

Parents reading to children and children reading to their parents: some interesting conclusions...

A research study in 1985 found there was a strong positive relationship between the frequency with which parents read (stories) to their children and the reading achievement of their children (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott and Wilkinson).

However a researcher in 2000 (Lefevre) looked for other research studies in this area, and commented that there was actually quite a shortage of evidence to show a direct link between reading achievement and parents reading stories to their children. Most people would agree that there are very great benefits to be gained from children hearing stories in terms of vocabulary knowledge, comprehension, motivation, syntax development..a whole host of things. It's extremely helpful, and deserves to be an important part of both popular wisdom and professional advice to parents who want to help their children. However by and of itself, it will not teach reading, especially when children have a basic difference regarding phonological processing skills (“at-risk” for reading difficulties).

Had the study in 1985 examined children both “at risk” for reading difficulties and “not at risk” for reading difficulties in a systematic way, conclusions may have been qualified and discussed differently, even though reading to children is especially important if they are “at-risk” for reading difficulties because they do not experience failure, *as they may when being asked to read aloud themselves to parents or teachers.*

What about children reading aloud to adults? A researcher (Tracey 1998) found that very few studies have examined the practice of children reading aloud to their parents at home, especially in view of how often it is recommended.

When some research studies started to examine this practice (2002 onwards: Tracey and Young), and with the distinction between at risk and non at risk readers, they found that several different literacy approaches may be going on when parents get their children to read at home.

...Unsurprisingly, during the first year of learning to read, parents heard both at risk and not at risk children read aloud with similar frequency. However by the third year of school, children who have started to read quite well do not read aloud at home so much as those who are still struggling – again not surprising because those good readers could now read independently. However parent approaches were also different with at risk or succeeding readers. The parents of succeeding readers asked more questions, made more comments while their children were reading. They found helpful and positive strategies to help the child if words were challenging and were sensitive about frustration levels of reading. They were generally “expansive” and comfortable within the activity.

...In contrast, when parents were helping their children who were below average at reading, there was a significant and persistent trend for these parents (of below average

readers) to correct their children : “In short the reading sessions were punctuated by frustration and failure for the children and, most likely, for the mothers (parents) as well”. It was concluded that parents should be forewarned about minimizing error corrections and by intervening only when necessary.

This conclusion is important and emphasises that parents of below average readers need much more help themselves, especially in adopting some of the methods of the parents of good readers.

SUMMARY

- Reading aloud to children is excellent in many ways but does not teach reading in and of itself. *If you are a parent of an at-risk reader don't assume you are failing because all the reading aloud you do doesn't seem to be improving things.*
- Good readers get better and better because they read more. This has long been known as the “Matthew” principle in reading (Stanovich). Parents need to help increase the quantities of reading that “at-risk” readers do, BUT they need to help in a very effective way - NOT with tension and a high rate of correcting errors. The quality of the reading interactions is very important.
- The three stage approach of paired reading (for younger children) allows a child to read substantial quantities without failure and frustration. Parents can also learn how to talk about the story in a relaxed way that encourages good thinking skills and personal confidence.
- For more information, see Section 3 of Sound Track for Reading