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A program teachers can establish to help persuade parents to read frequently to their children

Maureen Gilhooley Walker
University of Northern Iowa

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A program teachers can establish to help persuade parents to read frequently to their children

Abstract

The teaching of reading begins before formal schooling. It begins before age five and before nine o'clock in the morning (Clark 1976). It starts with the first story that is read to the child and builds from there. A problem occurs when parents do not see the role of reading to their children as vital, and thus do not read to them frequently. Teachers should not only read to their students, but also convince parents that "they stand at the center of their children's educational world" (Smith 1990). Reading to children is an important aspect of reading development and success. There is a strong indication that there is a need for teachers to interact with their students' parents to enhance language development. The problem, then, is what program can teachers establish to provide the necessary incentive to parents so they will read frequently to their children?

**A Program Teachers Can Establish
To Help Persuade Parents To Read Frequently
To Their Children**

**A Research Paper
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Reading Education**

**Maureen Gilhooley Walker
University of Northern Iowa
Spring 1992**

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The teaching of reading begins before formal schooling. It begins before age five and before nine o'clock in the morning (Clark 1976). It starts with the first story that is read to the child and builds from there. A problem occurs when parents do not see the role of reading to their children as vital, and thus do not read to them frequently. Teachers should not only read to their students, but also convince parents that "they stand at the center of their children's educational world" (Smith 1990).

Reading to children is an important aspect of reading development and success. There is a strong indication that there is a need for teachers to interact with their students' parents to enhance language development. The problem, then, is what program can teachers establish to provide the necessary incentive to parents so they will read frequently to their children?

In this paper the teacher, uses a qualitative approach (Ary 1990) and describes a take home reading program (author unknown), that was implemented for two years in her classroom of thirty kindergarten students. This program included response cards so at home reading could

be monitored by the teacher. Simple incentives were given to the students to read at home and have their parents fill out the response cards. It was established through a parent survey and teacher observations that this program was effective, and the results seemed to justify continuing it and sharing the program with other teachers.

Review of the Literature

An increasing amount of attention has been given to the importance of reading to children both at home and at school. As Anderson states in Becoming A Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading (1985), reading aloud has been shown to be the most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading. Anderson cited that "The best way for parents to help their children become better readers is to read to them even when they are very young" (p.9). This is especially true in the preschool years.

A child's listening comprehension comes long before reading comprehension. A child learns to speak because s/he is spoken to. A person's listening vocabulary is a well of words that feeds a child's reading vocabulary (Trelease, 1989). Therefore, children that are read to

by their parents are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary, and this is a vocabulary that is richer than one hears on television. The children "develop a sense of story and begin to understand that reading is a process of getting meaning from written symbols" (Rasinski, 1990, p 344).

Clark's (1976) longitudinal study on early readers showed that the parents of children who came to school already reading played an active role in their children's interests, and they encourage them (p.109). Clark concluded that it is important to consider the contributions of their home environment and experiences. These were homes rich in print, and if parents could not afford to buy books the local library was used extensively.

Durkin (1966) and Clark (1976) both conclude that in the long run four basic factors are paramount to the development of early readers. These factors are not independent of each other, but interrelated to help develop a reader. These factors are: 1. A wide range of reading material is available in the home. 2. Reading is done in the home. The child sees their parents reading for enjoyment, and parents read to the child. Through these contacts with reading the student forms the concept that print is meaningful. 3. There is the availability of paper and pencils in the home for the child to scribble, draw, and write. 4. The Parents respond to

what the child is trying to do by answering the questions s/he has about books and print seen in real life, for example, signs and cereal boxes.

Children who come to school reading come from a print rich environment.

The results of Reutzels 1989 study with three classes of kindergarten students indicate that "changes in the kindergarten language curriculum and modification in the classroom environment, designed to immerse young children in a print rich environment are helpful in developing both print concept awareness and reading readiness abilities as well as word reading ability" (p.215). A young reader's concepts about printed language were improved by placing them in a classroom where they were immersed in print as opposed to a classroom where reading readiness curriculum was in place.

Most reseachers in the area agree with Anderson (1985) when he states that "There is no substitute for a teacher who reads children good stories. It whets the appetite of children for reading and provides a model of skillful oral reading. It is a practice that should continue throughout the grades" (p.52).

If a teacher has this much influence on a child, then according to Smith (1990), the child is naturally primed to view the actions of his/her parents in an even higher regard, "because reading becomes important to

the child because the most important person in the world reads" (p.332).

Notwithstanding that if a parent starts reading to a child at birth, there will be five years of vocabulary development before the child even gets to formal schooling. The reverse is also true however, in some cases the teacher has students where this vocabulary development is lacking, and s/he is expected to make up this deficiency in in one year. Trelease (1990) states that it would be helpful for pediatricians to recommend parents begin reading to their child at the first visit.

At a time when 80% of the books published for adults are financial failures and TV Guide is the best selling periodical and when 80% of our twenty-one year olds cannot comprehend a college textbook (Trelease 1990), teachers have to realize that they cannot do this alone. Teachers need help, the help of the student's family to create a nation of lifetime readers. Both teachers and parents need to work as a team to provide a print rich environment at school, and at home.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Description of Community and Work Setting

Reading aloud has been shown to be one of the most important activities for building the knowledge required for future reading success. This teacher wanted to implement a take home reading program that would encourage parents to read to their children on a daily basis and establish a routine which might continue through the summer and years to come. A Take Home Reading Program was established in this teacher's kindergarten class of thirty students each for two consecutive years. It was implemented in a parochial consolidated school where two parishes joined to establish one school which consisted of two buildings four miles apart. One building contained approximately one hundred fifty, preschool, kindergarten, first, and second grade students. The second building contained approximately one hundred seventy, third through eighth grade students. The school was in an urban setting with a population in excess of one hundred thousand people.

This program was implemented by the classroom teacher and full-time aid. The thirty kindergarten students who participated were enrolled in an all-day everyday school situation. This classroom consisted of

children who came from a wide economic background. The ethnic background in this classroom was Caucasian and remained intact through the year.

The philosophy of the school was to stress the uniqueness of each child and encourage the children to develop their potential to the fullest. Students were encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own learning so they will become lifelong learners. This was accomplished through the use of small flexible groups which met the needs of the students. Basals were used in the classroom and supplemented with literature.

The kindergarten was a print rich environment designed to immerse the students in print. Writing centers, listening centers, class library, reading charts, and other reading activities were provided for the students to choose. Because the school chose the basal approach to reading instruction in January of the school year, the teacher introduced the students to basal reading material in small groups while she continued to use big books and literature based instruction and activities.

Establishing Parent-Teacher Communication

In this section the writer will describe the many roles of the

kindergarten teacher, all of which help in establishing parent-teacher communication which was vital to a successful school year. One of the teacher's roles was to provide an environment for learning. This was a developmental program where each child's needs were considered and instruction took place from these needs. Skills were covered both in large and small groups as the need appeared, as well as individually during conferencing at journal time.

The role which was the foundation for all future parent-teacher communication was a "round -up" for the kindergarten parents. This was conducted by both the teacher and principal in the spring of the year and was the first contact between parent and teacher. At this time the kindergarten program was discussed, as well as the school goals. The teacher stressed that the most important activities they, as a parent, can do for their child to prepare them for school is to read to them daily, to take them to the library, to provide writing materials, and to be good reading models. The parents are also introduced to the daily take home reading program which their child will participate when s/he begins kindergarten in the fall.

The second parent-teacher contact was made before school officially started in August at a kindergarten open house. During the

Thursday of teacher inservice, the student and parent, came to visit their classroom at a prescheduled time to become familiar with it. At this time the students: met the teacher and aid, found their table and name, made a snack with their parent, and played with some of the equipment provided. This provided the teacher time to talk with the parent about any concerns that might have developed during the summer and again to stress the importance of reading daily to their child at home.

A third parent-teacher contact occurred during two conferences with the parent and child during the year. These conferences provided the opportunity for the teacher to learn more about her students. The information gathered from the parent was used to help further instruct the child. Conference time also provided an opportunity to discuss the academic and developmental progress of the student. Activities were explained to the parent that could be used at home to help their child's progress. Reading daily to their child was stressed. Enrichment activities were also given. The teacher used this time to explain to the parent what instructional techniques were used in the classroom to teach their child and to demonstrate how some of these could be used at home during their reading sessions.

A fourth contact occurred with weekly newsletters that went home

with the student every Friday. This newsletter contained books that were read in class as well as facts the class learned about the authors and illustrators. Continued reading at home was also encouraged at this time. Monthly book orders were sent home in hope of providing an inexpensive means building the students' at home library.

Overview of Take Home Reading Program

Because reading at home has been found an important aspect in future reading development of children, this teacher established a daily take home reading program with her class. In this program, thirty kindergarten students each selected a new book to take home daily for a parent to read aloud to them. Each student also had a response card to be filled out by the parent after the book was read. Parents indicated what books were read, the date they were read, who they were read by, and the student's comment on the book (see Appendix 1). As each side of the response card was completed, the student received a bookmark and his/her name was added to the wall as reward.

As this program progressed the response cards revealed, which children were being read to and which books merely traveled back and forth to school in the book bag.

The books the students had to choose from were from the teacher's own library, books chosen from the Area 7 library which were rotated monthly, and books the class had written. Books that the students had at home, or books checked out at the local library could also be written on these cards.

Pictures were used to help the students check out their own books. On the first day of school, each student had his/her picture taken and a zerox copy of this picture was glued on a library pocket. This pocket was then glued on poster board, (see Appendix 2). When the students checked out books, they placed the book's card in the library pocket with their picture. The teacher knew which book each student had checked out at a glance. The child was not required to write on the small cards.

In reviewing the parent response cards at the end of the first year it was found that 2,386 books had been read by the twenty-five students who participated (five students never turned in cards, but did take books home daily). The range of participation varied from the student who read the least with twenty-three books to the student who read the most with two hundred and twenty five books.

In reviewing the parent response cards at the end of January in the second year of the program, it was found that twenty-seven out of thirty

students had read at home and filled in cards. Out of these twenty-seven students, 2,398 books had been read with four more months of school to complete. The range of participation varied from the student who read the least with twenty-one books to the student who read the most with two hundred forty-six books. This averaged to ninety-five books being read by each participating student by May in the first year, and students averaging ninety-eight books each by the end of January in the second year of the program. This teacher feels that these numbers indicated that this program was worthwhile, but this teacher also wanted to find out if the parents thought it was worthwhile. Therefore, two surveys were sent to the students' parents.

The two intangible surveys (Ayr p 409) were sent home in March of 1992 which consisted of both closed and open ended questions. They were sent to the parents of the present kindergarten class and the parents of the previous kindergarten class (see Appendix 3). These surveys were designed to find out the following: if the parents thought the take home reading program was effective in providing extra incentive for them to read at home to their children; if there was any improvements that could be made in the program to make it easier for the parent to participate, (for example could the cards be modified to make reporting easier); and,

only for the 1991/1992 kindergarten parents, did the habit of reading carry over into the summer and following year. Fifty eight surveys were sent out and fifty, (eighty six percent) were returned.

The results are summarized in figure 1 on page 16. The results of the survey indicate that the parent thought it was a worthwhile program in providing them with both the incentive to read and materials to be read. Thirty-eight percent thought this program provided them with extra incentive to read often, twenty-two percent thought it provided them with extra incentive sometimes, and one parent wrote in that they already did read everyday.

Students also encouraged their parents to read so their response cards could be filled out. Fifty-two percent of the parents said that their children encouraged them to read so their card could be filled out, forty percent said that children sometimes encouraged them to read, and eight percent said their children seldom encouraged them to read so they could fill out their reading card.

This take home reading program also helped families to establish and/or maintain a reading routine. Eighty-two percent of the parents said that this reading program helped them to establish and/or maintain a reading routine at home, sixteen percent said that it did not, and one

parent said that they already read at home. Forty-six percent of responding parents said that they read more because their child brought a book home daily, fifty percent said that sometimes they read more because their child brought a book home everyday, and four percent said they seldom read.

Many parents filled out the response cards. Ninety-two percent of responding parents said that when they read they filled out the reading response card, four percent filled the card out sometimes, and four percent seldom filled it out.

Questions six and seven were for the parents who had students in my kindergarten class last year, these questions were designed to determine if reading had carried over into the summer and following year in school. Summer reading did diminish, but when the school year commenced the daily reading increased. Thirty-five percent of the responding parents said that they continued to read during the summer, thirty-five percent said they sometimes read during the summer, and thirty percent seldom read. Sixty-five percent have continued to read often this year, thirty percent read to their children sometimes, and five percent noted that their children now read to them.

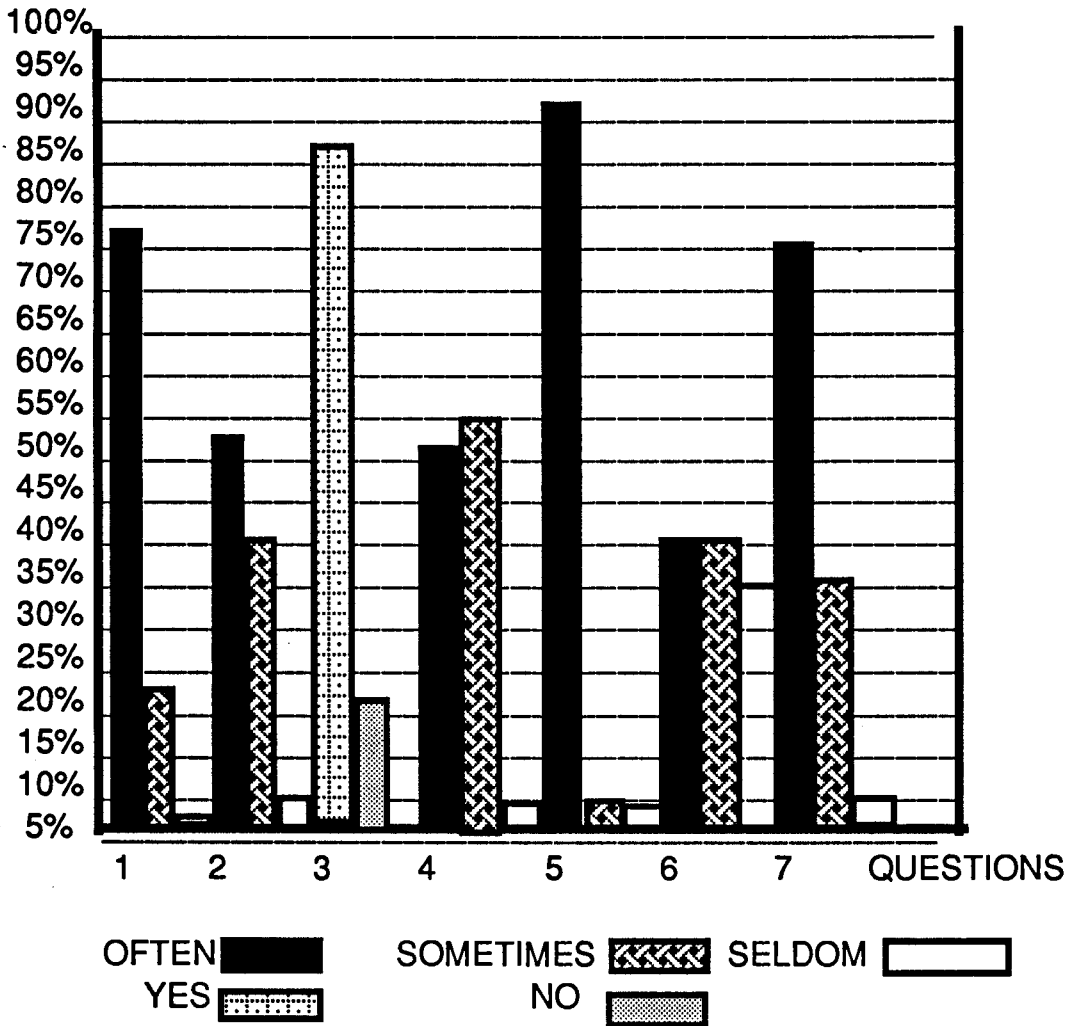
Ten percent of the responding parents had suggestions on how they

thought the reading response card could be improved. Their suggestions included having more room for student comments about the books they read and having less books on each card so it would not take so long to fill the card out. Some parents thought that it was hard for their child to "come up with a comment" and were not sure if this part of the card was necessary or optional.

Fifty six percent of the parents listed other comments and suggestions about this daily take home reading program. Some of these comments and suggestions included: "Keep it up!" ; "I thought it was great that new books were introduced each month." ; "Because of the reading program we developed a routine of shutting off the television by 7:00-7:30 and had reading time. If there were 3-5 spaces left- we had to fill them. This program was a good experience for parents too!"

One parent suggested that more of the techniques that are used in school be sent home so parents could use the same techniques and thus reinforce what is being taught in school. One parent would like to see the program continued in first and second grade. A suggestion was also made that the rewards be changed routinely when the response cards were filled out. For example, book marks one month, stickers another, a stick of gum, or sucker could be additional rewards.

Figure I
Parent Survey of Reading at Home Program
PERCENT OF RESPONSES



1. Did you find this program provided you with extra incentive to read to your child?
 2. Did your child encourage you to read so the card could be filled out?
 3. Did this daily take home reading program help you establish and /or maintain a routine of reading to your child?
 4. Do you think you read more to your child, than you would have otherwise, because s/he brought books home daily.
 5. When you read did you fill out the daily response cards that required you to list the title of the book, date read, the reader, and any comments the child had about the book?
- QUESTIONS 6 AND 7 WERE ANSWERED BY PARENTS OF 1990-1991 KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS**
6. when you read did you fill out the daily response cards that required you to list the title of the book, date read, the reader, and any comments the child had about the book?
 7. If a routine was established did you continue to read during the summer

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION

The survey supports my view that this was a successful program.

However, this program was only one aspect of this teacher's effort to involve parents in their child's language development. In this classroom there was considerable parent-teacher contact on the subject of at-home reading. Weekly notes were sent home informing parents of the daily events in the classroom. The notes included many of the books read and authors discussed. The importance of reading was also stressed in these weekly newsletters.

Also students had an incentive to hand their cards in with a bookmark reward for each side of the card filled, as well as their name added to the chain of names on the wall. Parents have told this teacher that their children insist their parents take the time to read to them at night: "Only two more books, and I get a book mark Mom!"

The students' enthusiasm was also shown when they came to school with their card filled. They made a point to show it to the teacher, reminded the teacher about their bookmark, and beamed when their name was announced to receive a bookmark.

When the students' names were added to the wall, this was not in

competition with other students. The classroom as a whole was trying to "get around the room," where each child's name was added to a shape and hung on the wall. These shapes were changed each month so the teacher could tell how much reading was going on at a glance. For example, apples for September, pumpkins for October, and turkeys for November. All of the students took pleasure in seeing how far the class progressed.

In talking to parents at individual conferences about reading at home and its importance, parents shared stories on how books have become an important part of their daily routine. For example, one parent told this teacher about the time she had taken her child to the store to buy a gift for his new baby brother. The child insisted that the gift be a book. One child even took to sleeping with her favorite book and chose to be its main character for Halloween.

The responses given in the survey were positive. The parents seem to think that this is a worthwhile program which provides incentive to read to their child at home. This teacher thought the suggestion about routinely changing the incentives for filling out the reading response cards was a good one, however this teacher will try to substitute the gum and sucker suggestion for pencils and pads of paper. The rewards should reinforce reading and writing.

This teacher will also discuss with the first and second grade teachers about continuing the program next year. Establishing some inservice experiences for parents that will include techniques they can use when reading to their children is another possibility.

Generalizing from parent response cards does have some drawbacks. Obviously, some parents could have read to their child and just not have bothered to enter his/her reading on these cards. Some cards did become lost in transit to and from school and had to be replaced. However, even with these drawbacks this teachers feel that this program was a valuable one, and that it merits repeating in future years.

CHAPTER IV

Summary

As shown in Clark's 1976 longitudinal study of students who came to school reading, parents played an active role in their child's interests and encouraged them. These students came from homes that were rich in print. The parents read to them and provided them with books to "read". As Durkin (1966) and Clark (1976) conclude, children need a wide range of reading material and reading must be done in the home.

Teachers need help, the help of the student's family to create a nation of lifetime readers. To create a nation of readers who not only can read but a nation of readers who do read! It is not enough for a teacher to provide his/her students with a print rich environment at school, teachers must also encourage parents to provide one at home.

This take home reading program is only one step in process to encourage parents to take an active role in their child's reading education. This program should be expanded to include parent-student-teacher workshops where techniques are taught to the parents to make these reading sessions even more valuable. For example, by having the child use prediction when being read to, by having the parent ask comprehension

questions which require higher level thinking skills, and by having the child and parent retell the stories could be some workshop ideas. When the student starts to read, the teacher can model the techniques used in class when the student reads and comes to unknown words. Paired reading can be modeled and used with this program. The possibilities are endless.

This teacher does feel that this is a valuable educational program, and it should be continued and expanded.

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APPENDIX II
Book Check-Out Board

Library					
■	■				

APPENDIX III
Survey of Previous Year's Parents

March 10, 1992

Dear Parent,

An increasing amount of attention has been given to the importance of reading to both children at home and at school. Reading aloud has been shown to be one of the most important activities for building the knowledge required for future reading success. This was the reason your child's kindergarten teacher implemented a daily take home reading program.

I would find it very helpful, for the further development of this program, if you would complete the attached survey on the kindergarten daily reading program. I am hoping to answer three questions through this survey: 1. I would like to know if you thought this program was helpful and worth-while in establishing and/or maintaining a reading routine in your home. 2. If your answer to the first question was yes I would like to know if this reading continued through the summer. 3. I would like to find out if you have any suggestions for the improvement of this reading program.

You may be assured that your responses will remain completely confidential. The return envelope has an identification number on it so I can check off your name when your survey has been returned. The envelope will then be discarded. Your name will not be placed on the answer sheet that I read, so I will know who has returned their surveys, but I will not know which survey is yours.

I would be very grateful if you could find the time to answer these questions and return this form in the attached envelope. I will use your answers and comments to evaluate this program and make necessary changes.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Maureen Walker
Kindergarten Teacher

Please Circle Correct Answer

1. Did you find this program provided you with an extra incentive to read to your child?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

2. Did your child encourage you to read so the card could be filled out?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

3. Did this daily take home reading program help you establish and/or maintain a routine of reading to your child?
 - A. YES
 - B. NO

4. Do you think you read more to your child, than you would have otherwise, because s/he brought books home daily?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

5. When you read did you fill out the daily response cards that required you to list the title of the book, date read, the reader, and any comments the child had about the book?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

6. If a routine was established did you continue to read during the summer?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SELDOM
 - C. SOMETIMES

7. Have you continued to read to your child in this year?

A. OFTEN

B. SOMETIMES

C. SELDOM

8. If you have any suggestions on how the reading response cards could be improved please indicate your suggestions below.

Please write down any comments you have about this daily take home reading program, or other suggestions you have on how you think this program can be improved.

APPENDIX IV
Survey of Current Year's Parents

March 10, 1992

Dear Parent,

An increasing amount of attention has been given to the importance of reading to both children at home and at school. Reading aloud has been shown to be one of the most important activities for building the knowledge required for future reading success. This was the reason your child's kindergarten teacher implemented a daily take home reading program.

I would find it very helpful, for the further development of this program, if you would complete the attached survey on the kindergarten daily reading program. I am hoping to answer two questions through this survey: 1. I would like to know if you thought this program was helpful and worth-while in establishing and/or maintaining a reading routine in your home. 2. I would like to find out if you have any suggestions for the improvement of this take home reading program.

You may be assured that your responses will remain completely confidential. The return envelope has an identification number on it so I can check off your name when your survey has been returned. The envelope will then be discarded. Your name will not be placed on the answer sheet that I read, so I will know who has returned their surveys, but I will not know which survey is yours.

I would be very grateful if you could find the time to answer these questions and return this form in the attached envelope. I will use your answers and comments to evaluate this program and make necessary changes.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Maureen Walker
Kindergarten Teacher

Please Circle Correct Answer

1. Did you find this program provided you with an extra incentive to read to your child?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

2. Did your child encourage you to read so the card could be filled out?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

3. Did this daily take home reading program help you establish and/or maintain a routine of reading to your child?
 - A. YES
 - B. NO

4. Do you think you read more to your child, than you would have otherwise, because s/he brought books home daily?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

5. When you read did you fill out the daily response cards that required you to list the title of the book, date read, the reader, and any comments the child had about the book?
 - A. OFTEN
 - B. SOMETIMES
 - C. SELDOM

6. If you have any suggestions on how the reading response cards could be improved please indicate your suggestions below.

Please write down any comments you have about this daily take home reading program, or other suggestions you have on how you think this program can be improved.