



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

**Lend me your ears:
When adults read out loud (and what
this could mean for adult literacy policy
and teaching)**

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EBSN

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When did you last read out loud (quietly or loudly)?

Where?

Why?

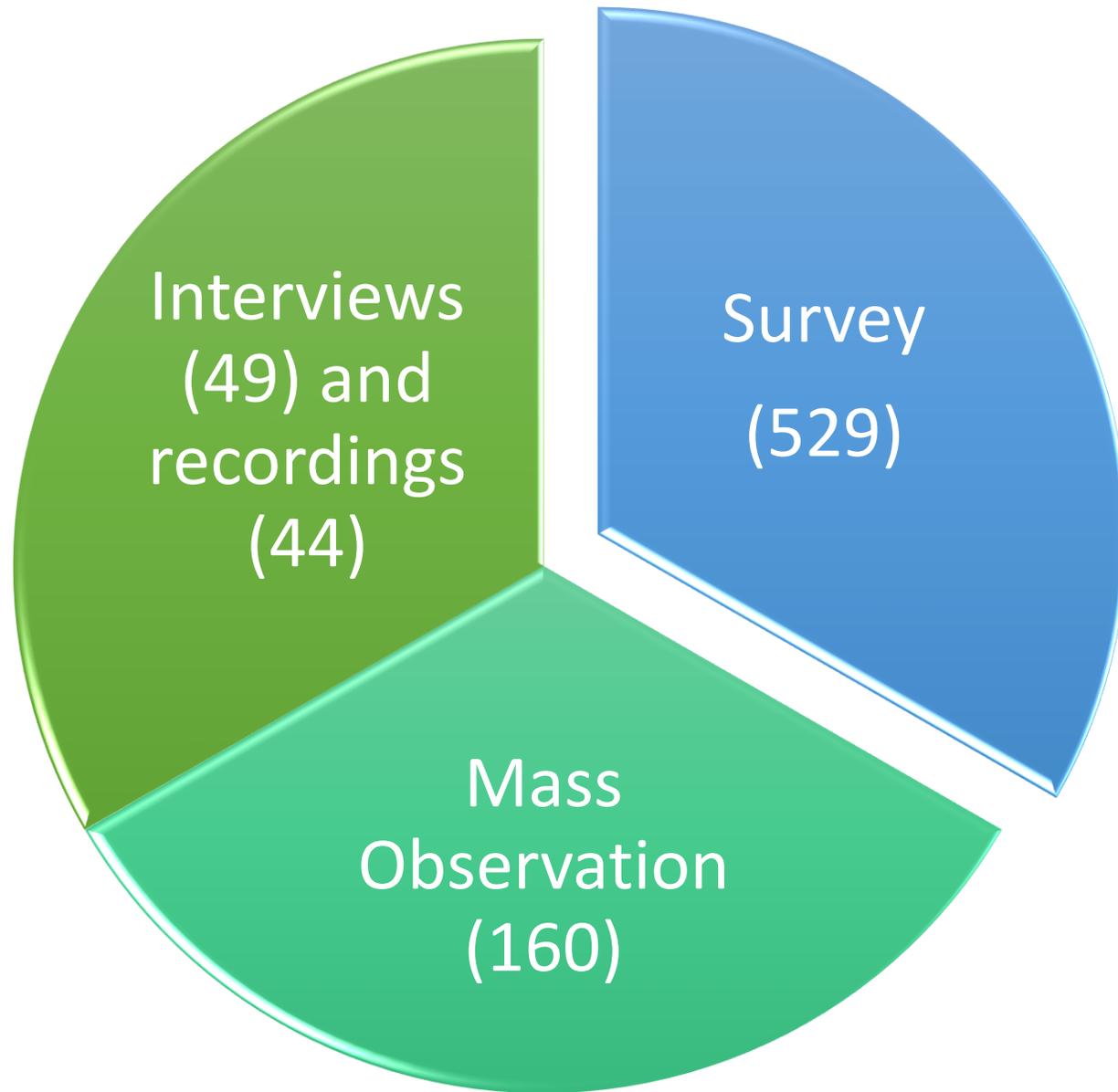
When did someone last read aloud to you?

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT)

...is a two-year study of contemporary adult reading aloud practices.

We want to find out whether, what, where, how and why adults read aloud, or listen to others reading.

Why?



The Survey

- Adult reading aloud is **widespread**: 90% read something aloud daily, weekly or monthly and less than 3% never read anything aloud
- And **diverse**, from social media posts to graffiti
- **Why?** To share, to memorize, to learn, to help, to worship, to enjoy, to write
- Forms of **multilingualism**

Mass Observation

Layers or levels of **duality**/the 'dual vision'

Kramer, Anne-Marie. 2014. 'The Observers and the Observed: The "Dual Vision" of the Mass Observation Project'. *Sociological Research Online* 19 (3): 7.

As researchers or sociologists

- **Surprise and realization**
- 20 categories of practices, with some 'headline points'
 1. Social media and newspapers top (reading to children close)
 2. Not all reading of books is to children, lots to other adults
 3. Not all to or with other people, lots alone (and to pets)
 4. Lots in the workplace, both specific and more generic
 5. Key part of religious practice
 6. Huge amount of literary, drama, poetry work done by all sorts of different people

And as storytellers

My dying friend, bed-ridden and no longer able to go outside, particularly enjoyed listening to poems about nature and the seaside. It made her feel nostalgic and she imagined herself walking along a beach with sand between her toes.

I chanced one evening to accidentally receive Radio Cairo which was broadcasting, in Arabic I suppose, an extremely long reading [...] by a man whose voice and style were so intense and passionate, that I was mesmerized by it all, and was compelled to listen. I didn't understand any of it, but recognised that some sentences were from time to time repeated as in an heroic poem. The passion and intensity of the reading increased to an extreme degree as the reading continued until, abruptly it ended [...] as if the reader had been shot dead. I sat stunned: its emotional effect was enormous although I understood not a word.

For a wedding present, we were given a cheese board, adorned with the legend “Please help yourself.”
He read it aloud every time it was used.

Interviews and recordings

British Library Sound Archive

[Sound and Moving Image Catalogue \(SAMI\) C1765](#)

So....?

- **Ubiquity**
- **Diversity** (purpose, context, formation, language)
- Re-thinking relationships between the **oral/aural** and the **written**
- Different forms of engagement with **different languages**
- What makes a reading practice **common, visible** or **important**?
- And we can't predict our neighbours' (or students') practices.
- But mainly that reading is not THIS but **THIS**

What does this mean for adult literacy policy and teaching?

- The 'visibility' or not of certain literacy practices within educational, research and policy settings, and what this means for a more genuine engagement with diversity.
- 'Bringing practices into the classroom': motivation vs shifting the curriculum: our very definitions of reading and writing (and digital skills) need to be broader.
- How do our literacy practices from one domain relate to our reading practices in other?
- Working for more detailed initial/diagnostic assessments with recognition of existing practices and what is and isn't 'transferrable'.

Transferable? Different but *interrelating*

Shove, Pantzar & Watson's (2012) conceptualisation of social practice as composed of three interacting elements:

- **Competences**
- **Materials**
- **Meanings**

Shove, E., Pantzar, M., & Watson, M. (2012). The dynamics of social practice: Everyday life and how it changes. Sage.

Thank you!



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<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/projects/reading-aloud-in-britain-today>

Duncan, S., & Freeman, M. (2019). [Adults reading aloud: a survey of contemporary practices in Britain](#). *British Journal of Educational Studies*.

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Duncan, S. (2015). Reading aloud in Lewisham: an exploration of adult reading-aloud practices. *Literacy*, 49(2), 84-90.

Thank you to all the project partners and
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