 Survey of current literature to determine ways parents can help their children in reading

Mary Carla Grosse

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.stritch.edu/etd/756
A SURVEY OF CURRENT LITERATURE
TO DETERMINE WAYS
PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN
IN READING

CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE
LIBRARY
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

by

Sister Mary Carla Grosse, O.S.U.

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
(READING SPECIALIST)
AT CARDINAL STRITCH COLLEGE
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1974
This research paper has been
approved for the Graduate Committee
of Cardinal Stritch College by

George F. Castello
(Advisor)

Date 2/18/74
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to thank Sister Margaret Welter, O.S.U. and the Ursuline Sisters of Toledo, Ohio for the opportunity to pursue graduate studies in the field of reading.

Appreciation is expressed to Mr. George J. Cretilli, advisor of this paper, for his encouragement and direction.

The writer also wishes to extend appreciation to all those who have given encouragement or helped in any way in the preparation of this research paper.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE PROBLEM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope and Limitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Child Himself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Parents can Assist the Child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Teachers can Assist Parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Children differ greatly in their ability to learn how to read. Children do not become interested in letters and reading at the same time or in the same way. Children are different—physically, intellectually, and emotionally. In no circumstances are these differences more apparent than in reading.

It is important that parents of children who are learning to read realize that children are different from each other.

Parents have come to accept the fact that a child will not necessarily cut his first tooth at exactly six months or walk at exactly fourteen months. In the same way, they should accept the fact that the child will learn to read only when he has attained the maturity required for him to learn to read successfully—by no means necessarily on the stroke of his sixth birthday.¹

Though parents need to accept the rate at which each child grows into reading this does not mean that a parent

cannot provide definite help to enable his child to attain the maturity necessary for reading. There are many ways in which a parent can help a child mature physically, emotionally, and intellectually, thus preparing him for the great task of learning to read.

As the child learns to read parents are also encouraged to assist in the learning process. There are many facets to learning to read and there are many stages of development through which a child passes on his way to competency and maturity in reading. Therefore no one simple answer or one limited technique will teach every child to read. Thus, it is necessary that parents who are helping children to read be given definite guidelines in this process. It is important that parents confer with the teacher, become acquainted with the school's reading program and learn what their own role is in relationship to their child's reading.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this research is twofold. First: To discover through a review of current literature various ways teachers can assist parents in helping their children to read. Second: To develop ways to help parents through school sponsored programs and special materials. Included will be ideas from various programs.
Scope and Limitation

Because parents and reading is a very broad topic the writer concentrated mainly on how parents can help primary to low intermediate age children. Some of the information for parents of primary age children would also necessarily pertain to parents of pre-school children who are in the readiness stages for learning to read.

Significance

It has been noted by many specialists in the field of reading that many parents experience difficulty in helping their children in reading. General guidelines do not provide enough assistance to enable parents to help their child.

It is hoped that this study will give the writer a deeper insight into problems parents face in helping their children to read and also a more adequate background of information which can be useful in solving these problems.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Child Himself

Children learn to read at different times and in different ways because of their unique individuality and because of factors outside themselves. Each child comes to school with his own special bundle of experiences, anxieties, feelings, and attitudes.

It is important to realize that the child's total development is related to his growth in reading. An outline by Strang indicates the reciprocal relation between child development and reading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Development</th>
<th>Reading Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Skills needed for further learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Growth</td>
<td>Happiness, enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Growth</td>
<td>Understanding of oneself and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Development</td>
<td>Mental Health¹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a child seems to be retarded in physical growth, social development, word knowledge, or mental alertness, he is likely to show a similar retardation in learning to read. He may need just a little more time to grow.

Getting ready to read is a developmental process that proceeds all through the school years. It doesn't happen at a certain age point in a child's life. Reading growth begins when a child speaks his first word; it continues when he watches the pictures and printed pages in a book as someone reads to him; and as he first realizes that he can identify a word. Thus, readiness in the use of the reading process develops gradually through the early years and differs widely from child to child.

When a child is ready for formal reading instruction he will give evidence of certain characteristics that are necessary if he is to experience success in beginning reading. One most important trait evidenced by the child is the desire to read. Clymer says:

Motivation is one of the greatest factors influencing all school learning. Little is learned in reading unless the child really wants to learn. This motivation must originate in the child, not with his teacher or his parents.1

In order to succeed in reading a child needs to be rested, well nourished and be well enough to concentrate

1Theodore Clymer, A Letter to Parents (Lexington, Massachusetts: Ginn and Company).
and work for prolonged periods of time. General physical health is important in any learning situation.

A beginning reader needs to be able to distinguish likenesses and differences in written and spoken words. Poor visual acuity will prevent a child from developing these necessary visual discrimination skills.

Ability to hear well increases a child's opportunities to gain new ideas, learn new words, and imitate correct speech sounds. Even a small hearing loss that goes undetected will be detrimental to a child's general educational progress. Auditory discrimination (the ability to hear and distinguish the difference in similar sounds and words) is especially necessary for phonics instruction and spelling.

Learning to read takes place in a group situation. If a child is to succeed in reading he needs to know how to work in the "give and take" setting of the classroom. The child who can get along with others, who learns to take his turn and who can talk out his problems with other pupils has developed some of the skills necessary for work in a group situation. Some of the observable signs of social immaturity are temper tantrums, selfishness, intolerance, crying, pouting, baby talk, overdependence on adults, and discomfort in small group situations. All children have some of these symptoms at times yet if several of these characteristics are noticed frequently, the problem should
be discussed with someone who is qualified to give assistance such as a psychiatrist or a physician.

An emotionally disturbed child or a child who has problems of personal adjustment may not be able to concentrate, remember, or develop an interest in reading. Various investigators have judged that forty to ninety percent of the cases of underachievement are caused by emotional conflict. Some of the symptoms of emotional conflict are nervousness, anxiety, fearfulness, extreme shyness, unhappiness, daydreaming, mistrust, and aggressiveness. The areas that need improvement in the youngster who is underachieving because of emotional conflict are his self-confidence, his study habits, and his fund of knowledge.

Reading is part of a child's general growth in language. The language skills of listening, talking, writing, and reading are all interrelated, and growth in one of these areas influences the others. At the early levels, reading and writing skills lag far behind listening and talking. At a later time skill in all four areas advances with skill in reading approaching and finally passing the skill levels of talking and even listening. At early levels a child's reading cannot surpass or even equal his oral language skills. This fact has important implications for reading instruction for children with poor oral language skills.
Being able to follow directions is an important skill in the reading program. How much a child learns will often depend on his ability to listen carefully to directions and then carry out the assignment as given by the teacher. The teacher can give a child individual attention only part of the time. The child who can progress independently has a great advantage in developing reading skills.

To summarize: in order to be able to learn to read and to progress satisfactorily in reading a child has to possess certain physical, mental, and emotional characteristics without which he will not be able to be successful in the reading process.

How Parents can Assist the Child

Research has shown that some children are able to learn to read even before they go to school. A program carried on by the Denver Public Schools indicated that many children could learn to read at earlier ages without any apparent drawbacks and that many kindergarten teachers and parents can teach four and five year olds to read. The success of the Denver program has been repeated in other parts of the country.

The reading approach used by kindergarten teachers and parents was based upon procedures developed by Paul McKee and M. Lucille Harrison. Steps were designed to make children aware of the words, letters, and printed material
which literally surround them. The methods which can be used by parents with children who show an aptitude for reading are based upon the fact that most young children understand several thousand words when they hear them spoken. The ability to translate these unfamiliar printed words into words they know when they listen is developed through a series of steps.

1. Build upon the language skill children developed as they learned to talk.

In speaking, children have learned certain language patterns and that spoken words must make sense. Extend this principle. Develop an awareness that context, the meaning of what is being said, can be used as a clue to strange printed words. Read aloud a sentence omitting a word. Have a child supply the missing word or one which fits and makes sense. For example:

Betsy's coat is ________. (red, warm, furry, new, nice, old)

When John looked up in the sky, he saw _______.
(clouds, planes, kites, birds, stars)

This creates the habit of listening for meaning. It develops an awareness that words make sense. Later when youngsters are reading, they will use the printed context in this same way to read new words.

2. Start with the consonants and teach children all about letters.

Help boys and girls to learn letter-names, to learn letter-sounds, and to associate those with the printed letter-shapes, both capital and small. Alphabetical order isn't important at this stage and isn't taught yet.
3. Teach what is meant by the beginning sound of words.

Provide children with practice in listening for the beginning sounds of words. Help them to decide whether or not certain spoken sounds do or do not begin with the same sound. Say several words slowly and ask which word begins with a different sound. For example:

Some, so, same, sit, till
Bob, Barry, Judith, Bill, Barbara

4. Encourage children to combine these steps as they read.

Because, quite often, two or more words make sense, teach children to use, in addition to the context, the beginning sound of the word and, to the extent that they are needed, other letter-sounds in the word.

In the previous steps any word that made sense was acceptable. Now only a word that makes sense and starts with the sound of the letter which is held up is required. For example:

John, Betty, and Judy were going to the country to visit their grandfather. He lived on a big _______. (f) farm. (It couldn't be a ranch, it doesn't start with an "f". It couldn't be a factory, it wouldn't make sense.)

The last step completes the process and actually involves reading a word printed on a card. For example:

When they arrived, they wanted to go to the barn to see the _______. (cows)¹

When using these techniques with young children, parents and teachers were cautioned to proceed at a pace which permitted boys and girls to achieve with reasonable success and pleasure.

The Denver research did not discover any data to support the belief that early reading instruction: is harmful to the eyes of children; produces objectionable social or psychological problems; or causes reading difficulties or aversion to reading. On the contrary, the results suggested that children benefitted by reading early and with understanding. Many had a headstart which led them to read widely and well—they were rapid readers who also excelled in other school subjects where reading skill is required.

Durkin has done much research on early reading and came to the conclusion that some children were successful at very early ages in learning about language and learning to read. In her research findings, though, she specified that the successes of individual children were directly proportional to their readiness, maturation, and general interest in language and books.¹

Educators who have worked with two to four year olds have reported success in reading instruction with television teaching, the talking typewriter, programmed instruction and special nursery school materials. These methods demand somewhat complicated equipment, though, so they are not ideal for home use by a parent.

Mountain, with the help of graduate students, worked on developing some approaches that a parent could use to give his preschooler a head start on reading. The simplest and most economical method he developed so far employs three materials: word cards, stories written by the parent, and phonics games. How to use this method is described in the article, "How Parents are Teaching their Preschoolers to Read," in *Parents and Reading*.  

Some other books that contain helpful suggestions for parents are: *Help Your Child Read Well and Enjoy It* which is a collection of games and play activities designed for parents to use to teach decoding skills to youngsters from ages three to ten; *A Parents' Guide to Children's Reading* which is an extremely useful guide for every aspect of reading and also contains an annotated bibliography of

---

1 Lee Mountain, "How Parents are Teaching their Preschoolers to Read," in *Parents and Reading*, Perspectives in Reading No. 14 ed. by Carl B. Smith (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1971), pp. 76-86.

the more recent books for children;1 Parent Handbook: Developing Your Child's Skills and Abilities at Home which contains suggestions for parents who wish to offer constructive assistance in aiding their child's development in various skills and abilities prior to first grade—specific techniques are suggested along with general ideas.2 An excellent set of micromonographs on parents and children's reading was recently published by the International Reading Association.3

Studies in child development provide evidence that children are physiologically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually ready for reading at different periods between the ages of two and seven years of age. To subscribe to a certain program policy in pre-first grade reading does not seem feasible at the present time. Current literature and research do not clearly indicate what the long-term advantages are for the child who is ready for an early pre-first grade start in reading. We also do not know what type of program focus might be best, nor how highly structured or intentionally incidental a pre-first grade reading


3ERIC/CRIER + International Reading Association Micromonographs, Parents and Reading (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association).
reading program ought to be. Further research should be concerned with some obviously pertinent questions.¹

Many reading authorities and educators such as Strang,² Sheldon,³ Zintz,⁴ Sleight,⁵ Ilg and Ames,⁶ DeBoer and Dallman,⁷ and others have believed that most parents do not have the needed training for developing specific reading skills, though reading "games" are alright and word drills and phonics can be used in playful situations.

DeBoer and Dallman state that:

The best contribution parents can make to the reading progress of their children is to provide them with a secure and happy home, an abundance of love and encouragement, a great variety of play, creative and constructive experiences, and unlimited opportunity for free reading in good books and magazines. Time to read, encouragement to read, and materials to read are necessary; pressure and a sense of urgency may be dangerous.³


⁵Alice Sleight, "This is Reading," Reading Horizons, Vol. XII, No. 1 (1971), pp. 18-21.


⁸Ibid.
Recent research evidence, though, tends to support the view that large numbers of four and five year olds can be taught to read by parents at home or by teachers in the kindergarten with no adverse effects. Parents, aware of such information may wish to consider whether they are able to teach their children and if early reading is appropriate for their children. The possible values of early reading instruction serve serious consideration.

In order to help their children with reading Corliss suggests that parents first be aware of their child's general development:

1. Know whether he has learned to walk and talk at about the time most children do.
2. Know whether his relationship with family, playmates, and other adults have been typical.
3. Know whether he has been able to develop a wholesome attitude toward himself and playmates.
4. Know whether his early group opportunities in Sunday School or nursery school have been typical.
5. Know whether he has been able to learn things as quickly as other children.
6. Know whether his pediatrician has discussed any particular problems of his development.¹

The sooner a parent is aware of any problems in his child's development the more easily the problems can be solved.

Bamman gives these suggestions to parents:

1. Give the child wide experiences which are shared with the family and discussed in such a way that the child actually understands what he is seeing or doing.

2. Provide a rich background of language development by allowing children to use their parents and brothers and sisters as sounding boards for their ideas. Answer questions, remembering that children's concepts are very often vague and inaccurate.

3. Have a family reading hour each day. Read books, poetry, and articles from magazines and newspapers. Encourage the child to read, too.

4. Praise progress, even though it appears to be slight.

5. Teach the child to handle a book: to turn pages, to hold the book properly, and to put it away in a safe place when he has finished with it.

6. Help him develop a sense of responsibility for correcting his own errors; do not be quick to criticize nor too quick to help him if there is a possibility he can work it out for himself.

7. Surround the child with books. So many lovely but inexpensive books can be purchased today. Encourage him to read them by reading them with him.

8. Keep him in good health. Have frequent checks on his visual and auditory acuity. Be certain that he gets plenty of rest, since a day at school demands much energy.

9. Refrain from pushing the child into too many activities. Many parents feel that they were denied dancing lessons, music lessons, membership in clubs, and other extracurricular activities, and push their children into so many activities that the child cannot possibly keep up with his school work.

10. If there is something which you do not understand about the methods or goals of the school, confer with the teacher or the principal.

11. Assume responsibility for helping the child if he is failing. With the teacher's help, ascertain what the prediction for his success is on the basis of his capacity to learn. Ask the teacher for suggestions on how you might help him with his skills development.

12. Encourage the children in the family to help each other; refrain from making comparisons among older brothers and sisters and the younger child.

13. Help your child to understand that, in addition to reading, many other learnings are important in life. Not all children will excel in reading, but they may excel in other areas.

14. Refrain from projecting your own feelings of failure in reading or other areas of the school upon your child; give him a chance to make up his own mind about how he feels about his teacher and the school.1

1Henry A. Bamman, Fundamental of Basic Reading Instruction, 2nd ed. (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1963), pp. 299-300.
No panaceas are suggested simply because there are none. In each combination of a child and a teacher and parents, there are elements which are unique.

Alma Harrington constructed a ten week course for helping parents to help their children with reading. The participants in the course were not taught to assume the role or responsibility of the teacher or provide a formal instructional situation. The parents were advised to reinforce or work with the teacher with whom their child was involved. In the course emphasis was placed upon the fact that each reading skill is best introduced in the school by a professional teacher. Once the skill has been introduced, it should be practiced and built up in both the school and the home. Real learning does not take place with only one encounter, but is reinforced through repetition.

From her article in *Parents and Reading*, Alma Harrington has these suggestions for parents:

1. Make sure your child has sufficient rest each night. Get him to bed early.
2. See that your child is not rushed off to school in the morning in an unhappy mood.
3. Do not compare your child's progress with that of other children—brothers, sisters, or the child next door. Each child is an individual with his own pattern and rate of learning.
4. Be genuinely interested in the work which your child brings home. Your interest will make him want to do his best work.
5. Do read to your child, even though he may be able to enjoy books by himself.
6. Take your child to the library regularly and let him browse among the books in the children's section.
7. Be a good listener. Set aside a few minutes each evening for the child who wants to tell you what he has done in school.
8. Make your child feel that you enjoy listening to him read. No matter how simple the story, show an interest in what happens.

9. Praise your child when he puts forth a real effort to do his best.

10. Help your child to read with expression—just the way he would talk. Make sure he chooses stories with words that are easy for him to read aloud.

11. Make it a privilege for a younger brother or sister to hear your child read a story.

12. Share the reading aloud of a story with your child. For instance, you read one page and he reads the next page. It will help him to improve his expression and gain more confidence.

13. Ask questions about the story to make sure that your child is getting the meaning. If he cannot remember what he has read or answer questions about material read, he is not really reading. He is only word calling.

14. Help your child to add words to his speaking vocabulary. The larger number of words he can use naturally, in everyday conversation, the more meanings for words he will know when he sees a specific word in a book.

15. Play word games—such as rhyming words, words beginning with the same sound, or "I'm thinking of a word . . ."—with your child.

Michael Flanigan has these suggestions for parents:

Owning a few well-loved and many-times read books of his own is important to a child's developing image of himself as a reader. If you are lucky enough to have a good bookstore nearby, go browsing, and take your children along. Establish a family tradition of always giving at least one book as a gift for Christmas or birthdays.

Magazine and newspaper reviews can assist you in selecting books to borrow or buy for your children. Television and radio programs sometimes offer information about new books, or interview a children's book author or illustrator. Encourage your newspaper and stations to review more children's books and to sponsor, or at least give publicity to, bookfairs and special exhibits and events at the library.

The following are helps to remember when selecting books for your children:

1. Buy the book to appeal to the child—rather than assuming what you find appealing will naturally appeal to him.
2. Let the child have a say in getting the book.
3. Be sure he can read the book you choose.
4. A more difficult book can be selected if it is to be read aloud.
5. Select a book for a style of illustration that will appeal to the child.
6. By selecting a book for an individual child, you are telling him he is unique, a person known by the book company he keeps—a reader! In the reading atmosphere you have developed, it is the ultimate compliment.1

Ruth Strang stresses the importance of not pressuring the child:

The role of the parent during the first three years of school is to contribute in pleasant, casual ways to the child's readiness to read, to share his excitement in his first successful attempts to read, to help him over specific learning difficulties in any ways that the teacher may suggest, to provide him with plenty of books on his present level of reading ability, and to encourage but not force him to read at home.2

Strang gives examples of word games that parents and children may enjoy playing together:

Pick a Slip Game

Purpose: Increase vocabulary by words and phrases.

Materials: Print single words and phrases on slips of heavy paper. Write a numerical value from one to three in the upper-right-hand corner of each slip.


Procedure: Two or more people may play. The slips are placed face down on the table. The players take turns selecting a slip and reading it. If the player reads it correctly, he keeps the slip. If not, he replaces it on the table. Add the numbers on each player's slips, and the highest score wins.

Rhyming Game

Purpose: To develop associations with familiar letter groups at the end of words.

Materials: Print single words on the slips of heavy paper 1 1/2" x 3/4". Have twelve sets of six cards, each set having a particular ending such as:

- pan
- man
- can
- ran
- fan
- tan

- wing
- sing
- thing
- ring
- sling
- string

- harm
- farm
- charm
- alarm
- arm
- disarm

Procedure: Two or more people may play. The cards are dealt out to the players. The word slips are placed face down in the center of the table. Each player in turn selects a slip and reads the word. If any other player has the set that goes with the word selected from the center pile, that player is allowed to take the set for his own. The set may not be complete, so another player also has the chance to get the set. The procedure goes on until all the slips are taken from the center. The winner is the one who has the greatest number of rhyming sets.

Verb Form Game

Purpose: To give practice in reading verb forms.

Materials: Cards approximately the size of regular playing cards made from tag board or heavy construction paper. There are four cards in each book and there are as many books as desired. A book comprises the four forms of a verb such as play, plays, played, playing. The order of the words on the cards is rotated. The first word on the card is underlined and serves as the name of that card.
Procedure: Three or more may play the game, depending on the number of books in the set. Each player is dealt four cards, and the remainder of the pack is placed in the center of the table face down. Each player in turn asks another player for a particular card to be used in completing his book. If he receives the card, he may call again. He continues to call for cards as long as he receives the card asked for. When he fails to receive the card, he draws from the top of the deck on the table. If the player draws the cards for which he has asked, he may continue his turn by asking for other cards as before. When the four cards of a book have been completed, the book is placed on the table in front of the player. When the books have all been assembled, the player having the most books is the winner. Each player is required to repeat all the words in each book and to give a sentence using the verb form correctly.

Letter-Sound Association Game

Purpose: For practice on initial consonants, initial blends, or rhyming words.

Materials: Baseball diamond made on oak tag or firm paper.

Procedure: Each child tries to make a home run by thinking of a word that begins with each of the three letters, as man, like, see, home. If the purpose is to teach rhyming words, place the words around the bases. The child thinks of a word that rhymes with each of the words on the bases.

Lone Wolf

Purpose: Improve visual discrimination, build a sight vocabulary.

Materials: Deck of about twenty cards, with one additional card for the Lone Wolf. At the top of each card print a word; on another card print the same word, so that they make a pair. Prepare all the cards in this way; all the
cards form pairs except the Lone Wolf. The word on the Lone Wolf card can be changed frequently, thus eliminating the chance for memorization.

Procedure: Deal out all cards. Beginning with the person at the dealer's left, take turns drawing cards, each person drawing from the person at his right. As pairs are formed, the words are pronounced and the book is placed on the table. Continue until all cards are matched and one person is left with the Lone Wolf.

Oral Games

Purpose: For practice on initial consonants, initial blends, or vowels, or rhyming words.

Procedure: Mother or father suggests a consonant and the child or children see how many words he or they can say that begin with that letter sound.

Vary by naming things in the room that begin with a given letter.

Vary by using blends like th, ch, bl, sm, and others.

Other games require more thinking and self-expression on the child's part:

Acting out a word: Chuckle—let's hear you chuckle.

Detecting absurdities in sentences, which the child reads: "A plan flies under the ocean."

All children need to feel secure. Dinkmeyer and Dreifurs in Encouraging Children to Learn list six attitudes through which parents and teachers can give "security" to children.

---

1. You are the kind who can do it.
2. It's all right to try. Failure is no crime.
3. Provide plenty of opportunities for successful achievement. Don't set standards so high children are constantly falling short.
4. Be pleased with a reasonably good attempt. Show confidence in their ability to become competent.
5. Accept children as they are. Like him as he is so he can like himself.
6. Guarantee certain rights and privileges.

These attitudes let the child know you have faith in him . . . faith, as he is, not as he could be. Unless you have faith in him as he is, you cannot encourage him. Faith communicates to the child your belief in his strength and ability, not in his potentiality.\(^1\)

Children whose parents have faith in them are unafraid and relaxed about learning and can be motivated to do their best in any learning situation.

**How Teachers Can Assist Parents**

Parents need to know how reading is being taught in their child's school and they have a right to learn about the reading program. Discussion groups, visits to the classroom, special programs, parent-teacher conferences, and written material prepared by the school staff are effective ways of helping parents to understand the school's reading program.

Teachers often wonder how they can get some parents to come to school or attend meetings. Certain techniques for contacting parents and getting them into the school have

been successfully utilized. These means are not unusual. It is good will that makes them work.

One effective procedure has been for the teacher to make a home call just for the purpose of inviting a parent to come to visit the school. This type of personal invitation starts a very positive and constructive relationship between the teacher and the parent. Smith suggests that before the visit the teacher should write a note to the parent indicating the desire to make a visit and send it home with the child.\(^1\) Another procedure might be to make a phone call to the parents that she would like to drop in for a few minutes. This first visit could be very brief.

If home visiting is a new practice in the school, the parent might be concerned, wondering, "What is wrong?" Teachers can alleviate anxiety by telling the parent plainly, "The only purpose in coming to see you is to get acquainted." The teacher can let the parent know that she wants to meet the parents of all the children in her classroom so the parent knows that there is no major problem with his child. The teacher can then explain to the parent that she wants the parents of all the children in the class to come to the school and visit the classroom so that each parent can observe his child at work and see how the child is working in comparison with the other children in the classroom.

The teacher can have in mind some ways of assisting parents who say they cannot come to school because of complications, among these the problem of taking care of preschool children. The teacher should assure the parent that preschool children are welcome, and if possible see if some kind of baby-sitting service could be made available for the younger children if required. The teacher should point out the value of bringing preschool children to school. When a younger child accompanies the mother to school and finds that the mother assists the teacher in some activity in which a brother or sister takes part, the younger child learns through direct experience that the mother values education. When the younger child enters school, he will most likely be much more interested in what the school has to offer than were the older children.

In-service sessions can be set up to answer parent questions about what books do we get from the library or—with encouragement—what books do we buy. A Book Fair, planned by a special committee and school staff can be the answer says Griffin in her article "Parent-Level Answers—Reading in the P.T.A. Study Program". At school the children should have time to browse among the new books. When the evening or day comes for parents to attend the Fair, many parents will be instructed to look

---

at certain books. A parent, teacher, or librarian, selected for enthusiasm and wisdom can give a brief, introductory talk to explain the range and placement of the books in the Fair. After that parents can browse with coffee cup in hand. In each section a class elected pupil host and hostess book enthusiast should greet the parents and if encouraged, talk with them about the books. A special table is set aside for book orders. In less-affluent neighborhoods where books are not a part of family life, a paperback Book Fair might be the answer.

Involving parents in self-learning experiences is another kind of study program. For preschool and first year parent sessions, McKee's *A Primer for Parents* has proved interesting and enlightening. In using this special primer, parents put themselves in the situation of a first grader learning to read. Through systematic codebreaking, they practice using letter forms, beginning sounds, and context clues to get meaning from the printed page. As they unlock the code, they gain some understanding about how their child is learning to read and also some insight about complexities in learning.

In the more general kind of study sessions with panel discussions, dialogues, or a single speaker, the opportunity to see children in action can clarify talking or explaining.

---

Live demonstrations are not always feasible. Taping class activities is perhaps one of the least expensive and most easily prepared kinds of demonstration, says Griffin. As a teacher explains what and how she is teaching, she can illustrate from the taped record of children's responses in the classroom. A taped sequence of developmental skill learnings from kindergarten through senior high school could offer interesting parent-level answers to what kind of reading experiences children are having.

Some schools are filming classroom activities which help in the parent-study program. For schools that are not ready to prepare films there are excellent ones available for borrowing. Skippy and the Three R's, Gregory Learns to Read, They All Learn to Read, and Learning to Read are a few which offer opportunity for parent learning. State Departments of Education will have information about these and newer films that are being produced.

Television offers an opportunity to reach parents who are unable to attend live in-service sessions. Planned by both parent and school leaders, these sessions can reach a wide audience. Local television stations are usually glad to work with the planners as one of their public service contributions. New York City used television very

---

effectively in helping parents understand their children's reading progress.  

In *Helping Your Child Improve His Reading*, Strang offers a possible guide for parent study sessions when there is a need to activate questions. Strang makes clear the relation between home and school reading. She sets up a starter shelf of questions and answers, from both the parent and the child's point of view, that could launch a series of in-service discussions for people trying to articulate their misunderstanding and misgivings. For parent and school leaders the book offers a bibliography of inexpensive resources on reading, written primarily for parents. It also has an extensive annotated bibliography of children's reading material.

The interview is a most effective technique to use in cooperative parent-teacher work. The interview may be initiated by the teacher or by a parent. It may be short or long. It may be in the classroom or in the home and it may be planned or spontaneous. These things are not too important. What does matter, Smith says, is that:

---


1. Both the parent and teacher should feel perfectly at ease;
2. The teacher should be a good listener;
3. She should keep herself highly alert to anything the parent says which might be significant;
4. She should interject questions unobtrusively, tactfully, delicately, and in some instances, not at all;
5. She should make constructive suggestions to the parent in regard to any matter that needs attention;
6. She should follow up any significant information she obtains from the parent with applications in her own work with the child.¹

Nelson has these suggestions for improving the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences:

1. Don't in any way suggest that the parents are to blame for their child's reading difficulty. Parents send us the best children they have. If they had any better children, they would send them. It is a rare parent indeed who would purposely cause his child to have difficulty in school. Even if you recognize parent behaviors that appear to be causal to the child's problems, don't place any blame. The parent is most likely unaware of the relationship between his behavior and the difficulty. If you make him feel guilty, he is apt to rationalize his behavior and shut out the communication of positive remedies.

2. Don't make communication more difficult by adopting a deferent or patronizing attitude. Too much deference causes the parents to lose confidence in the teacher's ability and competence. A patronizing attitude leads to hostility. Attempt to establish a partnership with the parents in your endeavor to help the child.

3. Don't speak to parents in clichés and glittering generalities. Unless the parent can translate your advice into positive action, the result will be frustration for the parent and increasing anxiety for the child.

4. Don't give the impression that your reporting to the parents places the responsibility upon them. The more pressure the parents put on the child, the less likely a positive outcome will result.

5. Do prepare for conferences with parents by reviewing carefully the child's record, test scores, and your analysis of his reading progress.

6. Be ready to tell the parent how the child's reading progress compares with his reading expectancy in terms of his age, grade level, and scholastic aptitude.

7. Explain to the parent the specific difficulties the child is encountering, i.e. whether he is having trouble with word recognition, comprehension, study skills, or a more generalized deficiency.

8. If the child is engaging in inappropriate classroom behavior, be sure the the parents understand that it is probably the result of the learning difficulty rather than the cause of it. Both parents and teachers should be aware that out-of-bounds behavior is often a device used to avoid the anxiety producing situation.

9. Explain to the parents how you as a reading teacher plan to deal with the child's difficulty. Tell which skills you will focus on and the kinds of experiences you plan for the child. Your plan for positive action will give the parents confidence that the child can be helped and assurance that the problem is not theirs alone.

10. If you ask the parents to help, be specific about what you want them to do. If possible, give them prepared lists of suggestions designed to help with the child's specific difficulties. Be sure that the lists stress the importance of self-concept and sense of competence so that parents in their zeal to help do not put undue pressure on the child.

11. If there is a possibility of a vision or hearing defect, be sure to suggest referral to an appropriate specialist.

12. If you suggest that the parents provide reading material for the child to use at home be prepared to provide a list of books and periodicals which are appropriate for the child's independent reading and interest levels. When specific materials are not suggested, the parents are apt to fall prey to attractive but relatively ineffective commercial materials advertised to "make your child a better reader".

13. If you ask the parents to reward appropriate reading behaviors, be prepared to offer specific examples and demonstration of parent behaviors that will build the child's self-concept and his sense of competence in reading. (For example, you might say to the parent "Take time to have the child read aloud to you. The reading material should be at the child's independent reading level so that he may read it with relative ease. Listen wholeheartedly but without criticism. Enjoy the story with the child. Compliment him on his progress. If he stumbles over a word, supply
14. End the conference on a positive note. Encourage the parents to attend information meetings about the reading program and discussion groups on topics of interest. Have the dates, times, and topics of future meetings ready to hand out. Give parents a sense of partnership in the educational enterprise.

In planning meetings and activities for parents, Nelson has these suggestions for teachers and reading specialists:

As an example of the content of these meetings, the first topic might include an explanation of the importance of reading in the total school program, the relationship of the reading process to the child's language development and the necessity of meeting the needs of the child that are prerequisite to the need for knowledge. (Maslow's hierarchy of needs may be used here to give parents a sense of the physical and psychological needs of the child that must be met before the need for knowledge becomes prepotent.) Finally, the prereading skills should be defined and specific suggestions provided to help parents initiate readiness training for their children.

Nelson gives the following suggestions as an example of a prereading skills activities list. They were compiled by the Reading Department of the West Jefferson Hills School District, Pennsylvania.

1. Cultivate your child's power of close observation—Visual Discrimination
   a. Lead him to discover likenesses and differences in objects, pictures, growing things.

---


2 Ibid., p. 134.
b. Lead him to make comparisons in sizes (big, middle-sized, little; large, medium, small; tall, short), in shapes (round, square, flat), in colors, and in numbers (many, few, and actual count of objects).
c. Lead him to notice details, study pictures and objects carefully.

2. Cultivate your child's ability to recall what he has seen—Visual Memory

a. What did you see on the way to the store?
b. What was in the store window we just passed?
c. What did a certain fruit, vegetable, or toy look like? (size, color, shape)

3. Cultivate your child's power to listen carefully—Auditory Discrimination

a. Note likenesses and differences in sounds heard all around home (loud, soft, high, low, shrill, gentle)
b. Note likenesses and differences in sounds of words (think of words that begin with the same sound—man, ran, can, pan, tan).
c. Say two words—have child tell whether they begin alike, end alike, or are not alike at all.

4. Cultivate your child's power to remember what he has heard—Auditory Memory

a. Have child repeat exactly a direction after hearing it once.
b. Have child follow directions exactly ("Run to the door; shut it quietly; hop back to me.")
c. Repeat songs and poems the child has heard.

5. Build up your child's fund of information—Background of experience

a. Encourage child to ask worthwhile questions about things all around him.
b. Help child to find answers to his questions himself whenever possible.
c. Take child to see and do things within the range of his understanding and enjoyment (on picnics, to the zoo, on walks in woods).
d. As far as he is able to understand, encourage him to discover the "how" and "what" and "why" of the things he sees and uses daily.
e. Help child to develop ability to classify his knowledge of objects (things that fly, things that swim, things we find on the farm, those we find in the city, those which are fruits or vegetables, things which have feathers, things which have fur).

6. Develop your child's ability to express himself through Language

   a. Have him retell stories you have read or told to him.
   b. Have him make up stories about pictures he looks at.
   c. Encourage him to recount experiences he has had.
   d. Encourage him to tell "make-believe" stories—being sure that you both know they are make-believe.

7. Encourage your child to develop his Muscular Control

   a. Encourage running, skipping, hopping, jumping, skating, bouncing, and catching balls, etc. to develop large muscular coordination and to give him a feeling of assurance in the ability to do many things with his body.
   b. Encourage careful coloring of large outline pictures, cutting pasting, working with tools, etc. to develop muscular coordination in his hands.

8. Develop your child's Sense of Responsibility

   a. Have him learn to finish a task before leaving it.
   b. Have him learn to work steadily without dawdling.
   c. Have him learn to clean up when task is completed.
   d. Have simple tasks which he does daily as a part of his regular contribution to the family living—for which he is responsible.

Two things to keep in mind

1. See that the child gets satisfaction from all of these experiences.

   a. Praise honest effort.
   b. Make a "game" of these activities and play these "games" with your child—enjoy these things with him.
c. Show pleasure when child has success—when he shows improvement.
d. If child is unsuccessful, give him positive suggestions of what to do to improve—avoid don't.

2. Because a child is six years old, he is not necessarily ready to read.

   a. All children mature at their own rate of speed. We can cultivate the soil and enrich the ground, but we cannot make a plant bloom before it is ready. This same is true for the child—we can give him the best environment possible and then we must have patience to wait for him to mature at his own pace.

   b. Your child will enjoy his reading if he is not forced to try it before he is mature enough to have success with it.

Nelson continues with these suggestions for teachers and reading specialists:

1. Plan a time when reading teachers are regularly available to meet with parents on an informal basis to discuss specific problems or answer individual questions. The questions most often asked by parents include the following (6):

   What is reading readiness?
   What can I do to help my child with his reading?
   Why don't the schools teach more phonics?
   How can I get my child to read?
   What is remedial reading?
   Why isn't oral reading used more in our schools?

2. Prepare lists of specific activities appropriate for the home that would be useful for strengthening various aspects of reading development, such as the following:

1Tbid., pp. 139-140.
Prereading skills (see previous suggested list)
Primary word recognition skills
Intermediate word recognition skills
Improvement of oral reading
Comprehension skills
Work-study skills
Vocabulary development

3. Prepare lists of trade books appropriate to various reading and interest levels. (The appendix of Hopkins' book lists books of interest for the urban and disadvantaged child plus outstanding volumes of Negro poetry. The books are listed by grade level to aid parents in their choices.)

4. Encourage parent study groups and provide bibliographies pertinent to topics of interest.

5. Plan classroom demonstrations of methods and materials to be followed by questions and discussions.

6. Plan special meetings for parents whose children are experiencing difficulty in reading. Provide information about the causes of reading difficulties and the special help that is provided for these children within the program. Provide demonstrations of ways parents may help the child who is experiencing difficulty. Demonstrations may take the form of videotaped sessions illustrating suggested activities and examples of supportive behavior. Role-playing sessions may be used in which the parent plays the part of the child and attempts to experience the child's anxiety and frustration. The ambitious reading teacher may wish to work with both parent and child by demonstrating an activity, allowing the parent to work with the child and providing feedback on the effectiveness of performance.

7. If school regulations permit, the reading specialist may train a corps of interested parents to be volunteer tutors or teacher aides. School districts which have adopted a tolerant attitude toward parents as tutors and aides have been pleasantly surprised by the results. Some of the advantages cited are as follows:

- Children see parents and teachers work together to help them learn.
- Children get more individual attention.
- Parents and teachers increase their understanding of one another.
- Teachers have time to use their professional skills more effectively.
- Parents become interested in careers in education.
Parent tutors and aides may engage in a variety of activities, such as the following:

- Giving practice in skills previously taught by teacher.
- Performing various clerical duties.
- Correcting workbooks and assignments.
- Preparing practice materials.
- Preparing bulletin boards.

8. Invite parents to attend selected in-service sessions describing innovations and the latest techniques of reading instruction.¹

Bulletins, reports, and informal communications are very valuable adjuncts to school visits and programs. An advantage of material which the school sends home to interpret the reading program is that it may be reread. Written material can encourage joint participation of parent and child in an activity that shows the parent the child's progress, as well as the many facets of reading. If the information is clear and interesting and if it is easily available to parents, it can supplement and heighten the impact of other means used to acquaint parents with the program in reading.

Handbooks for parents can offer both specific and general suggestions for fostering reading skills. A list of handbooks are included in the bibliography for parents. Criscuolo suggests:

In addition to handbooks and brochures, letters to parents can be prepared and sent home periodically. In New Haven, additional stories and exercises which reinforce the vocabulary and skills of the basic reading program have been prepared. When a child completes a certain level of the program, these exercises with an accompanying letter are sent home. This type of communication provides a sense of accomplishment for the child.

¹Ibid., pp. 134-135.
and allows the parent to interact with the child in a meaningful way. The following is the type of communication between the home and school which yields positive results:

Reading Center
NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dear Parent:

Your child has just completed the first book, Tigers, of Level 3 of our basic reading program. The stories and exercises attached have been prepared to provide some extra meaningful practice. Your child will enjoy reading these stories to you. Please take the necessary time to hear your child read these stories and check the completed exercises.

Praise your child for his effort. Keep in close contact with the school so as to be fully informed of your child's progress at subsequent reading levels.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,
Nicholas P. Criscuolo, Ph.D.
Supervisor of Reading

Rondeau suggests the following form be sent to parents as a special help in guiding their child's reading at home:

SUPPLEMENTARY READER FORM

This reader corresponds to the reading level your child is on in school. Some of the vocabulary words will be new to him, but he should be able to read most of them.

He is expected to read the book orally. Encourage him to read with expression. Check his comprehension by questioning him.

---

Title of Book

I felt that the book was:
Too easy __________ Just right __________
Too difficult _______________________
Comments: _______________________

(Parent's Signature)

Teachers must help parents understand the total development of the child if reading is to be put into its proper perspective. She must help parents realize that it is the responsibility of the home to offer children an atmosphere in which sturdy physical, mental, social, and emotional growth is realized. For success in school work, children need security, affection, and sympathetic guidance. Hester states:

Parents are spared much anxiety and are freed to establish a favorable atmosphere when they learn to look upon reading growth in the same way that they consider physical growth. Each is a gradual developmental process which goes on at different rates for different children. Guidance in these understandings must come from professional people in education if the public is to accept the modern classroom. A school staff

must take the lead in establishing a program for parent support.¹

According to Strang and Bracken:

Parents need to build up a resistance to the plausible advocates of phonics as the cure-all of reading difficulty. They need to be convinced that:

1. There is no one cause of reading difficulty.
2. Inability to identify words may not be the cause of their child's reading difficulty; it may be only a symptom.
3. Drill on phonics alone will not make their child an independent, effective reader.
4. There are other ways than phonics of identifying unfamiliar words, and the good reader uses a variety of methods instead of giving up after trying a single method.
5. Reading for meaning requires many more skills than merely identifying words.
6. Overattention to sounding out words will make a child a slow reader.
7. Overattention to sounding out words takes the joy and adventure out of reading.

Instead of beginning with phonic drill, parents should reinforce children's natural interest in reading as a means of finding out something that they want to know, such as the label on a can in a store or the name on a gift package. Both parents and teachers should avoid giving children books that are too difficult. Often a child will decide which is the best book for him to read— one that makes sense to him and is interesting.²

Newton says that parents should understand these basic concepts if they are going to understand and support the reading program:


Reading is Understanding. The first of these basic concepts of reading deals with the comprehension of what is read. In order to comprehend, a child has to do much more than verbalize. He must understand the meanings of words and be able, at least in part, to determine meanings of unknown words from structural clues, context, and such built-in helps as the writer gives him. Further, the reader must have a background of experience in order to have insight into ideas that are being expressed. It is possible to understand every word in a sentence without gaining a clear idea of the author's meaning. The ability to do this becomes increasingly important as the child moves into the middle and upper grades.

Granted one side of the coin of reading is the ability to sound out words. This is the side that parents are most likely to come in contact with when their children read aloud to them. The other side of the coin is comprehension and is not so obvious and not so easily determined. Yet reading without comprehension causes no change in the reader's thoughts. It is this change or reaction to what is being read--called understanding or learning--about which parents need to be aware.

Child Must Want to Read and Find Uses for Reading. A second basic idea which parents should be helped to accept is that children must want to read. The normal child, having seen his parents and other adults gain pleasure from reading, is usually anxious to learn. If his first experiences are successful, he will continue and, because of his desire, will make the extra effort that is sometimes necessary. Parents are in a strategic position to make the most of spontaneous reading situations occurring as a result of watching television, participating in various hobbies, and other everyday happenings. Children's interests should be developed, thus leading into reading rather than the grim alternative--forcing reading upon them.

Reading is Omnipresent. Third, the parent should learn that reading is not limited to formal school instruction but goes on all the time. The opportunities for reading are countless: advertising signs and labels, street signs, directions, and television commercials. Frequently this out-of-school reading occurs in well-motivated situations with the child having a special reason for his reading.
Children Develop at Different Rates. The fourth, and probably the hardest of these basic concepts for a parent to accept, is that children have different rates of development and that these rates are not constant. This is as true of mental growth as it is of physical accomplishments and is a perfectly normal situation. This concept is basic to the parents' understanding of many of the questions that bother them, such as the need for reading readiness programs and grouping in the classroom. At the same time, a deeper understanding of individual differences in development enables parents to appreciate the problems of promotion and the reporting of progress.  

Tyler suggests six principles of learning around which, he believes, sound advice to parents can be developed. These principles involve reinforcement, interest, practice, individual differences, imitation, and action:

Principle 1: Nothing succeeds like success. Parents are urged to emphasize the positive, to look for opportunities to reward (praise, congratulate, reinforce) school and learning accomplishments, and to consider small, medium, and large successes. Examples might be the child bringing home a book to study, talking at home about school happenings, or showing his reading mastery through some reading done at home. Such activities contribute to a basis for recognition and the idea that success begets success.

Principle 2: Children tend to do (and do best) those things that most interest them. This suggests that parents need to know their children well enough to know which things "turn them on". These "turned on" things need to be pursued. Perhaps reading does not interest Johnny. How about reading to him? How about popular games which involve some reading? How about art work which needs captions? Such activities inflict no pressure. Set Johnny up by following interests and looking for those golden opportunities to get reading into the act.

Principle 3: Practice makes perfect. What about the child who knows the skills by heart and still has

---

difficulty in reading? Application is a separate step and must be nurtured. Books and reading are important. Family trips to the library, quiet times at home, books as presents, reading discussions at the family meal—all are means to this end.

Principle 4: Every child is different. This is not easy for many parents to accept. Perhaps the most fruitful message to get across to parents is to show the child that they have every expectation that learning will occur and the timetable is unimportant. The burden of proof must be eased from the child's shoulders. A positive self-fulfilling prophesy is a winner.

Principle 5: We learn by example. This is a highly individual matter and may or may not be true for all children. Let us assume it is true. This would, then, mean that parents need to read, need to talk about reading, need to read in comfortable surroundings, need to show a value for books, and need to share their reading experiences.

Principle 6: Learning requires action. Whether we refer to physical or mental activity, this principle necessitates something other than verbalization. Brow-beating, exorcising, and the like are totally inappropriate in nurturing reading success. Intellectual stimulation, reading to the child, or the example of reading parents are useful means that result in success. Parents must thoroughly understand this or find that their efforts have little effect.¹

We do have to be careful when we begin to apply learning theory in any precise manner. These are general ideas, suggestions, and advice that parents need to consider in dealing with their children in relation to school. The specifics must always come on an individual basis—through direct teacher-parent contacts.

The school staff should always be ready to answer questions about reading instruction, the total reading program, and a wide variety of questions about personal reading and children's reading problems. Of course, no teacher can have all the answers, but each staff member ought to be able to answer general questions about the reading program and specific ones about reading instruction at his particular level; and he should be able to find answers to other questions or make referrals to the appropriate persons. Otto and Smith offer some frequently asked questions along with some guidelines for providing answers:

1. When will my first-grader learn to read? The implicit question here seems to be: When will my first-grader begin to bring home books that he is able to read? An important point to be made in answering is that not all children are ready to profit from reading instruction at the same time and that not all respond with equal success to beginning instruction. Therefore, it should be made clear that a general answer is not realistic and that even with regard to a particular child one cannot predict with much accuracy when actual "reading" will begin. The danger in making a specific prediction is that if something occurs to impede expected progress anxieties and pressures are likely to get out of hand. A realistic response will be that most of the activities of the first grade are directed toward reading, and each child is repeatedly given opportunities to begin actual reading.

2. How is reading taught? Again, the implicit question usually amounts to: How is beginning reading taught? And more often than not it is asked by a person who has a very specific notion of how he thinks it should be taught; therefore, any answer that is not in line with his expectations is likely to be unsatisfactory. Perhaps, then the best way to avoid a quarrel over specifics is to give a fairly comprehensive answer to start with. In well-considered programs, reading is usually taught in a number of
ways, depending upon both the strengths and preferences of individual teachers and the characteristics and needs of individual pupils. If that is first made clear, then a discussion of how and where certain specific approaches and materials fit into the pattern may be in order.

3. Do you teach phonics? This may be the question that is really being asked when the previous one is actually verbalized. Despite everything that has been said recently about phonics and linguistics and decoding, some people are still hung up on articles they read in women's magazines that say reading is taught by "look-and-say". A response to the query should point out the fact that in some approaches a few words are taught as sight words—which seems to be how the whole look-and-say business got started—but that the sight words become the basis for teaching sound-symbol relationships through an analytic approach. On the other hand, some approaches begin with the sounds of letters, which are then put together to form words. This is a synthetic approach. Whether one calls it a phonic, linguistic, or decoding approach makes little difference (though, of course, sequences may vary greatly). The point is that virtually every approach in use today teaches sound-symbol relationships; nobody advocates memorizing all the words in the English language as sight words. The main differences are in the rate and the sequence of teaching.

4. Why aren't my daughter and the neighbor girl, both of whom are in the same class, reading the same book? Typically the questioner is convinced that his child's book is easier, so he is afraid that the child is (a) a slow learner, (b) a "dyslexic", or (c) the opposite of teacher's pet. The main function of the answer then, should be to reassure the questioner that none of these is necessarily true. It may be pointed out that children are ready for instruction at different times, progress at different rates, need reinforcement of different skills, and respond better to different materials; and for any of these reasons two children might be reading from different books. One might add, too, that sometimes easy books are read just for fun. Reading need not always be the serious business some parents seem to think it is.

5. Should my child repeat the grade he is now completing? Often parents will suggest a retention because they feel their child is "immature" or "behind in reading".
Depending on the school's position regarding retentions, then, the response could attempt to convince parents that a retention is or is not advisable. There is, of course, no inherent value in a retention as such; in fact, the repetition of a failure experience ordinarily has little to recommend it. On the other hand, if certain conditions have changed and the repeat will involve a different set of experiences, retention may be defensible. The answer must be made in view of school policy and a careful examination of the facts in the specific case. It is to be hoped that the person, not the policy, will be given prime consideration.

6. **Is my child reading at grade level?** Even when schools are ungraded, the question continues to be asked—not, we think, because parents are any more dazzled by the grade level concept than teachers, but because they want to know how their child is progressing. An adequate answer, then, might be given in terms of (a) the child's performance in comparison to his age-grade peers and (b) performance in view of his own capabilities. The former response might appropriately be given terms of a percentile band: "Bonnie is reading between the 64th and 83rd percentiles; this means, she reads better, according to Test X, than 63 percent of the children in her grade and 16 percent read better than she does." (We do not believe that percentiles are too esoteric for most parents.) The latter response can be given in terms of a more global assessment of capacity: "Bonnie's achievement is in line with her capability, which, according to test scores and her achievement in other areas, is somewhat above average."

7. **What about the low group?** Children invariable know when they are in the low reading group, no matter how cleverly the groups are named or manipulated or how many groups are established. If the children know, their parents know, so the question merits a straightforward answer. Perhaps the most important point to be made is that assignment to the low group need not be a life sentence, that groups are constantly being changed and children reassigned as they progress. While he is assigned to a low reading group, however, it should be clear that the child works in many other groups and individually during the course of each school day. And, of course, it should also be clear that a low reading group is not just another name for the slow learners; children may lag behind at various times during their development, and a reduction
in pace can give them an opportunity to consolidate their skills and lay a foundation for their next period of more rapid progress.

Even when reading instruction is almost completely individualized, somebody must always be reading easier material, thinner, or newer books, etc. The basic question, therefore, cannot be evaded. The best approach is simply to stress the positive without attempting to conceal the fact.

8. What can I do to make my child like reading? Perhaps the honest answer, when the question is phrased as it is, is: Nothing. A child can no more be made to like reading than an adult can be made to like the opera. Perhaps the basic message of the response must be that all coercion should be removed from the situation. A child comes to like to read mainly because he has had pleasant, memorable experiences through reading. Such experiences cannot be forced, but the stage can be set for them. Reading materials can be made available, trips to the library can be arranged, books can be discussed (not reported on, but discussed spontaneously), a quiet place to read can be available, good examples can be provided. Children can be made to read, but they cannot be made to like reading. Those who learn to like it are usually those who are exposed to books and then left alone to discover them.

9. Why do girls usually read better than boys? Although the person who asks the question may be basing it upon a very limited number of observations, girls' reading achievement scores, as a group, at least in the early grades, generally are higher than boys', as a group. Furthermore, more boys than girls apparently have severe reading problems, for boys almost invariably sharply outnumber girls enrolled in remedial reading clinics. The question, then, seems to represent more than idle speculation and it deserves a considered answer. Several hypotheses are commonly advanced to "explain" the sex difference in reading achievement. While no single ones seems adequate, a combination of the factors involved in some or all may account for the difference. The six hypotheses given here are taken from Heilman's (1967) excellent discussion:

1. Boys and girls differ in intelligence at different ages. The problem here is that the intelligence tests available provide no basis for testing the hypothesis.

2. Boys and girls mature at different rates. There is some evidence that girls get ahead on some
factors related to reading development; but there is evidence, too, that the difference is educational rather than maturational factors.

3. The early school environment and curriculum are more frustrating to boys than to girls. Perhaps the problem is aggravated by ignoring boys' developmental lag, and an interaction between the two would tend to obscure each factor taken by itself.

4. Beginning reading materials are more satisfying to girls than to boys. Inspection of the material would seem to support the hypothesis, but, recently, publishers have been making real attempts to appeal to boys.

5. Primary teachers are women. The basic reasoning is that girls and women are more compatible than boys and women teachers.

6. Boys are less motivated to learn to read.

An adequate answer to the question would include all six hypotheses. As the bases for the sex difference come to be more clearly understood, certain variables--e.g., teacher attitudes and behaviors and materials--can be manipulated to enhance boys' achievement.

10. What about those machines? Parents hear about the hardware that has, mainly in the past decade, been thrust upon the educational community in general and reading teachers in particular. Typically, they are thinking of a specific, but unnamed device and they want to know either: (a) Why isn't it being used with my child? or (b) Why is it being used with my child? Thus, before an answer is ventured an attempt should be made to identify the device in mind. We feel this is necessary because there is no generalizable statement to be made about "machines" in the teaching of reading. Some are defensible and some are not; sometimes they are sensibly used and sometimes they are abused; some are appropriate for use at certain levels but not at others. There is, then, no point in getting involved in a defense of tachistoscopes in speed reading courses when what the questioner has in mind is a tape recorder or filmstrip projector in the first grade. Unfortunately, a straightforward answer may not be forthcoming even after the question is focused. The hardware is often used simply because it is there. If, on the other hand, the rationale for its use is worked out before the hardware is purchased--as it should--there will be no problem.
11. What do you mean, "reading" in high school? To many lay people the notion of extending the teaching of reading upward to all levels is still as alien as it was to many teachers a few years ago. The idea of a reading program that stretches through the high school is one that needs to be developed and, for a time, defended.

12. What special programs do you have for poor readers? The answer to this question depends, of course, on what is available locally. Whatever the specifics, however, the response should make it clear that disabled readers are provided for within the context of an overall developmental program. The typical expectation is that the child with a reading problem will be given remedial help outside the classroom. Yet special help may be given in or out of the classroom, in accordance with the circumstances and the case at hand, and it must be coordinated with the regular activities in the classroom.

13. What can we parents do to help our poor reader? Parents are usually more ego-involved with their children's performance in reading than with their performance in any other area of the curriculum. Failure in any other subject can usually be ignored or rationalized in terms of interest, attitude, or aptitude, but failure in reading is not only blatantly obvious but also seeming evidence of some esoteric defect or plain stupidity. Therefore, parents tend to apply considerable pressure--either explicitly or implicitly--when a child has a problem in reading. Their attempts to help the child will probably amount to more pressure rather than anything worthwhile to alleviating the problem. In framing a response to the query, then, the focus ought to be upon reducing the pressure on the child and, at the same time, reducing parental anxieties. While the best advice might be to stop trying to help and let the school handle the problem, such a suggestion is not likely to be accepted with much enthusiasm. We have found, however, that most parents are willing to channel their efforts into activities that both they and the child can enjoy, like reading stories aloud to the child, working for brief periods with flash cards, or listening to passages the child has had an opportunity to rehearse previously. They will drop phonics instruction, "helping" with assignments, etc., if they are convinced that the problem is receiving attention at school and that their efforts could be running contrary to the school's.
14. Does my child have dyslexia? The term dyslexia has been around for a long time, but only recently has it become popular to say "dyslexic" instead of something more mundane, like "poor", "disabled", or "remedial" reader. In our opinion, "dyslexia" has ceased to have any specialized meaning and has become a label stuck on anybody who, for any reason at all, is having some (not necessarily severe) problems with reading. Rather than redefine the term each time it is used, our inclination is to drop it completely. In its present bastardized state the only function it serves is to terrify parents whose children are said to be so afflicted.

An appropriate response to the question, then, would be neither Yes nor No but a summary of what has been learned through diagnosis about the child's reading problem and a statement of what the prognosis for recovery seems to be. The implicit question has to do less with what to call the problem than with what can be done about it.

15. What about that creeping and crawling business? This question, while disarmingly nonspecific, is quite common and it is clearly a reference to one of the salient features of the treatment for reading disability based upon the Doman-Delacato theory of neurological organization. The theory and treatment, developed at the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential (formerly the Rehabilitation Center), have been popularized mainly through articles that have appeared in women's and general feature magazines.

The response to the query must be simply that, although the mass media have reported favorably upon the approach, professionals in the fields of medicine, reading, psychology, and education have not only failed to share the enthusiasm but been openly skeptical. There is not a shred of objective evidence to support the approach. Robbins (1967), for example, concluded on the basis of a careful study that (a) "The data did not support the postulated relationship between neurological organization (as measured by creeping and laterality) and reading achievement . . .," and (b) "The data from the study did not support the contention that the addition of the Delacato program to the ongoing curriculum of the retarded readers in any way enhanced their reading development . . . when compared to similar children not exposed to the experimental program."
16. Should I hire a tutor for my disabled reader? While seemingly straightforward, the question is loaded. A positive answer could appear to bespeak a lack of confidence in the instruction, remedial or otherwise, offered by the school. On the other hand, an arbitrarily negative answer could preclude the provision of needed additional help. Honesty, as usual, seems to be the best policy. If the school is able to provide sufficient diagnostic and remedial services, the nature of the services should be explained and a negative answer given. If the school's resources are limited, the judgment is that additional help would be beneficial (i.e., the prognosis for progress is good), and a qualified tutor is available, then the situation should be explained and a positive answer given. There should, of course, be some assurance that the tutor will be available for a reasonable period of time. As always, consideration for the person must guide the answer.

17. If my child is having difficulty in reading, shouldn't he be bringing work home? This question is probably, in most cases, related to Question 13, which had to do with help at home. The assumption seems to be that the best way to overcome a problem is to overwhelm it with hard work. Yet, in reality, more general drill, nonspecific exercises, and pressure are precisely what the poor reader does not need. This should be explained in responding to the question. Furthermore, it should be made clear that special help is ordinarily best offered during the school day when it will not appear to be a form of punishment. Children with reading problems are likely to have negative feelings about school and teachers. There is no need to add to them by piling on homework.

18. Should I be teaching my preschooler to read? This question picked up impetus when a number of the mass magazines ran articles on teaching infants to read. Apparently some parents with four-year-olds began to feel that they had already waited too long. But the question is not really new, nor can it be answered once and for all. Some children do learn to read before they go to school. There is a certain amount of evidence that reading skills can be acquired almost as easily and naturally as oral language if minimal help is provided. On the other hand, an early start may amount to a handicap if the school is not prepared to cope with the child who knows how to read when he first arrives. Further, the fact that a child can learn to read at an early age does not mean that he should. And it might as well be
recognized that most of the available instructional materials are written for traditional first-graders. How, then should the question be answered? Our inclination is simply to say: Do what comes naturally. Do not pressure the child to begin to read, but do show your own enthusiasm for books and do answer questions as they arise. A child who is ready and able to begin to read should be permitted to do so. But there is no definitive evidence that preschool reading experience either enhances or impedes future progress in reading.¹

In all aspects of superior reading instruction, parents are given the opportunity, through various means, to learn about a school's philosophy regarding reading, the specific goals of its reading program, and the means selected by the school to achieve them.

The happiest and most successful teacher in the school is usually the one who regards parents as helpmates and friends to education.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The two-fold purpose of this research study was (1) to review current literature in order to assess various ways teachers can assist parents in helping their children to read, and (2) to develop ways to help parents through school sponsored programs and special materials.

Authors included in this study were in agreement on the following points:

1. Some children can learn to read early and should be encouraged to do so.

2. Caution should be taken—in using any exercises with young children—to proceed at a pace which permits the children to achieve with reasonable success and pleasure.

3. Research has not as yet ascertained the long-term benefits of early reading instruction.

4. When helping the school-age child to read, parents should work closely with the teacher.

5. Parents should leave development of specific reading skills to the teacher, though reading
games are all right and word drill and phonics can be used in playful situations.

6. Home visits, discussion groups, visits to the classroom by parents, special programs, parent-teacher conferences, and written material are some of the means teachers can use to help parents understand the school's reading program.

7. In helping their child to read, parents should be helped to understand:

a. The relationship of the total development of the child to his progress in reading.

b. Getting ready to read is a developmental process that proceeds all through the school years.

c. When a child is ready for formal reading instruction he will give evidence of certain physical, mental, and emotional characteristics which make it possible for him to be able to read.

d. Reading is one part of a child's general growth in language.

e. Developing responsibility in a child and helping him to learn to follow directions are important aids in development and will help a child to progress in reading.
f. Children learn to read and progress in reading at different rates.

g. Reading is understanding.

h. Phonics is not a cure-all for a child having difficulties in reading.

i. Many children have trouble learning to read because of emotional conflict.

j. A good home situation is the most valuable contribution parents can make to the reading progress of their children.

k. Teachers, besides giving general advice, should always offer parents specific ways to help their children in reading. It is especially important that examples be given that will help build the child's self-concept and his sense of competence in reading.

l. Care must always be taken that in helping their child to read parents do not put undue pressure on the child.

m. Teachers should always assist parents to help their child in a positive, encouraging way.
Conclusions

Reading can never be considered as a separate entity, but must be thought of in the context of the whole child, his background, and his environment.

For a child to reach his full potential in reading, a concerted effort both by parents and teachers is essential.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Periodicals

Sheldon, William D. "Teaching the Very Young to Read." The Reading Teacher, XVI, No. 3 (December, 1962), 163-69.

Sleight, Alice. "This is Reading." Reading Horizons, XII, No. 1 (1971), 18-21.


Other Sources


ERIC/CRIER + International Reading Association Micromonographs, Parents and Reading. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association.


Recommended Books


and others. Children's Books Too Good to Miss. Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, Quail Building, 1971.


