Read to me: Encouraging parents to read aloud

Lisa Marie Harris

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California State University
San Bernardino

READ TO ME:
ENCOURAGING PARENTS TO READ ALOUD

A Project Submitted to
The Faculty of the School of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the
Degree of
Master of Arts
in
Education: Reading Option
by
Lisa Marie Harris, M.A.
San Bernardino, California
1990
APPROVED BY:

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READ TO ME:

WHY PARENTS SHOULD READ TO THEIR CHILDREN

Lisa Marie Harris, M.A.
California State University, San Bernardino, 1990

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to promote literacy development by encouraging parents to read-aloud to their children. The problem stems from the fact that a growing number of parents are not participating in this important activity. The project was to create a video cassette designed specifically for parents outlining the importance of reading aloud to children at home. The material in the video cassette reflects the belief that reading aloud is one of, if not the most important influence on literacy development. The tape focuses on the benefits reading aloud has on literacy development, as well as some specific techniques to enhance the effectiveness of the experience.

Procedure

The video examines the benefits of reading aloud to children in relation to the home environment. The effects of reading aloud on emergent
literacy development and on later progress in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking are discussed. Helpful advice to parents on creating an environment conducive to literacy development is also included. Parents and children were filmed at home and at school as examples of important points.

Results
The result of this project is a video cassette to be used for educating parents of the importance of reading aloud to their children. The video is appropriate for use in a group training situation or for individual viewing by parents in their home.

Conclusions and Implications
In developing this project, the writer found a great many resources for parents, all in the form of books or pamphlets, encouraging them to read aloud to their children. The implications on this subject are clear – reading aloud in the home is an extremely important aspect of literacy development – however, parents are not getting the message because many of them do not take advantage of these written resources. I believe that in today's electronically oriented society a video tape will be more effective in reaching these parents.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Read to me riddles
and read to me rhymes,
read to me stories
of magical times.

Read to me tales
about castles and kings,
read to me stories
of fabulous things.

Read to me pirates,
and read to me knights,
read to me dragons
and dragon-back flights.

Read to me spaceships
and cowboys and then
when you are finished—
please read them again!
(Yolen, 1987, p.29)

Young children enjoy listening to stories, poetry, nursery rhymes,
and songs. These rich experiences with language are the foundation of
quality literacy programs for young children. The teachers who provide
these experiences know that children learn from and enjoy the language
of stories, and they use these experiences as a bridge to their
developing literacy skills. It has largely been the teacher's job to
provide opportunities and experiences which will promote literacy
learning; but many experts in the field of emergent literacy realize
that the foundation of this learning lies not only in the books that teachers share with children at school, but more importantly, in those the parents share with their children at home.

There are many individual pieces of knowledge children gather as adults read aloud to them. In combination, these pieces provide the conceptual foundation which enables children to learn to read independently. Researchers in the field of emergent literacy (Butler & Clay, 1987; Michener, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989), emphasize the significance of reading aloud in relation to learning the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, especially in the very young child. Some of the concepts children acquire as a result of the read-aloud experience include:

- increased interest in books and learning to read
- a sense of story structure
- familiarity with the difference between written and oral language
- the concept that print carries meaning
- the concept that printed words have letters and sounds
- Left-to-right and front-to-back directionality
- the realization that the words rather than the pictures are
read
- the development of comprehension and language skills
- the idea that stories have a beginning, middle, and end

These concepts and others develop slowly over a period of time as children experience books being read aloud. As a result, these children usually come to school displaying a higher level of emergent reading and writing behaviors than children who have not been read to. For children who have not had stories read aloud at home, development of many of these concepts is often delayed until the child reaches school, thus frequently putting those children at a disadvantage (Jolly, 1980). Strickland and Morrow (1989), authors of an abundance of information on the subject, say that "children who have been read to during their early years associate reading with pleasure and follow models of reading behaviour. Some learn to read earlier and more easily than others" (p. 322). Two very prominent authors in the field of emergent literacy, Dorothy Butler and Marie Clay (1987), have stated what many researchers and educators know: "There is no substitute for reading and telling stories to children, from the earliest days" (p. 17).

The problem in this statement lies in the words "from the earliest days". Educators do not usually have charge of children "from the
earliest days"; therefore, it is much the responsibility of the primary caretakers, usually the parents, to start children on the road to literacy development, and many parents are unaware of the role they play.

Much has been written about the role parents play in children's literacy development. Many researchers, including Butler and Clay (1987), make statements in their findings similar to the following by Rudman and Pearce (1988):

Research indicates that children who come from home environments where books, magazines, and newspapers are in evidence and where reading aloud is a common routine, are much more likely to succeed academically than children whose homes are barren of print and where reading aloud has not been the practice (p. 45).

Reading aloud to children is seen by many as the most important thing parents can do to prepare their children for reading and writing. Butler and Clay (1987) indicate strong agreement saying: "Well prepared children seldom fail to learn to read but 'ill-equipped' children tend to go from bad to worse. Handicapped, they fall behind. Then, because they can't read, they become disheartened and stop trying" (p.37).
Some researchers point to the negative effects of *not* reading aloud to children at home. As Rudman and Pearce (1988) point out: "When pleasurable experiences with books have not been a part of a child's regular home routine, the books that are introduced at school may be associated with academic expectations of a threatening nature" (p. 45).

It is the responsibility of both the teachers and the parents to educate children in the skills of literacy. However, in the earliest and most influential stages of literacy development, it is often only the parents who are directly involved with the child's literacy learning. Before children have entered into their formal schooling, parents have usually spent five years with them, in which time their physical and cognitive development have progressed rapidly. Butler and Clay (1987) point out: "...parents have their children's future largely in their hands. So much development has already taken place before children enter school that the teacher's role can be viewed as only supplementary to what has gone before at home" (p. 7). Whether or not children's literacy development has been encouraged and nurtured depends a great deal on whether or not they have been read to at home.

Many parents do not understand the connection between reading
aloud to children and the development of early literacy skills. Most still believe children will not learn about reading until they go to school. Parents who do read to their children usually do so because it is an enjoyable experience or a relaxing event before bedtime or at another time during the day. Few are aware of how much literacy learning actually takes place. Teachers often comment that they can tell which children have been read to at home by the literacy skills they possess upon school entry. On the other hand, exasperated by students who have been placed at a 'literacy disadvantage', they also make such comments as, "If only their parents would read to them at home...".

It was not until I moved from second grade and began teaching kindergarten that I noticed the tremendous differences in children's literacy knowledge upon school entry. In a second grade classroom children come in with knowledge from home, sometimes preschool, kindergarten, and first grade, so it is difficult to separate the results of each experience and decipher which of them had the greatest impact on their development in reading and writing. But in kindergarten, because it is one of the earliest formal experiences many children have, it is much more apparent where the children's skills and abilities
have their roots.

Each year I send home a questionnaire which enables me to get to know the children better. One of the questions on the form reads: "Do you read to your child? If yes, how often?" Parents, not realizing the importance of reading aloud, usually answer very honestly, and it is all too apparent that too few parents read to their children. Very soon after examining these questionnaires it becomes clear in observing the children which questionnaires can be matched with which child. Quite frankly, it is usually the brightest, most alert and enthusiastic, and most verbal children which are matched with the responses of "yes, everyday".

My attempts to encourage reading aloud have been generally unsuccessful. I have tried to encourage parents through newsletters and conferences but have found no significantly positive results. It is a difficult message to get across because parents don't understand the tremendous significance of the activity.

There are many apparent reasons why parents do not read-aloud to their children today. This old past-time has been replaced with a variety of new preoccupations and reasons for not participating in the age-old tradition. Such reasons as busier schedules, working or single
parents, video-games, and as Trelease (1979) so adamantly elaborates
- "the plug-in-drug" (television), are blamed for the lack of reading
aloud in the home. Jolly (1980) points to a variety of other reasons:
  - Some parents fear that reading aloud will spoil children once
    they have learned to read.
  - Some parents are afraid they will not know the correct book
to read so they opt for reading nothing at all.
  - Parents may simply be embarrassed to read aloud because
    their own reading skills are limited.
  - They may be uncertain how to interest children in reading.
  - They may not have material they consider appropriate.

Instead of wishing that parents would read to their children more,
educators need to take action. The benefits of reading aloud to children
are so great. Convincing parents to read to their children from the
earliest age could have a tremendous impact on the problems of
illiteracy which plague our country. Most parents care about their
children's future and want to help them succeed, however, many of
them need guidance from educators who know the importance of
reading to children.

Ross and Bondy (1987) point out the responsibility of the teacher in
helping parents understand the nature and the process of children's literacy learning. If teachers want parental support, they must first educate the parents about the importance of sharing books and reading aloud in the home. I have learned that sending home written material on the subject has been ineffective. Also, conversing with them at conferences has not proven successful. Parents need more than someone just telling them they should read to their children. They need to know the facts about the differences in development between children who are read to and children who are not. In today's electronically oriented society, a video, in which visual images can be combined with verbal information, may be one answer to the problem.
CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The type of natural learning that occurs when parents read to their children is one facet of what is known by educators as *Whole Language* learning. In the whole language approach, children learn the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening in a meaningful and natural context, usually through quality literature and their own writing experiences. Goodman (1986) explains that the idea is to keep experiences with language whole and natural, rather than breaking them down into small *manageable* parts which has long been the practice in schools. He says that in whole language environments children are using language "functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs" (p. 7). Many schools are now changing their methods of reading instruction to simulate what has been taking place naturally at home:

In homes, children learn oral language without having it broken into simple bits and pieces. They are amazingly good at learning language when they need it to express themselves and
understand others, as long as they are surrounded by people who are using language meaningfully and purposefully (p. 7).

Both Smith (1979) and Goodman (1986) emphasize that learning to read can and should be as easy as learning to talk. In his book *Reading Without Nonsense* (1979), Smith refers to this connection frequently:

...children do not learn to read in order to make sense of print. They strive to make sense of print and as a consequence learn to read. ...This order of events is identical with the way in which spoken language is learned. Children do not learn to talk in order to "communicate" and to make sense of the language they hear. As they try to make sense of the language they hear spoken around them, they learn to understand speech and to use it for communication (p. 132-133).

*Meaning* is the emphasis in whole language learning, and what greater meaning can there be than the communication of one's own ideas? "Children are literally driven to learn language by their need to communicate" (Goodman, 1986: p. 15).

There are certain factors in home and school environments which are necessary in order to foster the natural growth of literacy skills. Frank Smith (1978) explains that these factors are present in what he
the *literacy club*, and says that to understand reading children must become members of this group of written language users:

The experienced members of the club take it for granted that the children will be like them; they are the same kind of people. ...members occupy themselves with whatever activities the club has formed itself to promote, constantly demonstrating the value and utility of these activities to the new members, helping them to participate in these activities themselves when they want, but never forcing their involvement. And never discriminating against them for lacking the understanding or expertise of more practiced members (p. 124).

Children who are members of the *literacy club* upon entering school generally come from homes where reading and writing activities are a natural and prevalent part of everyday life. They see and hear family members reading and writing for pleasure, information, and purpose. They are encouraged to experiment with the tools of language and are given positive feedback and support for their efforts. Children who have had these experiences are described by Don Holdaway (1979) as having a strong *literacy set*.
Children with a background of book experience since infancy develop a complex range of attitudes, concepts, and skills predisposing them to literacy. They are likely to continue into literacy on entering school with a minimum of discontinuity (p. 49).

Children with strong *literacy sets* when they arrive at school have not been specifically *taught* these concepts. They *develop* them as a result of the natural experiences they encounter at home. Being read to is one of these experiences. But unfortunately, as Holdaway (1979) states, "Most children enter school with a poorly developed 'literacy set'" (p. 57). Parents are an integral part of membership in the *literacy club* of whole language learners, and educators need to help them realize it. As Butler and Clay (1987) put it, "Ideas about reading are more readily caught than taught in the very early years" (p. 8).
CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading aloud to children at home is said to be one of the most important, if not the most important activity parents can engage in with their children prior to and after school enrollment. Many parents and educators do not realize the tremendous significance this otherwise simple activity has on the literacy development of children.

In developing an educational video cassette for parents, there are two major areas of research to consider. The first area is in relation to the specific benefits children gain as a result of being read to at home from an early age. This section will discuss the benefits reading aloud has on the four major areas of literacy development: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The second section will discuss the actual process of parents reading aloud and will provide helpful hints from researchers in the field to help make the experience naturally beneficial rather than instructional. This section will include parts on who parents should read-aloud to, what types of literature to read-aloud, when to read-aloud, where to read-aloud, and how to
make read-aloud times enjoyable and beneficial.

THE BENEFITS OF READING ALOUD

While reading aloud to children has many *educational* benefits, it is also important to discuss the more *affective* benefits of the experience. As Taylor and Strickland (1986) point out, it is crucial for parents to understand that "reading stories is not an activity added to the family agenda specifically to teach reading. Rather, books become a part of the very fabric of family life" (p. 54). Parents should be *aware* of the educational value reading aloud has for their children, but this should not be the sole reason for participating in the activity. Reading aloud to children should be a pleasurable experience for all of the family members involved. Too much emphasis on the learning that is taking place can create an atmosphere that is strained and undesirable. Holdaway (1979) agrees with the importance of the affective dimension:

... for the parents who engage in it, reading books to their youngsters provides deep satisfaction and pleasure. It is not engaged in as a duty or to achieve specific educational advantages for the child: it is a simple giving and taking of pleasure in which the parent makes no demands on the child,
but is deeply gratified by the lively responses and questions that normally arise (p. 39).

Taylor and Strickland (1986) report that 'family storybook reading' can actually bring families together:

Family storybook reading is a special time when families grow together, as parents and children learn about one another and the world in which they live. It is a time for loving and caring as some books inspire joy and laughter while others bring sadness and tears (p. 5).

Jim Trelease, author of *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (1979), points out that "the initial reasons are the same reasons you talk to a child: to reassure, to entertain, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire" (p. 1). He says that "a secondary reason, and of great importance in an age of rising illiteracy, is the established fact that regular reading aloud strengthens children's reading, writing, and speaking skills - and thus the entire civilizing process" (p. 1-2).

When parents establish a pleasant atmosphere for reading aloud, the informal discussions that inevitably accompany the experience help children to acquire a variety of understandings about the ways in which print is used. Children acquire knowledge about the ways people
communicate through print which will enable them to be successful with their first attempts at formal reading. But more importantly, as Taylor and Strickland (1986) point out:

Exposed to loving and caring human beings as reading models, children demonstrate an ever-increasing interest in books and stories as well as in the masses of print that surround them in their environment. Most important, they begin to view themselves as becoming readers and writers too (p. 5–6). Interest and the view of oneself as a reader are two of the key factors present in most successful readers.

All children do not learn to read prior to entering school simply because their parents read-aloud to them. However, studies on early readers by Dolores Durkin (1966, as cited in Trelease 1979) indicate four factors which are present in the home environment of nearly every early reader:

1. The child is read to on a regular basis. Additionally, the parents were avid readers and led by example.
2. A wide variety of printed material – books, magazines, newspapers, comics – is available in the home.
3. Paper and pencil are readily available for the child.
4. The people in the child's home stimulate the child's interest in reading and writing by answering endless questions, praising the child's efforts at reading and writing, taking the child to the library frequently, buying books, writing stories that the child dictates, and displaying his paperwork in a prominent place in the home (p. 20).

If we look at these factors individually, we can get a more in-depth picture of the kind of literacy learning that takes place in this kind of home environment.

READING TO CHILDREN

Whether in school or at home, we know that the insights children gain as a result of being read to are many. Addressing teachers in an article on reading aloud, Michener (1988) outlines some of them as follows:

1. Reading aloud to students helps them do better in beginning reading.
2. Reading aloud to students improves listening skill.
3. Reading aloud to students increases their abilities to read on their own.
4. Reading aloud to students increases their vocabulary.
5. Reading aloud to students improves reading comprehension.
6. Reading aloud to students helps them speak better.
7. Reading aloud to students helps them become better writers.
8. Reading aloud to students improves the quality and amount of what they read on their own.

Reading aloud to children helps them do better in beginning reading. While listening to their parents read, children have the opportunity to sit back and observe the behaviors of the adult who is reading. During this observation, and through the casual conversations which naturally ensue, children are able to figure out a great deal about the way print works. As mentioned in the introduction, for the emergent reader there are a vast number of concepts which are considered to be the prerequisites to actual formal reading experiences. These concepts are discussed by prominent researchers (Butler & Clay, 1987; Michener, 1988; Strickland & Morrow, 1989) in much of the literature dealing with emergent literacy. These important concepts include:

- increased interest in books and learning to read
- a sense of story structure
- familiarity with the difference between written and oral language
- the concept that print carries meaning
- the concept that printed words have letters and sounds
- left-to-right and front-to-back directionality
- the realization that the words rather than the pictures are read
- the development of comprehension and language skills
- the idea that stories have a beginning, middle, and end

All of these concepts are crucial to a child's success at beginning reading and develop slowly over a period of time. For the child who is not read to at home, these concepts will not develop until much later and may cause slower growth during the beginning stages of reading at school while the child is 'catching-up'.

Reading aloud to students improves listening skill. The ability to listen is an essential requirement for learning, both in and out of school. About listening, Trelease (1979) says:

It is the most important communications skill and very little is done with it at any educational level. ...Since reading comprehension stems directly from listening comprehension, it
stands to reason that many of our current reading problems can be attributed to a breakdown in children's listening skills. ...Reading aloud is one of the best stimulants for listening skills (p. 107).

Much as individuals learn in different ways, they also listen in different ways. As Taylor and Strickland (1986) point out: "Very often, children are listening attentively when it appears that they are not" (p. 55). They say that many children do listen quietly, but there are also children who enjoy the experience of being read to just as much who wander around the room, draw with crayons, or play while they are listening. Taylor and Strickland say that it is a myth that the "good" listener "sits quietly, does not interrupt the reader, enjoys every book equally well, and is properly grateful for the experience" (p. 53). The ability to listen grows over time as a result of hearing stories read aloud. Parents who read to their children prior to school entry are preparing them for the days full of listening they will do at school.

Reading aloud to students increases their abilities to read on their own. As parents read aloud, children gain concepts about print that are essential to reading on their own. They learn that the squiggles on the
page tell the reader what to say. They learn that it is those squiggles that carry the meaning of the text. They begin to ask questions about words and letters. Hill (1989) explains that “this knowledge children have of words and the way they are used is helpful when they encounter them in books or want to use them in writing” (p. 7). When they have acquired some of these concepts as well as a story-awareness, “they will begin to recite pieces of books and tell their own stories based on those that they have heard”, says Rudman and Pearce (1988; p. 52). This becomes children’s early reading and is not simple memorization, but the children’s demonstration of book knowledge. Rudman and Pearce caution parents:

> It is very important at this time, even though the child is showing more independence with books, to continue the regular practice of reading aloud and storytelling. Children can become reluctant to learn to read on their own if they think that this prowess will cut off the very pleasurable activity of being read to by others (p. 52).

Young readers use the concepts they have seen their adult models use when they are trying to make sense of print. Michener (1988) stresses the importance of reading aloud from quality literature and
says that it "strengthens that ever important experiential background
young children use when trying to make sense of new words they may
see on a page" (p. 119). McCormick (1977) also emphasizes the
importance of the quality of the literature read to children and says
that children are more likely to read a story that has been read aloud to
them - "exposure to a good story increases one's desire to read it for
himself" (p. 796). Holdaway explains that a child's experiences with a
favorite book passes through three phases:

1. The child is introduced to the book and may participate as it
   is being read.

2. The child demands many repetitions of the book.

3. The child "reads" the book independently and does other
   activities related to it such as drawing and "writing" (p.40).

Holdaway also says that this 'reading-like' behavior is an extremely
important aspect of learning to read on one's own:

...the much-lauded bed-time story situation is only half the
picture: practice of reading-like behaviour and writing-like
behaviour completes the picture. A noteworthy feature of this
behaviour is that is arises naturally without direction from the
parents - and perhaps that is one reason why its significance
has been overlooked. It is independent behaviour which does not depend on an audience of any kind and is therefore self-regulated, self-corrected, and self-sustaining. It occurs at just those times when the adult whose behaviour is being emulated is not available (p. 61).

**Reading aloud to students increases their vocabularies.** The richness of the language children use is greatly affected by the richness of the language they hear. Taylor and Strickland (1986) emphasize - "there is no doubt that engagement in storybook reading is one of the richest resources for vocabulary development available to children" (p. 42). When parents read a variety of quality stories and poetry to their children, rich language and vocabulary are a significant part of the experience. Children can learn new words and new ways of expressing themselves. "Family storybook reading provides children with a treasury of words that can be listened to and talked about" (p. 42). Kobrin (1988) compares vocabulary development to buying clothes: It doesn't matter if youngsters don't understand all your words, what matters is that you speak new ones. They'll pick up the general meaning of the unfamiliar word from the familiar ones that surround it. That's how their vocabulary increases. When
youngsters are young, you buy clothes a little too big so that they can grow into them. The same should be true for books. The more language children hear, the more they will use: the more fluently they speak, the easier reading becomes" (p. 17).

**Reading aloud to students improves reading comprehension.** During the read-aloud experience, children encounter new words, new concepts, and new connections to sort through and make sense of. "Family experiences with books and stories help children to build a storehouse of information that they will need as they learn to read and write" (Taylor & Strickland, 1986; p. 35). Studies in child development indicate that when children encounter an idea which they do not have previous experience with, they assimilate that new knowledge into already existing schemata. Reading aloud to children is one of the best methods to expose children to new ideas and involve them in experiences in which to develop and practice comprehension skills. Casanova (1987) describes the importance of an awareness of story structure on developing comprehension skills: "... children who lack comprehension skills have had little - if any - exposure to reading at home. Such children haven't had the opportunity to develop what psychologists call story scripts or story structures." Story structure,
according to Berliner (1987) is a "general mental model of what stories are like and how they can be interpreted." Children who lack this basic concept will have a difficult time comprehending the new ideas contained in stories and other texts. Yaden (1988) points out that an enhanced story and print awareness occur when:

- several people read to the child
- the child requests numerous books for rereading
- the child discusses story books read by others
- the child pretends to read to or shares books with a younger sibling

Through repeated experiences with favorite books, children gain new understandings with every encounter.

Reading aloud to students helps them speak better. "What children learn from one language experience they use and develop in other language experiences. Without doubt the richness of the language that children use is greatly affected by the richness of the language that they hear" (Taylor and Strickland, 1986; p. 65). Based on these statements, we can conclude that children will use the information they gain during the read-aloud experience in all other areas of language use. One of these areas is speaking. Children who have been
read to use the new sentence structures and vocabulary they have heard repeatedly in literature, in their everyday speaking. Chomsky (1972) indicates that "The child who reads (or listens to) a variety of rich and complex materials benefits from a range of linguistic inputs that are unavailable to the non-literary child" (p. 23). Children also become knowledgeable in book-related language such as author, illustrator, and characters. This knowledge helps children as they learn to read and write.

Reading aloud to students helps them become better writers. Children who hear a wide variety of written language in the literature that is read aloud to them have more of a knowledge base with which to create written language than children who do not. Children often write stories or poems based or modeled upon those that have been read to them. When children write, they are usually able to read their writing back to someone. In Learning to Read Naturally, Jewell and Zintz (1986) explain: "Learning to read is reinforced by writing, and learning to write is reinforced by reading" (p. 6). Children who are read to and who are encouraged to write, and read their writing back to someone, develop a heightened awareness and knowledge of the print around them, thus making them more successful as readers and writers.
In Taylor and Strickland's book *Family Storybook Reading* (1986), the connection between children's knowledge of story-structure and writing is discussed. "Children who have a concept of what makes a story are more apt to develop an understanding of stories written by others and the ability to create their own" (p. 39). It is important that young children hear the language of books and are provided with writing tools with which to experiment.

Reading aloud to students improves the quality and amount of what they read on their own. One of the most crucial reasons for parents to read-aloud to their children is to create an interest in reading. Children who experience pleasant times with books from an early age are more likely to develop a desire to read on their own than those who only encounter books when they enter school. Trelease (1979) says that "desire is not something we are born with" (p. 6).

Obviously, if we are spending immense amounts of time and money in successfully teaching children to read but they in turn are choosing not to read, we can only conclude that something is wrong. In concentrating exclusively on teaching the child how to read, we have forgotten to teach him to want to read. ...What you make a child love and desire is more important than
what you make him learn (p. 6).

Reading aloud to children at home is one way parents show that reading is enjoyable, purposeful, and interesting. "Before a child can have an interest in reading, he must first have an awareness of it" (p. 8).

AVAILABILITY OF READING MATERIALS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

The world we live in is filled with printed messages. Even children whose parents do not read to them are not immune to the print in the environment. Print is everywhere – on street signs, in the supermarket, and on the mail that arrives at our houses. Hill (1989) elaborates on this notion:

To have an idea of the vast amount of print children encounter on a regular basis, we can begin by sorting through the books, newspapers, and magazines many of us read. Then we can rifle through our kitchen cabinets – full of cereal boxes, canned goods, and junk food – peruse our coupon file and recipe box, check the junk mail, watch a bit of advertising on television, and take note of messages on billboards and bumper stickers (p. 18).

Print is everywhere in the world outside of children's homes, however,
aside from some of the instances listed above, the availability of print in the home depends in large part on whether or not parents are readers and whether they provide reading materials for the family. "Children need access to books just as they need access to their dolls and trucks and other important possessions" (Trelease, 1979; p. 82). Children are constantly exploring what Fields (1989) terms as a *print-rich environment* and she says that children are keen observers who are constantly observing the many uses of print. She says they notice whether books are considered important and entertaining to the adults around them. A print-rich environment will invite children into the world of reading.

**PARENTS AS READING MODELS**

Closely connected with the availability of printed materials in the home, is whether or not children see the adults in their lives participating in reading experiences. All of the research in emergent literacy indicates that the more children are aware of the importance of reading in the *parents* lives, the firmer the foundation for learning to read. Parents model reading every time they pick up a newspaper and talk about the news they have read. They model reading when they
use a cookbook to find out how to make a favorite recipe; and they model reading every time they curl up to read a good book. Fields (1989) says that just *seeing* the parents reading is extremely important and it is the main way children become curious and find out that reading is worth their while. She says that "children's natural desire to do the things they see grown-ups doing makes reading seem to run in families. Children of eager readers are usually eager readers themselves" (p. 6).

**AVAILABILITY OF WRITING MATERIALS**

Learning to read and learning to write go hand in hand according to many researchers in the field of emergent literacy. In a discussion of literacy environments, Shapiro and Doiron (1987) point out that literacy development is effected by "the ease of access children have to pencils, paper, books and other materials needed to become literate. Children will not learn how to read and write easily if their experiences with the tools of literacy have been limited" (p. 262). Children develop a better understanding of what reading is when they realize that what has been written down can be read back. Most leading experts in the field of emergent writing including Newman (1984) and
Cambourne & Turbill (1987) emphasize the importance of experimentation as a fundamental aspect of learning to write. Parents must allow children to experiment and praise them for their efforts while providing a variety of materials for them to use.

RESPONSIVE PERSONS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Just as they respond enthusiastically to infants who are learning to talk, parents need to respond to children who are developing the skills of reading and writing. As children begin to practice their new awareness of literacy and begin to display 'reading-like' and 'writing-like' behaviors (Holdaway, 1979), adults need to be especially positive in their responses so as not to discourage their experimentation. Children will begin experimenting with their ideas of how printed language works at a very early age. They are usually content just doing so without much adult interference. Positive encouragement is helpful in support of this experimentation. Holdaway (1979) explains that an important feature of homes where literacy occurs naturally is "the presence of a certain type of supportive and emulative adult or peer who answers questions directly and readily without interfering with what the child is trying to do" (p. 39).
The important relationship here is that parents do not deliberately set out to teach the child how to read and write. They are simply there for support and guidance when the child needs them.

READING ALOUD: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW

WHO

Most parents view reading aloud to children as something which begins at around two or three years of age and ends around the time children are seven or eight and reading on their own. The reasons for this pattern are usually based on parents' ideas of what is best for their children. Often times parents do not begin reading aloud to their children until they think that the children are old enough to understand the stories. On the opposite end of the spectrum, parents often stop reading aloud when they think that children are able to read on their own. In a guide for parents on encouraging young readers, Rudman and Pearce (1988) try to dispel this notion, saying that "most people like to be read to. No one is too young to enjoy it; no one is too old; it does not matter whether or not the listener knows how to read. Reading
aloud can be informative, entertaining, soothing, inspiring, and challenging" (p. 42).

Another reason why parents do not begin reading to their children at an earlier age is awkwardness. Parents believe that the infant does not understand anyway and this makes them feel silly. In her book *Babies Need Books*, Dorothy Butler says that learning begins at birth: "fifty percent of a child's intellectual capacity is developed by age four" (p. 1). Trelease (1979) points to studies of infant learning which indicate that an infant's learning is much more sophisticated than we give them credit for and he recommends beginning read-aloud experiences as early as possible pointing to the fact that infants enjoy the sound of the parents' voice and the closeness which accompanies the experience:

Until a child is six months old, I don't think it matters a great deal what you read, as long as you are reading. What is important up to this stage is that the child becomes accustomed to the rhythmic sound of your reading voice and associates it with a peaceful, secure time of day (p. 30).

Many studies have been done on the benefits of reading aloud to infants. Dinsmore (1988) strongly advocates the introduction of books
to infants for these reasons:

- Books help the infant's eyes to focus.

- Through naming and pointing, books help build the infant's vocabulary.

- Through books, infants learn to recognize objects that are familiar to their environment. They are also introduced to pictures of objects they rarely see.

- Books aid in the understanding of language, which is crucial to reading comprehension later on.

- Books build and reinforce basic concepts related to people, animals, possessions, familiar events and daily routines.

- Through rollicking rhymes and rhythms, actions with the mouth/fingers/toes, and exploration of textures and smells, books build an infant's sensory awareness.

- Most important, the interaction of reading and sharing books provides the opportunity for physical closeness - holding, talking, smiling, loving - so critical to an infant's emotional and intellectual growth.

Parents should not feel uneasy about reading to their infant. The benefits of beginning read-aloud experiences at birth are the same as
reading to older children—pleasure, and the lifelong development of literacy skills. Taylor and Strickland (1986) say that "books are like lullabies: they caress a newborn baby, calm a fretful child, and help a nervous mother" (p. 23). The purpose of reading aloud to infants is not to force them into early reading. Rather, it is to develop an enthusiastic attitude about books and reading through pleasurable experiences at the earliest age.

Aside from the pleasure of the experience of reading aloud, there are good reasons to continue reading aloud to children even after they have become too old for bedtime stories. Learning from an adult reading model does not simply stop once a child is able to read on their own. Most children who can read on their own still enjoy the experience of being read to. One reason for this, according to Richardson (1988), is that beginning readers are not yet able to read at the level of much of the good literature they enjoy. Being read to by an adult allows children "to interact with a literary text that most of them could not have read themselves". In order to enjoy the story, someone must read it to them. Michener (1988) agrees that beginning readers still need adult models to allow them to enjoy quality literature which is too advanced for their reading level:
Unfortunately, many teachers and parents stop reading aloud as soon as children begin to read on their own. This, however, is the very time children need an appropriate reading model through which they can enjoy (and not just struggle through) wonderful children's stories ... reading aloud to students exposes them to a variety and level of quality literature they might be unwilling or unable to tackle on their own (p. 120).

But, beginning readers are not the only older children who benefit from parents continuing read-aloud practices. Teenagers benefit from the experience too. Reading aloud can and should be a pleasurable part of the family agenda even as the family grows older. Reading out loud can be pleasurable and informative at any age, but it can also help the teenager who is more reluctant about reading to become interested in a good book. *Beginning* a book can often be the most difficult aspect of reading. Sometimes it is hard to delve into the unknown and stay interested until the "plot thickens". Hill (1989) suggests:

> At times it may be useful for us to read the first section or two, particularly if the youngster is not already familiar with the book. At other times we may want to take turns reading different parts of the book. Because the reading is being
shared, the youngster can listen to the development of the story and for new concepts without being responsible for the entire text (p. 43).

If children are to become lifelong readers, reading aloud for enjoyment needs to continue on into adulthood.

Another relatively important issue to consider is who is doing the reading to children. Many times it is the mother who takes on this role. But it can be beneficial for children to hear others read aloud too. In a list of "Do's and Don'ts" for reading aloud, Trelease (1979) lists one of the "Do's" as follows:

Fathers should make an extra effort to read to their children. Because 98 percent of primary-school teachers are women, young boys often associate reading with women and schoolwork. And just as unfortunately, too many fathers prefer to be seen playing catch in the driveway with their sons than taking them to the library. It is not by chance that most of the students in remedial-reading classes are boys. A father's early involvement with books and reading can do much to elevate books to at least the same status as baseball gloves and hockey sticks in a boy's estimation (p. 61).
Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and family friends also make good readers. When distance separates families, it can be fun for relatives to make tapes of stories read aloud and send them to children. Older siblings can also read to younger members of the family.

WHAT

Since "reading to children provides them with a sense of what reading is all about" (Bissex, 1980), we need to make their experiences with books especially tantalizing when they are very young so that they will want to form the habit of reading. One way in which parents can do this is by using and providing stimulating and appropriate reading materials. A good book will inspire a child to request another, and eventually, to read on his own.

Parents who are new to the practice of reading aloud sometimes worry about which books are good to read to their children. Whether parents are new to the practice of reading aloud or have been reading aloud for years, Rudman and Pearce (1988) say that "one of the first rules for successful reading aloud is that [parents] select something [they] are attracted to. [They] will be especially successful if [they] love a book and can communicate this strong positive feeling to [their]
child" (p. 42). Another very important aspect in the success of reading aloud to children is that parents regularly read literature of the child's choice. These requests are important because children will benefit most from listening to stories they really want to hear. Sometimes their choices will be from the best literature and other times it will not. Kobrin (1988) cautions parents not to admonish children because of their choices. She says "books that are 'right' for children are the ones they want to read - or look at - now" (p. 17). One idea for parents concerned with a child wishing only to hear 'supermarket stories' or books based on the latest cartoon character, is for the child and the parent to each choose one book, thus integrating more quality literature into the experience.

Many children's booklists and literature guides have been published in an effort to assist parents in the selection of quality read-aloud material. Rudman and Pearce (1988) say that:

The qualities of a good children's book are the same qualities as a good adult book. The plot should be plausible, engrossing, and flowing; the characters should be believable, interesting, and three-dimensional; the theme should be appropriately handled with authenticity and accuracy; the language should be
rich and the illustrations should satisfy the aesthetic tastes and needs of the reader. Humor should be humane; no character or group should be demeaned (p. 44).

Since young children latch onto certain sounds of language and believe that both the text and the picture are readable (Butler, 1980), these two aspects are especially important in choosing quality literature for youngsters. There should be a close match between the illustrations and the storyline. This connection aids in comprehension when parents read the book aloud and gives children a support system when they want to read it themselves.

Of course some types of books are more appropriate for certain age groups than others, but experts recommend introducing children to a wide variety of literature from an early age and sometimes even reading books above their intellectual level to challenge their minds (Trelease, 1979; Taylor and Strickland, 1986; Hill, 1989; Rudman & Pearce, 1988; Butler & Clay, 1987; Kobrin, 1988; Butler, 1980; White, 1984). The following list is an accumulation of the many types of literature these experts suggest.

- toy and board books
- fabric books
- Mother Goose
- picture storybooks
- traditional folk and fairy tales
- predictable books
- concept books
- ABC and counting books
- wordless picture books
- poetry
- language play books
- cumulative tales
- books for special needs and special times
- classics
- short novels
- full-length novels
- mysteries
- biographies
- legends
- joke books
- books of riddles and rhymes
- homemade books
Libraries are an excellent resource for borrowing most types of books. They are a good place to find a variety of books and borrow several at a time. Taylor and Strickland say that a library is a place where children can "try books on for size" (p. 74).

While parents should make frequent trips to the library with their children to borrow books, Trelease (1979) emphasizes the importance of purchasing books for children as well. "Since familiarity is essential in developing a lasting relationship with books, it's a good idea to purchase your own copies to keep in the home along with those you borrow from the library" (p. 34).

Acquiring books at an early age helps children build and sustain an interest in books. However, as parents know, books can be costly. Hill (1989) suggests that relatives and friends can be asked to give books rather than toys to children on special occasions. A magazine subscription is another way to acquire a variety of reading material.

There are many other ways of acquiring a 'home library' for children. Taylor and Strickland (1986) say that searching for books can become a rewarding family activity. They suggest looking in some of the following places:

- supermarket
- pharmacy
- bookstores, secondhand bookstores, children's bookstores
- thrift shops
- yard sales
- book clubs

There is no substitute for the feeling of ownership of one's own books.

With ownership comes the responsibility of caring for books. It is important for children to learn the care and proper treatment of books, however, books should not be put away and kept from children until read-aloud times. It is important, if children are going to benefit from having books, to make them accessible at all times for children to explore in their own way. About very young children and books, White (1984) reminds us that each book is "fated to suffer every indignity that a child's physically expressed affection could devise - a book not only looked at, but licked, sat on, slept on, and at least torn to shreds" (p. 2). As with all other objects, babies need to explore a book to become familiar with it. Trelease (1979) says:

This 'playing' is an important factor in a child's attachment to books. He must have ample opportunity to feel them, taste them, and see them. At the same time, parents act as role
models in the way they treat books (carefully and affectionately) and the way they speak of books. Children should be encouraged to become as affectionate with a book as they are with a teddy bear (p. 77).

Trelease suggests dividing the books into two categories: expensive and inexpensive. He recommends that the higher priced books be kept visible on a high shelf and the lower priced books be kept on low shelves within easy reach. He encourages parents to position books with their covers facing out so that they serve to arouse the child's imagination and curiosity. He says: "If you want children to read books, put them within easy reach" (p. 34).

WHEN AND WHERE

Free time is becoming increasingly scarce in our busy society, and reading aloud to children at home is often pushed to the back burner. It is important for parents to learn the benefits of reading aloud to their children so that they will begin to consider it a top priority in their busy schedules. McCormick (1977) indicates that there is a direct correlation between the regularity or frequency of being read to and the benefits the practice has on literacy development.
Parents are often too tired to spend the time reading aloud to their children. Many are content to let children play or watch television so that they can relax during their free time. But reading aloud can be as relaxing for parents as it is for children. It gives children the attention they are craving, stops their fussing, and it gives the parents a chance to rest. Trelease (1979) points out that "brevity is one of reading aloud’s advantages. It doesn’t take anywhere near as much time as a game of bridge, Trivial Pursuit, the week’s grocery shopping, a bowling string, or a Little League game. And the memories last longer" (p. 72).

For families who do participate in reading aloud on a regular basis, Taylor and Strickland (1986) say that very often it occurs at specific times and in given locations, and the participants have designated places to sit and special roles to play. Routines develop when reading aloud is an everyday occurrence.

Each family establishes its own routines for reading aloud according to their schedules and preferences. However, experts have made a few recommendations regarding times and places that may be helpful for parents and children. Trelease (1979) recommends reading as often as parents have time for. He suggests families set aside at
least one *traditional* time each day for a story, and fit in others as
time allows. For infants, according to Rudman and Pearce (1988), a
good time to read-aloud to infants is while they are being fed. It helps
the baby to associate books with the fulfillment of needs. Babies who
are read to at feeding time begin to sense a connection between
nurturing and the reading of a book. Taylor and Strickland (1986) point
to the more unusual read-aloud times for families on the go. Bus rides,
bath time, while the child is washing dishes, car trips, and doctors
office visits are all good times to squeeze in a story. For parents who
find it especially difficult to find the time, Hill (1989) suggests that
parents ask the individuals who care for their children to read to them.

Of course there is always bedtime. This is a time when children are
likely to be more receptive to listening because they are wound down.
Fields (1989) recommends that parents find additional times other
than bedtime too. She says that while it is an emotionally fulfilling
time, children are often too sleepy and not alert enough to fully benefit
from the experience in terms of literacy development. Additionally,
Trelease (1979) warns parents about getting “too comfortable”. He
says that a reclining position is bound to bring on drowsiness, and a
slouching position can cause the same effects.
HOW

Many parents who do not read to their children need encouragement and advice on how to get the process started in their homes. For those who do read to their children, there are some suggestions from researchers to help parents in creating supportive learning environments for children which encourage language learning and help them learn to read and write.

All children have their own way of sharing books, and parents should be sensitive to these needs and react accordingly. Some children are more quiet listeners than others. Some like to talk about the book and ask lots of questions. Some like to play language games with the reader and with the stories they hear. But Taylor and Strickland (1986) say that it is the mutual pleasure that storytime brings that is the key contributing factor to children's success in learning to read and write. "Parents do not deliberately set out to give language lessons. Nevertheless, all kinds of lessons about language do occur" (p. 17).

Most researchers agree that children need to be involved in the story from beginning to end. They need the freedom to interact with the text and the reader - to play with the language, discuss their ideas, question their understanding, and relate the content to their own
experiences. Strickland and Morrow (1989) say:

Active participation accounts for many of the benefits of reading stories to youngsters. The social interaction in storybook reading motivates interest. Adult and child cooperatively construct meaning as they pause to comment and respond during the reading. The interaction provides a direct channel for information for the child (p. 322).

Furthermore, they encourage parents to use some form of Directed Listening-Thinking Activity (DLTA) as a way of giving children an organizational framework in which to interpret and comprehend new stories. They suggest that parents follow three simple steps. First prepare the children for listening with questions and discussion, second, read the story, and third, discuss the story after reading.

A similar model is presented by Flood (1977). He outlines the model for parents as follows:

STEP 1: Children profit from preparation for reading - warm-up questions.

STEP 2: Children need to be part of the process; they need to speak, to ask and answer questions, to relate the content of the present story to past experiences. This enables the children to
integrate the information which has been read to them and, thereby, prepares them for the remainder of the story.

STEP 3: Positive reinforcement during the episode.

STEP 4: Post story evaluative questioning helps the child learn to assess, evaluate, and integrate.

Parents should not use these models as a type of 'lesson plan' for reading aloud. Rather, they should be aware of the steps and integrate them naturally into the read-aloud experience. It is very important that children do not perceive story-time as test time. This could easily discourage them from reading and ruin the experience of listening to stories.

Another very important part of read-aloud times is referred to by Taylor and Strickland (1986) as 'book binging'. Often times children get hooked on a particular book and 'binge' on it. Much to the dismay of their parents, children will request it over and over again for read-aloud times. While children do need exposure to many different books, researchers advise parents to try and let the 'binge' run its course (Taylor & Strickland, 1986; Martinez & Roser, 1985; Butler, 1980; Hill, 1989). They point to the great benefits of the practice and say that sometimes children need to hear a book over and over again for
questions to emerge and understandings to develop.

Hill (1989) says that rereading stories to children "helps to affirm previously held information while at the same time helps them extend the knowledge they already have" (p. 34). She also points out that rereading can act as a preview for a book they may want to read on their own at a later time and that having a general sense of the story helps them to do it. "Children who have repeatedly heard their favorite books will often read them to themselves or to any other willing individual. Although they may not read the book verbatim, children usually approximate it rather closely" (p. 34). These are the first steps in reading.

The following is a combination of suggestions from experts (Trelease, 1979; Rudman & Pearce, 1988; Flood, 1977) compiled loosely in the order of a read-aloud experience, which could serve as a guide for parents.

* Preview the book by reading it ahead of time. Such advance reading allows you to spot material you may wish to shorten, eliminate, or elaborate on.

* Allow your listeners a few minutes to settle down and adjust their feet and minds to the story.
* Prepare your listeners for the story by discussing what the story might be about, giving them information they might need to understand certain vocabulary or concepts, or giving them a brief overview of the story.

* If you are reading a picture book, make sure the children can see the pictures easily.

* Discuss the different parts of the book naturally as you begin to read it – front, back, author, illustrator, cover, pages, pictures, words, beginning, and end.

* Use plenty of expression when reading. If possible, change your tone of voice to fit the dialogue.

* Read slowly enough for the child to build mental pictures of what he just heard you read. Slow down enough for the children to see the pictures in the book without feeling hurried.

* Maintain enough eye contact so that you can react and respond to signs of interest, or lack of it.

* Disregard the old third-grade rule about using your finger when you read. Let your finger do the walking and the talking sometimes by lightly running your finger under the text as you read, sometimes pointing to individual words. This helps the
child to make the connection between what your voice is saying and what is on the printed page.

* Answer children's questions thoroughly. Don't be concerned that the story is interrupted for a few moments. Allow the children to react, comment or question.

* Encourage your child's interaction through repetitive phrases, predicting what will happen next, and allowing them to read along. Praise them for their efforts.

* Rather than putting the book away immediately after reading, discuss the story briefly after you have finished it, being careful not to make this a test time. Go by the reactions of your child to know when they have had enough. Ask open-ended questions which will encourage thinking rather than mere memory skills.

* Make the book available so that the child might look at it on his own.

* If the child enjoyed the book, read it again at another time.

* From time to time, make it a practice to retell familiar stories from memory and have your child tell them to you. Use such occasions as pushing the shopping cart, wheeling the
baby carriage, doing the daily chores, bedtime, bath time, meal
time, or while driving in the car. This practice aides in
comprehension and overall language development.

It is clear to many educators that parents can make a big difference
in their children's literacy development right from the earliest years.
Many well-intentioned parents are totally unaware of the important
connection between reading aloud to their children and literacy
development. Parents want to help their children learn to read and
write, but in order to succeed at this task, they need information and
guidance from educators who truly understand the process of literacy
development.
CHAPTER FOUR

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The first goal of this project is to create an awareness among parents of the important role they play in the literacy development of their children. Parents need to be aware of the fact that an activity as simple as reading aloud to their children on a regular basis can make a significant difference in the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Parents really do not need to try and formally teach their children how to read if they participate in reading aloud and use some simple guidelines to insure that their children receive the most benefit from the experience.

The second goal of this project is to provide teachers with a tool with which to educate parents. Teachers often speak of the importance of parents reading to their children, and speak of how much parents need to be educated about methods for child rearing, but seldom do they act on this idea. This video cassette will help them to take action.

The final, and most important goal, is to help children to grow up literate and enjoy reading. It has been proven that children who come
from homes where they are read to are more likely to learn to read easily and enjoy the process of reading than children who do not. Children who develop some of the basic literacy skills at home will come to school more prepared for formal reading education and for learning in general.

The objective of this project is to create a resource for teachers in educating parents. This resource will be a visual lesson in the form of a video cassette on the benefits of reading aloud in the home, and of helpful hints in getting started or continuing the practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

LIMITATIONS

There are primarily two limitations of this project. First of all, the availability of the technology necessary to use the video - a video cassette recorder (VCR). This project is designed so that it may be used in group training situations or may be sent home with students for parents to view at their leisure. A VCR would be necessary in both instances.

The second limitation of the project lies in the student/parent population for which the video cassette is targeted. Although the video touches briefly on the importance of reading to older children, its main focus is on preschoolers and other children who are in the emergent stages of literacy development.

Also, the content of the video and the expectations that the video holds of parents is geared more toward parents who have developed some literacy skills themselves. Parents who are not literate would obviously require a different type of training.
APPENDIX
TITLE: Read to Me .... How Important is Reading Aloud to Your Children?

POEM:
Read to Me
Read to me riddles
and read to me rhymes.
Read to me stories
of magical times.

Read to me tales
about castles and kings.
Read to me stories
of fabulous things.

Read to me pirates
and read to me knights.
Read to me dragons
and dragon backed flights.

Read to me spaceships
and cowboys and then,
when you are finished,
please read them again!

Children love listening to stories, and next to hugging and talking to your children, reading aloud is the greatest gift you can give them. Many parents don't realize that helping their children learn to read is as easy as reading to them on a regular basis. What you do at home has a tremendous impact on your child's success in reading. Reading aloud is one of the most important activities you can do with your children while they are growing up. It is a time for sharing, a
time for togetherness, and a time to examine the world through the pages of a book. It is a special time in which your family come together for pleasure and for learning.

Also important in an age of rising illiteracy, are the many benefits your children will gain as a result of your taking the time to read to them. Reading aloud to your children will give them a definite advantage in acquiring one of the most important skills in life - the ability to read.

Children who are read to at home from an early age learn the skills which will help them to become successful readers and writers. They begin learning these skills naturally at an earlier age as a direct result of being read to at home. It does take time for parents to read to their children, but the time you put into it will prove to be some of the most quality time you spend with your children.

Those children who have been read to at home enter school with an advantage over children who have had little or no experience with books and stories. These children can easily be distinguished from those who have not been read to by their knowledge about the way print works. These same children who have had lots of experience with books during their early years at home, often become the top readers in their classrooms.

If you don't already read to your children, it's never too late to start. Your children will begin to benefit from it as soon as you pick up your first book. You can begin right away! This video will provide some helpful information for those who are just beginning, as well as for those who already read-aloud. Come along as we go into the classroom and homes of children who are read to regularly.

It is no coincidence that teachers can frequently be found reading aloud to their students. Teachers know that children learn to read and write more easily if they have an idea of what printed messages are all about. Young children learn this through the actions of the adult models around them - more specifically, through adults reading books
to them.

When an adult points to the words in a book as it is being read, the child learns that it is the black marks on the page which tell the reader what to say. Eventually they learn that these marks are known as letters and words, and that they have sounds and are meaningful. This is only one example of the many concepts children must acquire before they can even begin to read on their own. Other ideas include the knowledge that stories have a beginning, middle and end, and that the text is read from left to right, and a book is read from front to back.

To adults, these ideas seem very simple and easy to learn, but it takes children a good deal of time and experience with books to truly grasp these ideas. This knowledge is best learned in a natural way through books. True understanding will not come from a workbook because direct teaching of these concepts is generally ineffective. It is frequent, every day experience with books that will enable children to discover for themselves, and thus really understand, these and other concepts, which are so crucial to learning to read. For this reason, children who are not read to at home often have some “catching-up” to do when they enter school. Children who have been read to at home have an advantage, and often learn to read much easier and much earlier.

In addition to learning to read easier, reading aloud to your child also improves listening skill, increases vocabulary, improves reading comprehension, helps your child speak better, become a better writer, and it improves the quality and amount of what they read and write on their own by creating an interest and a desire to read.

The desire to read is key to your child’s success in reading. Many parents comment that their child just doesn’t like to read. This is usually not the case with children who have been read to since they were young. When enjoyment is found in books from the earliest years as a result of your reading aloud, your child will become excited about books and will want to read.
Parents continuously ask teachers what they can do to help their child in reading. The answer is really very simple. Get some books and read to them daily. In fact studies done on early readers indicate four very basic factors which are present in the home environment of nearly every early reader.

The first factor is that reading to children is done on a regular basis and begins from the earliest years, usually during infancy, and continues on into the teenage years or beyond. No one is too young or too old to enjoy it. Many parents begin reading to their child very soon after it is born. Parents should not feel silly doing this. An infants learning is much more sophisticated than we give them credit for. Infants enjoy the sound of the parents voice and the closeness they feel while the parent reads. Books help the infant’s eyes to focus and they help build sensory awareness. As the child grows, books help them to develop vocabulary and understand language, as well as build and reinforce basic concepts related to people, animals and familiar events. Young children begin to associate books with pleasure and develop an early interest in reading.

One misconception that many parents often have is that once children begin reading on their own, they no longer need or wish to be read to. Most children who can read on their own still enjoy the experience of being read to. Reading aloud to older children and teenagers is a time for closeness and getting to know each other better. Children continue to learn from the adult reading model even after they have become experienced readers themselves. Aside from the pleasure of the experience, children are often not yet at a level to read some of the fine literature that they enjoy hearing. Reading aloud to them or taking turns reading parts of a book, will allow them to experience a wider range of literature. Comprehension and enjoyment are often greater when children don’t have to struggle through the reading themselves.

Of course this is not to say that they should never read on their own. Time must also be provided for independent reading for children of all ages. Some experts recommend scheduling a time during the day in which the whole family reads to themselves. Turn off the T.V., grab
something to read, and enjoy the time reading for 15 to 20 minutes. This sets a good example and establishes the habit of reading.

Older siblings also make excellent readers for their younger brothers and sisters. It is good practice for them, and it provides a good role model for the younger child.

Most children want to be like their older brothers and sisters and do the things that they do, so they will pick up a book to imitate them, and in the process, may discover what reading is all about.

Regardless of who is doing the reading, it is so important that it is done regularly. You will not see as many benefits from reading only once a week. Make reading aloud a top priority each and every day.

And don’t forget, in the homes of early readers, parents are good role models for the children, they participate in reading activities themselves. Parents are seen reading for pleasure and information. If children are not read to and do not see their parents reading, they will not learn that it is important and enjoyable.

One other point to consider is the father’s role in reading aloud. Often it is the mother in the family who reads aloud to the children. However, it is important that reading not be seen as a strictly feminine activity. Fathers need to take an active role in reading to children as well.

But when we come right down to it, the most important thing is not so much who does the reading, but that the child is read to as regularly as possible. The most benefit will be gained from hearing stories every day. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and baby-sitters can all serve as readers and provide a variety of role models for the child.

The second factor present in the environment of children who read early is that printed materials are available in the home. Books, magazines, newspapers, and a variety of other materials should be available for reading and browsing. Children who do not see reading materials at home learn that reading is not important or worthwhile.
In homes where there is an abundance of reading material available, the message is clear to children – reading is an important activity.

It is highly recommended that children have their own collection of books. If children are to develop an interest in reading, they need to have access to their own special books. Acquiring a home library can be done by purchasing inexpensive books such as "Golden Books" at supermarkets or department stores. Some of the very best books for children can be found in book stores or in children's book stores, and can usually be purchased in the cheaper paperback form. If children are to learn to love reading, it is important that the books contain good stories that the children will want to hear over and over again and eventually, read for themselves. Look over the books carefully before buying, chances are if you enjoy it, so will your child.

The library is also an excellent source of quality children's literature. Children should have their own library card and should be taken to the library frequently to select their own books.

Teachers, librarians, and children's bookstores can help you and your child in selecting good books. Library books that are special favorites can be purchased at bookstores and given as gifts on holidays and special occasions. Owning a book definitely makes it more special – and the more special a book is, the more effort your child will put into learning to read it.

Try to expose your child to a wide variety of books. Picture storybooks and fairy tales are excellent and are the most common among parents who read to their children. Don't forget to include Mother Goose and other poetry books, ABC books and counting books, wordless picture books, and as your child grows in listening abilities, begin to read short chapter books.

Make sure that your child's books are available for them to read just as their toys are available for them to play with. Teach children the proper care of books, but don't keep books from them because of a fear
that they will be ruined. Certain fragile or expensive books may need to be kept in special out-of-reach places when you're not around, but in order for children to fully benefit from their books, they must be able to use them at any time. Worn out books are a sign of learning and enjoyment! When children learn to read easily, the price will be worth it!

Children will begin to pick up books at an early age and play at reading them. They may not read the story exactly as it is written, but children who are praised and encouraged to do this will soon begin to recite the story more accurately, and in time, will begin reading the actual words. This playing at reading is a crucial step in the development of reading skills and you should encourage your child to play at reading the stories he knows.

The third element present in the homes of early readers is the availability of writing materials. Knowledge about reading and knowledge about writing are very closely linked. Children who have access to writing materials and who are encouraged to experiment with writing, develop important knowledge about how we use print, and they learn this at a much earlier age. Children who are encouraged to write stories, letters, poems, thank-you notes, and lists will ease into reading and writing naturally.

Children's early writing should be based on their ideas of what writing looks like. As with learning to read, direct teaching is not as effective as natural experimentation. You should resist the urge to correct their writing or spell for them. Encourage them to give it a try the way they think it should be. Take the time to answer their questions, but be careful not to force information on them which they are not ready for. Praise them for their efforts. And remember, if they can read it and it means something to them, that's what's important.

Just as children learn about letters and words through playing at reading books, they learn these same concepts through what begins as scribbling and progresses to writing letters and later, inventing the spellings of words. When you combine reading aloud to your children
with encouraging them to experiment with writing, learning to read is the natural result.

And the fourth characteristic common in all of the homes of children who learn to read early and easily, is a factor necessary for any type of learning to take place - there is someone who provides encouragement and support.

Children who learn to read naturally and successfully have responsive persons in the environment who take the time to read to them every day. They take the time to answer their questions, and they take the time to stimulate their interest in books. The following are some helpful hints for you to consider when reading aloud to your child.

First of all, if you are reading a new story that you haven't read before, preview the book by briefly looking it over or reading it ahead of time. If such advance reading is possible, it allows you to spot material you may wish to shorten, eliminate, elaborate on, or prepare your child for in advance so that they will better understand the story.

Try to schedule a read-aloud time which will be the same from day to day. Bedtime is often a good time, but remember, children are usually tired at this time and may not be alert enough to fully benefit from the experience. Try to choose a time in which your child is alert and ready to interact.

Prepare your child for the reading by discussing what the story might be about based on the picture on the cover. Sometimes it is helpful to give information that might be needed to understand certain words or ideas. It can also be helpful to tell them a little bit about the story before you begin. These practices will help your child become more involved in the book and understand it better.

Discuss the different parts of the book in a natural way as you read it. Talk about the author who wrote the book, the illustrator who made the
pictures, the words and letters on the pages, and the title on the cover.

If you are reading a picture book, make sure the child can see the pictures easily. Read slowly enough for the child to build mental pictures of what he just heard you read. Slow down enough for the child to see the pictures in the book without feeling hurried.

Also, maintain enough eye contact to react to signs of interest or lack of it. Don't be afraid to abandon a book if it was not a good choice.

Disregard the old third-grade rule about using your finger when you read. Let your finger do the talking occasionally by lightly running it under the text as you read, sometimes pointing to individual words. This practice helps the child to make the connection between what your voice is saying and what is on the printed page.

Answer your child's questions thoroughly. Don't be concerned that the story is interrupted for a few moments. Allow the child to react, comment, question, or join in with the reading. Encourage your child's interaction through phrases that repeat, guessing what will happen next, and discussing the pictures. Praise them for their efforts.

Discuss the story briefly after you have finished it, but be careful not to make this a test time. Go by the reactions of your child to know when they have had enough. Ask questions which will require more than a yes or no answer, and more than mere memory skills.

Make the book available for the child to look at it on his own, and if the child enjoyed the book, read it again sometime! This practice of rereading is extremely important to the development of early literacy skills, as it enables children to learn stories, and thus understand them better. When children learn the story a book contains, often memorizing the words, they are more likely to try and make the connection between what they know the story says and what the actual words on the page say. This is one of the first steps in beginning to read on their own.
In today's society with schedules becoming more and more active, and families becoming busier and busier, it is increasingly difficult to find time to do the things we need to do, let alone the things we enjoy doing.

Reading aloud to your children can fit both of these categories - it can be something you enjoy doing and it is definitely something you need to do in order to assist them in becoming literate.

Give your children the advantage they deserve.

READ TO ME!
REFERENCES


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