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COORDINATING TEACHER AND PARENT SUPPORT  
FOR BEGINNING READERS

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A Project

Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Education: Reading

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by

Shelly L. Ferguson

September 1995

COORDINATING TEACHER AND PARENT SUPPORT  
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by  
Shelly L. Ferguson

September 1995

Approved by:

  
Adria Klein, First Reader

6-10-95  
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## ABSTRACT

Parents are children's first teachers. As such they facilitate the acquisition of oral language, build their child's awareness and knowledge of print, and assist him or her in learning about the world.

Parents and teachers are natural partners in helping children learn how to read because they share similar motivations and objectives. However, when children enter school, parental support usually decreases as parents assume a subordinate role in their child's education.

The combined support of both parents and teachers affords the best learning potential for beginning readers (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Goldenburg, 1989). Teachers need to make parents aware of the critical role they play in their child's education and to encourage their continued support.

This project consists of seventeen parent information papers which will assist teachers in coordinating home and school efforts. They will be a means to communicate general information about literacy and to give specific suggestions for reinforcing reading behaviors and strategies. The object is to continually remind parents of the developmental nature of reading and its relationship to speech and writing. With these understandings, parents can recognize signs of growth toward becoming a reader, and actively support their child's progress.

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## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### Introduction

Children's first and most powerful teachers are their parents. Parents establish the foundation for learning to read by: (a) supporting the acquisition of oral language (listening and speaking), (b) building an awareness and knowledge of print, and, (c) facilitating their child's ability to learn about the world.

They do all this, not necessarily through formal instruction, but by simply recognizing and assisting their child's efforts to learn. As an example, when the toddler is learning to speak, the parent is at the child's side, anticipating the message, accepting the approximations and supporting all efforts to communicate. Parents supply the missing words--extending the child's language by providing a model--thus acknowledging and validating the communication attempt. Learning to read is an extension of oral language (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Cullinan, 1992). The same strategies parents use to encourage the development of speech are those needed to move a child into reading (Mooney, 1990).

The most reliable predictor for a child's success in learning to read is being read to, regularly, from an early age. This has been so proven by innumerable studies, that probably few would challenge it. However, Teale and Sulzby

(cited in Stickland & Morrow, 1989), while agreeing that reading aloud is the most important indicator, maintain that it is not so much the fact that the child is read to but the quality of interaction between parent and child that makes the difference. It is the conversation that takes place between the capable reader and the learner as they explore the pictures, talk about the story and relate it to their own experiences that is so powerful in building a child's understanding of how print works. In addition, this collaboration contributes to concept development, extends the child's oral language and listening vocabulary, and strengthens the emotional bond between parent and child (Cullinan, 1992; Elley, 1989).

The most prevalent print, however, is not found in books but appears in the child's home, church, on streets, in stores, restaurants, parks, and other public places. Becoming aware of this environmental print and its purpose is fundamental to the acquisition of written language. It is the parent who is most often there when a child notices a sign, points and asks, "What does that say?" According to research, adults can help children make sense of print by reading to them the print to which their attention is drawn.

Helping children read environmental print should be as natural as talking to them about other important things in

their environment. It is probably more important than reading books because it serves a function, thereby making a direct connection to meaning (Smith, 1985; Jewell & Zintz, 1990).

Parents assist children in learning about the world. Children learn by making predictions, in the form of generalizations, based on what they have already discovered from encounters with their immediate environment (Smith 1985; Short & Burke, 1991). Daily activities provide opportunities for learning language, concepts and vocabulary. "Let's put on your blue jacket." "Bring me three forks." "How many plates will we need?" A child's store of experiences, and therefore his or her opportunities to learn, are extended when parents use ordinary and special activities as learning situations--visits to a bank, park, bakery, museum, and other locals--as ways to enlarge a child's knowledge of the world. As in the case of early speech attempts, parents help children to confirm or revise their predictions about how the world works by providing relevant feedback. The experiences in themselves, as was noted about the books in reading aloud, are not as valuable as the interaction between parent and child. It is the conversation about situations that helps children make connections between what is already known and new information. This bank of

knowledge that the child is accumulating, is part of the nonvisual, or background information so essential to successful reading (Smith, 1985; Weaver, 1994; Cullinan, 1992; Jewell & Zintz, 1990).

When children enter school, the additional environment and resources increase the potential for learning. The daily experiences and language transactions parents and children share can be augmented by group experiences and language interactions not possible in the home.

#### Identifying the Problem

Although the best support for continued learning, especially in the area of written language, is through the coordination of home/school efforts, in reality this seldom happens. Teachers understand the nature of learning, that reading is developmental and the interrelationship of listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, it is difficult to find time and opportunity to talk with parents about the principles that guide reading instruction.

At the same time, parents, who understand so much about facilitating their child's learning about oral language, how print works and about the world in which they live, often feel powerless in assisting their child in learning to read. There are several reasons for this. Probably the most important one is that our society has assigned responsibility for reading instruction to schools.

The common perception is that children are "supposed" to learn how to read in first grade. Some parents are more than willing to leave the task to the schools because of other commitments. Others view themselves as incompetent to help with this most important and fundamental step in their child's education, and are reluctant to take an active part for fear of impeding their child's progress.

That a common understanding be reached and cooperation between home and school be established is advantageous for three reasons: (a) parents and teachers share common goals; (b) children who lack experiences with print and their world, or whose oral language is underdeveloped, are at a disadvantage in learning to read; and, (c) just as with the development of speech, all children need encouragement, demonstrations and continuous opportunities to use written language in order to develop their reading potential.

Schools cannot do it all: Children are only in school a few hours of the day (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Goldenburg, 1989). Teachers need to take the lead in eliciting parental assistance in helping children learn to read. Most parents will help their children if they understand that they need to do so, and are assisted with information about the most effective ways to support their developing reader (Goldenburg, 1989; Routman, 1991; Soiferman, 1991). This project is designed to help teachers accomplish this

goal by encouraging parents to define and accept their role in their child's reading development.

As the young child moves into the school environment, parents can provide a viable bridge between the independent support of parent-to-child and the large group situation of the classroom. At the same time that the child is struggling to adjust to the demands of a new social group, a different environment, and increased academic expectations, there is a drastic reduction in the amount and nature of personal interactions. Parents can lessen the shock by providing the vital continuity between home and school. By continuing to read to their children, they demonstrate that reading is important, they model the behaviors that their beginning reader will need to assume, and they continue to contribute to their child's bank of knowledge about the world, supporting the learning until their child is ready to read alone. In addition, they build their child's knowledge of print, stories and book awareness daily.

The beginning reader learns about books by interacting with many varieties, in different settings. The child learns about language by hearing the sounds of language--rhyming passages, nonsense words, narrative works, and samples of different genres and writing styles. This personal reading experience is enhanced by the

opportunity to hear the same stories repeatedly. The lap-reading experience is so enriching for children that teachers attempt to duplicate it for students in school by sharing big books and reading in small group or whole class settings (Holdaway, 1989). However, the unique experience of being personally read to by a caring adult can only be approximated in the classroom.

When children begin to read more for themselves, the parent's role expands. Now, along with providing a model of reading, parents can support the child in taking on the role of a reader. Children need to view themselves as readers, and this depends on continuous, successful encounters with text. Readers learn to read by reading. Children get validation along with valuable practice when they read to a caring adult. As in the case of the read-aloud experience, the child's enjoyment as well as his or her comprehension of the text is deepened by the discussion and interaction that takes place during and after the reading.

Children who are not feeling successful or are finding reading difficult may need a different level of assistance for awhile. Parents can lend additional support by sharing the reading task with their child. This can be done by: echo reading, where the parent reads and the child reads along, following the lead; shared reading, in which

participants read alternate paragraphs or pages; or by any other method that eases the burden on the beginning reader.

Parents are the translators of print at this stage. The support they lend will enable their developing reader to assume more and more of the responsibility for his or her own learning: about language, about print, and about the world.

Parents who read themselves and make time to read to their children provide the best model and motivation for their beginning readers (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Cullinan, 1992; Trelease, 1989). They are also the best equipped for continuing that support throughout the school years. Parents have a vested interest in their child's learning, and they are the most able to provide the individualized, one-on-one assistance that can make the difference between success and failure in learning to read.

Teachers who invite parents to become their partners gain invaluable instructional support. The benefits can be worth the time needed to discuss reading insights and goals toward achieving effective collaboration. Children who know their parents are interested in their learning, are not only more successful academically but their confidence and feelings of self-worth are significantly enhanced, which translates into improved behavior in the classroom (Cummins, as cited in Hays, Bahruth, & Kessler, 1991, pp. 29-30; Cullinan, 1992; Jewell & Zintz, 1990).

Parents of the children who have the greatest need of learning-support are often the very parents most reluctant to attend school meetings. Therefore, this project will provide literacy information through regular school-to-home and teacher-to-parent contacts.

General information about literacy will be inserted in the school's monthly newsletter or made available in pamphlet format. Timely reading/writing suggestions can be included in the teachers' newsletters, homework packets or in the form of individual notes to parents when appropriate. More direct assistance can be given by the teacher or Reading Specialist when there is an identified need. For example, this alternative might be followed when a parent requests specific information or as a result of a proposed intervention during a Student Study Team meeting.

Having sample communications for commonly identified needs of beginning readers will save teachers time in writing out reading and writing suggestions for each parent contact. Making communication with parents easier will encourage a closer coordination of home and school efforts to provide optimal support for beginning readers.

#### Theoretical Orientation

This project was developed upon these underlying theoretical beliefs: (a) learning to listen, speak, read and write are similar, interrelated, and reciprocal;

(b) learning to read is developmental; (c) certain understandings are critical for learning to read but are not necessarily developed in any particular order; (d) children learn to read by engaging in authentic reading and writing activities; (e) demonstrations and sharing are necessary for learning to read; (f) parents and teachers share common motivations and objectives; and, (g) coordinating parent and teacher efforts provides the best support for beginning readers.

Learning to listen, speak, read, and write are similar, interrelated and reciprocal (Edelsky, Altwerger & Flores, 1991; Jewell & Zintz, 1990). Learning in any one area increases the potential for learning in the other three language areas. The acquisition of speech provides a model for how language is learned. Children are born into a world of spoken language. Hearing language constantly, they gradually become aware of its uses and begin to experiment with communicating their needs in the surrounding medium--speech. More capable speakers accept and celebrate the child's efforts, and in so doing, support the transition to more effective communication. The child has numerous opportunities to approximate, to practice and to receive feedback in a supportive environment where higher level speech is continually modeled. Speech both

depends upon and continues to develop through hearing and using language in a meaningful real-world context.

The acquisition of written language is a natural extension of the continuing development of oral language. It arises from the same need to communicate in the medium of the immediate environment. Witnessing people in the real world enjoying and using written language to send and receive messages, motivates children to learn to read and write. It is just one more step in the development of communication skills.

Reading and writing, then, can be thought of as adding other dimensions to the child's language development. Since growth in one area of language extends the potential for growth in all other areas, the child's language-learning capability has now multiplied.

Learning to read is developmental (Teale & Sulzby, cited in Strickland & Morrow, 1989, p.4; Jewell & Zintz, 1990). It has its roots in listening to stories and develops through multiple experiences with print which serve to build a gradual awareness of the purposes of reading and writing. Through these experiences and with the support of others, readers are assisted along their own personal routes to reading independence and the life-long development of competence.

Certain understandings are critical for learning to read. These understandings are not necessarily developed in any particular order, but are simultaneously acquired and refined at individual rates. Some of these understandings are: (a) the purposes of reading; (b) the constraints of reading (directionality and alphabetic principle); (c) the conventions of reading (format, organization, and punctuation); (d) the development and use of enabling schemas; and (e) the aesthetics of reading (book language, reader and print interaction) (Clay, 1991; Weaver, 1994; Cullinan, 1992). This list is representative and not intended to be complete.

Children learn to read by engaging in authentic reading and writing activities (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988; Goodman, 1986). From hearing stories read aloud and having signs and other significant print read to them as they engage in real world experiences with others, children gradually assume a more active role in reading experiences as they move toward independence.

Demonstrations and sharing are necessary for learning to read (Harste, Short & Burke, 1988; Cambourne, 1988; Goodman, 1986; Smith, 1985; Edelsky, Altwenger & Flores, 1991). Most children come to school competent in oral language and in organizing and assimilating new learnings. All have knowledge of the world, of environmental print and

some knowledge about stories and written language as well--depending on the home environment. The foundation is there for the development of written language. However, success depends upon those more language-capable adults, just as in the case of speech development.

Parents and teachers share common motivations and objectives. Both want children to learn how to read independently as early as possible in order to increase their likelihood of continuing success in learning. Both want children to enjoy their reading experiences and to continue to develop their capabilities.

Coordinating parent and teacher efforts provides the best support for beginning readers (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Goldenburg, 1989). Through these combined efforts, and with common expectations and support at home and in school, children can develop reading and writing skills as naturally and effortlessly as they develop speech (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Morrow, 1989). This is not to say that they can do it unaided. Both parents and teachers need to provide the experiences and model the behaviors that extend children's explorations and knowledge of oral and written language. Approximations must be recognized and accepted as growth (Routman, 1988). Most important, both parents and teachers need to evaluate the child's strengths and

consolidate their efforts to extend learning by expecting and acknowledging improvement as a reader and writer.

During the past decade, there has been increased pressure on schools to return to the "basics". In reading, this translates to teaching children discrete skills for recognizing words. This so called "common sense" approach assumes that once children can recognize the words, comprehension will follow (Weaver, 1994; Shannon, 1991).

Advocates of intensive phonics instruction stress that children need to learn to decode words before they can read and write (Weaver, 1994). Linguistics promoters support the same theory of starting with the parts and working up to whole text. However, their approach to making reading easy is to have children read regularly patterned words, in lists and in controlled texts. This controlled practice would help children intuit patterns that would aid in decoding text, and they could then gradually move into real books (Weaver, 1994).

The emphasis on starting with recognizing words is also embodied in the "sight words" approach to reading. Children are drilled on about a hundred basic, high-frequency words in the belief that these known words will facilitate successful reading (Weaver, 1994).

Basal readers typically employ elements of all these approaches: reading skills are carefully sequenced to

include attention to spelling patterns, decoding, sight words, and comprehension strategies. The vocabulary is controlled (Weaver, 1994; Cambourne, 1988; Shannon, 1991).

These small-step, parts approaches contradict this project's premise that certain understandings are critical for learning to read, but are not necessarily developed in any particular order. Children learn at varying rates and acquire understandings in an individual need-determined sequence.

Some writers take a more moderate view of requisite strategies for successful reading. Adams (1990) contends that although the primary focus is on making meaning, reading at any level and by any definition is dependent upon a thorough understanding and integration of all cueing systems. Clay (1991) states that even the most easily understood principle must be brought to children's conscious attention through modeling or direct teaching.

The important thing to remember amid all the controversy, is that children learn to read and write by engaging in authentic activities and for their own purposes, and not according to any predetermined and practiced steps.

### Summary

Parents are children's first teachers and, as such, are natural partners with classroom teachers in facilitating their children's learning. When a child

enters school, parents can continue to provide the modeling and motivation for learning to read by visibly engaging in reading. They can continue to expand their child's understanding of the world by treating each new experience or activity as a learning opportunity. They can build their child's knowledge base--concepts, language, stories--by continuing to read aloud from material too difficult for the child to manage alone. They can talk about what is read and help their child make personal connections as a way of increasing both understanding and enjoyment of reading. Parents foster their beginning reader's development by providing appropriate support, both emotional and in terms of what their child is trying to do as a reader and writer.

However, the ideal situation of home-school support for the learner is difficult to achieve. Teachers have little time to initiate contacts with parents to share their teaching philosophy or to solicit explicit help in reinforcing classroom learning. Many parents, for various reasons, are hesitant to provide more than general assistance to further what they may perceive as the teachers goals for their child.

The theoretical beliefs behind this project are: (a) learning to listen, speak, read and write are similar, interrelated and reciprocal; (b) learning to read is

developmental; (c) certain understandings are critical for learning to read but these are not necessarily developed in any particular order; (d) children learn to read by engaging in authentic reading and writing activities; (e) demonstrations and sharing are necessary for learning to read; (f) parents and teachers share common motivations and objectives; and, (g) coordinating parent and teacher efforts provides the best support for beginning readers.

Since coordination of parent and teacher efforts provides the best support for beginning readers, a packet of sample communications has been prepared to facilitate home and school cooperation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review has been organized around the seven theoretical beliefs which support this project: (a) learning to listen, speak, read, and write are similar, interrelated, and reciprocal; (b) learning to read is developmental; (c) certain understandings are critical for learning to read but are not necessarily developed in any particular order; (d) children learn to read by engaging in authentic reading and writing activities; (e) demonstrations and sharing are necessary for learning to read; (f) parents and teachers share common motivations and objectives; and (g) coordinating parent and teacher efforts provides the best support for beginning readers.

### Learning to Listen, Speak, Read, and Write Are Similar, Interrelated, and Reciprocal

The currently accepted view of reading arose from studies of how people learn their native language and how they produce and understand sentences (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Weaver, 1994).

Research on language development and on natural learning connects speaking, listening, reading and writing into one interrelated language system, its fundamental function being communication (Holdaway, 1979; Smith, 1985; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Cambourne, 1988; Jewell & Zintz, 1990).

It is commonly agreed that spoken language is a developmental process which begins at birth and passes through degrees of approximation and refinement. From the earliest stages, communication attempts are accepted and recognized as part of a functioning system. There is no magical moment when the ability to talk arrives because the definition of talking is relevant to the level of individual development. There is little of the same tolerance given to the development of written language. Because society has handed over literacy instruction to the schools, the two subsystems of language have been separated into one that is clearly seen as developmental and one that is perceived to depend upon formal instruction.

However, many researchers argue that the same conditions which help children learn speech will also help them learn to read and write (Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Goodman, Y., 1986; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Morrow, 1989; Jewell & Zintz, 1990; McGill-Franzen, 1992). "If we do the same things to encourage reading and writing that we did to encourage learning to talk, children will learn to read and write just as 'naturally' as they learned to talk. That means surrounding them with books (let them see that print is important) modeling reading by reading to them (show them how) and encouraging their attempts to read even when

they make mistakes (praise their effort)" (Cullinan, 1992, p. 9).

Goodman states emphatically, "...just as kids learn to talk by talking, they learn to read by reading" (1992, p. 108). This natural aspect of language learning is stressed, also, by Jewell and Zintz. They see reading and writing as natural extensions of what children have already learned about oral language. "Expanding and enriching competent oral language performance is the greatest need most children have for establishing a curiosity about 'what do words say' and 'how do I write that?" (Jewell and Zintz, 1990, p. 105).

"Traditionally, literacy learning has been viewed as a sequential development: listening, then speaking, followed by reading, and then writing. However, the latest research shows that each is reinforced by the other when they are developed through activities that promote their integration" (Jewell & Zintz, p. 101).

Clay (1991) also found an interdependence between the communication system components. Although she, too, believes that learning throughout the system is not ordered, she recognizes that what is learned in one area promotes learning in all other areas. A child's fluency in speech is seen as a determiner for fluency in reading. Articulation ease and control of sentence structure are

also identified as facilitative factors. She views reading and writing as related in two ways: what a child is able to write, independently, is a good indication of what he or she understands; learning in reading and writing is complementary and reciprocal.

Writing and reading make their own unique contributions to language learning. They promote vocabulary development and use (Holdaway, 1979; Elley, 1989; Cullinan, 1992; Calkins, 1991;). "...both reading and writing lead children to discover and make use of vocabulary and structures that they would be unlikely to meet in speech" (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992, p. 75).

Adams notes yet another significant understanding to be gained from writing. "Through writing, children learn that the purpose of text is not to be read but to be understood" (Adams, 1990, p. 405).

The subsystems of language share certain characteristics: they are social; they are connected and interdependent; and, they are predictable (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Edelsky, Altwerger & Flores, 1991; Short & Burke, 1991; Clay, 1991; Cullinan, 1992; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

### Learning to Read is Developmental

Many researchers describe learning to read as a developmental continuum that begins in infancy with

exposure to oral and written language in the home, and is extended and refined over a lifetime. Some of the early manifestations are: filling in the word when readers' pause; pretend reading--turning the pages and mumbling--imitation of adult behavior; looking at the pictures and recreating the story; approximation, and then the gradual matching of speech and print (Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Cullinan, 1992; Harste, 1992; McGill-Franzen, 1992;). "The steps between knowing nothing about reading and becoming a fluent reader are similar to the steps between the child who makes 'goo goo' sounds and one who speaks clearly" (Cullinan, 1992, p. 9).

In contrast to the developmental theory, some researchers seem to subscribe to a stage-governed pattern of learning to read (Yopp, 1992; Ehri & Sweet, 1991; Adams, 1990). They purport to believe that certain learnings are prerequisite for successful reading. However, many of them seem, instead, to be operating from a poorly defined personal theory of learning. For instance, two researchers carried out a study with kindergarten children on finger-point reading--pointing to the words and reciting text from memory. They clearly identified the prerequisites for success in finger-point reading as letter knowledge, the ability to segment words into sounds, and knowing a few preprimer words. However, in their

conclusion following the study, they wrote that without pretend reading practice (turning pages and reciting the story from memory) letter-sound relations and isolated word reading don't make sense to children (Ehri & Sweet, 1991).

Adams makes a strong case for the stages of learning theory by arbitrarily separating and describing prereading and reading, then changes her mind in the same paragraph.

Acquisition of letter-sound relations depends, first, on solid visual familiarity with individual letters. Unless the relevant letters are already firmly represented in memory, such instruction cannot be anchored. Just as critically, it depends on the students' awareness of phonemes--on their understanding that the little sounds paired with each letter are the subsounds of words. This again requires an understanding of the essential nature and purpose of print. Thus it seems that the true basics on which productive acquisition of letter-sound correspondences depend include prior learning about higher--as well as lower--order strata of the system" (Adams, 1990, p. 255).

Even though Adams devoted chapters to outlining the various print detail she stated was required for profiting from reading instruction, she continually moderated her stance throughout her book. Another quote revealing her conflicting theory is "...as valuable as phonic knowledge may be, its very learnability depends on prior knowledge about language and print" (Adams, 1990, p. 235).

Perhaps a realistic representation of Adams, Ehri, and Sweet's beliefs would be that espoused by Clay: For most children, exposure to demonstrations and sharing in a print enriched environment, with opportunities to

participate in real reading and writing activities is sufficient. But, for the children who are making slow progress, direct assistance with what the child is trying to learn is necessary to ensure success (Clay, 1991).

Certain Understandings Are Critical for Learning to Read But Are Not Necessarily Developed in Any Particular Order

Although children come to reading knowing a lot about spoken language, reading requires understanding the differences between oral and written language. "To learn to read, a child must first learn what it means to read and that she or he would like to be able to do so" (Adams, 1990, p. 411). Just as in the acquisition of speech, competent users provide the modeling, support for approximations, and reinforcement necessary for learning written language. Some of the understandings children need to develop are: (a) book handling, such as, message is in the print and does not vary with successive readings, pictures support the meaning, directionality; (b) speech can be written down; (c) sounds in speech can be represented by letters; and, (d) language is predictable.

Most of these concepts are straightforward and self-explanatory. However, the significance researchers have given to directionality in children's ability to read successfully should be noted. The concept of directionality--the rule that English reading begins at the

top, left side of the page and moves to the right, then returns for the next line of print and proceeds down the page--is basic to written language. Not only is directionality important as an orientation to the overall page; readers must learn to process print, both letters and words, in sequential order from left to right. Understanding of this rudimentary concept is developed through repeated encounters with print and students often show lapses in directional control, even after months of successful reading (Clay, 1991).

Learning to read is a complex, cognitive activity that depends upon developing and incorporating a variety of strategies for processing print (Holdaway, 1979; Smith, 1985; Adams, 1990; Clay, 1991; Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992; Goodman, 1992; Weaver, 1994).

Ball and Blackman (1991), and Lie, 1991) conducted studies where kindergarten and first grade children were taught phoneme awareness, along with phonetic segmentation, in order to improve word analysis skills. They found that such training did improve children's success in learning to read. "The results of this study do suggest that skills in word analysis facilitate learning to read, and thus are not merely a consequence of reading acquisition" (Lie, 1991, p. 249).

According to Yopp, there are two sides to phonemic awareness, the understanding that speech is composed of individual sounds. "...in order to benefit from formal reading instruction, youngsters must have a certain level of phonemic awareness. Reading instruction, in turn, heightens their awareness of language. Thus, phonemic awareness is both a prerequisite for and a consequence of learning to read" (1992, p. 697).

However, these findings are contradicted, as will be shown in the next section. Perhaps, the difference lies in the model of reading. The phonemic awareness studies involved children in an instructional situation as contrasted to the developmental model of learning to read.

Children Learn to Read by Engaging in Authentic Reading and Writing Activities

Even as they document the complexities of learning to read, researchers point out the apparent paradox. Frank Smith said, " We learn to read by reading..." (1985, p. 88), and Goodman reiterated, "Whatever skills are involved in reading, are learned best while trying to make sense of real language" (Goodman, 1992, p. 108).

That statement by Goodman, sums up what many understand about how children learn to read (Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Goodman, Y., 1986; Cambourne, 1988; Morrow, 1989; Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Weaver, 1994).

Activities to get children ready to read are unnecessary: Children become ready for the next step in their development by reading, not by getting ready to read. As was said about speech, there is no magic moment when reading begins; reading is defined relative to an individual's development.

Regarding word analysis, as discussed in the studies of Ball and Blackman and of Lie, earlier, and, indeed, in arguments throughout her own book, Adams affirms,..."the strongest implication of the theory toward developing solid word recognition skills is that children should read lots and often" (1990, p. 135).

Harste, when considering the role of environmental print in the development of reading states, "The findings mean that we do not have to teach young children to read, but rather we need to support and expand their continued understanding of reading" (1992, p. 102).

The role of reading aloud as a developmental step in the acquisition of reading is recognized by many (Holdaway, 1979; Cambourne, 1988; Cullinan, 1992). Jewell and Zintz reflect the consensus of belief:

When children have heard a story so often that its meaning has been memorized, they have the foundation for identifying words by using the total context to predict what they are. Their discovery that context can be used to identify words adds another schema, or knowledge base, in the child's growing repertoire about the features of print and how he can use them to arrive at

meaning. Continuation of experiences with reading thus builds an ever-larger nonvisual base for dealing with the visual aspects of print (1990, p. 133).

A statement by Clay provides a perspective for understanding this controversy, in the literature, over prerequisite versus facilitative:

...attention to the formal properties of print and correspondence with sound segments is the final step in a progression, not the entry point to understanding what written language is. Many conceptual shifts about the nature of written language have to occur before the child begins to use the alphabetic principle of letter-sound relationships which is often considered to be the beginning of reading. When the child first finds some one-to-one correspondence it is between a particular segment of the graphic forms and a particular segment of the utterance (1991, p. 33).

If children are to read and write, there must be a purpose for them doing so, just as there is a purpose--communication--for oral language. This theory is widely supported by research (Holdaway, 1979; Cambourne, 1988; Harste, Short & Burke, 1988; Edelsky, Altwerger & Flores, 1991; Short & Burke, 1991). Teale and Sulzby represent this literacy-learning-as-purposeful view:

The orientation to literacy as a goal directed activity is an important part of the portrait to remember because it shows that the foundation for children's growth in reading and writing rests upon viewing literacy as functional rather than as a set of abstract, isolated skills to be learned (cited in Strickland & Morrow, 1989, p. 3).

## Demonstrations and Sharing Are Necessary for Learning to Read

The evidence is heavy on the side of the importance of demonstrations and sharing in reading development (Holdaway, 1979; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Cambourne, 1988; Harste, Short & Burke, 1988; Clay, 1991; Culinan, 1992; Lyons, Pinnell & DeFord, 1993). Smith even goes so far as to say that the only things necessary for learning to read are a book and a guide--someone to show the novice how (1985). Harste states, "Classrooms must be places where children can see others using language for real purposes. It is important that children be put in situations where they can see the strategies of successful written language use and learning demonstrated" (1992, p. 103).

## Parents and Teachers Share Common Motivations and Objectives

Both parents and teachers want children to learn how to read as quickly and painlessly as possible. Both are concerned with the best way of accomplishing that goal.

Goldenburg discussed successful interventions into children's literacy learning. "...what was decisive was teachers' and parents' subjective perceptions of the child at each point during the year and the actions or inactions to which these perceptions led" (1989, p. 76). He went on

to state that interest and motivation are already present, that parents need to be made aware of how they can help:

What would be the effect on at-risk children's achievement if the teacher informs parents (1) that the child is behind academically, (2) what skills or concepts the child needs help on, and, (3) what kinds of activities parents can initiate at home? All three components are necessary, because my guess is that parent contacts, in and of themselves, are not sufficient. They must specifically focus on the child's academic needs and what parents can do to address them (Goldenburg, 1989, p. 76).

Jewell and Zintz state, "We see the parental role as extremely important in children's learning to read and write. Parents are truly the primary architects of their children's early literacy accomplishments" (1990, p. 5). They credit a literate home environment with the development of: reading and writing like behaviors; the acquisition of print awareness; and, affective growth. Experiences with literature enhance children's ability to recognize and express feelings.

The supportive role of parents in early literacy development is also described by Smith:

There is an extremely critical role that adults play in helping children in this fundamental task of making sense of print, and that is to make sense of print for them. Just as adults almost unwittingly make it possible for children to learn spoken language by talking to them in situations that make sense, so adults can help children master print by the simple practice of reading to them the print to which their attention is drawn. All of the specific aspects of reading--like using telephone directories, consulting menus, checking catalogs--are learned through guidance and models

contributed by people who know how to do these things. It is not so much a matter of teaching these skills to children, as doing them alongside children, showing how the skill is performed

The central role of parents in their children's lives and the influence they wield for literacy learning is referred to often in the literature concerning reading development (Wood, 1988 in Harste, Short & Burke; Teale & Sulzby, as cited in Strickland & Morrow, (Eds.), 1989; Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Cummins, as cited in Hays, Bahruth & Kessler, 1991; Cullinan, 1992; Elementary Grades Task Force, 1992; Morrow & Parratore, 1993; Bartoli, 1995; Yellin, & Blake, 1994). The basis for this position is best explained by this quote from McGill-Franzen:

We know now that reading instruction does not start in preschool, or kindergarten, or first grade. We learn to read, as Frank Smith says, from "the company we keep", and children are in the company of adults from the moment they are born (1992, p. 57).

#### Coordinating Parent and Teacher Efforts Provides the Best Support for Beginning Readers

According to Jewell and Zintz (1990), the parent's role in literacy--reading and writing--development is critical to children's success:

...we believe that expectations about what formal education can achieve in promoting literacy development must be realistic. School is only one place where children should be guided and developed. The home, church, and the community play a large role in meeting children's 'out of school' needs. Today, however, many parents rely on baby-sitters, care centers, and the schools to do everything that helps a child to grow. This is not possible (p. xxi).

Goldenburg echoes the concern of Jewell and Zintz:

There are not enough hours in the school day to permit teachers to fully address the academic needs of all students. Consequently, other resources must be mobilized, and parents are uniquely suited to this task. My hypothesis is

that virtually all parents can help, at some level and in some way, and that virtually all will--provided the teacher contacts them and informs them of the need for their help. And the earlier in a child's school career his or her parents become involved, and that involvement is sustained, the bigger the payoff (1989, p. 76).

One school sparked effective parent-child interaction around reading and writing by the regular exchange of literature response journals. Parents, other family members, students and teachers wrote in the journals. The journals allowed teachers and parents to exchange information about how children were responding to reading in both environments. Parents had opportunities to seek information and to provide input. Teachers were able to offer specific suggestions for effective collaboration between students and parents (Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995).

In conclusion, most of the literature reporting on written language learning, reading and writing, support a developmental model that closely parallels the way children learn to speak. The model for both written and oral language acquisition includes the following principles: (a) language learning is a natural phenomenon that takes place in an environment where continuous use of high level language is present; (b) certain understandings are critical to language learning but are best developed in the

process of making meaning; (c) children learn language by using it for real purposes to meet their individual needs; (d) children learn language best by sharing in language activities with others which allow them to observe its use; (e) adults--parents and teachers--facilitate language development by accepting and extending children's approximations; and, (f) the best support for language learning is through cooperative efforts in both the school and home environments.

Although there are some negative voices raised against the developmental model in written language learning, most of these seem to be a matter of degree and not a philosophical dichotomy. An example of this is Adams' (1990) focus on mastery of the parts--letters, phonemes, segmentation--as beginning steps in reading instruction, alongside her, frequent disclaimers that understanding of the reading process is a prerequisite for successfully learning the details of print.

## Goals and Limitations

### Goals and Objectives

The goal of this project is to provide individual schools with a packet of materials which can be used to coordinate teacher and parent support for beginning readers. The packet consists of communication models to be used by the school for parent contact. The school will invite collaboration with parents through monthly articles in the school's newsletter and by regular teacher contacts (class newsletter, homework packets, individual notes).

The first objective of the project is to emphasize to parents the crucial role they have played thus far in their child's literacy development, and to enlist their help in continuing that support.

The second objective is to make parents aware of the essential components of the school's reading program, including its research base. Parents will be encouraged to communicate often with their child's teacher in order to stay abreast of their child's progress and to be able to support classroom reading and writing activities.

The third objective of the program is to help parents define how they can support their beginning reader. Communications will specifically address the parent's role in all three aspects of reading: (a) reading to the child and its importance all through school; (b) reading with the

child, as a way of supporting his beginning efforts; and (c) reading by the child and ways of recognizing and facilitating growth. In addition, model communications will be included which allow teachers to provide timely information on early reading strategies and activities to enhance comprehension.

### Limitations

The packet of materials is designed for use with English-speaking parents only. However, it is hoped that schools with significant numbers of non-English speakers would translate the communication models into other languages.

The communications are aimed at parents who can read, so support for beginning readers from non-literate homes is not addressed.

Although the general information concerning the school's reading program, the importance of parental support for school success (reading success in particular), will benefit all students, the information on reading strategies targets beginning readers only.

Success of the coordination of teacher and parent efforts will be determined by: (a) interest and comfort of the parent in participating, (b) number and quality of teacher contacts, (c) relevancy and timeliness of communications.

## Summary

This project provides a packet of communications which can be printed in the school newsletter, utilized by the school as brochures, or distributed to parents by classroom teachers. The communications are designed to coordinate support of teachers and parents for beginning readers. It is hoped that the prepared materials will facilitate coordination of efforts by making it easier for teachers to keep parents informed of both needs and means of assisting beginning readers.

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## PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

A partnership of parents and teachers provides the best model of support for beginning readers (Jewell & Zintz, 1990; Goldenburg, 1989; Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995; Yellin, & Blake, 1994). Since many parents are reluctant to work with their children for various reasons, this project provides teachers with a means of contacting parents: to recognize the major role they play in their child's education; to communicate the developmental nature of reading; and to suggest ways parents can assist their child's efforts to learn to read.

This project consists of seventeen communication papers designed to assist teachers in coordinating home and school efforts. The papers will provide parents with general literacy information, as well as specific suggestions for working with their young readers. Information can be printed in class or school newsletters, distributed by the classroom teacher, the Student Study Team, or through the office in the form of brochures.

### **Did You Know?**

The single most important thing you can do to help your child succeed in school is to read to him or her every day. Reading and writing, as well as academic achievement, are improved by taking a few minutes of quiet time to read and to talk with your child. It's not the reading, alone, that makes the difference, its the combined effect of the concepts in the book, spending time together in a pleasurable activity, and then having a conversation about the experience. The book provides opportunity and focus for the parent/child interaction. Ask questions that encourage your child to reflect on the story and how it relates to his or her own life, and to other familiar stories. Model how to reflect by sharing your own reactions and feelings about the story and characters.

So, grab an interesting book, schedule some time with your child and watch his or her learning and self-esteem soar. Don't be surprised if you enjoy this special time as much as your child does!

For more ideas on reading to your child and suggested age and interest appropriate books, see Cullinan's (1992) book in Village School's Media Center.

## **Reading Aloud To Beginning Readers**

Objective: To read a story, poem or book to your child and talk together about it.

Why is it important? Reading aloud is the single most important thing you can do to improve your child's reading and writing ability and to ensure his/her school success.

Reading aloud:

- . increases understandings of the world (concepts)
- . increases language knowledge (grammar, word order, etc.)
- . builds vocabulary
- . allows child to hear how good reading sounds
- . allows child to hear book language (different from speech)
- . provides a model for directionality (if parent is pointing to the words as they are read)
- . helps draw attention to the individual words
- . provides a model for figuring out words, making sense of text

What you can do to help: Acknowledge all signs of growth toward becoming a reader:

- . responding to pictures or text (story, words, letters)
- . joining in or asking to read parts alone
- . identifying and pointing out known words

- reading or pretend-reading story after hearing it several times

How To Read Aloud Successfully:

- choose appropriate books (Trelease, 1989; Culinan, 1992)
- schedule a quiet time or times each day (short sessions are better than one long period)
- set expectations by talking about the pictures, asking child what he or she thinks will happen, or telling a little about the story
- talk with your child about the book to make links between the story and what your child already knows
- add to the fun by using different voices for the characters, reading to express the mood of the story, etc.

Important: Make reading aloud a pleasurable experience for you and your child in order to increase learning and build positive feelings toward reading.

## **Book Introductions**

Objective: To activate prior knowledge and to set up a purpose for listening or reading.

Why is it important?: Young children need to be reminded of what they know in order to make links between what they already understand and a new experience. Isolated bits of information are not likely to be either understood or remembered. The more connections we can help children make, the more likely it is that they will understand something new.

How To Do: Read the title, names of author and illustrator

For listeners:

- . ask for predictions of the setting, characters, what story will be about
- . encourage your child to talk about what he or she knows about the story's subject and to share similar experiences

For readers:

- . give a brief summary of the story
- . look at the pictures in the book, asking, "What is happening?" to draw attention to meaningful information
- . while looking at the pictures, ask your child to find one or two important words after first predicting beginning and/or ending letters (only

ask for prediction of letters your child knows and can use)

- as you talk about the book, use any words or language patterns that your child might not know before expecting him or her to read them.

Important: The younger your child and the less he or she knows about reading, language, and the subject of the reading, the more thorough an introduction you will need to give in order for your child to be able to read it successfully. If your child begins to have trouble, prompt to something he or she can use:

- "Will the picture help you?"
- "What do you think would fit there?"
- "Could you go back and read that line again and say the first sound when you get to this word?"
- "Do you think that word could be ...or...?  
(giving him or her a chance to problem solve).
- If your child still has trouble, go back and sum up the story so far or simply read along with him or her. Keep the experience positive. Success builds success. (Hill, 1989; Clay, 1985; 1991).

## **Reading Is Developmental**

Objective: Understanding that reading is developmental: (1) explains the different rates of progress in learning to read; (2) changes the role of adults from that of "teachers" to "expert helpers".

Why is it important? Just as in the learning of spoken language, teachers and parents can best help a child learn to read by: (a) providing a rich environment where written language is constantly used; (b) setting up chances to write for real purposes; (c) accepting and reinforcing all approximations (partly right answers) that show progress toward becoming a reader; (d) using all forms of language (listening, speaking, writing) to help children learn to read; (d) helping children, as needed, with what they are trying to learn; and, (f) making it possible to repeatedly practice and to share what is learned for individual growth and enjoyment.

How you can help: 1. Let your child see you read, often and for different purposes.

2. Read to your child to demonstrate different reading strategies, to support his or her learning, and to reinforce that reading is enjoyable.

3. Help your child to see him or herself as a reader, whether he or she is pretend reading, using pictures to create a story, or reading independently. Seeing one's self as a reader provides a positive mind-set that leads to success. (Hill, 1989; Barron, 1990; Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Crosswhite, 1994; Mooney, 1994).

## Reading To and With Children

Reading aloud to young children is recognized as one of the most important contributors to children's school success. Reading aloud is a pleasurable experience for both parent and child. In addition, it is powerful in other ways:

- . it builds concept knowledge of the world;
- . it expands a child's vocabulary;
- . it helps children understand different kinds of texts;
- . it demonstrates both the uses and strategies of reading;
- . it motivates children to read for themselves.

However, many times we, as parents, stop reading to our children as soon as they can read for themselves. This is not productive. We must "read for children what they cannot read for themselves" (Smith, 1985, p. 133).

Children's ability to read with understanding, different kinds of material develops slowly, over many years. We do not help our children by expecting them to read, by themselves, material that is too hard for them. Just as with the beginning reader, older readers need help with what they cannot handle alone.

Parents can help by observing how their children approach different kinds of reading materials. Find out what strategies they are using well and which they are

neglecting. You may need to share the reading work in some cases. Taking turns reading paragraphs or pages will directly help your child but, more importantly, it will provide opportunities to model effective strategies, such as:

- . previewing the reading through the use of pictures, captions, graphs, maps, charts, etc.;
- . checking on one's own understanding during reading;
- . varying reading speed according to purpose (skimming for specifics, careful reading for detail);
- . relating the reading to your own experiences;
- . questioning the author's purposes and positions; etc.

If you are afraid that taking on part of the reading work will limit your child's opportunities to learn, consider these bonuses. Sharing the reading work will increase the amount of reading. Supported reading means exposure to higher level material than your child can manage alone. This will result in increased vocabulary and concept development, as well as more opportunities to practice effective reading strategies. More reading success will build a positive attitude toward learning. Best of all, your willingness to help will strengthen your relationship with your child and improve his or her school achievement.

For more information on reading with your child, and suggestions for age and interest appropriate books, see Cullinan's (1992) book in the Village School Media Center.

## Reading by Children

Parents can increase children's motivation, skills and confidence in reading by simply listening to them read. Parents have always supported children's efforts to communicate in speech. The same tactics can be used with their reading efforts. Remember to help only as much as necessary. Children need to know they can do it alone, but parents can help by providing support with what the child is trying to do. Timely prompts aid without intruding. "What do you think would fit there?" After an error, wait until the end of the sentence, read back what your child said and ask, "Does that sound right?" or "Does that make sense?"

Your child's success in reading can be aided by:

- . previewing and discussing the pictures;
- . having your child locate one or two words he or she might expect to find in the story;
- . drawing your child's attention to meaning (asking questions about the pictures, summing up the story so far;
- . helping your child make connections between the story and his or her own life.

If your child still has trouble with reading the story, share the work by taking the lead and allowing your child to echo-read, or by reading one page and having him or her read

the next. Books with dialogue can be read by dividing up the characters and reading the lines belonging to each.

In summary, you can help your children improve in reading by just listening to them read. When you listen to your children read you:

- . validate that reading is important;
- . support their efforts;
- . give them an opportunity to practice their reading strategies and to learn new words. (Cullinan, 1992; Routman, 1991; Crosswhite, 1994).

## Language Development

Language development is central to a child's success in all learning. Communication is dependent upon language. Language can be thought of as having four parts: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Development begins with listening and then proceeds naturally into speaking. Once a child is speaking, whatever is learned in one area reinforces and promotes learning in the other area. Not only does language growth take place but speaking and listening skills build a child's knowledge of the world.

"If a child's language development seems to be lagging it is misplaced sympathy to do his talking for him. Instead, put your ear closer, concentrate more sharply, smile more rewardingly and spend time in genuine conversation, difficult though it is. To foster children's language development, create opportunities for them to talk, and then talk with them (not at them)" (Clay, 1991, p. 69).

Parents who talk with their children and listen to their ideas help their children's language and minds grow. Children learn important concepts and vocabulary through every day interactions. "Let's put on your blue sweater." "We can use the biggest block on the bottom." "Please help me set the table. How many plates will we need?" "Yes,

McDonald's starts just like your name; M for McDonald's and M for Michael."

Reading builds on the words and understandings, gained through listening and speaking. Parents introduce children to reading very early in life as a part of listening. Even as an infant, a child reacts to his parent's voice and learns that reading is a pleasant, accepted activity. Parents model the importance, the uses, and the strategies of reading as they read to their children and perform every day tasks with them. "We will write 'cookies' on the grocery list so I will remember to buy them." "I will read the directions to see how to put your wagon together." "Let's look at the recipe to see how many eggs we need to make pancakes." "Let's read the rules to see how to play the game." "The mailman brought a letter from Grandma. Would you like to hear what she wrote?" As the child grows, he or she attends to more of the modeling and begins to take on more responsibility in shared activities. Children who work with adults in activities using reading and writing, will move gradually and quite naturally into independent reading and writing.

As parents and teachers support children's learning, their skills expand rapidly in all directions. What is learned in oral language becomes a base for learning to read. What is learned in reading can be used in writing.

Efforts to write build a knowledge of words and sentence structure that helps with reading.

In summary, children both learn language and about language while using it to learn about their world. Parents and teachers can best help by supporting children's efforts in what they are trying to learn, by talking with them while engaging in everyday activities, and by listening respectfully to their ideas.

## **Directional Movement**

Objective: To help children understand that an English reader begins at the top, left of the page, moves across the line of print to the right and then comes back left and moves down to the next line, continuing in this way to the bottom of the page.

Why is it important? Understanding the correct direction for reading: (a) makes it possible for children to begin to match written and spoken words in order to read; and, (b) builds the foundation for learning that letters are also ordered from left to right through a word.

What you can do to help: 1. When you read to your child, sit so that he or she can clearly see where you are reading. Point to each word as you read.  
2. Answer any request your child makes to be shown where it says something.  
3. Ask your child to point with you, at times, for short periods, but don't require it.

Important: The idea that things (words) must be looked at in a certain order is new to a young child. It takes repeated demonstrations of reading to develop an understanding of one appropriate direction. (Clay, 1991).

## Using Pictures to Read

The first clues to meaning for a child are the pictures in a book. Children must learn to use the pictures to help with reading. Children do not automatically know how to use a picture effectively. They may be trying to look at everything instead of focusing on the meaning.

There are three ways you can teach your child to use pictures to aid reading. First, teach your child to look through the pictures in a book in order to preview the story. Help to focus attention on what is important by asking, "What is happening here?" If you ask, "What do you see?" it may not draw attention to story meaning.

The next step is to teach how to use each individual picture to predict what will be written on the page. If there is a picture of a child pulling a wagon, for example, ask, "Do you think the word wagon might be on this page? What letters would you see at the beginning of wagon? How would wagon end?" As you ask these questions, say the word slowly and ask your child to say it with you. (Ask for predictions of beginning and ending letters **only** if your child knows those particular letters.) If your child has trouble responding, give help immediately. "It begins like we and want." If he or she still hesitates, say, "It starts with w. Can you find the word wagon?"

A third way to use pictures is as a way of predicting and checking while reading. When your child stalls on a word, say, "Do you see something in the picture that will help?" or, "Is there something in the picture that begins with those letters?" Teach checking by saying, "Yes, bunny makes sense and it sounds right, but does this word look like bunny?" Again, use the questions **only** if your child knows those letters and is able to check.

Sometimes children get the idea that looking at the pictures is cheating, that they aren't really reading if they do so. Encourage your child to use the pictures to help with the reading. Pictures carry much of the meaning. It is important that children know that getting the meaning is more important than getting all the words right. You can help build the habit of reading for meaning by drawing your child back to the story line anytime there seems to be confusion, or if the reading bogs down. "Back here, he rode his bike on Tuesday, and then he rode his bike on Wednesday. What day do you think it will say now?" (Martin, 1991).

In summary, pictures are important for previewing a story so that students have a framework of the story in their heads as a means of predicting the plot. Pictures aid in predicting story vocabulary. Finally, pictures are

a way to check on reading accuracy because they provide so much of the meaning. (Clay, 1991; Routman, 1991).

## Predicting and Confirming

Two of the most important things to learn in reading are predicting (guessing) and confirming (checking to see if you are right). A good reader does not figure out the words and then decide what they mean. Instead, the reader's mind races ahead of the words on the page, looking forward to what is coming and then feeling good about the right guess and being surprised and puzzled when something does not fit what was expected.

The ability to predict before reading and check to see if you are right as you read aids understanding because it makes reading easier, faster, and more enjoyable.

Parents can teach predicting and confirming as they read to their children. Before beginning to read a book, talk with your child about what it might be about, using the title and pictures. Stop at times during the reading to tell your child that his or her predictions were right. "That was a good guess. Sammy did miss the bus." Talk about it when the story does not follow what was expected. Then encourage the making of new predictions based on any added information.

During the reading, encourage your child to predict words by pausing and allowing him or her to say the next word. Children need to learn that it is the reader's job

to use everything they know, and everything the author provides to make sense of the words on the page.

As children begin to act like readers with their favorite books, you can watch them putting these skills into practice as they pretend-read a book using the pictures and their memory of the story. Sometimes they will "read" the exact words of the book, but more often they retell the story from what they understand from hearing the story over and over. This is truly reading for meaning, and that's what reading is all about.

When your child begins to read the words on the page, alone, give help by asking him or her to look at the pictures and talk about what might happen in the story before beginning to read. During the reading, give help, when needed, by asking questions like: "What do you think would fit there?" "What can you see (or do you know) that starts with those letters?" When predictions are made, help your child check to see if his or her guesses were right: "Were you right? How do you know? How else could you check?" If your child does not know a way to check, ask "Does it sound right?" or "Does that make sense?"

Above all, as your child reads, help keep the focus on meaning. It is your child's strongest aid to reading and the most important strategy (action) he or she can use, both as a beginner and an experienced reader.

## **One-to-One Matching**

Objective: To have the child point to each word as he says a word in reading.

Why is it important? One to one matching will help the child to begin to look at print. It gives the reader a way to check on his or her own reading. If there are too many or too few words, it will signal an error. When the child can match the words spoken to the words in text, he or she can use known words as an additional way to check the reading.

How you can help: Say, "Put your finger under the words and point to each one as you read." If he or she has trouble matching, you can point over the word while your child points under it.

Praise all monitoring attempts:

- . matching (or nearly matching) spoken words and print;
- . noticing that there are too few/many words for what is read;
- . stopping in puzzlement when things aren't quite right;
- . rereading in an attempt to match print;
- . using a known word to check the reading.

Important: We are looking for growth in becoming a reader, not perfection. Let miscues that sound right and make sense go uncorrected. Accept and praise approximations. Tell your child the things he or she is doing right and support all attempts. (Clay, 1985; 1991).

## Self-Monitoring In Reading

Objective: To check one's own reading.

Why is it important?: Monitoring one's own reading is essential for self-correction: It's the first step toward becoming an independent reader. As a beginning reader, your child can learn to check by:

- . one to one matching (speech to print)
- . words he or she recognizes
- . first and/or last letters of words

How you can help: Watch for signs of attention to print (hesitating, frowning or looking puzzled, rereading).

- . Allow time for your child to notice errors. If you offer help immediately, he or she will not learn to take responsibility for checking.
- . After a response that doesn't make sense, wait until the end of the page or story. Then say, "There is something not quite right on this page, can you find it?" If he or she is unable to find the problem, reread the error sentence and ask, "Does that make sense?" or "Does that sound right?" (whichever is easier for your child to hear and check).
- . Praise your child for stopping or rereading when things aren't right (one-to-one matching,

inappropriate beginning letter, mismatch of meaning or language structure).

Important: It does not matter whether or not your child can correct the error. The behavior to establish is noticing that something is not quite right and trying to correct it. (Clay, 1985; 1991; Jewell & Zintz, 1990).

## **Cross Checking In Reading**

Objective: To check one cue system against another.

Why is it important?: Being able to check one cue system against another makes it possible to confirm predictions or to self-correct when reading.

How you can help:

- Watch for and praise signs of checking: (looking at picture, repeating word or rereading, skipping and reading on and returning to the problem word).
- Ask for checking: "That sounds right but does it look right?" What letters would you expect to see at the beginning (or the end) of...?" Give as much help as necessary.
- Confirm checking: "You said... Why did you change your mind? What did you check?"
- After both correct and incorrect responses, ask, "Are you right?" to set up an expectancy of checking behavior. (Don't over use.)
- After successful self-correction, ask, "Is it...? How did you know? Again, don't over use.

Important: Asking 'checking questions' accomplishes three goals:

- it tells your child that checking is important
- it makes your child aware that there are several ways to check

- . it establishes a pattern for self-talk that your child can use to recall his or her strategies for checking (Clay 1985; 1991; Jewell & Zintz, 1990).

## Using Known Words

Objective: To help your child use words he or she knows to monitor his or her own reading.

Why is it important?

1. Known words allow children to check on the accuracy of their own reading.
2. Solid knowledge of a growing number of words is empowering. The child begins to believe he can really read.
3. When a word is known in one area of language (reading), it can be used in all other areas (speaking, listening, writing).

How you can help:

1. Draw attention to newly learned words everytime they appear. "There's your new word. Tell me what it is again."
2. When your child is reading along, miscues on a word and says something like, "No, this is cat" (pointing to cat in print), recognize and applaud it as a major step. Say, "Yes, you know the word cat. Read this sentence again and see if you can figure out what it says."
3. Help your child connect reading and writing. A child may be able to write words and not be able to read them. When this happens, say, "You know how to write that word."

Quickly write it, ask that he or she read it, then say, "Now read it in the story."

Praise all attempts to use known words: 1. Hesitating or rereading when he or she realizes the word spoken is not there.

2. Realizing an error has been made, and then pointing to the correct location of the word read.

Important: The first words a child comes to know are usually high-frequency words. They are certain to appear over and over in what is read and written. Lots of reading practice, on easy material, will ensure that they become "sight words", words that can be recognized and read immediately, without conscious thought. (Clay, 1991; Jewell & Zintz, 1990).

## Story Retelling

Objective: To have a child tell a story heard or read, in his or her own words.

Why is it important?:

1. Retelling a story helps a child make connections between it and what he or she knows. This making of links to the known creates understanding.
2. It helps the child internalize story structure.
3. It allows the teacher or parent to know what the child understands and where more help is needed.

How you can help:

1. After a child has heard or read a story several times, say, "Pretend I wasn't here to listen to that story and tell it to me."
2. After the child tells what she or he knows, prompt for parts left out. Ask **who** questions for characters. "You said... who else was in the story? Who was the most important character?" Ask **why** questions for cause and effect. "Why did the Little Red Hen...? Ask **what** questions for plot. What happened first? ... and then what happened?"

Praise all attempts: First retellings will be fragmentary, but they will improve. Guided by your questions, your

child will gradually learn what parts of a story are important and attention will center on those elements, rather than on unimportant details.

Important: Understanding stories reinforces the idea that reading should make sense. Both enjoyment and learning depend on understanding what is heard and read.

## **The Reading/Writing Connection**

Objective: To use writing to increase reading ability.

Why is it important?: 1. What is learned in one area of language can be used in all other language areas: speaking, listening, reading, and writing all reinforce each other. 2. Letter knowledge is developed because children must pay more attention to letter and word details when they write. In reading, meaning and sentence form give the most important clues and children need to pay minimal attention to letters and words in order to get meaning from the print on the page. In writing, however, children must think of the letters that correspond to the sounds they hear and then form them one by one and in order. The mind, eye, and hand all have a part in writing. When thought, sight, and movement are all brought into play, individual letters and words are more easily remembered.

What you can do to help. 1. Let your child see you writing for real purposes (notes, letters, lists, labels, etc.). Whenever possible, allow your child to help you. Say words slowly, stressing the sounds as you write, if this is something your child needs to learn.

2. Give your child writing materials to encourage him or her to write. Help your child (when asked) with letters, words, or by writing what he or she dictates. Encourage your child to write by communicating often in notes on the refrigerator, your child's pillow or door, in lunch boxes, etc.

Important: Writing builds reading in three ways: (a) it helps your child understand the connections between the spoken language he or she has been building since infancy and the next step--written language; (b) it builds your child's understanding of letters, words and sentences; and, (c) it increases understanding for what has just been read and of reading in general. In order to write about something, your child must think about what was read. (Barron, 1990; Clay, 1991).

### **Using Analogy In Reading**

Objective: To use one's knowledge of words to build word recognition.

Why is it important? Children learn most easily by making links between what they know and something new.

How you can help: Help your child to recall and use what he or she already knows. The least helpful thing you can do is to offer help too quickly. Show your child that you have faith in his or her ability to work things out by waiting quietly and patiently. The next least helpful thing you can do is to tell him or her the word. He or she will learn to wait for help. The best way to help is to nudge your child toward something he or she already knows. Try for meaning or sentence form first. "What would make sense there?" or, "What would fit there?" Remember that if your child has paused more than a few seconds, he or she will need to read the sentence again to bring it back into memory. Encourage the rereading or read it again with him or her. If there is no way to help with meaning or sentence form, say something like: "Do you know a word that starts with those letters?" then, pause for think time. If your

child is able to make a connection, reinforce it and give him or her any help needed to use it. If there is no response, make the link yourself. "If e-a-t is eat," (write it quickly), "then s-e-a-t "(write new word underneath to show correspondence), "is ..."

Whenever you think your child has made a link, alone, with an unfamiliar word, reinforce it to let him or her know that was a good way to work it out.

Reinforce the habit of looking for patterns when you help your child write words. Say, "Do you know a word that sounds like that on the end?" (for example). If your child can think of a rhyming word, ask him or her to write it then give help in using it to write the new word. If there is no response to your question, say, "You know ... Can you write it?" Then give help, as needed, to use the known part.

Important: Remember, that to a beginning reader, all the shapes good readers know so well are strange and easily confused. It takes time for letters to become so familiar that your child can begin to see patterns. Have patience and help with the connections until he or she can do it alone.

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