

A Qualitative Study on Book Clubs and Dialogic Literary Gatherings in Spain and Brazil

Carmen Álvarez Álvarez

Universidad de Cantabria

Abstract

Some organisations in Spain that seek to foster innovation in reading are keen to establish book clubs or dialogical literary gatherings. However, there are notable differences between these two practices that are not always clear. This paper presents the results of an observational study based on participant observation and interviews with key informants that tackles their similarities and differences in school and social settings. The results show that their differences lie in origin, purpose, methodology, and coordination, among others. The conclusions show different paradigms behind these practices, and organisations should opt for one or the other.

Keywords: Book club, dialogic literary gathering, reading communities, schools improvement, library

Innovation is understood as a process of planned change that occurs within an institution to pursue improvement, regardless of the novelty of the proposal or the creativity involved. From this perspective, innovating in terms of encouraging reading in both childhood and in adulthood implies that institutions implement processes of planned change to face a threefold challenge: fostering reading comprehension, promoting a taste for reading, and developing the habit of reading (Avci & Yuksel, 2011; Gritter, 2011; Reed & Vaughn, 2012). This threefold challenge is not an easy one to achieve, but some reading strategies have been shown to be effective in those social organisations with a greater predisposition to innovate (Aranda & Galindo, 2009; Beach & Yussen, 2011; Duncan, 2012; Lyons & Ray, 2014; Valls, Soler, & Flecha, 2008). This paper will focus on two of them: book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings, which have seen an extraordinary growth since they first emerged (Aranda & Galindo, 2009; Girotto, 2011; Valls et al., 2008). Although these practices are used in some organisations, there are still many more that could further innovation in reading and benefit from its advantages (Lyons & Ray, 2014; Nelson & Guerra, 2013), which could be promoted and expanded in the future.

As will be seen in the theoretical framework section, both practices yield remarkable results in the cultivation of reading. The object of this study is to identify the similarities and differences between book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings, from a theoretical (next section) and a practical point of view (results section). This will help clarify the opportunities that each of them provide to the institutions that plan to use them to innovate their approaches to reading.

Literature Review

These two strategies have been extensively researched internationally, as has a third strategy that is very similar but has not yet been used in Spain and Brazil, namely study circles (Certo, Moxley, Reffitt, & Miller, 2010; Duncan, 2012). However, scientific research on this field in Spain differs from the status of international studies, as publications on book clubs, which

began in the 1990s, are scarce and focus mainly on how they have been promoted (Álvarez, 2015; Aranda & Galindo, 2009; Calvo, 2007; Domingo & Sola, 2005).

In contrast, some studies have been published in Spain and Brazil on dialogic literary gatherings (Giroto, 2011; Pulido & Zepa, 2010; Serrano, Mirceva, & Larena, 2010; Valls et al., 2008,). In any event, to date there has been no research that has focused on the similarities and differences between book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings, both in terms of their theoretical foundations and their practices. Therefore, this bears further investigation in order to clarify how these two innovative strategies operate.

Book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings have at least six similarities that are key to the international recognition of their success (Aranda & Galindo, 2009; Duncan, 2012; Lyons & Ray, 2014; Reed & Vaughn, 2012; Valls et al., 2008):

1. People join a book club or a literary gathering freely, and they may register or deregister as they wish.
2. No participants are rejected or discriminated against because of sex, age, culture, or academic background.
3. Whether or not reading is a habit previously acquired by participants, it is central and takes place on an individual basis.
4. After the individual reading, a group discussion is held that seeks to involve participants in an egalitarian and democratic way. To facilitate this, group members usually sit in a circle where they can see each other's faces.
5. They can take place in all kinds of contexts: cultural associations, libraries, schools, prisons, nursing homes, community centres, women's groups, private homes or companies.
6. They can be carried out with children, young people, and adults with slight variations, which depending on the cases, can cause problems regarding point

1. For example, in schools the dialogical literary gathering usually takes place during the Spanish Language and Literature class, which means that those taking part cannot opt out.

However, it is also possible to identify differences between both practices, mainly due to their origins. The first book clubs began in English-speaking countries during the Victorian period, and due to their success, the practice spread to other countries, but it did not reach Spain until the mid-1980s, first in public libraries and years later in social, educational, and cultural centres of all kinds which imitated this model. At first, they were only addressed to an adult audience and narrative reading predominated, but gradually they started to involve children and young people in libraries and schools that were innovative in terms of reading (Álvarez, & Pascual, 2014). They have now become diversified, and in some cases book clubs are organised by specific literary genres (comics, black novels, poetry), or to work on specific themes, both in face-to-face and virtual formats (Domingo & Sola, 2005; Vlieghe, Mulb & Ruttena, 2016). Book clubs are networks that are usually, but not always, comprised of consumers of literature who meet periodically to discuss all kinds of literary works proposed either by the participants or by the coordinator.

This practice has seen an extraordinary development in the United States, the United Kingdom, Latin America, and Spain, especially in public libraries and bookshops (Aranda & Galindo, 2009). They have promoted the taste for reading among people who have taken different paths to reading, ranging from non-readers to those who were regular readers who sought to improve their literary and linguistic skills (Hall, 2009); helped to increase participants' enjoyment of literature in their leisure time and deepen their understanding (Gritter, 2011; Reed & Vaughn, 2012); while also stimulating learning and critical reading skills and contributing to develop their taste of reading and book discussion (Álvarez & Pascual, 2014). In the educational setting, it has been shown that a book club can be a very

effective strategy to boost innovation and improvement in reading. On the one hand, it can enhance the professional development of teaching practitioners at all levels, both at university and in schools by promoting a more democratic and deliberative teaching. On the other hand, it also fosters greater engagement by students, generates better reading comprehension skills, and focuses on in-depth value-laden reading (Alvarez & Gutiérrez, 2012; Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010; Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin & Hesterman, 2013; Polleck, 2010). Some studies even suggest that individual changes (e.g., social skills improvement, confidence) and social transformations can be promoted by a book club, as participants become more actively involved in other activities related to citizen mobilisation for social improvements (Lyons & Ray, 2014).

Dialogic literary gatherings began in the early 1980s in Spain at an adult education centre, as part of a process of egalitarian and democratic change implemented by the centre and its community. It stemmed from the efforts of community organisations, associations and groups, teaching practitioners and students, and experimented with practices that would foment learning, participation, motivation, and a positive coexistence. Dialogic literary gatherings are based on Freire's concept of dialogicity (Freire, 1975) and have given rise to another concept, that of “dialogic reading” (Serrano et al., 2010, p. 192), which relies on the seven principles of dialogic learning: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, creation of meaning, solidarity, and the equality of differences. From this approach, reading is the intersubjective process of appropriating a text by moving to more profound interpretations, critically reflecting on the text and its context, and intensifying reading comprehension through interaction with others, thus opening up possibilities for the transformation of the individual as a reader and as an individual in the world (Valls et al., 2008). Literary gathering members read classic works of universal literature, divided into chapters and hold a (usually weekly) meeting aimed at their discussion. Participants usually

decide which works they would like to read, whether based on online lists or by contacting people who take part in other literary gatherings.

In Spain, this practice is very successful and is having a positive impact. It is also expanding in Brazil, Chile, and Australia, where highly diverse groups of people are reading, sharing, and enjoying the reading of the universal classics. In this way, they appropriate works considered “difficult,” and improve their self-esteem and confidence (Serrano et al., 2010; Valls et al., 2008). People gradually consolidate their reading level by acquiring a greater vocabulary and increasing their basic skills, as personal challenges can be overcome through public speaking. As their participants are very often adults or children of low social status, they manage to improve their poverty status through the interaction of communicative dialogical acts. Through such interaction, it becomes clear that there is no single correct interpretation but many, surpassing typically authoritarian conceptions in academic environments where the expert’s interpretation is rewarded (Pulido & Zepa, 2010). By participating in these activities, people transform their own vision of reality, broadening their points of view through contributions that they themselves formulate and hear from others, reflecting and developing a linguistic and critical reflexive ability that they can later transfer to other day-to-day situations that they face (Serrano et al., 2010; Pulido & Zepa, 2010). In the educational setting, dialogic literary gatherings have also been found to improve and accelerate literacy learning for children and families who are also involved in this practice (Valls et al., 2008).

Despite the fact that the two strategies described may lead to important results in improving reading comprehension and fostering a taste for reading and reading habit in childhood/adulthood, they have not yet become widespread in all educational and social organisations, where many gaps exist in their common and differentiating features.

Researcher Context

I have participated in various reading clubs and literary gatherings as a researcher in order to gain a better understanding of the potential of these two practices of dialogic reading and conducted several studies on them. I believe it was necessary to carry out a study that reconciled both practices and compared and contrasted the similarities and differences between them. This was intended to show the potential of these practices to those who engage in or theorise about them, since in general, they are worlds apart.

This paper presents the results of an ethnographic study in which I compare how different book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings operate in Spain and Brazil, with children and adults, respectively, from the perspective of reading innovation in social and educational organisations.

Methodological Framework

In this methodological framework I will address the aim of the study, the method and model used, the research procedure, the participants, and the data analysis.

Aim

The aim of the study is to identify the similarities and differences between a book club and a dialogic literary gathering within an organisation (e.g., school, community centre, library, prison, women's association). Based on this general aim, I hold the following specific objectives:

1. To become involved in the discussions in different book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings in order to observe them from an observational perspective, audio-record them (if possible), and note the most prominent interactions and the moderation carried out.
2. To discover the opinions of key informants (participants and coordinators) in book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings (organisation of the activity, moderation, and literary works) and to investigate further their similarities and differences.

3. To develop a system to categorise the similarities and discrepancies between book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings.

Method and Model

The research method employed was the case study (Stake, 2005), with the use of an observational model to collect and interpret the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). The ultimate objective of the case studies was to discover relevant units of analysis in order to investigate in depth at the “micro” level and thus provide ideas to help to understand and enhance specific realities. In observational models, it is considered that in order to have a good knowledge of a given reality, it is necessary to experience it as an actual member of the community. To this end, I participated in different dialogic literary gatherings and book club meetings in different settings as a participant, with a view to becoming closer to the coordinators and participants and investigating these reading practices further.

The case study is the research approach typically used to study specific relevant contexts are selected to explore phenomena from within, mainly in those situations where it would seem that a certain phenomenon is generating a important change. In fact, the ultimate goal of a case study is to gain in-depth knowledge of a unit of interest in order to provide ideas that contribute to improve the phenomenon under study (Grandon, 2011; Stake, 2005). Since each reading club and literary gathering is a unit of meaning in itself, the case study is the most appropriate method to understand each literary debate in its specific context. In each case, differences and similarities between the various groups can be compared, but in this study the information collected was used to compare differences and similarities between these two reading practices. This is why it was important for me to access various meetings of groups in different contexts, to be able to triangulate space, time, persons, and settings. By the use of case studies, unique experiences can be accessed to observe regularities, make contrasts and draw first-person conclusions, hence their potential as a method in this paper.

Procedure

The methodology included participant observation of various meetings of book clubs and dialogic literary gatherings in Spain and Brazil, both in schools and other social organisations, as well as interviews with key informants (coordinators and participants), and the circumstances described below were observed.

Initially the study was only to be conducted in Spain, but on the occasion of a research stay in Brazil, I took the opportunity to visit literary gatherings with children and adults and I thought that this could be an enriching contribution to my research and would be helpful with data triangulation.

During the observation I was able to be part of the groups as their members were. This included being aware of the mechanisms to take part and discovering the idiosyncrasies of each coordinator, each group and each meeting, among other aspects. This provided a very rich, first-person view of the object of study, both in children and adult groups (Højholt & Kousholt, 2014). In order to become integrated in each meeting, I read the book selected and took notes about the debates, acting similarly to the members of the various groups. I then used these notes as a basis to ask coordinators and participants some questions about important or particular aspects of their dynamics, in order to gain a better understanding of them and be able to compare them better, as suggested by Velasco and Díaz (2006).

From the interviews I became aware of the testimonies related to the reading experiences of the participants, gathered a more in-depth knowledge of dialogic reading groups and, ultimately, gained a better understanding of how the groups operated and what the interests of their members were. I did so in compliance with the ethical guidelines used in qualitative research applicable to the conduct of interviews (Hammersley, 2014; Matteson & Lincoln, 2009). The interviews were intended to further explore the differences between the various

groups visited, considered in light of the main features of interviews, according to Woods (1987:77) “trust, curiosity and naturalness” (p. 77).

Participants

When choosing the meetings to be visited and the informants to be interviewed, I took into account the advice received from the different experts in the management of these practices with whom I became acquainted and consulted over time. They made suggestions to facilitate my participation in as many meetings as possible and my interaction with as many people as possible. The research process was verbally negotiated with the subjects and groups involved. In order to comply with ethical research practices, I ensured the confidentiality of participants’ data.

A total of 82 meetings were attended (48 in book clubs and 34 in dialogic literary gatherings over 3 years). Wherever possible, the interactions of the members were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Where this was not possible, field notes were taken on the discussions.

In addition, a total of 30 interviews were conducted (with 7 coordinators of book clubs and 12 participants in book clubs, and 4 coordinators of and 7 participants in dialogical literary gatherings). The style of the interviews varied; some were more in depth, to achieve triangulation and saturation of data that had been recorded and/or transcribed, and others were more informal, depending on the situation. The questions in the interviews dealt with their reading experience and the literary meetings in which they participated. I sought to conduct the interviews after visiting a meeting, in order to ask specific questions about the object of my observation. The basic questions for discussions were the following: Why do you coordinate/participate in a reading group? What are the advantages and disadvantages of coordinating/participating in a reading group? How is your reading group organised? In your view, what are the differences between your group and other reading groups you know? What

is your role in the meetings, and why? What is your opinion about the books read to date, and about the process of choosing the books? If you know any dialogic reading clubs/literary gatherings, what would you say are the differences between these two types of groups? The participants very kindly collaborated in the study, were glad to be asked about their reading experience in the group and showed a high degree of satisfaction.

Data Analysis

Once the information had been collected, the qualitative data was organised and analysed following content analysis guidelines, given the need to ascertain—through data analysis—how these two innovative practices operated, and the participants' points of view as key players in their development.

A large volume of data was collected, since a large part of the content of these meetings and the interviews conducted were transcribed. Therefore categorising the information was a slow process that required careful consideration and took two months to be completed. The steps mentioned by Stake (2005) were taken in this process, namely selection, reduction, new selection and new reduction. The analytical categories that emerged from the data analysis are those contained in the results section below. The main similarities and differences between reading clubs and literary gatherings have been identified, across a number of areas.

I have sought to ensure rigour by using a number of strategies, namely triangulation, saturation, negotiation of partial reports with those involved, and contextualisation.

Results

The results show that book clubs and dialogic literary gatherings differ in eight aspects, in addition to their origin, as described in the theoretical framework.

TABLE 1. Differences between these two practices

Aspects	Book clubs	Dialogic literary gatherings
Participants	High reading level	Very different reading levels

Timelines	Usually monthly meetings	Usually weekly meetings
Purpose	Critically analyse	Improve self-esteem
Variants	Specific literary genres or particular authors, periods or topics	dialogical pedagogical gatherings, dialogical musical gatherings, dialogic curricular gatherings, and dialogical gatherings on the arts
Coordinator(s)	Expert in literature	Rotate among participants
Moderation	It depends on the style of the coordinator	Based on basic rules
Literary works	All kind of books	Universal classics
Selection	By the coordinator	By the participants

They have been grouped in pairs in order to better account for them. To help illustrate and understand the results, brief transcripts of interviews or interactions from the meetings have been incorporated into the text.

Participants and timelines

The participants in the literary gatherings had very different reading levels, who predominantly belonged to excluded social groups without a consistent reading habit. However, book clubs usually involved adults with a university degree and a high reading level, who had developed the habit of reading to a certain extent. In the case of children's clubs, those who had a better predisposition towards reading tended to join, as can be seen in the next extract, where a girl surprisingly stated that she had joined the book club to learn to enjoy reading.

Book club (extra-curricular activity) for year 5 and year 6 students of Primary Education. State school. Asturias, Spain.

Coordinator. Last year a student came to the book club who did not like reading, and our jaw dropped. Why did you come to the book club if you do not like to read? And she said:

'I have come precisely to learn to enjoy reading, to see if I can start to like reading.' We were all amazed. And the best thing is that she succeeded.

These instances show how important these practices are for some participants.

This difference in the profile of users is related to the fact that book clubs have grown mostly under the auspices of libraries, whereas literary gatherings started in adult education centres. In both groups, heterogeneity among the participants was seen in a good light.

In the clubs, there are usually monthly meetings where the whole book is discussed (or half of it if it is very long, such as *The Cavern* by Saramago), while in dialogic literary gatherings a meeting is held—usually weekly—with the aim of discussing a specific number of pages previously decided by the group (one chapter, twenty pages, etc.). In a dialogic literary gathering, according to the principles of solidarity and egalitarian dialogue, the work is fragmented into as many parts as the group feel is needed to make it accessible to all participants (based on reasoned arguments), as can be seen in the extract below, in which a group decided how much reading they would assign for the next meeting.

Dialogic literary gathering. Year 6 Primary Education classroom. State School. Cantabria

Coordinator: Well, how much shall we read for the next session, which is in a fortnight?

Male Student: One chapter.

Female Student: No, no, no, two. Let's vote.

Coordinator: We don't vote, but we choose based on arguments. Arguments for reading one?

Female Student: We remember more things.

Coordinator: Arguments for reading two chapters?

Male Student: In the past, we have hardly had anything to discuss when reading two.

Female Student: Because it takes less time to read the whole book.

Coordinator: So, we will read two chapters, shall we?

Different ideas were heard in this discussion process and, after reaching a shared understanding, a specific number of reading pages was established. This generated argument-based interactions between participants, who made decisions accordingly. In fact, the content learnt by students in their general schooling led them to seek to take a vote on the number of pages to be read in the first stage of the interaction.

The meetings of the members of a club and a gathering usually last between one and two hours, as decided by the groups. Meetings are aimed at the discussion and in-depth understanding of the book being read. Each person's interpretation based on their experience is of interest. Usually the duration of the club or meeting is agreed beforehand, and if it is not, it is negotiated during the meeting.

School book clubs tend to be held after school hours, as an additional activity offered by the school for those who want to attend. Conversely, dialogic literary gatherings usually take place during school hours, normally in the Spanish Language and Literature class, and therefore they are mandatory.

Purpose and variants

The purpose of both clubs and gatherings is similar: to enjoy reading in one's leisure time and to take part in literary debates, sharing interpretations about reading, learning, improving language skills, and so on. In short, they are intended to construct knowledge collectively. In both literary gatherings and book club meetings participants discuss personal experiences related to literary ones, question the behaviour of the protagonists, review the most important passages in the eyes of readers, analyse the language and the literary strategies used by the

author, and provide thoughts and reflections, thus generating a rich and profound exchange between the participants.

As shown by a coordinator in the extract below, the purposes of reading clubs are very varied.

Interview with a book club coordinator (municipal library). Cantabria, Spain

Interviewer: What do book clubs do for adults?

Coordinator: I think they work as hobbies and provide entertainment. Also, they allow them to relate to other people with common interests and to learn, by sharing discussions in the meetings.

Interviewer: What is the most important aspect in the meetings?

Coordinator: Listening to the comments of the other participants. There is always someone who has identified an idea or nuance that you had missed. Also, the exchange of information on other books or other issues that come up is very important.

A reading club provides enjoyment, entertainment, and the possibility to interact with other people, exchange views and engage in learning.

Due to the different profiles of the participants and the different formats that book clubs and literary gatherings often adopt, book clubs assign a greater role to literature and critically analyse the work from an expert point of view, thus generating unequal interventions (in relation to academic intelligence). On the contrary, the aim of the gatherings is to improve self-esteem and to learn from others, and all interventions are considered equally valuable due to the principle of cultural intelligence.

The following example shows how some children helped each other understand words they did not previously know.

Interaction in a dialogic literary gathering of Year 5 of Primary Education. State School. São Carlos, Brazil. Translated from Portuguese.

Female Student: I found several unknown words and I want to know the meaning. One of them is 'tamargueira'.

Male Student: I know what it is. Can I tell her?

Coordinator: Yes, go ahead.

Male Student: It is a fruit tree.

Female Student: Thank you. Another word is laryngitis.

Female Student: I think I know what it is.

Coordinator: Okay, try it.

Female Student: I think it's an allergy.

Coordinator: Can you improve on that?

Male Student: It is more an illness.

Coordinator: Yes, it is an illness of the larynx, of the respiratory system.

This exchange facilitated growth and learning, and enhanced the participants' self-esteem and the communication between them.

Different variants book club have emerged in book clubs in line to their different purposes, organised by specific literary genres (comics, black novels, poetry) or intended to discuss the work of particular authors, periods or topics (Shakespeare, the Civil War, etc.), both in face-to-face and in virtual formats.

There have been no variants in literary gatherings, but their method of operation has been transferred to other fields. There are now dialogical pedagogical gatherings (where a classic educational book is read), dialogical musical gatherings (where a classical composition

is heard), dialogic curricular gatherings (students read the various topics in the classroom and discuss what they have and have not understood, and share their views on the subject), and dialogical gatherings on the arts (where a classic work of art is examined). Sometimes students in classrooms from different schools have held dialogic gatherings by the use of video conferencing.

Coordinator(s) and moderation

In book clubs, there must be at least one coordinator who is responsible for the management of the group, including booking the meeting place, selecting the works to be discussed (although there are cases in which the books are chosen by the participants), keeping the agenda of meetings, allocating turns to speak on the day of the meeting, updating the club's website if there is one, etc. The coordinator is usually an expert in literature and / or working with groups of people, and book club members often give authority to the coordinator within the group. This is sometimes used by the coordinator to introduce the author or the work to be studied to the group at the beginning of the session.

Interview with the coordinator of a book club in a municipal library. Cantabria, Spain.

Coordinator: The coordinator is a key player in book clubs. This is a city with a demographic of an aging population, where many people have a university degree. This gives the debates perhaps a slightly higher intellectual tone than average in other book clubs, which means that people who do not have that kind of knowledge don't join or leave. And instead it attracts other people. The level of the debates is set by the coordinator, and this may be off-putting for certain people and attractive for others.

The role of the coordinator is crucial to establish discussion rules, enable participants to express their views, create or preclude a serene atmosphere, generate or hinder an elitist conversation, etc.

In dialogic literary gatherings, there is also a person who is in charge of moderating the group, but this task may rotate among the different participants, so it does not need to be the same person in every meeting. When it comes to discussing the books, the moderator is just another member and abides by the same rules as the rest of the group. The way to approach a particular reading in a gathering and the task of the moderator are clear: people ask to speak in turns and highlight a paragraph, and the moderator notes who they are. The first person is allowed to speak, highlights an idea that is read with the book in hand, indicating the page and paragraph, and discusses it. After this, the coordinator asks if anyone wants to comment on what the first speaker said, generating a new exchange of views. The coordinator allows the next person to speak and the process is repeated. The person who moderates turn-taking makes a note as participants state they wish to speak. This is a transparent process whereby respect pervades the meetings, allowing those who wish to speak to do so in order, thus avoiding interventions overlapping between the various participants. Good communication is achieved, which promotes learning and discussion based on arguments. This is something that can be missing from some book club meetings, because at times two people speak at a time, or turn the debate into a personal argument, making moderation difficult. In addition, a principle of egalitarian dialogue holds sway in literary gatherings, which means that preference will be given to the people who wish to speak but have intervened less. However, when there are literary gatherings in younger students' classrooms, the coordinator of the literary gathering is logically the teacher, although it could be a student in the class.

Interview with dialogic literary gathering coordinator in an Adult Education Centre. Catalonia, Spain.

Coordinator: Moderating is easy, there is no mystery to it. I usually do it, but someone else has done it in the past. That's not important. What is really important is that people who never thought they could understand a classic, don't just understand it, but enjoy it. You have already seen the comments they made about "One Hundred Years of Solitude" today. They began to read the book a week ago, and the first contributions were to raise doubts about unknown words and small complaints because they got lost with the names of all the characters in the book. But then you can tell that they ended up tackling the most important passages of those pages with great honesty, understanding everything and relating it to their lives.

In literary gatherings great importance is given to the challenge involved in participants' understanding the works, sharing their views, learning, developing a taste for literature, etc., above and beyond the rules for moderation.

Literary works and their selection

In book clubs, the books are usually selected by the coordinator and the way of acquiring them varies from one club to another. Most of the clubs select books that are held in libraries, whereas in others the members buy their book, and in others they read them on-screen through e-books after downloading individual copies.

All kinds of books are read in the clubs: classical, current, best-sellers, etc. And although different kinds of genres are read, the narrative genre usually dominates, as the library collections used for book clubs usually have this limitation. It is generally considered that the more variety there is in the readings proposed, the more quality the book club has, because participants will have more opportunities to become acquainted with interesting books. In

school book clubs, a bit of everything tends to be read, and participants emphatically value the opportunity that the club gives them to read books that they would not have read by themselves, as conveyed by the coordinator featured below.

Book club (extracurricular activity) for Year 5 and Year 6 students of a state-funded private primary School. Cantabria, Spain.

Coordinator: In the book club, sometimes we read classics, but this year we had to do it without any funding, and the children had to buy their own copies. There are all kinds of families, so we opted for books which cost about seven euros so price does not prevent parents from taking the children to the club. Adapted classics range from ten to fifteen euros. Maybe we read a classic or two, but the truth is that the participants haven't said anything about reading classics. They chose *Matilda* and *James and the Giant Peach* as well. We may also read *Konrad*, which is in the library and therefore it's free ... but basically you have to juggle a whole load of things to make the club work.

This variety in readings helps enhance the focus of readings in the groups, and explore some works and genres that participants would otherwise not have read.

In dialogic literary gatherings, only universal classics are read, and these are selected by the participants after a process in which they submit reasoned proposals, after which the group reach a consensus (not by voting), taking on board the best arguments provided. This may seem a limitation, but it is done for an important reason: why read all kinds of books if there is a corpus of literary works considered to be the best of all time? (Calvin, 1993). Dialogic literary gatherings operate in such a way that they ensure that everyone can read these books (which are often judged as being 'hard'), as they are broken down into small parts which are

then discussed at the meetings. In literary gatherings, be they for adults or children, people buy their own book or borrow it from a library.

In school gatherings, children's classics (authors such as Andersen or Verne) or adapted adult universal classics (*The Odyssey*, *Don Quixote*, *Romeo and Juliet*, etc.) are often chosen because they are an apt vehicle for in-depth debates, given the large number of values, behaviours, attitudes, and ways of thinking and acting that occur in this type of books, as can be seen in the following example.

Year 5 Primary Education classroom. Dialogic literary gathering. State School. Cantabria, Spain.

Female student: I have underlined Mrs Capulet's second speech. *Mrs. Capulet: 'Marry, that 'marry' is the very theme I came to talk of. Tell me, daughter Juliet, How stands your disposition to be married?'* I have underlined it because one thing struck me: I don't think it's right that a girl of fourteen should have to marry, and least of all someone she doesn't love.

In this case a child identified herself with the girl in the story and advocated that marriages should only be based on love, and never take place in adolescence. This generated a discussion about the issue in the classroom.

Taking stock

The results highlight a key aspect: behind each of these two practices there is an innovation paradigm in reading which cannot be ignored by the organisations that intend to promote them. Both currently present opportunities and ways of working that are of great interest and render improvements. Taking stock of the results, the following can be stated:

- Book clubs are based on a more vertical and expert model than literary gatherings, which try to use a more egalitarian and democratic model.
- The meeting timeframes in both cases are flexible and adaptable to the needs of the group.
- Academic intelligence is particularly valued in book clubs, while cultural intelligence is valued in the dialogic literary gatherings.
- Debates are moderated according to clear rules that are well-known to all members in dialogic literary gatherings (asking to speak, turn-taking, etc.), in order to ensure group attention and respect for all opinions and arguments at all times. This could be improved in book clubs.
- In book clubs, all types of books can be read, while dialogic literary gatherings are limited to universal classics.
- The methodology of dialogic literary gatherings is more open and has greater organisational opportunities than book clubs, as an expert is not required, thanks to the principles of dialogic learning on which they are based. The procedure is clearer and more transparent than in book clubs, which makes it easy for any member of the group to moderate the meeting, and for everyone to be aware of and follow the basic rules that ensure all participate satisfactorily in the debates.
- Book clubs have both face-to-face and online variants (genres, authors, etc.).

Discussion

Depending on the profile of the social organisation that seeks to promote innovation in reading, on the profile of the participants and on the interests pursued, the format that is most stimulating to them should be chosen: either book clubs or literary gatherings. Both models, by combining individual reading with the group's verbal discussion of the book, help to achieve the threefold challenge of innovation in reading: to foster reading comprehension, to promote a taste for

reading, and to develop the habit of reading (Avci & Yuksel, 2011; Gritter, 2011; Reed & Vaughn, 2012).

TABLE 2. The process of improving reading skills by the use of a book club or a dialogic literary gathering.

(1) Starting point: The child or adult has a greater or lesser level of reading comprehension, taste for reading and habit of reading
(2) coming into contact with the chosen book
(3) development in reading comprehension, taste for reading and reading habit of the child or adult
(4) sharing their interpretations of the book
(5) reflecting and gaining a fuller understanding of the book by the child / adult
(6) Increasing the taste for reading and the reading habits of the child or adult
(7) coming into contact with a new book
Starting point again

Readers, when participating in a book club meeting or in a dialogic literary gathering, change their starting point and experience some internal growth. This takes place by reading the book, sharing their interpretations about it, reflecting on the work and becoming involved in a shared reading process, followed by another and then another, so that their reading comprehension, taste for reading and reading habits are enhanced, given the success of both strategies as evidenced by international research (Álvarez & Pascual, 2014; Aranda & Galindo, 2009; Beach & Yussen, 2011; Duncan, 2012; Lyons & Ray, 2014 Pulido & Zepa, 2010; Serrano et al., 2010; Valls et al., 2008;). On this point, it would be possible to differentiate between clubs and gatherings in point 4 ('interpretations on the work are shared'). In book clubs, given that a 'literary expert' is usually present, readers see their reading enhanced on two levels: the egalitarian one between readers, and one resulting from the expert or experts on the book, the author or the period, which can give rise to types of learning that may not arise in dialogical literary gatherings (Aranda & Galindo, 2009).

As mentioned in the theoretical framework section, book clubs and dialogical literary gatherings have at least six points in common that are key factors in the international

recognition of their success (Duncan, 2012; Lyons & Ray, 2014; Reed & Vaughn, 2012;). However, they differ in the eight categories that were examined in the results section: participants, timelines, purpose, variants, coordination, moderation, books and their selection. For this reason, any organisation that seeks to implement a process of innovation or improvement, a model must be chosen (with all this implies) to try to develop the process consistently and having full awareness of the reasons behind each decision at all times.

However, even if one model is chosen at a certain time and the other is discarded, this does not mean that the former is incompatible with a second. In other words, establishing a book club or several is not incompatible with setting up one or more dialogical literary gatherings within the same institution. Rather, the opposite is true: these models can complement each other, contributing to innovation in reading. However, launching a book club or literary gathering requires some knowledge and effort at the outset and, therefore, it is advisable to be clear about their differences regarding participants, timelines, purpose, variants, coordination, moderation, books and their selection when the decision-making process takes place.

Both models contribute to innovation in reading in the social organisations where they occur, as the literature has shown, and it is urgent that more and more institutions become involved in promoting innovation processes to improve reading comprehension, the taste for reading and the reading habits of children and adults, whether based on one model or the other.

This paper can help professionals to develop better practices of dialogic reading and can be useful to researchers, to managers of both public and private bodies with an interest in promoting reading, to political managers, etc. It is important and necessary to gain an understanding of the commonalities and differences between both practices, but more studies are required in different contexts, as well as further research into both practices separately.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Julian Thomas, for his help with translating the paper from Spanish.

References

- Álvarez, C. (2015). Book clubs: an ethnographic study of an innovative reading practice in Spain. *Studies in continuing education*, 38(2), 228-242. DOI:10.1080/0158037X.2015.1080676
- Álvarez, C. & Pascual J. (2014). Contributions of a school reading club to reading for pleasure. *El profesional de la información*, 23(6), 625-631. DOI:10.3145/epi.2014.nov.10
- Aranda, J. & Galindo, B. (2009). *Reading and talking. An introduction to reading clubs*. Gijón: Trea.
- Avci, S. & Yuksel, A. (2011). Cognitive and affective contributions of the literature circles method on the acquisition of reading habits and comprehension skills in primary level students. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 11(3), 1295-1300.
- Beach, R. & Steven Y. (2011). Practices of productive adult book clubs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(2), 121-131. DOI:10.1002/JAAL.00015
- Calvino, I. (1993). *Why should we read the classics?* Barcelona: Tusquets.
- Calvo, B. (2007). Reading clubs in Spain. *Peonza*, 68, 21-29.
- Certo, J., Moxley, K., Reffitt, K. & Miller, J. A. (2010). I learned how to talk about a book: Children's perceptions of literature circles across grade and ability levels. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 49(3), 243-263. DOI:10.1080/19388070902947352
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2012). *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. United States: SAGE.
- Domingo G. & Sola, M. A. (2005). Reading clubs: two experiences in two cities. *Item: Revista de biblioteconomía y documentación*, 40, 29-44.
- Duncan, S. (2012). *Reading circles, novels and adult reading development*. London: Continuum/Bloomsbury.

- Burbank, M. D., Kauchak, D. & Bates, A. J. (2010). Book clubs as professional development opportunities for preservice teacher candidates and practicing teachers: an exploratory study. *The new educator*, 6(1), 56-73. DOI:10.1080/1547688X.2010.10399588
- Gardiner, V., Cumming-Potvin, W. & Hesterman, S. (2013). Professional learning in a scaffolded 'multiliteracies book club': Transforming primary teacher participation. *Issues in Educational Research*, 23(3), 357-374.
- Giroto, V. C. (2011). Dissertation: Dialogical reading: first experiences with dialogical literary discussion with children in the classroom. <https://repositorio.ufscar.br/handle/ufscar/2258>
- Grandon, T. (2011). *Book Informing with the Case Method*. London: Informing Science Press.
- Gritter, K. (2011). Promoting lively literature discussion. *The Reading Teacher*, 64(6), 445-449. DOI:10.1598/RT.64.6.7
- Hall, L. A. (2009). "A necessary part of good teaching": using Book Clubs to develop preservice teachers' visions of self. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 48(4), 298-317. DOI:10.1080/19388070802433206
- Hammersley, M. (2014). On the ethics of interviewing for discourse analysis. *Qualitative Research*, 14(5), 529-541.
- Højholt, C. & Kousholt, D. (2014). Participant Observations of Children's Communities- Exploring Subjective Aspects of Social Practice. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(3), 316-334. DOI:10.1080/14780887.2014.908989
- Lyons, B. & Ray, C. (2014). The Continuous Quality Improvement Book Club: Developing a Book Club to Promote Praxis. *Journal of Adult Education*, 43, 19-21.
- Nelson, S. W. & Guerra, P. L. (2013). Educator Beliefs and Cultural Knowledge Implications for School Improvement Efforts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 50(1), 67-95. DOI:10.1177/0013161X13488595

- Matteson, S. M., & Lincoln, Y. (2009). Using Multiple Interviewers in Qualitative Research Studies. The Influence of Ethic of Care Behaviors in Research Interview Settings. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15 4), 659-674. DOI:10.1177/1077800408330233
- Moral, A. & Arbe, U. (2013). A teaching experience on shared reading, reading for pleasure and ICT as a means of communication and creativity: Readers' Club. *Psicología educativa*, 19(2), 123-126.
- Polleck, J. N. (2010). Creating Transformational Spaces: High School Book Clubs with Inner-City Adolescent Females. *The University of North Carolina Press*, 93(2), 50-68.
- Pulido, C. & Zepa, B. (2010). The interactive interpretation of texts through dialogic literary gatherings. *Revista Signos*, 2, 295-309.
- Reed, D. K. & Vaughn S. (2012). Retell as an indicator of reading comprehension. *Scientific studies of reading*, 16(3), 187-217. DOI:10.1080/10888438.2010.538780
- Serrano, M.A., Mirceva, J. & Larena, R. (2010). Dialogic Imagination in Literacy Development. *Revista de Psicodidáctica*, 15(2), 191-205.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). *The art of case study research*. London: Sage.
- Valls, R., Soler, M. & Flecha, R. (2008). Dialogic reading: interactions that improve and accelerate Reading. *Revista Iberoamericana de educación*, 46, 71-88.
- Velasco, H. & Díaz, Á. (2006). *The logic of ethnography research. A model of work for school ethnographers*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Vlieghe, J., Mulsb, J. & Ruttena, K. (2016). Everybody reads: reader engagement with literature in social media environments. *Poetics*, 54, 25-37. DOI:10.1016/j.poetic.2015.09.001
- Woods, P. (1987). *Inside Schools: ethnography in educational research*. London: Routledge.