Reading Informational or Fictional Texts to Students: Choices and Perceptions of Preschool and Primary Grade Teachers

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Abstract: Teacher reading aloud to students is a practice that is well established in preschool and primary classrooms. Many benefits of this pedagogical activity have been highlighted in multiple studies. However, it has also been shown that teachers are not keen on choosing informational texts for their read aloud, as their selections for this venue are mainly fictional stories, mostly written in a unique narrative story-like structure. Considering that students soon have to read complex informational texts by themselves as they go from one grade to another, there is cause for concern because those who do not benefit from an early exposure to informational texts could be lacking knowledge of informational text structures that they will encounter regularly in their reading. Exposing students to informational texts could be done in different ways in classrooms. However, since read aloud appears to be such a common and efficient practice in preschool and primary grades, it is important to examine more deeply the factors taken into account by teachers when they are selecting their readings for this important teaching activity. Moreover, it seems critical to know why teachers are not inclined to choose more often informational texts when they are reading aloud to their pupils. A group of 22 preschool or primary grade teachers participated in this study. The data collection was done by a survey and an individual semi-structured interview. The survey was conducted in order to get quantitative data on the read-aloud practices of teachers. As for the interviews, they were organized around three categories of questions (exploratory, analytical, opinion) regarding the process of selecting the texts for the read-aloud sessions. A statistical analysis was conducted on the data obtained by the survey. As for the interviews, they were subjected to a content analysis aiming to classify the information collected in predetermined categories such as the reasons given to favor fictional texts over informative texts, the reasons given for avoiding informative texts for reading aloud, the perceptions of the challenges that the informative texts could bring when they are read aloud to students, and the perceived advantages that they would present if they were chosen more often for this activity. Results are showing variable factors that are guiding the teachers when they are making their selection of the texts to be read aloud. As for example, some of them are choosing solely fictional texts because of their convictions that these are more interesting for their students. They also perceive that the informational texts are not good choices because they are not suitable for pleasure reading. In that matter, results are pointing to some interesting elements. Many teachers perceive that read aloud of fictional or informational texts have different goals: fictional texts are read for pleasure and informational texts are read mostly for academic purposes. These results bring out the urgency for teachers to become aware of the numerous benefits that the reading aloud of each type of texts could bring to their students, especially the informational texts. The possible consequences of teachers’ perceptions will be discussed further in our presentation.

Keywords: fictional texts, informational texts, preschool or primary grade teachers, reading aloud

Conference Title: ICED 2018: International Conference on Education and Development

Conference Location: Lisbon, Portugal

Conference Dates: April 16-17, 2018