1 positions itself close to the performance of the control group. Figure 3b instead shows the significant difference between the increment levels of the experimental group (increment = 2.13) and the control group (increment = 0.47).

Full Scale – TOR	Time 0	Time 1	Increase
Control	5.23	5.70	0.47
Reading Aloud	2.55	4.68	2.13

Table 3. TOR average and increase scores of the control group and the experimental (reading-aloud) group.

11. Results for primary school

The results obtained for the primary school on verbal concept formation using the Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI) of WISC-IV battery are presented below. On a sample of 31 children in primary school, an analysis was carried out to compare the trend in the verbal comprehension average scores obtained with the data available from the standardised normative sample. The aim was to verify if there were changes over time in the positioning of the group exposed to reading-aloud training with respect to the performance ranges provided by the qualitative descriptive classifications of the

test. A score of 70 was used as the normative cut-off value, which, according to the alternative classification of indices/IQ by Flanagan and Kaufman (2004), represents the score at the lower limit of the normative average.

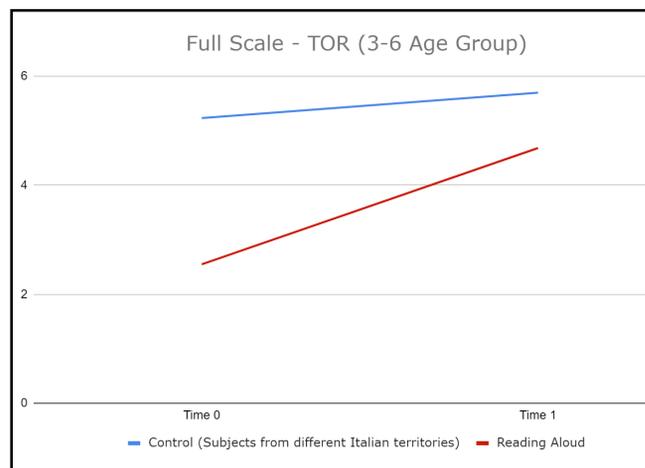


Figure 3a. Differences in TOR average scores at time 0 and time 1 for the experimental group and the control group.

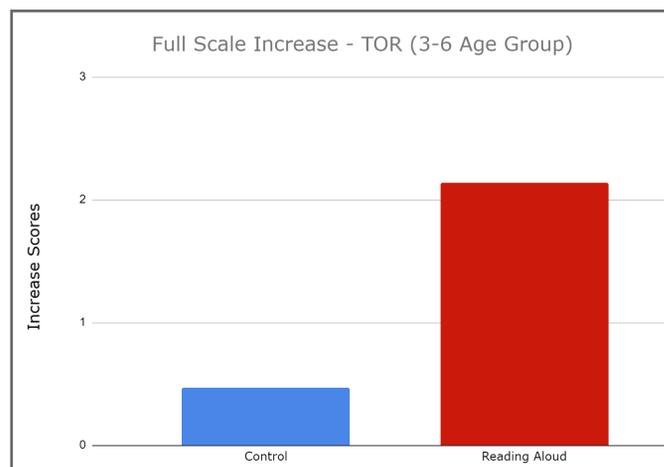


Figure 3b. Difference between the increment levels of the experimental group and the control group.

Figure 4 shows the increase over time of the positioning of the sample exposed to the reading-aloud training compared to the cut-off value corresponding to the lower limit of the normative average. At time 0 (before narrative training), the sample was on average 4.77 points below the normative cut-off value; at the end of the daily reading-aloud activity, the average

result of the sample classes was 15.94 points above it, with an increase of 20.71 points (Table 4).

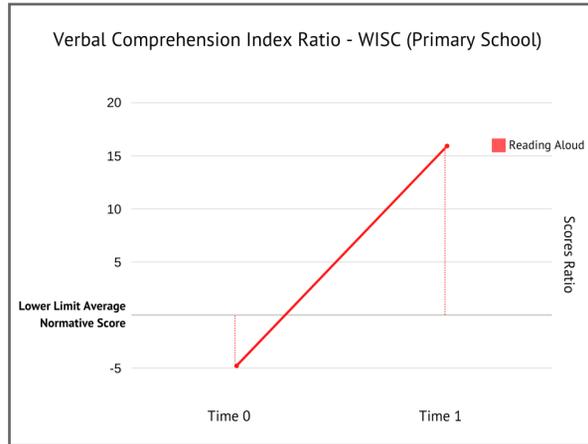


Figure 4. Increase in the positioning of the reading-aloud sample compared to the lower limit of the average normative score.

Ratio between sample average score and lower-limit average normative score – VCI)	
Time 0 Score	4.77-
Time 1 Score	15.94
Increase Score	20.71

Table 4. Ratio between reading-aloud sample average and lower limit of average normative score before and after narrative training, and related increase score.

In Figure 5, it is possible to observe the different distribution of the sample before and after the narrative training. Before reading-aloud training, 62.50% of the sample has a performance on verbal comprehension index that is below the cut-off value corresponding to the lower limit of the normative average; after narrative training only 25% of the sample is below it, while 75% is above it (Table 5).

Also, for this age group, further investigation was conducted to verify the effect of reading-aloud training by comparing the average variation over time of the scores obtained for the experimental group with the average variation over time for a selected control group (consisting of 26 children at primary school). As a control group, classes from different Italian territories and from different socio-cultural

contexts were chosen (group randomly selected from a large sample of the Tuscany region). These classes continued with the normal educational-didactic activities in school, and children were not subjected to any reading-aloud training.

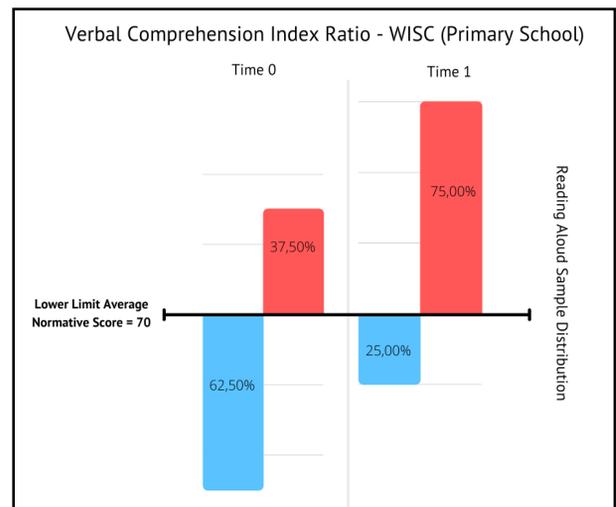


Figure 5. Different distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the lower limit of normative average score before and after narrative training.

VCI (Primary School)	Time 0	Time 1
< Lower-Limit Average Normative Score	62.50%	25.00%
> Lower-Limit Average Normative Score	37.50%	75.00%

Table 5. Distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the lower limit of average normative score at time 0 and at time 1.

From the analysis of the baselines, a significant difference emerges in the average starting scores of the two samples. At time 0, the reading aloud group shows a much lower average verbal comprehension score than the control group. The experimental group obtains an initial average score of 65.23 against an average score of 100.54 for the control sample.

This result can be read in light of the method of investigation of the construct under examination, i.e. through the use of a battery with a standardised normative sample made up of subjects of Italian nationality. Also, as

mentioned above, the VCI can be influenced by background, education and cultural conditions. The starting condition of the experimental sample is easily understandable if one considers the socio-cultural context described above and the plurality of nationalities of origin of the subjects making up the experimental group. Furthermore, the selected control group is made up of primary school children with an almost clear majority being of Italian nationality from different Italian territories. Also, for this age group, the meaning of this measurement, although conducted with culturally calibrated tools that do not take into account the different nationalities of origin, lies in the schooling processes that see the children of the project attend the educational school system in Italy, with Italian as their language of learning.

However, from the analyses conducted using a 2x2 mixed model, there is a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$; observed power = 0.999) in the increase of verbal concept formation skills between the two groups. The experimental group, although starting from an initial score of 65.23, reaches an average final score of 85.94, with an increase of about 20 points after the narrative training. The final mean score of the control group is 97.77, with a slight decrease in the mean score of 2.77 (Table 6). Figure 6a illustrates how the reading-aloud group, although starting from an average score lower than the control group, at the end of the daily reading-aloud activity positions itself close to the performance of the control group. Figure 6b instead shows the significant difference between the increment levels of the experimental group (increment = 20.71) and the control group (increment = -2.77).

VCI	Time 0	Time 1	Increase
Control	100.54	97.77	-2.77
Reading Aloud	65.23	85.94	20.71

Table 6. Verbal Comprehension Index average and increase scores of the control group and the experimental (reading-aloud) group.

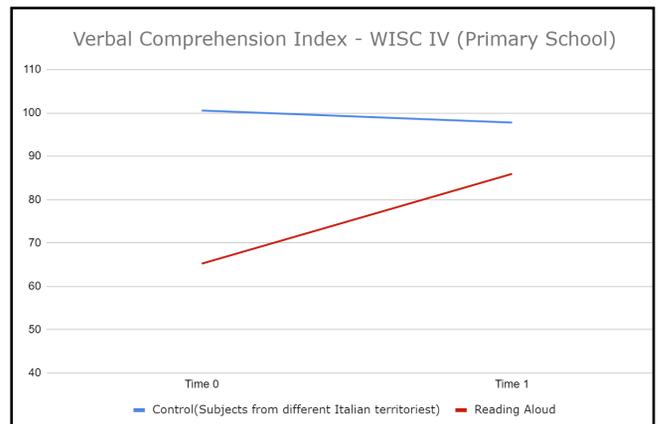


Figure 6a. Differences in Verbal Comprehension Index average scores at time 0 and time 1 for the experimental group and the control group.

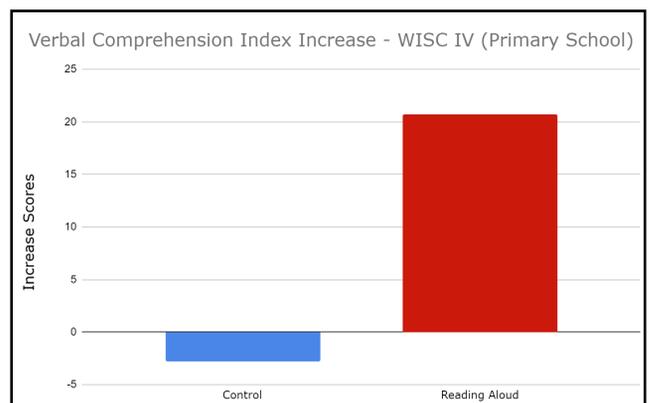


Figure 6b. Difference between the increment levels of the experimental group and the control group.

12. Conclusions

As per the literature, shared reading aloud acted on the dimensions of vocabulary and comprehension and confirmed the hypothesis. The peculiarity of these results lies in the fact that it is usually assumed that reading cannot be used with groups of such diverse backgrounds because they are deemed unable to comprehend the texts due to the language difficulties they display in traditional teaching practice. On the contrary, it has been shown that shared reading aloud has a much faster effect than didactic instructional activities. Indeed, there is an increase in text comprehension skills and even the development, in some cases, of autonomous reading practice.

The effects of this shared reading-aloud method are in fact multiplied by the involvement of the students and the creation of a welcoming and sharing climate created by the stories and the work of the teachers who engage in an activity at the service of all students (Surian et al., 2022). Several researches claim teacher support is an important factor affecting students' achievement at school: students need to feel that their teachers are involved in their education and that they care about their students' well-being (Klem and Connell, 2004). This ensures a feeling of well-being even for those who usually experience a difficult relationship with school, and it contributes to developing greater motivation with respect to school and studying: the qualitative data both collected from the students (who also talk about the class climate) and the teachers confirm what was collected through the standardised instruments.

Finally, the practice of the shared reading-aloud method contributes significantly to the inclusion of students with a migrant background and also their families. The bibliovariety and socialisation components, in fact, constitute a space for mutual understanding based on dialogue and comparison of different experiences, giving importance to an intercultural education activity that in most European countries is considered an autonomous discipline (Eurydice, 2019).

In the meetings with the families of the Porta Palazzo students, it was discovered that the children had gotten into the habit of reading stories in Italian to their parents, causing a retroactive effect on the adults, which contributes to increasing their understanding of Italian, enhancing their involvement in school life as well as their ability to make effective use of information about the functioning of the school system in order to be an active part of their children's education.

As far as the limitations of the research are concerned, it must be pointed out that there is a limited sample of subjects involved in the surveys: it is necessary to extend the field of research to other schools in order to verify the persistence of the effects of the method and its benefits. Since the project was first activated, teacher training has covered not only the Istituto Comprensivo 2 Torino school staff but also teachers, educators and principals from schools

in Turin with a social background similar to the one in Porta Palazzo and with a multicultural student population. This has offered the opportunity to detect the needs of the different language groups present in the district's schools and to implement the dissemination of educational resources in the area (intercultural centres, multilingual bibliographies prepared by experts and linked to individual cultures, etc.).

The continuation of the project will in any case provide an opportunity to observe the longitudinal effects of the method, and the analysis of the results could further confirm the effectiveness of shared reading aloud as a useful tool to counter school dropout.

Reflecting on the critical issues highlighted by the research could also contribute to a much-needed reflection on the actual opportunities that the education system in Italy offers to the new generations of students to ensure their educational success and to transmit, in particular to pupils with a migrant background, a greater sense of belonging to a community in which they can grow, flourish and to which they can make a personal and significant contribution to their own well-being and to that of society as a whole.

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