



Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 19
Issue 2 January 1979

Article 13

1-1-1979

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Recommended Citation

Shuman, R. B., & Schubert, D. G. (1979). Professional Concerns: Better Reading through Parent Teaching Pools. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 19 (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol19/iss2/13

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PROFESSIONAL CONCERNS: BETTER READING THROUGH PARENT TEACHING POOLS

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Delwyn G. Schubert, Contributor

Professional Concerns is a regular column devoted to the interchange of ideas among those interested in reading instruction. Send your comments and contributions to the editor. If you have questions about reading that you wish to have answered, the editor will find respondents to answer them. Address correspondence to R. Baird Shuman, Department of English, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, Illinois, 61801.

Many teachers of reading are familiar with Delwyn G. Schubert through four of his widely distributed books in the field of reading: *A Dictionary of Terms and Concepts in Reading*, *Readings in Reading*, *Improving Reading Through Individualized Correction*, and *Improving the Reading Program*. Others know him better through filmstrips which he has written such as "Developing Effective Reading-Study Skills," "Teaching Reading with Games," and "Words-Words-Words." Dr. Schubert is Professor of Education at California State University, Los Angeles, where he was named Outstanding Professor of the Year in 1973.

In this contribution, Professor Schubert outlines a highly practical means for involving parents in reading instruction with youngsters. The popular press of late has drawn attention to the need for parents to become involved in helping with their children's education. Such articles as "Parents Are the Key," which appeared in *U.S. News and World Report*, September 12, 1977, and "How to Help Your Kids in School," which appeared in *Better Homes and Gardens*, November, 1977, have received considerable attention. Professional journals have also scrutinized the desirability of involving parents as much as possible as adjuncts in the learning process.

Professor Schubert outlines a practical program which can easily be implemented in any school. It is a program which should capture the imaginations of parents and should aid substantially in the learning process.

Harold's parents have been informed that their son is doing poorly in reading and that he is in need of extra practice at home. Such practice, it is

assumed, should take the form of oral reading under careful scrutiny. With this in mind, Harold's father proceeds as follows:

"All right, Harold, we're going to do a little reading today. Your teacher says you need it. Start here."

The boy begins reading aloud but almost immediately encounters a strange word. He stops. "You don't know that?" asks the father, "Why, it's simple. I knew that word almost before I started school. Everybody knows it. The word is what."

At this point Harold's father wonders about his son's intelligence. But by now the boy is stumped again. Much to the father's dismay, the same four letter word is involved.

"For heaven's sake, I just told you that word a couple of seconds ago. Can't you remember anything? It's *what*. That's what it is. Do you hear me? *What!*" By now father is really disturbed. As he ponders the situation, his eyes move ahead to the next paragraph where he is surprised to see the troublesome pronoun occupying an initial position. With apprehension, he awaits, asking himself, "Will he know it now, the third time?"

When Harold fails to recognize the word again, father loses all control. He slams the book on the table and shouts, "How can you be so stupid? You still don't know what's *what!* Didn't I tell it to you over here and up there too? I can't believe it. You must take after your mother's side of the family!"

Needless to say, the reading session just described came to an abrupt end with Harold in tears and with his father fuming. Why did it have to end this way?

Most of us know from experience how very difficult it is to teach a loved one. Emotional bonds stand in the way of instructional success. How, then, can parents function successfully as reading tutors or helpers?

While serving overseas in an administrative capacity with the United States Air Force Schools a decade or more ago, the writer suggested to a number of concerned parents that they form a parent-teaching pool under the guidance of several interested teachers. The plan was implemented. But instead of working with their own children, the parents provided assistance on an exchange basis. For example, Captain Brown devoted an hour twice a week to reading with Major Jones' son while Major Jones reciprocated by reading with the Captain's daughter. A number of wives were members of the pool and they served in a similar capacity. The three teachers who volunteered their services met weekly with the parent-teaching pool. They answered questions, provided diagnostic insights, furnished suitable books, and suggested practice materials and specific reading games. In addition, they made a number of general suggestions such as the following:

1. Sit to the right of the child if you are right-handed and to the left of the child if you are left-handed. This seating arrangement makes it easier to follow the reading and permits your taking notes without getting in the child's way.
2. If for any reason a book proves uninteresting or distasteful to the child, return it for another.
3. If the book selected proves too difficult (the child should know on sight

at least 95 percent of the words and should be able to demonstrate a fair understanding of what is read), return it for another immediately.

4. Take turns during oral reading. Don't have the child do all the reading.
5. Stop reading occasionally and discuss the story. Ask questions that will stimulate the child's interest and will involve him/her in the story. For example: "What do you think is going to happen next? Do you think Bill should have punished his dog for running away by locking him in a closet? Do you know anyone who has done something like that? What would you have done had your dog run away?"
6. If you or the child becomes impatient or restless, take a break or cut the session short.
7. Give praise whenever it is deserved.
8. Keep a list of unknown words which seem important for the child to know. Incorporate them into word games such as Wordo or Word Rummy.
9. When the child encounters a word he doesn't know, try these approaches:
 - a. Tell him/her what the word is immediately. This is particularly desirable when the story is impelling and there is danger of destroying the child's interest by too many interruptions.
 - b. Encourage the child to skip the word and read the rest of the sentence. The context may provide needed clues.
 - c. Point to where the word may have appeared elsewhere in the story and ask what it is.
 - d. Ask the child, "Do you know another word that begins the same way?" Although it is not recommended that a parent teach phonics, it is safe and helpful to ask this question because it may enable the child to discover a valuable word recognition clue – the sound of the initial consonant or consonant blend.

The parent-teaching pool approach was successful and the results reported were very gratifying. Teachers who became involved were enthusiastic and were convinced that parents can be of great value as reading helpers if they work with children other than their own.

At the present time there is a great need for parent involvement with the school. Many parents in school districts throughout America would like to have their children receive extra help in reading. They want to assist and are willing to expend time and energy to do so. Teachers should capitalize on their concern by forming parent teaching pools similar to what has been described in this article. With proper guidance from interested teachers, a swap-a-child tutorial campaign can become an invaluable asset to any reading program.