

## Reading for pleasure in *Leggere: Forte!*

### Towards a framework for practice

### La lettura per piacere in *Leggere: Forte!*

### Verso un modello per la pratica

**Loredana Camizzi**

Ricercatrice | INDIRE | l.camizzi@indire.it

**Rachele Borgi**

Collaboratrice tecnica di Ricerca | INDIRE | r.borgi@indire.it

**Beatrice Marconi**

Assegnista di ricerca | INDIRE | b.marconi@indire.it

**Andrea Nardi**

Ricercatore | INDIRE | a.nardi@indire.it

**Francesco Perrone**

Collaboratore tecnico di Ricerca | INDIRE | f.perrone@indire.it

**Leyla Vahedi**

Assegnista di ricerca | INDIRE | l.vahedi@indire.it

### ABSTRACT

This contribution presents an organizational and educational model for the practice of reading for pleasure in schools, developed within the educational policy *Leggere: Forte!*. The model integrates reading aloud, independent reading, and peer conversations, emphasizing both the central role of the student and the professional expertise of the reading teacher. Structured on multiple levels – from the classroom to the educational community – it promotes inclusive reading environments, sustainable routines, bibliodiversity, and family involvement. The opinions gathered from teachers, educators, and school leaders, along with the analysis of classroom reading documentation, enabled us to convey a complex and systemic vision of the practice of reading for pleasure and to develop it into a proposal for its dissemination and integration within the educational system.

**Keywords:** reading for pleasure, reading aloud, reading pedagogy, school community, teacher professional development

In questo contributo viene presentato un modello organizzativo e didattico per la pratica della lettura per piacere a scuola, sviluppato nell'ambito della politica educativa *Leggere: Forte!*. Il modello si fonda sull'integrazione tra lettura ad alta voce, lettura autonoma e conversazioni tra pari, valorizzando la centralità dello studente e la professionalità del docente lettore. Articolato su più livelli – dalla classe alla comunità educante – promuove ambienti di lettura inclusivi, routine sostenibili, bibliovarietà e coinvolgimento delle famiglie. Le opinioni raccolte da docenti, educatori e dirigenti e l'analisi della documentazione della lettura realizzata nelle classi ha consentito di restituire una visione complessa e sistematica della pratica di lettura per piacere e di farne una proposta per la diffusione e il radicamento nel sistema educativo e di istruzione.

**Parole chiave:** lettura per piacere, lettura ad alta voce, pedagogia della lettura, comunità scolastica, sviluppo professionale dei docenti

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**Corresponding Author:** Loredana Camizzi | l.camizzi@indire.it

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## Introduction

Reading for pleasure, both independent and read aloud, is now widely recognized for its benefits on cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development (Batini, 2023; Cremin & Scholes, 2024; Mascia, 2023) and is increasingly being promoted by policy makers as a practice to foster in educational settings. In Italy, the *Leggere: Forte!* program (hereafter *LF*) represents a unique large-scale educational policy initiative launched by the Tuscany Region in 2019, aimed at embedding reading for pleasure throughout the entire education system.

Within this context, this article presents proposes a framework for reading for pleasure practice in schools. To date, few studies have examined classroom practices and attempted to build a model grounded in experience and research—one that can inform other schools and support educational policies (Cremin & Scholes, 2024).

The *LF Vademeicum*<sup>1</sup> has been developed from systematic observation and analysis of reading practices of educators and teachers, alongside theoretical reflection on the construct of Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy (RfP) (Cremin et al., 2014; Cremin & McGeown, 2025). Our starting point was the original *LF* method for *reading aloud* (Batini, 2021), which we have situated within the broader context of reading for pleasure practices while adapting it to the specific needs of schools and early childhood services in Tuscany.

The result is a manifesto for reading for pleasure in schools, offering a coherent and structured pedagogical vision. The Vademeicum brings together theoretical principles and practical guidelines, serving as a tool for educators who wish to introduce or strengthen this practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the proposal draws on several pedagogical models for reading. First, it is grounded on the Shared Reading Aloud method (Batini, 2023), which emphasizes key features such as voluntary nature, intensity, frequency, progression, transversality and sociability. In terms of classroom practice, we drew on the RfP framework conceptualized by Teresa Cremin's research group, which integrates teacher read-alouds, independent reading, and informal book discussions in a student-centered reading environment, supported by a Reading Teacher (Cremin, 2023; Cremin et al., 2022). Another key reference is Chambers's Reading Circle (Chambers, 2015), which describes the reading process in three interconnected phases guided by the educator/teacher: reading (managing time, space, and modality), book selection (presentation and choice), and reader response (conversations, feedback, desire to continue reading).

As illustrated in the following schema (Fig. 1), the Vademeicum articulates a systemic vision of reading for pleasure at school, structured across multiple levels – from the micro level of the classroom, where students, teachers, and books interact to create shared experiences and build a reading community (Cremin et al., 2014), to the macro level, which involves school organization, educational networks, and the wider community. These levels intersect with other dimensions, including types of practices, reading environments, and defining features of reading engagement.

When reading for pleasure enters the school context, from a private and personal activity it becomes a pedagogical practice rooted in the complexity of teaching (Altet, 2012), where content, methodological choices, organizational structures and relational dynamics are deeply intertwined.

1 The *Vademeicum di Leggere: Forte! Una proposta per sostenere la lettura per piacere nel sistema educativo e di istruzione toscano* was developed with the contribution of all *LF* partners and under the scientific coordination of INDIRE. It is freely accessible at this link ([https://leggereforte.indire.it/pluginfile.php/6894/block\\_lambdacb/content/Vademecum%20LF.pdf?time=1759851261651](https://leggereforte.indire.it/pluginfile.php/6894/block_lambdacb/content/Vademecum%20LF.pdf?time=1759851261651)) and is also being published in the forthcoming monographic volume on *Leggere: Forte!* edited by the Tuscany Region (Regione toscana, in press).

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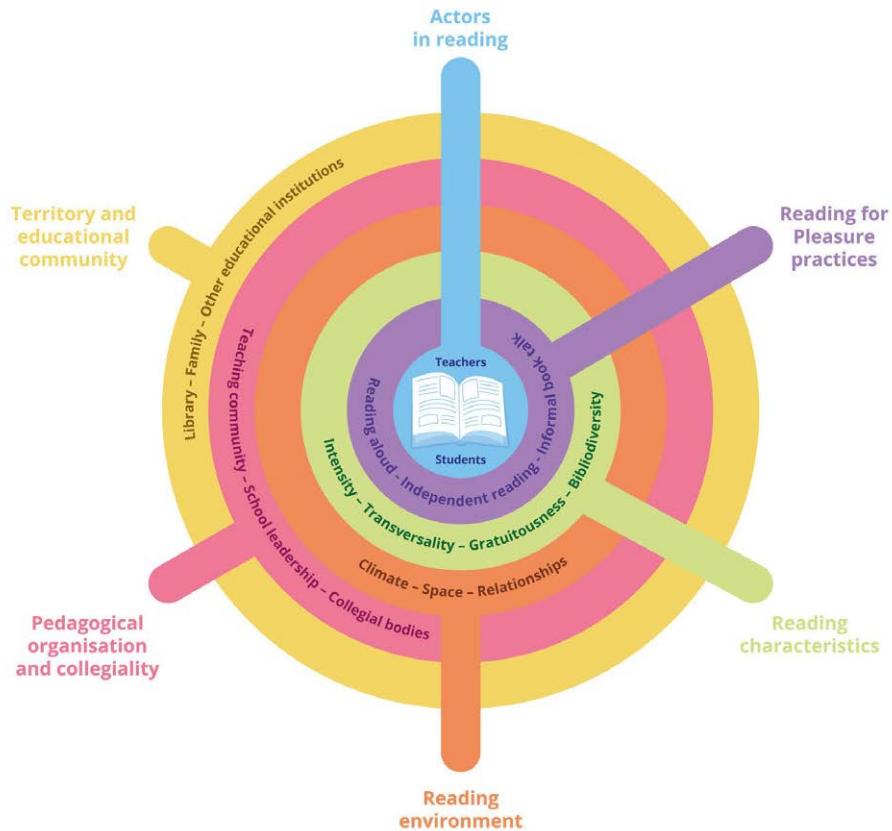


Fig 1. *Organizational and Pedagogical Framework for Reading for Pleasure in Schools*  
(Leggere: Forte! Vademecum, Regione Toscana, in press) – Graphics created by Luca Librandi (INDIRE).

The following sections examine the dimensions of the framework, drawing on relevant literature and data from the research carried out on reading practices within LF. The data come from multiple research tools used over the years to:

- Analyse the impact of *LF* on teaching practices and school organization through the collection of teachers' and school leaders' opinions (semi-structured questionnaires and focus groups). Four questionnaires were administered, with responses from 1,198 teachers and educators and 156 school leaders (Borgi et al., 2023).
- Monitor the teaching training actions during the 2023/24 and 2024/25 school years through two semi-structured questionnaires completed by a total of 604 participants.
- Monitor the coaching activities supporting schools in embedding reading into their educational systems: semi-structured questionnaires for school leaders and teachers (140 respondents) and 44 narrative reports written by the coaches<sup>2</sup> who worked with schools.
- Analyse teachers' and educators' documentation of reading practices through narrative reflection diaries (551 documents for 2023/24 and 300 for 2024/25, still under analysis).

2 Coaches are teachers or other professional figures with expertise in reading and school improvement processes. They are selected and trained by INDIRE to support schools in systematising reading practices.

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Quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed using descriptive statistics (Agresti & Finlay, 2009), while open-ended responses were explored through a grounded thematic approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), identifying recurrent themes and deepening the analysis through respondents' testimonies.

These findings enabled us to progressively refine and adapt our actions to better address teachers' needs and the diversity of educational contexts, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of LF implementation as an educational policy. At the same time, they allowed us to describe and conceptualize reading practice based on schools' lived experiences rather than relying solely on theoretical frameworks.

### 1. Actors in reading

At the heart of the Reading for Pleasure approach lies the figure of the Reading Teacher: a teacher who experiences reading as a personal, emotional, and social practice, moving beyond a purely instructional conception. The Reading Teacher promotes a shared reading culture, supporting especially less motivated students in developing their reader identities (Simpson & Cremin, 2022).

They are passionate, reflective, and aware: passionate because they recognize reading as a fundamental element of their personal and professional identity, embodying and conveying its value to students; reflective because they continually interrogate their own reading practices and preferences, as well as those of their students, in a perspective of continuous improvement; aware because they consider the pedagogical implications of their own reader identity, connecting personal experience and professional practice to develop more meaningful and effective approaches (Cremin, 2020).

The development of teachers' professional identity as Reading Teachers can be understood as a continuum of personal and professional growth (Kucirkova & Cremin, 2020), grounded in intentional practices of observation, documentation, and critical reflection. In the initial stages, the teacher shows a positive attitude toward reading and shares texts or recommendations in a general way, without a real understanding of students' reader identities. Gradually, they reflect on their own reading biography, recognize the diversity of reading practices, and begin to value students' reading preferences and experiences, including those outside the school context.

This growing awareness translates into a more attentive and targeted pedagogical stance, fostering in students a clearer sense of their own reader identity. In the intermediate phase, the teacher observes students' behaviors and attitudes during read-aloud sessions—particularly those of less engaged students—and provides targeted feedback to sustain and guide the reading process. At the most advanced point of the continuum, the Reading Teacher acts as a positive model and critically analyzes the different school-based, sociocultural, and personal factors that shape students' reading experiences. They are open to revising their practices in light of a broader understanding of the formative value of reading, questioning their own repertoire to include less traditional genres—such as children's literature, comics, or manga—in order to connect with students' tastes and interests (Cremin et al., 2014).

In the Anglo-Saxon context, the formalization of this professional figure has led to significant results (Cremin et al., 2022), with positive effects on students' learning, motivation, and well-being, as well as on teachers' personal and professional growth. Within the theoretical framework of Reading for Pleasure Pedagogy, the key actors are the student—considered in their individual, emotional, and imaginative dimensions (Batinini, 2023)—and the teacher, who brings their own reading experience into play and acts as a facilitator, creating the conditions for meaningful reading experiences in the classroom. The book becomes a mediator that, through stories, connects students with each other and with the teacher, forming a community of readers (see Fig. 1).

This article focuses in particular on the impact of the approach on teachers. Data from the impact study on *LF* (Borgi et al., 2023) confirm these trends, highlighting significant professional benefits: teachers

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report feeling more competent in text selection, expanding their knowledge of children's and young adult literature, and improving their read-aloud techniques. Reading aloud emerges as a powerful driver of pedagogical change, encouraging, for example, a return to full texts rather than relying solely on anthologies and textbooks.

Changes also occur in motivation and self-efficacy: teachers begin to perceive reading not only as a tool for developing comprehension but as an aesthetic and affective experience, deeply connected to pleasure. Their awareness of the impact of their practices on developing readers grows, as do opportunities for peer exchange and collaboration. The relational dimension and personal well-being also benefit: reading aloud strengthens bonds with students and contributes to a more positive classroom climate. Many teachers report greater satisfaction, enthusiasm, and motivation in their work.

Although to a lesser extent, personal effects are also evident: several teachers state that they feel more confident reading aloud and speaking in public, and some rediscover the pleasure of reading in their personal lives, opening up to new genres and practicing shared reading within their families.

## 2. Reading for pleasure practices

From a pedagogical perspective, reading for pleasure consists of a set of motivating instructional practices designed to nurture students' passion for reading: listening to read-aloud sessions, engaging in independent reading in dedicated times and spaces, and participating in book conversations (Cremin & McGeown, 2025).

In its first four years, *LF* focused on experimenting with and consolidating the method of teacher and educator *read-aloud*, highlighting its benefits across different dimensions of children's and adolescents' development (Batini, 2023). This practice has strong pedagogical value because it gives all children access to complex and engaging stories even before they are able to read independently, framing reading as meaning-making rather than mere decoding (Teruggi, 2019). Through expressive reading, the teacher or educator supports comprehension processes and also acts as a strong, passionate reading model that students can identify with (Valentino Merletti, 1996).

Read-aloud also emphasizes the relational and emotional dimensions of the reading experience, both with the teacher and among peers, creating a dialogic, inclusive environment in which students feel welcomed and part of the group (Cremin et al., 2022). These features make it a powerful catalyst for well-being and pleasure, as well as an effective gateway to independent reading (Batini & De Carlo, 2025; Marchi, 2020).

For this reason, read-aloud naturally integrates with the other core reading for pleasure practices that make up the RfP framework (Cremin & McGeown, 2025).

*Independent reading* can be encouraged from early childhood as an autonomous exploration of books displayed in accessible spaces appropriate for young children, who sometimes imitate the educator reading aloud (Borgi et al., 2023). Across all educational stages, allocating structured time for independent reading within the school context—coupled with the autonomy to select reading materials—significantly contributes to the development of autonomy and a sense of psychological safety. Students feel valued and unjudged in their choices, which strengthens intrinsic motivation and reading agency (Ivey & Friddle, 2025): a sense of responsibility and awareness through which readers actively ensure that their motivational needs are met, thereby reinforcing both their reading motivation and their developing reader identity.

Both independent reading and teacher read-aloud sessions stimulate opportunities for exchanging opinions and comments about stories (Batini, 2023; Cremin et al., 2014; Detti, 1987; Rodriguez-Leon et al., 2025). It is the teacher who can create the conditions for these exchanges through prompting questions – either woven throughout the text during interactive reading or posed before and after the narrative rea-

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ding (Batini, 2023). The aim is to encourage spontaneous, *informal peer conversations* (Cremin et al., 2014), *book sharing, and book talk* –either structured by the teacher or emerging informally among peers (Rodriguez-Leon et al., 2025). These exchanges also help students develop deeper, more reflective reading (Wolf, 2019; Chambers, 2015), enhancing both comprehension and critical engagement. By voicing their thoughts and opinions, students strengthen their sense of confidence and agency (Ivey & Friddle, 2025).

Alongside these practices, students may be offered the use of *reader's notebooks*, where they can note ideas, record favourite passages or characters, and list books they want to read in the future (Chambers, 2015).

This combination of practices also emerges from the analysis of reading documentation collected from teachers and educators over the past two school years within *LF* (551 reports in 2023/24 and 300 in 2024/25, still under analysis). These data reveal the coexistence of teacher read-aloud and independent reading at all levels of schooling, from early childhood education through upper secondary school.

In the 2023/24 diaries, teacher read-aloud dominates, but 30% of primary and 40% of secondary teachers report integrating it with independent reading (Marconi & Vahedi, in press). Preliminary data from the 2024/25 school year confirm this trend: although reading aloud remains the predominant practice across grade levels (95% of the books reported were read aloud by the teacher), secondary schools account for 23% of independent reading. This indicates that the demand for autonomous reading progressively increases with age. Consequently, each grade level requires flexibility in the range of reading opportunities offered within the *LF* framework.

Teacher testimonies also indicate that reading is frequently accompanied by moments of discussion, book recommendations, and book talk, as well as the occasional use of free-annotation tools such as reading journals. Among younger children, reading often triggers spontaneous creative activities (Borgi et al., 2023).

In recent years, *LF* has evolved into a broader and more diversified methodological framework, in which multiple reading practices interact to promote reading for pleasure and its cognitive, emotional, and relational benefits (Mascia, 2023).

## 3. Characteristics Of Reading

### 3.1 Intensity and Transversality

The *LF* reading promotion initiative introduces reading into classroom practice through a structured, systematic, and recurring approach, with a gradual increase in intensity over time. Reading intensity refers to reading sessions that match students' attention spans while progressively extending them according to the class context and educational level. Intensity is one of the cornerstones of *LF*, supported by national and international research (Batini, 2023; Mol & Bus, 2011), and has remained consistent since the program's inception.

Initially, the method recommended one hour of daily read-aloud (Batini, 2021). In more recent editions, a more flexible approach has been adopted to account for the specific needs of each classroom context. However, gradually increasing the duration of read-aloud sessions remains essential in order to activate cognitive and emotional processes in a sustained way and maximize their benefits. This is made possible by the flexible and trainable nature of children's attention spans (Batini, 2021).

To strengthen reading intensity, it is crucial to practice regularly and consistently, ideally by incorporating it into a weekly schedule. Intensity should be increased gradually, starting with shorter sessions and lengthening them over time in response to students' engagement and attention levels. The key is regularity.

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Introducing reading progressively in the classroom supports the development of students' listening, attention, and comprehension skills – including those who are not regular readers or who have linguistic, cognitive, or learning difficulties. Extending attention spans also allows teachers to propose longer, more complex texts, which can be spread across multiple reading sessions.

Documentation from the *LF* project (Marconi & Vahedi, *in press*) shows that reading times vary by age group. In early childhood education settings, read-aloud typically lasts between 25 and 35 minutes per day on most days. In preschool and primary school, daily read-aloud reaches 35 to 45 minutes. In secondary school, the pattern changes: read-aloud times decrease (15–20 minutes in lower secondary and 5–10 minutes in upper secondary, two to three times per week), while independent silent reading increases compared to the earlier school levels. These data highlight the importance of tailoring the method to the age group and class needs.

To increase reading intensity effectively and establish it as a shared daily routine, transversal planning across the teaching team is essential. Sharing reading sessions among teachers ensures an equitable distribution of responsibilities. Reports from *LF* coaches during the 2023/24<sup>3</sup> school year show that distributing reading time across the teaching team improves organizational sustainability and prevents the workload from falling on a single teacher. In practice, diaries reveal that in many cases, reading aloud is primarily handled by the language teacher, especially in secondary school where subject fragmentation is more pronounced. Documentation also shows that having multiple teachers read aloud enriches the experience by exposing students to a variety of voices and reading styles (Batini, 2021).

### 3.2 Bibliodiversity and gratuitousness

Bibliodiversity is one of the cornerstones of the Reading for Pleasure (RfP) approach and has been widely promoted through teacher education and professional development, especially via age-specific bibliographic orientation sessions. As highlighted in previous surveys (Borgi et al., 2023), teachers involved in RfP initiatives are increasingly aware of the importance of building both a personal and a shared repertoire of high-quality reading materials. This awareness has developed in parallel with a vibrant and ever-evolving children's publishing landscape over the past twenty years.

However, the analysis of reading choices recorded in reading journals tells a more complex story: despite the very large number of titles mentioned (1,434, with more than 60% cited only once), actual reading practices do not fully reflect the principle of bibliodiversity (Marconi & Vahedi, *in press*).

Choosing what to read plays a crucial role in fostering reading enjoyment, student engagement and motivation (Cardarello & Mazza, 2005). The *disinterested reader*—someone who reads for no immediate informational, educational, or instructional purpose—is often a frequent and passionate reader. Approaching this kind of reading in the early years, when children are learning to decode and constructing their identities as readers, can be decisive in consolidating reading for pleasure (Ferrieri & Innocenti, 1995).

Bibliodiversity is, above all, a principle of respect and care for the reader: every student has the right to encounter books that respond to their individual tastes and needs. To make this encounter possible, it is important to offer a rich and varied range of reading opportunities. Many books are better than just one (Gramantieri et al., 2025), and ideally these books should be diverse: in literary form, style, format, publisher, and type of story.

To help each reader find "their" book – and each book find "its" reader – it is useful to offer a wide variety of reading materials, both fiction and non-fiction, across many genres: adventure, humour, mystery,

<sup>3</sup> Coach reports are pre-structured modules that allow to document the support process they carry out in schools.

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horror, and more. Meeting books with different features sharpens the ability to recognize multiple styles and offers opportunities to shape personal reading preferences.

Especially in the early years of reading, it is crucial to expose children to different literary forms: novels, comics, poetry collections, magazines, wordless picturebooks, and *brulicanti* (busy books full of details). From an editorial perspective, bibliodiversity also means including books from small independent publishers offering unconventional images and texts, well-established houses publishing timeless classics, as well as both vintage editions and new releases.

In the early years, when reading is also a highly sensory activity, the material features of books play an important role: large-format books, small boxed sets for handling, narrow and tall formats, top-bound or side-bound bindings, and different materials can all make a difference.

Working on both the quantity and the variety of reading opportunities is also a key inclusive practice, meeting the needs of children with different intelligences and reading modes. In secondary education, variety becomes not only a discovery opportunity but also a guiding principle for dialogue and connection with an age group experiencing rapid transformations and immersed in a multimedia universe that cannot be ignored (Varrà, 2018).

It is therefore urgent to work against homogenization and the flattening of the collective imagination (Zipes, 2002) by offering a wide, rich, and nourishing range of books, drawing also from adult literature (In territorio selvaggio, 2025).

Understood in this way, bibliodiversity becomes a key principle of reading for pleasure, helping readers to discover and define their preferences and refine their reading “palate”.

Another cornerstone of the RfP approach is the idea that reading should be a pleasurable and *free* experience for those who take part. Reading together – thanks to the principle of bibliodiversity – means offering moments of shared, autonomous, or free reading during the school day without asking for anything in return (Ramonda, 2013): no exercises, no written responses, just the gift of reading.

This creates a space free from assessment, a dedicated time for a practice that is already deeply intense, transformative, and enriching for the whole class community. Free reading, without ulterior motives, may initially unsettle those who are concerned with “productive” or explicitly didactic uses of time. But they will soon find traces of shared and autonomous reading emerging across the school experience: the regular encounter with reading for pleasure and shared stories is at the heart of improvements in classroom climate, well-being, relationships, and language development (Borgi et al., 2023), as evidenced for example in children’s free talk and play (Vahedi, 2018).

## 4. Reading Environment

What motivates and engages readers depends on what they read, why, where, with whom, and on the broader reading context (Cremin et al., 2022). The choice of a suitable, calm, and comfortable space (Batini & Giusti, 2021, 2022) is partly determined by the architecture and organization of the school building. Some schools are equipped with “*reading places*” (Chambers, 2015), dedicated spaces designed for reading and discussion, such as a specific room or a corner of the library. Where such spaces are not available or accessible, reading can always take place in the classroom or in the educational space normally used for daily activities. These practices are also reflected in the diary entries of educators and teachers involved in *LF* (Borgi et al., 2023). As one lower secondary teacher wrote in their 2024/25 diary:

I mainly read in the classroom, where we've created a warm and focused atmosphere, but whenever possible we also use other school spaces, such as the library or the multipurpose room, to make reading

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feel special and less tied to routine. Changing the environment stimulates interest and makes listening more active (Lower Secondary School).

Chambers (2015) reflects on the importance of considering how every element of the environment can influence the mood of readers and listeners. Creating a welcoming setting with cushions, rugs, or small sofas, adjusting the lighting to create a more intimate atmosphere, letting children choose their favourite spot, sitting in a circle to facilitate listening and exchange, and establishing small rituals before, during, and after reading are all factors that make the experience more meaningful.

Every time we read, students can leave their usual seats and move closer to one another. We also turn off the neon lights and draw the curtains (Upper Secondary School).

Changing the space or some of its features from time to time prevents the reading moment from becoming overly routine (Cremin et al., 2022). Reading outdoors, in the school garden or in a nearby park, allows readers and listeners to engage their senses in new ways smelling unfamiliar scents, feeling different textures and to anchor their memory of the story to a specific place, time, and emotional experience (Cremin et al., 2022; Cremin & McGeown, 2025).

However, it seems that *the set* that is, the attitude of both teacher and students has a stronger influence on the reading experience than the physical *setting* itself (Chambers, 2015).

Each reading moment is a different kind of adventure: sometimes the children's attention and participation are intense; it's fascinating to see some of them listening with their mouths open, and the room goes completely silent. Other times I have to give up: children moving around, someone rolling on the floor, someone else switching chairs; in those moments I close the book and say, 'This isn't the right time to read, let's choose something else' (Preschool).

A positive, non-judgmental reading environment enables students to express opinions and emotions, enhancing their reading experience (Batini & Giusti, 2022). In turn, the regular practice of reading fosters a calmer classroom climate that supports interaction and strengthens relationships among students and between students and teachers (Borgi et al., 2023).

Well-being is visible in the classroom (Primary School).

This impact is also reflected in the 2023/24 diaries (517 diaries from 169 respondents): about half of educators and teachers (87) reported a calmer, quieter, and more relaxed classroom atmosphere, while 88% (148/169) observed greater attention, listening, interest, active participation, interaction, and more frequent requests to continue reading.

## 5. Pedagogical organization and collegiality

The introduction and system-wide implementation of Reading for Pleasure (RfP) in schools, because of its intrinsic characteristics, requires a profound organisational and institutional transformation.

RfP is a cross-curricular practice that involves all teachers and educators, not just those in the humanities. The literature shows that its cognitive, relational, and personal benefits, as well as its impact on transversal skills, extend across all subject areas (Batini, 2023; Borgi et al., 2023; Cremin & Scholes, 2024). Implementing RfP in schools therefore means redesigning school organisation itself: redefining timetables,

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providing dedicated spaces and time for collaborative planning within collegial bodies, jointly selecting books, sharing strategies to engage pupils and students, and exchanging effective practices and outcomes. For this reason, implementation requires strong teacher collaboration and the support of school leadership and governance bodies.

Since the 2022-23 school year, the *LF* programme has introduced a coaching-based support action (D'Addario, 2017). This involves external experts trained by INDIRE, who guide schools in embedding RfP through a structured process of contextual analysis and diagnosis, practice redesign, implementation, and final reflection (Borgi et al., 2023). Between 2022 and 2025, approximately 85 schools and educational services at all levels have participated in this process<sup>4</sup>. The activity was monitored through process observation, documentation by coaches (44 reports in total), and questionnaires addressed to school leaders and teachers (140 respondents)<sup>5</sup>. Significant experiences were also identified and presented during the *LF* 2024–25 training programme, as part of the webinar series *Le voci della scuola* (The Voices of the School)<sup>6</sup>.

From these case studies, a structured bottom-up process for introducing and systematising RfP emerged, an adaptation of the coaching cycle articulated in several phases (Fig. 2):



Fig. 2 - Process of introducing and systematising the *LF* proposal

Motivation is the fundamental prerequisite for the success of the entire process. It is essential that both school leaders and teachers are genuinely motivated to adopt the *LF* proposal. Believing that reading aloud is “a gentle yet powerful and effective tool that benefits not only pupils and students but the entire school community”<sup>7</sup> is the indispensable starting point for engaging educators and effectively triggering the adoption process. Effective strategies include disseminating evidence on the benefits of RfP and promoting ongoing professional learning.

Another key step is context analysis and needs assessment, which involves sharing expectations and

4 Schools and educational services involved in the coaching action: 5 early childhood education services, 3 combined early childhood and preschool services, 1 preschool and primary school, 53 comprehensive schools (preschool, primary, and lower secondary), 1 lower secondary school, and 22 upper secondary schools.

5 The third edition of the coaching programme, referring to the 2024–25 school year, is still ongoing, and monitoring data is not yet available. For further information on the coaching action, see the contribution by Borgi R. in the forthcoming volume *Leggere: Forte! La Toscana che legge dal nido alla scuola superiore*, edited by the Tuscany Region (Borgi, in press).

6 This article refers to the experiences of IC3 in Sesto Fiorentino (Florence) and, in particular, IC Pietro Aldi in Manciano-Capalbio (Grosseto).

7 Quotation from the speech by the school leader of IC “Pietro Aldi” in Manciano-Capalbio during the webinar *Le voci della scuola: the case of IC Aldi*, 12 November 2024.

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concerns, listening to teachers' experiences, and discussing strengths and weaknesses. This phase is crucial to adapt the practice to the school's specific characteristics and to the needs of teachers and students. In some cases, to overcome barriers, the *LF* proposal was integrated into cross-disciplinary activities such as civic education and guidance programmes (Batini & Giusti, 2008).

Sharing effective practices plays a central role. Data collected by INDIRE shows that this aspect is perceived as the most relevant for embedding the practice in schools. Sharing can take place during collegial meetings, subject department sessions in secondary schools, or in dedicated planning groups. This collaborative dimension fosters the development of a reading culture and, by involving families as well, the creation of a genuine community of readers.

To move from an episodic activity to a systemic practice, reading must be embedded in the school's cross-curricular framework and formalised in strategic documents such as the PTOF (Three-Year Educational Offer Plan) and other institutional plans, particularly those concerning engagement with the wider educational community and social accountability. Monitoring outcomes, also through INVALSI test data analysis, helps verify the effects on learning, informs potential adjustments to teaching practices, and further stimulates teacher motivation (Cremin, 2023).

This process represents a virtuous cycle which, once initiated and consolidated, becomes self-sustaining. It contributes to establishing a lasting culture of Reading for Pleasure within schools and ensures its systematic and meaningful implementation.

## 6. Territory and educational community

An active, welcoming, and well-stocked school library is a crucial element for introducing, supporting, and sustaining Reading for Pleasure (RfP) in schools (Cremin et al., 2022; Cremin & McGeown, 2025; Mills et al., 2022). The library also serves as a bridge between school and territory, promoting and spreading a culture of reading throughout the community (Merga & Mason, 2019). As early as 2001, the OECD invited policymakers to move beyond the idea of the library as an isolated structure, promoting its role as a network hub open to the community, a vision reaffirmed by the recent IFLA-UNESCO Manifesto (2025). Within this framework, the model of dual-use libraries (Lee, 2024) has emerged: joint-use school-community libraries that act as genuine community hubs, offering integrated services and promoting democracy, inclusion, and active citizenship (Kranich, 2006).

Educational agencies, both inside and outside the school, work together to foster reading for pleasure, also involving families, who play a decisive role in this process (Payne et al., 1994). Their contribution operates on several levels, from fostering children's motivation to read to impacting learning and academic achievement (de Jong & Leseman, 2001a, 2001b). Promoting reading in the family is crucial to addressing educational inequalities from early childhood onwards (UNESCO, 2004). This highlights the need for school projects to build educational alliances with families (Silva & Lencioni, 2023; Silva & Prisco, 2025), involving the entire network that supports the educational experience.

In this perspective, the school library plays a central role in the local Reading Pacts promoted by the National Plan for the Promotion of Reading (MIBACT/MEF, 2020). Through partnerships with bookshops, newsstands, civic or commercial centres, it can become an active node in local networks dedicated to spreading reading practices. Its role is particularly relevant in disadvantaged areas (Errazuriz & Davison, 2023), urban outskirts (Pribesh et al., 2011), and small communities without a public library (Mangione & Pieri, 2021). In these contexts, its openness to the local area, following the extended school model, has inclusive and democratic value, helping to reduce educational inequalities and promote equal opportunities for all students (Band, 2022).

Since 2023, the INDIRE research group of the *LF* project has collaborated with Avanguardie Biblioe-

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ducative<sup>8</sup> to map school libraries and reading practices in Italian schools. The survey, addressed to school leaders and teachers, aimed to identify good practices for educational use of the school library. The questionnaires included sections specifically dedicated to reading for pleasure, with items designed to detect the activities carried out by *LF* schools, organisational modalities, reading times and spaces, perceived educational, cultural and relational value, and the relationship between library and territory.

A total of 1,396 questionnaires were collected from school leaders and 5,422 from teachers. The joint analysis of responses shows a significant correlation between the presence of an active school library and the vitality of reading-related educational practices. Schools with functioning libraries are more likely to participate in reading promotion projects and to regularly integrate read-aloud and silent reading activities into the curriculum. As for relations with the territory, most collaborations with educational and cultural institutions concern shared reading promotion initiatives. Participation in curricular, laboratory, or research projects remains more limited. The school library thus emerges as a key factor for the success of reading-related initiatives.

These findings confirm what has already emerged from the *LF* project (Borgi et al., 2023): there is a bidirectional relationship between reading practices – both aloud and silent – and the presence of an active, functioning school library. Each reinforces and sustains the other. Data from teacher questionnaires collected in different project phases clearly show that participation in *LF* has fostered the rediscovery of school, neighbourhood, and municipal libraries, valued not only as spaces dedicated to reading but also as environments for learning, connection, and growth. *LF* has also supported the revitalisation of school libraries, the enrichment of book collections, and the strengthening of ties with local libraries.

Data from the third cycle of the coaching programme clearly show that schools capable of collaborating with local agencies and leveraging coach support have activated structured and sustainable pathways for promoting reading for pleasure. These schools have organised both curricular and extracurricular activities, actively involving families. The family dimension is perceived as particularly crucial in the 0–6 age group, where early parental involvement receives special attention. It is no coincidence that in Italy the main programme for promoting early childhood reading, *Nati per Leggere*, identifies family reading as its primary objective.

Overall, the data confirm the strategic role of schools and school libraries as cultural anchors of the educational community, and that of families as essential allies in building a culture of reading for pleasure (Cremin et al., 2022).

## Conclusions

This study has presented an organizational and pedagogical model for promoting Reading for Pleasure (RfP) in schools, formally outlined in the *Vademecum di Leggere: Forte!*. This resource serves both as a conceptual framework and as a practical, flexible, and adaptable tool to support the implementation of RfP across diverse educational contexts.

Through the monitoring questionnaire, we gathered feedback from teachers and educators on the *Vademecum*, published on the training platform in spring 2025. The vast majority of respondents who consulted it (approximately 97%) regarded it as useful from both practical and theoretical perspectives, particularly emphasizing its value in supporting reading practices for both experienced practitioners and beginners, as well as its potential for dissemination among colleagues and within schools.

8 The project is part of the scientific collaboration between INDIRE and the National Network of Innovative School Libraries “Biblio”. Website: <https://www.indire.it/progetto/avanguardie-biblioedutative>

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Among the few suggestions for further development, teachers and educators highlighted the need for greater attention to inclusion, especially regarding the presence of children with special educational needs in the classroom. This and other insights emerging from practice will inform future reflection and analysis, with the aim of integrating and enriching the document in collaboration with LF partners, while keeping it open and continuously updated.

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