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Reading aloud at home: Supporting Chapter I students' reading development

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Reading aloud at home: Supporting Chapter I students' reading development

Abstract

The present condition of aliteracy in our country is a disturbing phenomenon. (The aliterate is defined as a person who can, but does not, read.) Functioning as a literate allows a person to enlarge and enrich one's experiences, to play productive roles in society, and to have contact with other minds in distant places and times (Heath, 1980).

READING ALOUD AT HOME:
SUPPORTING CHAPTER I STUDENTS' READING DEVELOPMENT

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Joann Kruckenberg
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This Research Paper by: Joann Kruckenberg

Entitled: READING ALOUD AT HOME: SUPPORTING CHAPTER I STUDENTS'
READING DEVELOPMENT

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

April 26, 1989
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The present condition of aliteracy in our country is a disturbing phenomenon. (The aliterate is defined as a person who can, but does not, read.) Functioning as a literate allows a person to enlarge and enrich one's experiences, to play productive roles in society, and to have contact with other minds in distant places and times (Heath, 1980).

According to a study commissioned by the Book Industry Study Group, young people from age 16 to 21 are reading less. The proportion of this group who were readers declined from 75 per cent in 1978 to 63 per cent in 1983 (Lehr, 1985-86). The technological and scientific advances in contemporary American culture have created changes but have not necessarily strengthened the quality of life. The lack of desire to read can be associated with environmental influences, both home and school. For example, family-shared reading and recreational reading have taken a backseat to a number of distractions. In part, the problem is due to today's life style, which is fast paced and stressful. In 1985, 49.2 per cent of American homes were found to have both parents working outside the home. Another 14.3 per cent were functioning as a one-parent family (Statistical Abstracts of U.S., 1986). This life style is increasing in our society causing an expenditure of so much effort in coping with the daily stress of living that parents find little time, strength, or enthusiasm remaining for quality parenting (Elkind, 1981).

A tremendous stumbling block to reading in today's society is television. Some parents find it too much of a sacrifice to unplug the television and share a book with their children. Studies conducted by Marie Winn (1985) report parents admitting to the use of television as a pacifier and a source of entertainment for their children. One mother related, "I try to limit the kids' TV watching, but Alfred (her husband) likes to watch quite a lot. Limiting the kids means he'd have to limit himself and he really doesn't want to do that" (p. 171).

The decline in reading for pleasure can also be attributed to the increase in activities outside the home. Young people's acquisition of reading as a pastime may be thwarted by demands on their time from other opportunities. As Margaret Meek (1982) notes, "Reading takes time; and, nowadays, most people are more sociable than in the past when solitary private reading was more common" (p. 9). To encourage reading among young people, parents need to assume the role model of a reader, guiding and balancing all experiences including reading aloud rather than fulfilling the role of a social activities director. Robert Goldensen (1957) states, "To neglect our children's reading is to miss a golden opportunity to help them toward a fuller life. To take that opportunity and make the most of it is to open the door that leads to the most unlimited, the most durable and the most fruitful of all the sources of enjoyment and enlightenment our world can offer" (p. 12).

Children need to grow up in an environment in which literacy is acquired through interaction with quality literature. Literature helps to build understanding of one's own feelings and those of others. It also allows for vicarious experiences that enable humans to compare, contrast, respond, and appreciate different aspects of life (Huck, 1987).

In this paper, the value of reading aloud to children will be explored and will be related to strengthening the language abilities of students, grades one through five, in a Chapter I reading program. These children are low achievers in the area of reading; they struggle to function on grade-level work and have not had the positive reading experiences that assist in developing reading abilities and interests. Therefore, they experience frustration with the process of reading and have developed negative feelings toward it. Because the ability to read is so closely tied to success in school and the child's emerging concept of self, the low achiever's self-esteem is usually low.

VALUE OF READING ALOUD TO CHILDREN

The value of reading aloud to children and its direct relationship to school success is supported by numerous studies. The Report of the Commission of Reading (1984) recognizes reading aloud as the single most important activity for building the knowledge necessary for success in reading. Children who are introduced to books at an early age are inclined to develop more

sophisticated language structures, greater vocabulary, and better comprehension skills. Children fortunate to experience an early exposure to quality literature gain important background knowledge and an interest in learning to read (McCormick, 1977; Chomsky, 1972; Durkin, 1966; Huck, 1987; Cohen, 1968).

The importance of reading fine literature aloud in school and at home not only facilitates children's reading ability, but also their desire to read. Kimmel (1983) acknowledges that among experts, reading aloud to children is considered the most effective as well as the simplest and least expensive way to foster in children a lifelong love of books and reading. According to Charlotte Huck (1982), a majority of children get little or no sustained reading at school and none at home.

Parents need to begin reading aloud to their children at an early age and then continue to practice this activity after their youngsters have achieved independence in reading. As part of the read-aloud experiences in the home, parents need to present many different types of books, models of readers, and opportunities for independent experiences in the library such as choosing books and checking them out (Heath, 1980).

Chapter I students may be those elementary school students who benefit the most from the read-aloud experiences. According to Sandra McCormick, (1977), reading aloud to children from low

income homes and to children who are low achievers seems to influence reading achievement in a positive way.

IMPLEMENTATION OF READ-ALoud EXPERIENCES IN A CHAPTER I PROGRAM

To extend children's language abilities in a Chapter I reading program, a project was initiated to encourage parents to read aloud to their children at home. The teacher provided parents with materials and methods to promote reading as an enjoyable pastime in the family and to assist them in serving as positive reading models.

Encouraging parents to become involved in their children's reading program needs careful consideration on the part of the teacher because many factors influence successful home-school relationships. For example, parents may have the misconception that reading is the sole responsibility of the school; therefore, they need not participate. The availability of reading materials in the home may be insufficient. Parents may feel inadequate because they, too, may have reading disabilities, or they may not be aware of the influence of literature experiences on their child's emerging literacy.

Criteria for Selection of Literature Works and Related Activities

The read-aloud-at-home project was devised to provide families with suggestions to stimulate the home-reading

environment. Books of high literary quality were selected, for quality literature enhances the imagination, broadens experience, activates thinking and reasoning skills, and develops an appreciation of reading. As stated in Raising Readers (1980), "Endearing characters, interesting plots, language play and beautiful illustrations have universal appeal" (p. 173). All of these factors were considered in the selection process along with the writer's past experience with books and their appeal to colleagues and previous students.

Content of Packets

To assist parents in engaging in read-aloud activities with their children, the writer developed packets of materials and activities. Each packet consisted of a book with related activities and suggested materials for carrying out the activities. Different types of literature (e.g., picture books, folktales, fiction, and poetry) were included. Also, the contents of the packets represented a range of reading levels and complexity of activities. The present inventory of read-aloud packets, numbering fifty-two, was extensive enough to enable children to have many from which to choose. Now the development of the packets is an ongoing project that also is engaged in by Chapter I teachers in three other elementary schools in the district.

After selecting the books, each one is presented on a sheet to be enclosed in a read-aloud packet. The contents include a

synopsis, the themes, key words, a guide for related discussion and expressive activities, and the titles of related books (see Appendix A). The book is summarized briefly so that the parent or the person reading aloud in the session may be informed about the content, if pre-reading has not occurred. Underlying themes of each book are noted for further discussion purposes. The key vocabulary words that may be unfamiliar in meaning and pronunciation to the children are listed. Children's vocabulary knowledge is often taken for granted. The word list can help children, and also their parents can develop an awareness of words.

Follow-up activities are included: Discussion questions are intended to extend the comprehension of the work and to encourage the development of thinking-language abilities. Many of the expressive activities are family oriented. Different types of activities that can naturally evolve from the literature experience such as dramatizing, writing, drawing, singing, and cooking, were included.

The parents and their children are encouraged to use the suggestion sheet with the book as they wished: It is not an assignment but rather an opportunity for growth. The activities listed are designed to help the children appreciate literature and develop thinking-language abilities while strengthening the bond with their family.

Lists of related books are provided to extend thinking and discussing of related topics, themes, and types of literature. Such an experience can also extend children's enjoyment of books and the time spent in reading.

The packet also contains a letter from the teacher (see Appendix B). This letter briefly explains the value of reading aloud and encourages parents to become actively involved as partners with the school in facilitating their child's reading success. A letter giving twelve tips for successful reading aloud at home is also included (see Appendix C). It explains how to carry out a successful read-aloud session and to create a more positive home environment for readers. Suggestions for employing questions before, during, and after reading aloud are also included (see Appendix D). These questions can promote more than literal meaning; they can involve several levels of thinking (e.g., combining verbal elements from the story and visual elements from the illustrations; recognizing the strengths, or well-developed literary elements, in a story; understanding the genres as different vehicles for creating meaning; and applying knowledge from reading to one's life).

Introducing the Parents to the Program

The teacher introduced the home read-aloud program to the parents through a group meeting and individual family conferences. Considerable guidance from research is available concerning the

relationship of adults and children while books are shared. These findings indicate that the benefits of reading aloud sessions may be more than children are read to, but the nature and quality of adult-child interactions with books influence children's concepts of reading thus moving them toward literacy (Roser, 1987). Parents need to be advised about methods to use in the read-aloud session that will foster literary and reading appreciation. While reading aloud, adults need to take time to ask and answer questions about pictures, words, and story elements. These questions should be thoughtful, and discussions should assist children in connecting the story with their own experiences and ideas. These sessions offer opportunity for immense growth and sharing.

During the parent conferences, the suggestions for the home read-aloud periods included in the packet were reviewed. Parents were encouraged to provide a regular time for daily reading without distractions such as radio or TV, to use an expressive voice in a comfortable setting, and to actively involve their children in participating throughout the sessions by asking questions about the story elements, by predicting outcomes, by analyzing characters, and by turning the pages or even counting pages. It was related to the parents that the major goals of these read-aloud experiences were to familiarize children with books and reading and to provide them opportunities for positive interactions with caring adults.

Conference sessions with parents are an opportunity to gain information about the reading habits of the Chapter I students and their families. At the beginning of the year, the teacher assisted parents in completing a checklist that was divided into three sections--reading activity in the home, parent's understanding of their children's attitudes towards reading, and their concept of the parent's role in their children's learning (see Appendix E). The parents checked most of the items on the first section regarding reading activity in the home with the exception of the item referring to the choice of reading as a free-time family activity. This response is of particular concern because it indicates a lack of support of reading in the families of the Chapter I students. The negative influence of television is clearly evident as the item related to nightly viewing was checked by 21 of the 24 respondents. The problem seems to be that books cannot compete with television. Unless books and reading have been introduced at an early age or before television became the primary source of entertainment, television becomes the major source of pastime activity.

The second section of the checklist asks parents to respond to their children's attitude toward reading. The question referring to the child's perception of reading as a worthwhile activity was most frequently not checked. This reflects the poor attitude towards reading as a priority held by numerous Chapter I students.

The last section seeks information about parental assistance in their children's learning. Those responding seemed to have a healthy attitude about reading. The item that was not frequently marked concerned making reading a natural part of family activities.

Promotion of Public Library Visits

The read-aloud project was developed to promote involvement in the reading process and to foster reading habits both at school and home. The parents were encouraged to take their children to the public library on a regular basis to acquire reading materials. To promote the use of the public library and reading, the teacher developed a thematic booklist recommending appropriate levels of reading experiences for every month. It was divided into three groupings based on grade placement. This list was published in the local newspaper and was sent home with the students. It was requested by numerous area educators to be used as a classroom guide for promoting available books in the public library (see Appendix F).

SUMMARY

The success of the read-aloud project can be realized by observing the student's increased enthusiasm for reading. The students introduced to the project last school year requested the book packets almost immediately upon arrival in the Chapter I room this year. Parents also have expressed their appreciation of the packets and seem to place more value on reading aloud at

home. Notes are frequently received from parents as the packets are returned stating how much a specific book packet was enjoyed by all the family. One reason for the success of the read-aloud-at-home project appears to be related to the specific suggestions given for the home activities.

Through the projects described, the home and school were able to collaborate in fostering the children's desire to read. The home offered the most ideal setting for stimulating reading interest by reading aloud and for developing reading as a lifelong activity.

Because of the success of the program in this specific Chapter I classroom, all Chapter I teachers in the district have adopted its use.

APPENDIX A
AN EXAMPLE BOOK PACKET

MISS RUMPHIUS
by Barbara Cooney

GRADES: all ages

SUMMARY: Life, as a shared experience, is reflected upon. Miss Rumphius is an example of an independent person, aging throughout the story. The story is told by the great niece of Miss Rumphius. It helps us realize the importance of contributing to society, respect for family, traditions and love of life.

THEMES: aging, concepts of time, family, traditions

VOCABULARY: lupine, wharves, conservatory

DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES:

- - How can you make the world a better place?
- - Do you know someone like Miss Rumphius?
- - Discuss your relatives and traditions.
- - Plant lupines or other seeds.
- - Visit an older relative. Talk about the family history.
- - Retell the story in your own words.
- - Make a family tree.

OTHER RELATED BOOKS:

WHEN I WAS YOUNG IN THE MOUNTAINS by Cynthia Rylant

OXCART MAN by Donald Hall

LITTLE HOUSE IN THE BIG WOODS by Laura Ingalls Wilder

APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents:

Reading aloud to your child has proven to be the most valuable way you can guide your child toward reading success. Experts have determined that parents who read to their children on a regular basis are more likely to have children who are good readers.

Reading aloud brings families closer together, shows that reading is fun and important, allows children to hear correct language, broadens experiences, increases vocabulary, listening, and comprehension skills and develops an appreciation of books.

I would like you to become a partner in your child's reading success this year by reading aloud to/with your child. I hope to make your job easier by helping with selection and availability of books to meet your child's reading level. Your child will be bringing home books, with suggested activities included, to share in your read-aloud activities you wish. Each book/set may be kept for one week, then return so it may be rotated. Include any questions or reactions to the story and activity on the paper provided. (This paper may also be used for any activities or lists.)

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Joann Kruckenberg
Chapter I

APPENDIX C

TWELVE TIPS FOR READING ALOUD AT HOME

1. Start with picture books and build to story books and novels.
2. Co-ordinate the age and interest level of the book to the child.
3. Let the child choose the materials based on special interests or hobbies.
4. Try to set aside a regular time for reading (10-30 minute sessions per evening/day).
5. Be patient! A good listener needs to learn the art of listening.
6. Enjoy the book yourself--practice and use plenty of expression.
7. Read in a quiet area. (Turn off TV and radio).
8. Allow time for discussion and question asking before, during, and after the book.
9. Involve the child. When possible, take turns reading.
10. Make books available at home.
11. Encourage your child to speak freely and fully so he/she is using oral language.
12. Make reading a family activity. Take books on trips. Read every chance you get.

APPENDIX D
STORY QUESTION TIPS

Before Reading

1. What do you think this story will be about? Why?
2. Where and when do you think the story took place?
3. Have you read other books by this author? Tell me about them.

During Reading

1. If you were in the story, how would you feel?
2. How do you think this story will turn out?
3. Discuss unfamiliar words as reading and explain any new situations.

After Reading

1. Did the story turn out as you expected?
2. Was there anything special you liked or did not like about the story? Tell me about it.
3. Is the main character someone you would like to have as a friend? Why or why not?
4. How would the story be different if the main character was someone else?
5. How could the story change if it took place where we live?
6. Is this a book your friends would enjoy reading? Why or why not?

APPENDIX E
PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent Check list

Pretest

Please check (✓) those items in each section which best describe your attitudes, behaviors, or skills. Check as many as needed to describe your family.

1. Attitude/Behavior (Parent)

- I enjoy working with my child.
- I enjoy our sharing times together.
- Our family reads books together.
- Our family chooses reading as a free-time activity.
- We visit the library.
- We watch TV nightly.
- Our family shares magazines, newspapers, and books.

2. Attitude toward Reading

- My child seems to enjoy reading.
- My child enjoys reading with me.
- My child enjoys reading to other members of the family.
- My child brings books home.
- My child sees reading as a worthwhile activity.

3. Personal attitude

- I understand the reading process.
- I help my child succeed in reading.
- I have a positive attitude about school.
- I help my child with his/her homework.
- I make reading a natural part of our family activities.
- I serve as a good role model for my child.
- I understand the importance of reading in my child's life.

(Date)

(Parent's Signature)

Comments:

APPENDIX F

READING THEME FOR MAY: FAMILY

KINDERGARTEN - THIRD GRADE

THE TWO OF THEM	Aliki
THE ONE IN THE MIDDLE IS THE GREEN KANGAROO	Judy Blume
MISS RUMPHIUS	Barbara Cooney
THE BEST MOM IN THE WORLD	Judy Delton
WAITING FOR MAMA	Beatric Schenk de Regniers
MY MOTHER AND I	Aileen Fisher
WATCH THE STARS COME OUT	Riki Levinson
WHEN I WAS YOUNG IN THE MOUNTAINS	Cynthia Rylant
TELL ME A TRUDY	Lore Segal
ALL KINDS OF FAMILIES	Norma Simon
STEVIE	John Steptoe
WHAT MARY JO SHARED	Janice May Udry
THE DAY OUR T.V. BROKE DOWN	Betty Ren Wright
BIG SISTER AND LITTLE SISTER	Charlotte Zolotow
WILLIAM'S DOLL	Charlotte Zolotow

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