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PARENTS READING ALOUD TO THEIR CHILDREN

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University
San Bernardino

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

by
Margaret Anne Smith

March 2000


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ABSTRACT

A significant way that parents can make a difference in their children's early literacy development is to read aloud to them. Early experiences with books give children the experiences, vocabulary, and oral language that helps prepare them for formal reading instruction in school. Research has shown that parents reading aloud to their children is a factor which makes a difference in their success at school.

It is important for parents to spend time reading aloud to their children. When parents read from a variety of books, children gain knowledge about the world. The more knowledge children can acquire at home, the greater their chance for success in reading. They will have more to draw upon from these background experiences to help them make sense of reading.

The purpose of this project is encourage parents to read aloud to their children. The project consists of a video cassette designed for parents explaining the importance of reading aloud to their children. The video focuses on the benefits of reading aloud and practical tips for effective read-aloud experiences. A brochure with parent tips and a bibliography of books will accompany the video. The video will be shown at a parent education meeting and can be checked out to parents through the school library.

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background Information

Reform in public schools has been mandated at the national, state, and local levels because of brain research on how children learn, major changes in society and the family, demands for higher reading levels due to rising technology and the rising illiteracy rate. As evidenced in declining achievement scores, America has a reading problem. Too many children, college students, and adults either cannot read or cannot read at a functional level. Parents, as well as educators, are concerned about this reading problem and need to work together to form a partnership to effect successful reform. Parent involvement is one of the keys to success in school for children and many experts propose that parents should prepare their children for reading instruction by providing a literate home environment. They propose that parents become involved in their children's early literacy formation, because the more parents become involved the more their children will benefit. In order for children to read well, Hall and Moats (1999) propose that parents need to invest time and effort in obtaining appropriate books, include time for reading and to read to their children. According to Butler and Clay (1979), all parents have their children's future in their hands and the school is supplementary to all the development that has already taken place at home.

Parents are crucial to successful change because they play a major role in their children's early literacy formation. It is they who introduce their children to literacy because learning to read and write begins early in life. "Children acquire knowledge before coming to school that lays the foundation for reading. They acquire concepts for understanding things and the oral language, vocabulary, and grammar for expressing these concepts" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1984, p. 21). Parents are the most important teachers of literacy. Since parents are with their children throughout their early learning experiences, they are their children's first teachers and role models. As role models, parents have the opportunity to send an important message to their children about learning and to help them develop a positive attitude towards books.

Parents play an important role in introducing their children to literacy by demonstrating literacy in real life settings where reading and writing are a part of everyday life. For example, children may see their parents reading a recipe to bake cookies, writing a grocery list to go shopping, or they may help their parents write a letter to a relative. Children thus see reading and writing as purposeful activities. Many parents are unaware of their role as primary models, so educators should take the opportunity to inform them about this important role and

help them recognize the importance of supporting their children during the early stages of literacy development, just as they supported them when they learned to walk and talk. By doing so, parents can be empowered to support their children as they become successful readers and achievers and thereby make a positive influence in their children's achievements. Working together, educators and parents can enable children to succeed and become literate citizens.

A significant way that parents can make a difference in their children's early literacy development is to read aloud to them. Reading aloud to children should begin in infancy and continue as children grow older, even after they have started to read. "Brain research emphasizes the importance of reading aloud to children from birth" (Maughan, 1998, p. 35). Barbara Bush, (former First Lady) states, "It's the home where a child should be first exposed to the joy of the written word. I go back to the memories of my mother reading to me; it's a moment all parents and children should share. Those first nursery books-even if the child cannot fully understand what's being read-can be an invaluable foundation for the school years ahead" (Bush, 1989, p. 11).

A great deal of research has gone into studying the benefits of reading aloud to young children and its effect on success at school. Research has shown that parents reading aloud to their children is the one factor which

makes a difference in their success at school (Bergenfield, 1994). "Reading aloud to children stimulates their interest, their emotional development, their imagination, and their language" (Trelease, 1985, p. 11). Children growing up in families where people read and where they are read to will value books and the reading process. Reading aloud demonstrates that books have ideas and the purpose of reading is to get ideas. It is the best way for children to learn that the purpose of reading is for meaning (Bialostok, 1992, p. 12). Children will learn how books work and how to handle books. They will become familiar with different kinds of stories and the book language within these stories.

Reading books can likewise provide pleasure and a rewarding interaction between children and parents. It can provide a time for building shared memories and for sharing ideas and values. Reading aloud to children can be a special time when parents and children spend quality time together. By stressing the importance of reading aloud, educators can influence parents to model an activity that can enhance their children's learning to read, as well as foster a life-long habit of reading enjoyment and learning. Parents can be taught the importance of reading aloud and how to effectively read aloud to their children. Educators can help parents take an active role in the reading development of their children by encouraging parents to make

reading aloud to their children a family activity.

Because parents are the primary models for their children, they can model the joy of reading. By starting to read to children when they are young, parents can influence them at an early age by setting a positive example for their children. When children see their parents enjoying reading, they'll want to copy their parents and also read. Not only will children want to read, they will become better listeners, learn about book language and the reading process, develop wider knowledge about the world, and develop vocabulary and greater verbal skills. When children are read to, they learn about themselves, the world, their place in the world and how stories can relate to events in their lives. They learn that books can bring joy into their lives, not only because of the stories but because of the joy of spending quality time with their parents. Reading aloud provides a close bond between parents and children that will last a lifetime. Taylor and Strickland (1986) believe that this may be a key contributing factor to children's success in learning to read. Children will remember the special times when their parents read aloud to them, and most likely will continue this legacy and will read to their children.

Theoretical Foundation

Harste and Burke (1979) propose that it's the teacher's knowledge and belief system about reading that determines a

significant difference in reading achievement. They organize current views of reading into three models: the sound/symbol model, the skills model and the whole language based model. The sound/symbol model defines reading as a decoding process. In the skills model the key to reading is the word and reading is stringing words together. Reading is the process of comprehending in the whole language based model.

The sound/symbol model is a decoding model. According to Harste and Burke, in this model reading is perceived as an offshoot of oral language. Emphasis is on looking at parts of words rather than comprehension. Children learn letter/sound correspondence so they can decode words. They also learn rules for pronouncing letters and combinations of letters and for sounding out words, (Weaver, 1994, p. 50). For example, they may learn the rule that "when two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking". In this model learning to read means learning to pronounce words.

In the skills model listening, speaking, reading, and writing are discrete skills which share "common abilities"; letter/sound, high frequency vocabulary and meaning (Harste and Burke, 1979). The key to reading in the skills model is the word and emphasis is on helping children build a repertoire of words. Reading occurs by stringing the words together and once the words are read, meaning will come. New words are taught in isolation and one way children learn

words is through the use of flash cards. According to Routman (1991), the teacher decides what skills the children need and directly teach the skills with emphasis on practice in isolation. Holdaway states, "In skills teaching the teacher tells the learner what to do and then 'corrects' or 'marks' the response" (Holdaway, 1979, p. 136).

In the whole language based model reading is a process of getting meaning from print. According to Routman (1991), all the language processes, listening, speaking, reading and writing are learned naturally in a meaningful context. Children learn in a social and literate environment where risk-taking and approximations are accepted. Readers are encouraged to use three major cue systems to make sense of the text; semantic (meaning), syntactic (grammar), and graphophonic (letter/sound relationships). Children are taught strategies to utilize when they are stuck on a word and the teacher facilitates their use through prompting. For example, the teacher may prompt by asking, "What would make sense?".

My philosophy of reading instruction has changed since I started teaching. Initially, I used a part-to-whole concept of reading instruction on the reading continuum. I taught a skills and phonics approach emphasizing sight word recognition and letter/sound relationships to decode words. Reading instruction involved learning rules and completing workbook pages. Because I learned about how children learn,

trained as a Reading Recovery teacher, and read professional books authored by Clay, Holdaway, Routman, Cambourne, Smith, and Vygotsky, I switched to a whole-to-part concept of reading instruction and now I am on the sociopsycholinguistic end of the reading continuum.

Children are taught to read for meaning drawing upon their knowledge of the world and life experiences. I act as a facilitator in the classroom fostering growth in children as they construct their own knowledge. As an effective observer, I use teaching strategies that encourage collaboration and responsibility, emphasize brain-based learning, and match children's natural language development. As children learn language by being immersed in talking, children learn to read and write in similar conditions with lots of modeling, demonstrations of mental processes, and feedback. As a facilitator, I model reading and writing and demonstrate and discuss reading and writing strategies. I think out loud to demonstrate my thought processes. For example, I model predicting by asking myself and the children the following question, "I wonder what's going to happen next?" I encourage children to predict and share their ideas and everyone's ideas and contributions are valued. I accept approximations and respond positively to children's attempts at reading and writing. To help children make sense of print I encourage them to utilize the three major cue systems; semantic (meaning), syntactic

(grammar), and graphophonic (letter/sound relationships). To help them become independent readers I teach children strategies to use when they get stuck.

I am a balanced literacy teacher and I believe that children should be immersed in daily language activities and have the opportunity to demonstrate their understandings in a risk-free environment. These activities include read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, literacy centers, modeled writing, interactive writing and independent writing. Through these activities children construct knowledge about reading and writing. They learn to read and write by reading and writing. Within the context of these activities, I help the children develop the skills and strategies they need as readers and writers.

As children construct their own knowledge by participating in these language activities, I nurture individual growth in reading and writing. Not everyone is expected to be at the same level in my classroom because of differences in developmental levels. We have standards and we are working toward achieving those standards, but as the facilitator in the classroom, I guide the children at their zone of proximal development. I observe their behaviors as they are reading and writing and show them the next step in their learning. I help them develop control over the processes involved in reading and writing. By providing a classroom that encourages choice and collaboration,

emphasizes risk-taking, and provides a purpose for writing and reading during authentic activities, I facilitate children's entry into the literacy club (Smith, 1997, p. 118). Children in my class may be reading and writing at different levels, but they all consider themselves readers and writers.

Children are encouraged to "have-a-go" at writing in a risk-free environment. Approximations are accepted as the developmental needs of the children are taken into consideration. Children write in daily journals on topics of their choice and they also have choices in the writing center, they may write letters to fellow classmates, make birthday cards, or write stories. By giving the children choices, I am giving them some control over their learning.

Not only do the children consider themselves readers, but they enjoy reading. It is one of their favorite things to do. They read throughout the day everyday and choose their own reading materials from around the room. They read to themselves, to me, and to each other. I have made learning to read easy for them because I have made reading meaningful, enjoyable, useful, and a daily experience for them (Smith, 1997, P. 123).

My reading instruction is based on the idea that learning to read involves bringing meaning to print in order to understand the text. When reading, readers bring their life experiences and knowledge to the story. There is an

interaction between what the reader brings to print and the text. The knowledge about the world we develop as we grow and interact with our environment is called schema and the schema we develop as we interact with our environment helps us bring meaning to print, (Weaver, 1994, pp. 17-29).

According to Becoming A Nation of Readers, reading depends upon wide knowledge of the world. This knowledge is crucial to the act of reading because it allows readers to make predictions about what they are reading. Making predictions is a natural way to make sense of the world. As we make predictions, we ask questions and as we answer these questions, we construct meaning (Smith, 1997, pp. 64-69). This is what is involved in reading-bringing meaning to print.

I provide opportunities for children to build their schemas and have shared meanings of texts through shared readings of big books, songs, poems, and interactive writing. Not only do the children add to their schemas about their world. but they also learn about the reading process and each other. Using read alouds is another activity to help the children learn about the world. I link the stories to their personal experiences by asking questions, giving the children the opportunity to share their experiences.

Project Plan

The more knowledge children are able to acquire at

home, the greater their chance for success in reading. Children can gain this knowledge through experiences, listening to stories, and talking about experiences and stories. Experiences are the foundations for reading. Parents should provide their children with experiences, but the best source of knowledge about the world is likely from books or other printed text. Through text children can develop knowledge about a variety of topics and learn about things, people, and places. Every story a parent reads to a child gives information about an environment and images of things that happen in that environment (Hall and Moats, 1999, pp. 53-54). This knowledge will enable children to comprehend when they begin reading stories.

Knowledge about the world is not enough. According to Becoming A Nation of Readers, the way in which parents talk to their children about an experience or story influences what knowledge the children will gain from the experience or story and their later ability to draw on this knowledge when reading. Therefore, not only is it crucial for parents to read to their children, it is also important that they talk about the stories with their children and allow them to interact with the stories. The way parents discuss stories with their children can make a difference. The way that parents interact with their children during the discussion will influence what the children gain from the interaction. It is important that parents phrase questions in ways that

require higher level thinking, rather than questions that require simple answers. Reading well requires thinking, asking questions, integrating information, and drawing inferences (Hall and Moats, 1999, p. 71). These higher level thinking skills can be learned through asking open-ended questions. For example, parents can ask questions such as, "What do you think will happen next?" or "Why do you think she did that?" If parents use closed questioning, such as yes or no questions, they do not engage their children in higher level thinking. Parents can be taught to effectively interact with their children when reading aloud to them.

I am committed to educating parents about the importance of reading aloud to their children and to encouraging them to make reading aloud a regular family activity. My plan is to record a video that can be shown to parents at a parent education meeting or can be checked out to parents through the school library. The video will illustrate why reading aloud is important, the importance of building schema about the world and the importance of the parent as positive role model in their children's early literacy development. It will also include tips to parents about reading aloud and ideas for different genres of books that can be used for read alouds. A brochure with parent tips and lists of books will accompany the video. Because modeling is so important, I will demonstrate how to read

aloud, emphasizing concepts about print, higher-level questioning and the interaction between myself and a child. I hope that parents will use this video as a tool to help them provide a literate home environment for their children. Educators and parents working together can make a difference in childrens' ability to be successful learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Reading aloud to children is a factor which makes a difference in success at school. Likewise, children who come from homes where reading aloud takes place have an educational advantage over those who do not. Parents reading aloud to their children has been a focus of research for several years and studies of emergent literacy have clearly revealed the importance of this practice.

(Spreadbury, 1995 p. 2). "When parents read stories to their children they are creating a safe, warm place for language and literacy learning" (Taylor and Strickland, 1986, p. 5). Reading aloud to children helps them build a positive attitude about books. Children associate books with the love and warmth of their parents reading aloud to them. This fosters the early love of books that is so important to early literacy formation. Larrack (1958) states, "Few activities create a warmer relationship between child and grownup than reading aloud. It is deeply flattering to be read to and have the adult's undivided attention" (p. 32). According to Cullinan (1992), when children share stories with their parents, they build memories about the warmth and joy in their early lives that come back long after the memory of the story is gone.

Parents reading aloud to their children is a worthwhile activity that benefits children in many ways. Reading aloud

is a shared activity that brings a family together and provides a time when families can learn about each other and share ideas, attitudes and values. During these times, children learn about themselves as part of a family and as part of the world. Reading aloud to children is a social activity that brings pleasure to all those involved. This social activity is important to children's language development. As children interact with their parents during reading aloud sessions, they learn language and use their language to learn about the world. Harste (1990) states:

Children learn best in low-risk environments where exploration is accepted and current efforts are socially supported and understood. Language is a social event. Most of what we know about language has been learned from being in the presence of others. (p. 317)

As children interact with their parents during read aloud sessions, they learn language as they share ideas and feelings. This interaction helps children develop an understanding of themselves and others.

Reading aloud to children provides a number of language lessons. Listening to stories is important for building background knowledge, fostering language development, developing a sense of story, linking reading and writing, acquiring word knowledge and vocabulary, and becoming aware of book language, print awareness and book handling skills. It also fosters listening comprehension, story comprehension, and word recognition comprehension (Mason,

1990). Wells' study (1982) indicated that listening to a story read aloud by a parent at age 3 was significantly associated with oral language ability and knowledge of literacy at age 5 and reading comprehension at age 7.

Studies have shown empirically that there is a difference in the nature of experiences which children have at home. Some parents view literacy as a source of entertainment, such as reading a story, but other parents view literacy as a set of activities, such as reviewing flash cards. Growing up in a home that fosters the view that literacy is a source of entertainment has a more positive impact on emergent literacy skills in the areas of phonological awareness, knowledge about print, and narrative competence (Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell, Scher, Truitt and Munsterman, 1997, pp. 115-116). Growing up in a home that fosters a view that literacy is a set of skills to be learned was not significantly related to literacy competency.

The literature review section focuses on the following points. Parents can be informed about the importance of their role in their children's early literacy formation and how they can take an active role in the reading development of their children. They can be shown how to create a home environment that promotes literacy growth and motivates children to want to learn, as well as how to effectively read aloud to their children. They can also be shown how to make greater use of questioning which involves higher level

thinking when they and their children are engaged in conversations about books. When reading aloud to their children, parents can also be shown methods that will enhance their children's reading readiness and prepare them for formal reading instruction. Studies have reported information about several programs around the country that promote reading aloud to children and how educators and parents are working together to connect literacy in the home and school.

Active Involvement

Lennox states, "Children build their knowledge of print and their strategies for reading and writing from their independent exploration of the world of print, from interaction with literate adults and peers, and from observations involved in literacy activities" (Lennox, 1994, p. 12). Irregardless of parents' economic or educational background, parents can create a literate environment for their children. According to Thorkildsen and Stein (1998), children's academic achievement appears to be more strongly related to their parents' level of involvement than to their level of education or income. A 1976 study by educational researcher, Margaret M. Clark, found that 32 Scottish children were reading at the time they entered kindergarten even though they came from different familial backgrounds. Clark found that the common factor in the achievement of these children was the parents' positive involvement in

telling stories and reading books. A more recent study by Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines found African-American children living in urban poverty were seen by their parents as being successful at learning to read and write (Wilford, 1998, p. 65). They found that the family provided a rich oral tradition and opportunities to see adults reading in a variety of situations.

Literate Home Environment

Because learning to read and write begins early in life parents can be encouraged to create home environments that promote literacy growth. A literate home environment, one where children observe others in literate activities, as well as exploring print on their own, provides children with opportunities to enjoy reading and writing in an interactive environment. According to Trelease (1985), the people in the child's home stimulate the child's interest in reading and writing by answering questions, praising the child's efforts, taking the child to the library, buying books and writing stories which the child dictates (1985). Several studies report common factors present in literate environments. "References to longitudinal studies by Dolores Durkin (1966) in the USA and by Margaret Clark (1976) in the UK found that children who read early usually had an interested adult with time to read to them" (Spreadbury, 1995, pp. 1-2). Durkin's comprehensive study indicated four factors that were present in the home

environment of early readers: Children are read to on a regular basis, including books and environmental print; Parents are avid readers, modeling a positive attitude towards reading and showing that reading is an enjoyable and beneficial activity; A wide variety of printed material is available to all family members in the home including books, magazines and newspapers available; There are writing tools and paper available for children to draw and write.

Teale's 1978 comprehensive review of research findings on positive environments for learning to read determined four main environmental factors. Firstly, there was an availability and range of printed materials including books and environmental reading of sign posts, product names, store names, etc. Secondly, reading was modeled by parents and older siblings, as well as reading to the child. Reading was valued as a part of daily living for different purposes such as for entertainment or for information. Thirdly, writing was encouraged at home for a variety of purposes and children had access to paper, pencils, markers, envelopes, and other writing materials. Finally, others in the child's environment encouraged, provided feedback, and answered questions about reading (Spreadbury, 1995).

Rasinski and Fredericks presented several ways that parents can create a literate environment (1991). Finding a time to read and a comfortable place for reading are two important considerations. Setting a routine time and place

for reading can establish the habit of a family reading together. A literate environment requires a large stock of appropriate books and magazines. These materials need to be available to all family members and it is important for children to see parents and other family members reading for different purposes. Modeled behavior is important to learning as children will want to read if they see other family members reading. It is also important for parents and children to talk about what they are reading and connect it with family experiences. By connecting a book to a family experience, such as a family trip, children's knowledge about the world develops. Likewise, parents can help their children share their ideas and feelings about the characters and events in the stories and connect them to their own experiences. According to Strickland (1989), this activity is very personal and child centered, which gives more meaning to the child. Likewise, a literate home environment offers children a plethora of opportunities for writing for a variety of purposes. All these studies point to a literate environment which provides children with many opportunities to enjoy reading and writing in the child's most natural setting, the home, as the most important factor in early literacy.

A common finding in research about why some children learn to read without difficulty while others do not, is that children who learn to read easily in school are the

same children whose parents have read to them at home. Researchers are not sure if it is the story reading or some other factor that helps children learn to read. Schickedanz (1978) discusses several theoretical explanations that explore the relationship between reading aloud at home and reading achievement in school. Most of the explanations are based on a learning theory model of learning in which the story reading serves as a preparation for instruction in reading. For example, children learn to read because their parents model reading or children learn to read because they have good feelings about the warmth of story times with their parents. The book knowledge and knowledge of reading explanation suggests that children learn something about reading from the story reading situation itself (Schickedanz, 1978, p. 49). Through many experiences with books children learn how a book works; books have a beginning, middle, and end that tell about something and make sense. They learn how to locate print in books and observe letter-sound correspondence. Children also learn how to handle books; how to hold books and turn the pages. Schickendanz proposes that children construct knowledge about rules that govern the reading process over time with many experiences with books and with a closeness with parents during reading aloud sessions.

Higher Level Thinking

Early research on reading aloud to children focused on

the belief that reading stories to children promotes reading achievement in school. Recent research has focused on the language and social interaction between parent and child during story reading and the effect it has on literacy development. According to Lennox (1994), social interactionist theories, especially Vygotsky's, propose new direction in the study of literacy development in children. Vygotsky's theory proposes that a child learns through social interaction with a more knowledgeable expert. During a literacy activity at home or school, children are given support by a parent or teacher until they can do the task independently. This scaffolding allows them to learn to read and write. Lennox (1995) states, "It is now believed that, not only the presence of a story time routine, but also the amount of verbal interaction between parent and child during story reading influences and shapes early development" (p. 12). Research indicates that this development comes from the discussion of the language and ideas of the author and the questions and comments from the reader and the child. The type and amount of interaction between parent and child during reading aloud are the major contributing factors in literacy development. As children interact with their parents during discussions about stories, they begin to develop their thinking and speaking skills. Marie Clay (1979) states that "the conversation which arises from this one-to-one story session is a

priceless asset" (p. 18). The conversations between a child and an adult enrich a child's repertoire of concepts and provide children with opportunities to hear new words in meaningful contexts and lead to acquisition of a large oral vocabulary. Taylor and Strickland state, "There is no doubt that engagement in storybook reading is one of the richest resources for vocabulary development available to children" (p. 42). A large vocabulary enables children to read better. They learn new words as they hear them read aloud in books and as parents talk about them. Children can later draw upon this repertoire of words when they read and write. Story language is different than the everyday language we use. As children listen to fairy tales and hear "once upon a time" over and over, they will begin to use it in their language as they talk about books and stories and will use it later when they learn to read and write stories on their own. Harste (1990) states:

By age 3, when asked to read or pretend to read a book, children start to vary their normal speech to sound like "book talk." By age 6, children who have been read to frequently have internalized the structures of stories in their culture and can produce many fine stories of their own. (p. 317)

Because story language is different from everyday language, it is important that children hear different kinds of stories or genres. Hearing different genres teaches children the qualities, such as plot, characters, setting and book language of those stories. Children learn what

makes a story and how different stories work. The language in a fairy tale is different than the language in a nursery rhyme or a mystery book. When children hear fairy tales over and over again, they will expect to hear those qualities found in fairy tales when they hear a new fairy tale. They will expect to hear "once upon a time" at the beginning and expect certain characters and events to be in the story. Knowing the qualities of genres will help children make predictions when they begin to read. They will have a sense of how the story should work so their predictions make sense. Mooney (1990) states, "Familiarity with knowing how stories work helps beginning readers develop confidence in becoming involved in the unfolding of the story line when they hear new stories or assume more of the reader's role for themselves (p. 22).

Several studies have investigated the interactions of parents and children as they shared books, with parents supporting their children by prompting, providing information and questioning. These studies found that parents usually engaged in closed questioning, a process wherein children labeled or described various aspects of the stories. They did not make great use of open or probe questions which necessitate higher level thinking, such as exploring attitudes and opinions or elaborating on information (Lennox, 1993). Quality instruction during literacy interactions requires strategies that elicit higher

level thinking which scaffolds the process of comprehension (Leseman and Jong, 1998). To engage in higher level thinking parents can think out loud as they are reading a story and ask questions such as, "How could that happen?" or "What do you think will happen next?" or "How do you think he feels?". Parents can help their children make inferences, comparisons and evaluations, as well as see cause and effect relationships, by asking questions during story reading. They can ask questions which have more than one correct answer or questions which require multiple word answers. As parents talk about the stories, the children can also interact by asking questions, answering questions, and making comments of their own.

Reading Readiness

Children are naturally curious about the world and reading aloud is one way that parents can help their children learn about the world. They can help their children acquire ideas and content in a natural setting by helping them understand new words and concepts by relating it to something they know already. Harste (1990) states:

Learning proceeds from the known to the unknown. Comprehension and learning are now seen as a search for patterns that connect, and growth is seen as a search for ever wider patterns. Children need to be given opportunities to make language their own by making connections with their lives and background information. In short, there is no better way to begin instruction than in terms of the learner's language and current background experience (p. 317).

Parents can help their children make connections between books and their own personal experiences by encouraging their children to talk about the illustrations and concepts. These conversations will help children to develop schema about the world and enable them to bring their understanding and knowledge of the world to print. This schema will enable them to bring meaning to the text once they begin reading independently. For example, a child living in the city may have no knowledge of living in the country or on a farm, but when parents read books about farms, children can learn concepts about farm life and animals. When children start reading independently and read a book about farms, they will have an understanding about farm life and because they can draw upon this knowledge base, they can problem solve new words in the book. "If children understand background ideas pertaining to what will be read, it becomes easier to recognize and pronounce new words in print" (Ediger, 1992, p. 3). The best way for children to learn that the purpose of reading is for meaning is by reading to them from the time they are infants. "Reading aloud sends the critical message to children that books have ideas, and that the purpose of reading is to get those ideas" (Bialostok, 1992, p. 12). Listening is related to reading and just as children listen to language to receive a message, children discover that by hearing books read aloud, they are receiving a message.

Although research has shown that reading aloud makes a positive difference in school success, children can also play enjoyable learning activities to enhance their reading readiness. It is important that children develop the ability to hear sounds in words. "Hearing and using sounds begins when a child is an infant and it is the beginning of learning to speak, read, and write" (Clinard, 1997, p. 21). There are many activities besides reading aloud to children, which parents can share at home with their children to help develop their ability to hear sounds in words. To hear rhyming sounds, parents can read poems and nursery rhymes to their children. Children's songs or poems on cassettes or compact disks from the library or store can be played so that children can sing or recite along. Parents and children can think of words that rhyme or words that start with the same sound. Parents can play the game "Does It Fit?" wherein the children have to say the word that does not begin or end with the same sound as the other words. Parents and children can read alphabet books and identify the letters in the books. They can play the alphabet guessing game by asking, "I am thinking of something that starts like toy, what is it?" and play alphabet games by naming a favorite food or animal for letters of the alphabet. Parents can buy a set of magnetic letters and spell out words, such as the child's name, on the refrigerator. By providing chalkboards or paper and pencil,

parents can encourage their children to write. It is also important that parents talk with their children by answering their questions and explaining things to them. Parents can also draw pictures with their children and each can tell stories about the pictures. They can take walks in the neighborhood and talk about what they see, hear, or touch.

Family Literacy Programs

There are several family literacy programs or projects that attempt to create more literacy-oriented homes by fostering a partnership between parents and children via a home reading program. Many participants in these programs view literacy learning as a family matter to be enjoyed and shared (Neuman, Caperelli and Kee, 1998, p. 246). The intent of these programs is to enhance the extent to which parents become involved in their children's literacy formation and education. They promote changes in how parents interact with their children. A year-long parent-child reading project for four year olds was implemented in an urban child-parent center classroom in Chicago. The purpose of the project was to emphasize the importance of reading aloud to children as well as providing opportunities for increased frequencies of reading aloud (Otto and Johnson, 1994). Many positive outcomes were observed during this project including the value of learning and reading. Subsequently, there was an increase in the children's interest in reading. They enjoyed reading books to

themselves as well as to each other and more children went to the library during independent work time. There was an increase in the children's listening skills which was noticed during class story times. Children's vocabulary increased and they used words and concepts that were found in their storybooks.

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory in Charleston, West Virginia, has created a program called "Family Connections". It consists of a set of guides developed to help teachers provide opportunities for parents and children to have fun doing things together that are suitable at a child's stage of development (Burns, 1993). The guides include a message to parents, read-aloud selections, developmentally appropriate activities for parents to do with their children and a "Sunshine Gram" to promote positive communication with families. The field-test experience showed that most families welcomed the guides and many parents commented on the enjoyment shared by their families using the guides as well as involving themselves in the schooling of their children. Likewise, teachers noticed positive changes in students involved in the program.

The "Three for the Road" program was created to get children reading more at home and to get parents involved in reading with their children. This school-home literacy program is a backpack program that sends children home with three books. "In selecting books careful consideration is

given to providing books that will initiate positive parent-child interactions and meet parent-child needs" (Richgels and Wold, 1998, p. 20). The best choices are books that enhance conversations between parents and children. The books are categorized according to ease of reading and genre. There are books for a child to read by himself, to read with a parent and for the parent to read to the child. The backpacks include a letter to parents which includes instructions and suggestions for talking about the books and using the journals, response journals, writing and drawing materials, and hand puppets. Teachers demonstrate how to use the backpacks so that students understand how they work. Demonstration sessions include talking about caring for the backpacks, deciding how to use the three books in the backpack, and reading strategies. The Three for the Road program has been very successful in its first four years of use in one elementary school (Richgels and Wold, 1998). These programs demonstrate that educators and parents can form a successful partnership to involve parents in their children's education.

All parents need to foster their children's early literacy formation by engaging in literate activities, especially reading aloud to their children. Because reading aloud is an enjoyable activity and has value in children's learning, educators can promote a home-school partnership to encourage this activity. Practical advice can be offered to

parents on how to effectively read aloud to their children on a regular basis. By making reading aloud at home a priority, parents and educators can work together to enhance children's early literacy formation and success in school.

GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

Goals

The primary goal for recording this video is to provide a resource for parents to help their children at home. It is designed to educate parents about the importance of reading aloud and to encourage them to read aloud to their children. Because the video provides information and suggestions as well as a model of a read-aloud session, it can empower parents to take an active role in the reading development of their children. Children who have been read to at home will come to school more prepared for formal reading instruction. The video will be parent-friendly so that it is easy for them to comprehend. A brochure of parent tips that reinforces the information provided on the video will accompany the video. Although the video will be recorded in English, the brochure will be available in English and Spanish. A bibliography of children's books will also be provided. Another goal is to present the video at a parent education meeting and keep the video in the school library for parents to checkout at their convenience. The video will be made available to other school libraries.

Objectives

In planning the content and purpose of the video the following objectives were determined.

1. Provide a resource for parents to help their children at home.

2. Encourage parents to read aloud to their children at home.
3. Provide parents with information about the benefits of reading aloud to their children.
4. Record the video in parent-friendly language.
5. Provide a bibliography of books for parents to use as read alouds.
6. Include a brochure of parent tips (available in English and Spanish).
7. Model a read-aloud session.
8. Model the use of higher-level questioning.
9. Present the video at a family literacy night.
10. Keep copies of the video in the school library for parent check-out.
11. Offer availability of the video to other school libraries.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this project. One limitation of the video is that it is recorded in English and may not be as helpful to non-English speakers. Also, parents who do not own a VCR will not have access to the video. Although reading aloud to older children is important, the video is targeted for parents of young children. It will be recorded by a teacher and not an actor so it will not have a professional look to it. The video is recorded for parent use but other teachers may use it at

parent inservices. Finally, it may be cost prohibitive for it to be copied and distributed to other school libraries.

APPENDIX A

Parents Reading Aloud To Children

Video Script

Reading aloud to children plays an important role in their literacy development. In fact, the most important thing parents can do to help their children become readers is to read aloud to them. This video explains the benefits of reading aloud to children and includes tips to help parents make reading aloud a family tradition in their homes. A demonstration of a read-aloud session is also provided.

Children enjoy listening to stories and the time their parents spend with them during read-aloud sessions. Reading aloud gives children and their parents an opportunity to spend quality time together and build shared memories. This togetherness forms a close bond that lasts a lifetime. Reading aloud is a special time when parents and children share books and learn about the world and each other. Children associate books with the love and warmth of their parents reading aloud to them. This fosters an early love of books that is so important to early literacy formation.

It is still important to read aloud to children when they start reading on their own. Parents and older children still need the closeness that reading aloud provides. Reading aloud is a social event. It is a special time when families get together to enjoy books. As children listen to stories, they learn about the world and people and

themselves. They relate events in stories to events in their own lives. When parents read aloud to their children, they are telling them that they want to spend time with them because they are special and important.

Parents reading aloud to their children is a factor which makes a difference in their success at school. Children who have been read to at home enter school with an advantage over children who have had little or no experience with books. They learn the skills which help them become successful readers. They begin learning these skills as a result of being read to at home.

Reading aloud to children benefits them in many ways. Children who are read to at home do better in school than those who are not.

The most important benefit that children gain is background knowledge about the world. Children are more likely to receive this knowledge from books than from any other source. They learn about things, people, and places from books. The more knowledge children can acquire at home, the greater their chance for success in reading. When children start reading independently, they can use this knowledge to make sense of what they read and problem solve new words in books. For example, if children have listened to books about the farm, they will know the names of farm animals and what activities occur on a farm. When they independently read a book about farms they can use this

knowledge to make sense of the story or problem solve unknown words. If an unknown word starts with a g and ends with a t, it makes sense that the word is goat because you would find a goat on a farm.

When listening to stories children are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary. They learn new words as they hear them read aloud in books and as parents talk about them. Children who have a large listening and speaking vocabulary have an advantage when they are learning to read. They can use these words when they read and write. Understanding what you are reading is easier when you know the meanings of words. Children will not understand a word in a reading book if they have never heard it before. Also, when children try to read unfamiliar words, they can problem solve them much faster if they have heard the word before.

Children who have been read to have learned that there is a different way of expressing ideas in books. The language in books is different from the way we talk. We use different words and different kinds of sentences when we talk. The language in books is more complex. For example, sentences are complete and usually are longer in books. When we talk to each other we usually use shorter and incomplete sentences. Children become familiar with the rich language patterns in books when they hear stories read aloud. It is important that children become familiar with the language used in books because this knowledge will help

them understand stories when they read on their own.

Because story language is different from everyday language, it is important that children hear different kinds of stories. The language in a fairy tale is different than the language in a nursery rhyme or a mystery book or a poem. When children hear fairy tales read over and over, they will expect to hear "once upon a time" at the beginning of the story. They will also expect certain characters and events to be in the story. For example, they will expect a princess or some talking animals to be in a fairy tale, but not a detective. This knowledge will help them make predictions when they begin to read. They will have a sense of how the story should work so their predictions make sense.

When children listen to stories everyday they learn what makes a story and how stories work. They learn that stories have a beginning, middle, and end. They learn that stories tell something and make sense. Children also learn that there are characters who usually have a problem to solve and the story takes place in a setting. This knowledge is helpful when children read because they know what to expect in stories and how they work.

When children listen to stories they also learn about the reading process. They learn about what people do when they read from observing others read to them. For example, they notice things such as where to start reading or what to

do at the end of a page. They begin to understand that the print on the page corresponds to what they are hearing as they discover that the squiggles and lines on the page have something to do with the story. When they begin to notice print they will discover letters and words. This is an early understanding that reading is a process of getting meaning from written symbols.

Finally, reading aloud helps identify reading as a fun activity. If children associate reading with fun, they will have a greater desire to learn to read and they will want to read. Reading aloud helps create a positive attitude toward reading and builds the desire to read which is important to children's success in reading.

Here are some practical tips for parents to think about when they are reading aloud to their children.

1. Begin reading to your child as soon as possible. Reading aloud to children should begin from the earliest years. You can start reading when your children are babies and continue until they become teenagers. Older children still need the closeness that reading aloud provides. Find time to read with your child everyday. Bedtime is often a good time. If this is not a good time, try to choose a time which is convenient for your family.

2. Provide reading materials for all family members. Reading materials can be obtained through school book clubs, public and school libraries, used book stores, or garage

sales. Swap books with family and friends. Get your child his/her own library card and go to the library regularly. When children see reading materials at home, they learn that reading is an important activity in their homes.

3. Let your child see you enjoy reading. You are your child's best role model for reading. Your child will value reading if you do.

4. Connect read alouds to your child's personal experiences or to family experiences. Read about things that your child or family has experienced or will be experiencing. Making connections makes the experiences and books more memorable.

5. Talk about what you read to help your child develop language and thinking skills. Talk about ideas in books and listen to your child's comments. As you read, ask questions such as, "What do you think will happen next?" Ask questions which require more than a yes or no answer. Other questions you could ask are, "What would you do if you were in the story?" or "Why do you think she did that?" Discuss whether or not your child likes the books.

6. Over time and with many experiences with books children gradually become aware of print. This is an important part of learning to read. Here are some ideas for helping children acquire concepts about print.

When reading a book with your child, you can:

Announce the name of the book and the author and the illustrator.

Talk about the cover and ask, "What do you think this story is going to be about?" Sometimes it's helpful to tell your child about the story before you begin reading to help your child understand the story better.

Talk about the parts of a book. Talk about the front and back of a book. Talk about the title page, first page, and the last page. Show your child that you read the left-hand page before the right-hand page. Show your child where to start reading on the page. Show your child that you read from the top of the page to the bottom and that you read from left to right.

Let your child hold the book and turn the pages.

Take your time reading and allow your child to look and talk about the pictures. Talk about how the pictures relate to the text. Read with expression. Change your tone of voice to fit the characters.

Point to the words as you read. Pointing to the words helps your child make the connection between what your voice is saying and what is on

the printed page. Eventually your child learns that the black marks on the page are letters and words and they have meaningful sounds. Sometimes talk about specific letters and words in the story. Talk about spaces between the words.

7. Turn off the television and read!

Parents often ask teachers what they can do to help their children. Reading aloud is an enjoyable activity that all parents need to do in order to help their children become literate. It does take time for parents to read to their children everyday, but reading aloud is time well-spent on helping children become successful in reading. Use this video as a tool to help make reading aloud a family tradition in your home. The following demonstration is a model of how you can read aloud to your child.

APPENDIX B

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR READING ALOUD

Parents reading aloud to their children is the one factor which makes a difference in their reading success at school. By reading aloud parents can help their children enjoy and value books and reading. Here are some ideas for making reading aloud as a family tradition in your home.

- 1) Begin reading to your child as soon as possible. Find time to read with your child everyday.
- 2) Provide reading materials for all family members. Reading materials can be obtained through school book clubs, public and school libraries, used book stores, or garage sales. Swap books with family and friends. Get your child his/her own library card and go to the library regularly.
- 3) Let your child see you enjoy reading. You are your child's best role model for reading. Your child will value reading if you do.
- 4) Connect read alouds to your child's personal experiences or to family experiences. Read about things that your child or family has experienced or will be experiencing.
- 5) Talk about what you read to help your child develop language and thinking skills. Talk about the ideas in books and listen to your child's comments. As you read, ask questions such as, "What do you think will happen next?" Discuss

whether or not your child likes the book.

- 6) When reading a book with your child, you can:

Announce the name of the book and the author and the illustrator.

Talk about the cover and ask "What do you think this story is going to be about?"

Talk about the parts of a book.

Let your child hold the book and turn the pages.

Take your time reading and allow your child to look and talk about the pictures.

Read with expression. Change your tone of voice to fit the characters.

Point to the words as you read.

- 7) Turn off the television and read!

APPENDIX C

BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR PARENTS

There is a wealth of books available for young children. The following list is a suggested guide of books for reading aloud to children.

Mother Goose

Mother Goose	Brian Wildsmith
The Random House Book of Mother Goose	Arnold Lobel
The Real Mother Goose	Blanche F. Wright
The Tall Book of Mother Goose	F. Rojankovsky
Tomie de Paola's Mother Goose	Tomie de Paola

ABC and Number Books

A My Name Is Alice	Jane Bayer
Chicka Chicka Boom Boom	Martin/Archambault
Eating the Alphabet	Lois Ehlert
On Market Street	Arnold Lobel
Twenty-Six Letters & Ninety-Nine Cents	Tana Hoban
Anno's Counting Book	A. Mitsumasa
Goodnight Moon	Margaret Wise Brown
One Hunter	Pat Hutchins
Ten Little Rabbits	Virginia Grossman
Ten, Nine, Eight	Molly Bang

Poetry Books

A Child's Garden of Verses	R. L. Stevenson
Hailstones And Halibut Bones	Mary O'Neill
Random House Bk. of Poetry for Children	Jack Prelutsky
When We Were Very Young	A. A. Mine
Where The Sidewalk Ends	Shel Silverstein

Picture Storybooks

Blueberries for Sal	Robert McCloskey
*Brown Bear, Brown Bear	Bill Martin Jr.
Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs	Judith Barrett
Corduroy	Don Freeman
*Curious George	H. A. Rey
Dear Zoo	Rod Campbell
Dinosaurs, Dinosaurs	Byron Barton
Frog and Toad Are Friends	Arnold Lobel
George and Martha	James Marshall
Go Away, Big Green Monster	Ed Emberly
*Goodnight Moon	Margaret Wise Brown
*Good-Night, Owl!	Pat Hutchins
Green Eggs and Ham	Dr. Seuss
Guess How Much I Love You	Sam McBratney

Happy Birthday Moon
 Hattie and the Fox
 If You Give a Mouse a Cookie
 Ira Sleeps Over
 Jamberry
 "More More More," Said the Baby
 No Jumping on the Bed
 Millions of Cats
 Quick as a Cricket
 *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble
 The Complete Adventures of Peter Rabbit
 The Doorbell Rang
 *The Gingerbread Boy
 The Little Engine That Could
 The Mitten
 The Napping House
 *The Very Hungry Caterpillar
 The Wolf's Chicken Stew
 There's A Nightmare in My Closet
 We're Going on a Bear Hunt
 Where the Wild Things Are
 *Where's Spot

Frank Asch
 Mem Fox
 Laura Numeroff
 Bernard Waber
 Bruce Degen
 Vera B. Williams
 Tedd Arnold
 Wanda Gag
 Don & Audrey Wood
 William Steig
 Beatrix Potter
 Pat Hutchins
 Paul Galdone
 Watty Piper
 Jan Brett
 Don & Audrey Wood
 Eric Carle
 Keiko Kasza
 Mercer Mayer
 Helen Oxenbury
 Maurice Sendak
 Eric Hill

*Available in Spanish

Chapter Books

A Wrinkle in Time
 Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
 Charlotte's Web
 Chocolate Fever
 Doctor Dolittle
 Encyclopedia Brown, Boy Detective
 Freckle Juice
 Henry Huggins
 James And The Giant Peach
 Johnny Tremain
 Little House on the Prairie
 Old Yeller
 Ramona The Pest
 Sarah, Plain and Tall
 Stuart Little
 Superfudge
 The Black Stallion
 The Boxcar Children
 The Cay
 The Hobbit
 The Indian In The Cupboard
 The Lion, The Witch, & The Wardrobe
 The Secret Garden
 Where the Red Fern Grows

Madeline L'Engle
 Roald Dahl
 E. B. White
 Robert K. Smith
 Hugh Lofting
 Donald Sobol
 Judy Blume
 Beverly Cleary
 Roald Dahl
 E. Forbes
 Laura I. Wilder
 M. D. Bauer
 Beverly Cleary
 Patricia MacLachlan
 E. B. White
 Judy Blume
 Walter Farley
 Gertrude C. Warner
 Theodore Taylor
 J. R. Tolkien
 Lynne Reid Banks
 C. S. Lewis
 Frances H. Burneft
 Wilson Rawls

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