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Review of the literature regarding the role of parents in the reading education program

Margaret Mary Allen

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A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE REGARDING THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE
READING EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

Margaret Mary Allen

A RESEARCH PAPER
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This research paper has been
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

No one doubts that we are living at a time of rapid and dramatic changes in our society. All aspects of our lives are being affected by these great changes, which include rapidly increasing population, development of nuclear energy, drive for civil rights, space exploration, knowledge explosion, and the growth of the mass media of communication.

Education has not been exempt from the influence of the rapidly changing society. Universities and organizations have undertaken programs to investigate ways of improving the teaching of physics, mathematics, and reading. New methods of teaching reading with programs, typewriters, and revised orthography are eagerly being tried. To keep the public informed of these experiments, there has been an abundance of articles in the popular press. Much of the focus has been on reading. This concern with the teaching of reading stimulated parents to want to teach their children to read.

The year may be 1965, or '75, or '85, but the question will always be the same when a parent meets his child's teacher: "How can I help my child in reading?" Some parents ask the question as a matter of routine, believing it is expected of them, but most parents ask the question in great sincerity. Most parents know it is important for their children to read well, and are genuinely concerned when they believe their children are not making progress in reading. Most parents consciously try to reinforce the school's reading program, yet they need to be reassured that what they are doing is of value to the child. Many parents

do need guidance in best helping their children; they ask for direction, they want it, they need it. It is the school's obligation to provide this direction. For a child to realize his full reading potential, parental assistance is needed. No teacher, no school, can be so magnificently successful in reading instruction that parental reinforcement can be shrugged off.¹

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this investigation was to present in concise form the findings of outstanding specialists in the field of reading regarding the role of parents in the reading education program. Also included was a review of some of the major parent education programs undertaken by several of the larger school systems in the United States for the purpose of acquainting parents with the reading program in their child's school.

A brief study of the community of Mequon with which the writer was associated was also included, reviewing the socio-economic background, population growth pattern, and educational growth pattern of the community. The writer attempted to associate this information with the role of the suburban parent in the reading education program.

Scope and Limitation

Because of the great amount of literature available on the subject of parents and reading, the writer attempted to limit the study to the role of the parent in the pre-school environment and the role of the parent in facilitating school learning in the early years of

¹Helene M. Lloyd, "New York City's Program for Developing the Role of Parents in Reading Progress," Reading Teacher, XVIII (May, 1965), p. 629.

school education.

The study also included a review of the literature regarding parent education programs, limiting this to the programs most recently undertaken by the larger school systems of the United States and to those most recently reviewed in the literature.

Justification of the Problem

Since the writer of this study has been employed as a primary and intermediate teacher for the past seven years, numerous parent conferences have been held. The concern most often expressed by parents has been related to what they could do to help their child, especially in reading. With this in mind, the writer hoped, through investigation of the literature, to be able to satisfy some parents' need to know what can be done early in a child's life to prepare him for his educational experiences, particularly the reading experience.

It is also hoped that the inclusion of the information on the community of Mequon and the role of the parents in the reading education program will help to acquaint any new reading personnel and new teachers employed in the school system with the background of the community and the reading program established there.

The writer also felt that, since Mequon is a new community and consists of many parents who are of a favored socio-economic background, these parents very often wish to be of help to their children, both in the pre-school years and in every year of their child's education.

It is hoped that this study will help them to prepare their

children for a successful reading experience, and perhaps might arouse some interest and curiosity in initiating a parent education program in their community.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Role of Parent in Pre-School Environment

Since parents want to play a part in their children's learning to read, educators must find legitimate roles for them. Teachers can no longer feel that teaching children to read is only the educator's task. Parents are curious about how reading is taught today and are interested in knowing what part they may play in the reading education of their child.

It is only natural for parents to want their children to read as early as possible. Reading is communication; it is the essential skill necessary for success in school and life. Reading brings new confidence to the child, opens up a whole new world, and gives him a means of new accomplishment. However, a lifetime of nightmares may be the result for a child if he is expected to perform before he is ready. Pressuring a preschooler to read can harm him permanently. So take the time to understand your child and time to analyze certain points:

1. Understand that there is no magic formula in preparing a youngster for reading at a certain age. Children do not grow in lock step.
2. Understand that there is no timetable for children while growing or learning. Whether the youngster is a bright child or a slow learning child, there is only one rate of growth and learning for him--his own natural rate.
3. Understand that the most beneficial activities you can provide for your child are activities associated with doing things and going places.
4. Understand the value of reading to your child and introduce him to the world of books.
5. Understand that informal talk and discussion with your child are necessary. Talk with him often, and listen intently when he speaks.¹

¹Donald Carline, "Preparing Your Child For Reading," Helping Your Child Grow in Reading, (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1967), p. 14.

Genuine parental concern for a child's success in life is very necessary. Over-concern which results in placing a child in school or beginning reading instruction at too early an age must be avoided. There is almost no danger in being relaxed about reading. The dangers are on the side of beginning prematurely.

When parents are eager to have a preschool child read, they run the risk of curbing his enthusiasm for reading and making him tense. There are pleasant, exciting, stimulating things for a child to do before he reads. The child who has a good, enriched, full life before he reads will take reading in stride when the time comes.

In preparing youngsters for reading, don't rush them, don't expect them to be eager. Instead, do all you can to provide a language background. The most realistic description of learning to read emphasizes that language development is the key to the whole process. The child must first hear the word, shape it on his tongue, and only then recognize it by sight. Preschool children possess a great deal of energy. They have an insatiable curiosity that should never be stifled; it should be used to develop motivation, stimulate imagination, and assure the child's experiencing the fun and excitement which are vital parts of his preparation for reading.¹

In view of modern pressures regarding a too early start in reading, what can teachers and administrators advise parents to do which is constructive and sensible to help their children become good readers? Rudman states:

Parents have long been recognized as having a vital influence on the development of intellectual growth through providing varied experiences for youngsters--trips to farms, cities, zoos, beaches, and the like. They have also contributed to those readiness activities closely related to what is conceived of as actual reading. Many of the magazines written for children have sections devoted to these readiness activities: matching games, tracing lines, coloring pictures, left-right and top-bottom exercises, classifying separate objects, developing sequence, and other exercises

¹Ibid, p. 15.

designed to develop skills needed in reading. Although these readiness activities are developed systematically in the early grades of the elementary school, many youngsters have already had these experiences in the home.¹

Artley has the following suggestions for parents:

1. Provide the child with many experiences of different kinds.
2. Encourage your youngster to ask questions and answer them just as well as you can, even if it means some studying on your part. A frank "I don't know" can open the door to shared research that brings parents and child close together in the search for facts.
3. Help your child speak plainly and distinctly. Give him opportunities to learn and use new words. Listen to his conversations and encourage him to think and talk well. Discuss his favorite radio and television programs with him, encouraging him to tell you what he heard, what he saw, what happened. Such conversations are builders of language power, and reading power is closely related to language power.
4. Help him to learn to follow directions, to work independently.
5. Toys, crayons, pencils, scissors--all help the child develop ability to coordinate the small muscles of his hands.
6. Finally, surround your child with good books. Read to him often, and let him see you reading too. A home that is filled with love for books and reading will do much to kindle the youngster's enthusiasm for reading by himself.²

Beery feels that parents can have an integral part in a child's pre-reading environment. She suggests the following:

1. Encourage your child to be self-reliant. Applaud his efforts to dress himself and give him responsibility for getting out and putting away his belongings. Be ready with praise for a good try; give him a bit of help when he has tackled something too difficult, but don't smother him with detailed directions and criticisms. Encourage him to solve his own problems. Provide play materials and equipment that encourage manipulation and experimentation.
2. Teach him to listen attentively and to follow simple directions. Set a good example by paying attention when he talks to you. Make it clear that he should listen when you speak to him. Include him in your conversation and family enjoy-

¹Herbert Rudman, "Parents and Their Children's Reading Interests," Reading Teacher, X, (October, 1956), p. 26.

²A. Sterl Artley, Your Child Learns to Read, (Chicago, Illinois: Scott-Foresman and Company, 1953), p. 11.

- ment of radio and television. Provide him with recordings which he can listen to again and again. Stimulate his interest in the world of sound.
3. Provide a reading environment. Read aloud to him, preferably at a regular time. Let him choose the story and add his comments. Give him books and a place to keep them. Make a game of noticing signs, praise him when he recognizes words on signs and on television. Include reading in the family pattern of living.
 4. Answer his questions or help him to answer his own by relating a new situation to a familiar one. Don't make him feel that his questions are foolish or unwelcome. Encourage him to experiment with various materials to find out how they work. Look up together the information he wants that you don't know off-hand. Foster an inquiring mind by "wondering why" yourself.
 5. Help him to express his ideas orally. Talk to your child from infancy, but no baby talk. Give him correct names for actions and objects. Encourage him to use new terms he hears on trips. Give him a chance to relate incidents or to guess how a story is going to end.¹

Carline feels that children must be included in the family atmosphere:

Children must experience family pressures--the sharing, doing, and compromising with all members in the family. They are a part of family activities outside the home as well, such as going to church, doing the shopping, visiting the neighbors, going to the doctor, and participating in other routine family activities.²

Much of the research done regarding parents and reading maintains that parents can provide many successful experiences for their children which help the children develop an awareness for their surroundings. Parents can offer encouragement to their children, as noted in DeBoer and Dallman's suggestions to parents:

¹Althea Beery, "Preparing Children For Reading," Journal of the National Education Association, I, (January, 1963), p. 36.

²Donald Carline, "Preparing Your Child For Reading," Helping Your Child Grow in Reading, (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1967), p. 14.

1. Give children plenty of experiences--not necessarily complex but meaningful and interesting ones.
2. Maintain a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere at home. Make the child feel important, give him a chance to talk, talk with him--not always to him.
3. Be enthusiastic about school. Talk encouragingly about it. Build up an interest.
4. Answer your children's questions. Answers needn't be involved or detailed.
5. Develop a feeling of independence in the child. Praise him often.
6. Encourage your child to participate in games and play with others.
7. Interest your child in things in which he should be interested.
8. Teach your children the correct names of people and things.
9. Read to your children often. Sing with them and play with them.
10. Encourage children to associate people and places, times and events.
11. Let the children see you reading often. Let them feel that you enjoy it.
12. Provide materials similar to those in school--paste, paper, scissors, paint.
13. Encourage, and, if necessary, be forceful in teaching children to follow directions and to pay attention.
14. Show the child that books aren't the only kind of reading. Magazines, packages, letters, road signs, etc., are other sources.
15. Accept and respect your child. You will be proud of him some day.
16. Be patient! Remember that these little folks have a lot to learn. Make this learning experience enjoyable.¹

According to Harris, the general cultural level of a child's home is the most important determiner of the adequacy of his background of knowledge and experience. Books and magazines in the home attract him with their bright pictures, and the stories which are read or told to him tend to develop an early interest in books and reading.²

¹John DeBoer and Martha Dallman, The Teaching of Reading, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. 37.

²Albert Harris, How To Increase Reading Ability, (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1961), p. 37.

Children need the every-day adventures and activities of the home and family to help them succeed in life and, specifically, in reading. These adventures and activities need not be elaborate. Rather, as has been pointed out by research, the common activity of every day brings a child closer to happiness, and to success in reading.

Role of Parents in Facilitating School Learning

A reading program cannot be entirely successful if it is left completely to the school. Most of the school time must be spent in instruction; but instruction loses its potency when it is not accompanied by practice. The home can provide the time and place for some of this practice. Furthermore, reading skills are lost and the whole purpose of the reading program is defeated unless the child establishes a habit of reading for information and entertainment. The home, the public library, and the community centers should offer the situations and reading materials to entrench the habit.

In addition to time and place for practice, the home can furnish the appreciators who make reading progress seem important, the listeners to ideas gained in reading, and the holders of cards or the suppliers of words in practice of reading skills.

What are some of the ways a parent can give positive support to the school reading program? Tinker and McCullough state:

1. The parent must be informed by the school about the reading program. At PTA a parent can learn something about the philosophy of the school and the conduct of the reading program. He can support drives that this organization sponsors to obtain books for school libraries, classroom collections, and the tape recorders and record players. He can be on

planning committees for these programs that are of interest to parents.

2. Open house nights are occasions for seeing the setting in which his child works, and for talking with the teacher about classroom activities.
3. Especially at the kindergarten and primary levels, parents should take advantage of demonstration lessons of a class activity.
4. Parents should read reports and requests and announcements that the school sends regarding his child.¹

Those parents who have asked about helping their children at home can do a great deal to help children to know that reading is communication and can be fun too. "Dear Harry. Look under your plate for a surprise," links reading with both of these. A short, simple note on the door or some other familiar place saying, "Dear Bobby, I have gone to the store. Please wait for me. Mother." -- or whatever message is appropriate, has the same value that school messages have. All children love mail. A postcard with a short message mailed from a city shopping trip can be fun. "Dear Henry. Do you like this funny card? I thought you would"! links reading with friendliness, love, fun, and security.

Larrick, in A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading, offers these points to parents:

1. Show children that you have confidence in them. Praise them for things well done. Word your questions so that they do not seem to be criticisms.
2. Show your interest in school life. Encourage your child to talk about the day's events and the people in his school world. But don't insist if he doesn't want to and don't be anxious if he sometimes prefers to keep his home world and school world apart.
3. Be sure that he is physically fit. Good food and plenty of sleep are all important. Watch out for bad tonsils, poor

¹Miles Tinker and Constance McCullough, Teaching Elementary Reading, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), p. 368.

- vision, undue fatigue.
4. Help him to know other children. This is especially needed if the teacher reports shyness. A hot dog picnic in the back yard may build confidence that the child needs in reading aloud.
 5. Get him accustomed to speaking distinctly by showing a decided interest in conversation with him. If the two of you join in reciting favorite nursery rhymes, he will get the feel of talking quickly and easily.
 6. Play listening games if he enjoys them. They will help him note likenesses and differences in words that he will meet later in print.
 7. Answer his questions about the meanings of words, but don't push him into reading words from a ready-made list.¹

The importance of providing a wide variety of experiences for a child in preparing him for learning to read has been emphasized in a previous section of this paper. Kenneth Smith feels that it is necessary for a child to have many opportunities for talking and listening with other children and adults. In this way, a child learns many needed concepts as well as the words which stand for those concepts. He goes on to say:

A child cannot be expected to learn to read if there is nothing interesting around for him to read. Let him select what he wants to read--you make sure he has interesting books and magazines from which to choose. Children's dictionaries are available for use in the home. Children's encyclopedias are very useful, but not essential. Control TV and radio--agree on programs to watch. A child cannot study while watching television. Provide a quiet, well-lighted, and comfortable place to study. Don't place unreasonable pressure on your child in an effort to make him learn. The ideal situation between parent and child is one of mutual respect, each cooperating with the other.²

It may be useful to remember that there was a time when parents looked askance at books as those instruments of idleness which caused

¹Nancy Larrick, A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading, (New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 58.

²Kenneth Smith, "Helping Your Child Grow in Reading," Helping Your Child Grow in Reading, (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1967), p. 9.

boys and girls to default their needful chores. Now, however, books, magazines, newspapers, television and radio bring the world into people's homes. Youngsters are aware of things that in an earlier day were not even thought of until they were in college.

Today every child has access to books in a way and in a quantity we never knew. Book counters in every part of town are heaped with books especially made for children. Book fairs are sponsored by schools, large and small, in city and country, across the land, and great metropolitan newspapers invite thousands of youngsters to come and see hundreds of books spread out for their browsing. Librarians reach out into the schools, and bookmobiles take their wares to villages and rural towns. Books are no longer only for the privileged or the highly educated. They are a part of the environment our children live in.¹

If the world is so filled with a multitude of books, how can one be selective about his reading? To say that parents cannot impose their own interests and tastes on their children is not the same as saying that children do not need their parents' help in finding their way in a world so full of printed words. Parents who have not kept alive their own interest in books, or for whom other activities have crowded it out, can still begin to explore with their children and enjoy some new discoveries. With or without adult guidance, some of our children's reading will be arrived at by trial and error. Nevertheless, they still need help in finding what will best suit the child's interests and tastes of the moment. This does not mean surrendering hard-won standards of judgment and discrimination. It does mean being willing to let youngsters go at their pace instead of an adult pace, feeling a child's way through their book world.

Children do need us not only to introduce them to the many books

¹Josette Frank, Your Child's Reading Today, (Garden City New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), p. 17.

available but also to help them grow in appreciation and broaden their interests. Whether or not we are ourselves great readers, our standards of appreciation have been the product of long experience, and it is this which we would like to pass along to our children. As in many other areas, we hope that they can be spared our mistakes, whether of omission or of commission. This we cannot do for them. We can suggest, and we can discuss their book interests, but we must let them arrive at their own values at their own rate of progress. We can count on our own interest in books, of whatever kind, to kindle theirs. But we cannot bring them to the many uses of books, including the pleasure of reading, by forcible feeding.¹

Each parent should be informed about the program of reading instruction in his child's school so that the resulting understanding will enable parents and teachers to work together in the best interests of the elementary school child who is learning to read.

Since the role of the parents and the home is so very important in molding good readers, and since in many instances children are denied the joys and privileges of a home experience with books, an active educational campaign for parents in a community, especially the parents of pre-school children, would be most worthwhile. This would be the "ounce of prevention" approach and, therefore, to be endorsed highly.²

Children have and need parents. Children need to feel that parents and school are working together.

Role of Schools in Reporting to Parents

The primary function of a school is to educate the child. The primary function of school reports is to provide the information necessary for cooperative planning and understanding on the part of parents and school personnel in achieving a child's maximum educa-

¹Josette Frank, Your Child's Reading Today, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), p. 38.

²Russell Stauffer, "Parents Can Help in the Reading Program," Reading Teacher, X, (October, 1956), p. 25.

tional growth. Unfortunately, this has been an area where communication has been impeded because of the failure of the school to keep parents properly informed and because of the failure of parents to understand the varying factors upon which the reports are based and to understand the meaning of scores and the results of other objective procedures which the school frequently furnishes in support of their reports.

"Hands off! This is our problem," is no longer a justifiable response from the educator. Educators are aware that parents rightfully want to assist at home when their child has difficulty at school. Since it is realistic to assume parents are involved with helping their child with his education, it becomes desirable to learn more about the role parents are playing. Specifically, it seems probable that educators could do a better job of helping parents provide assistance if they were more cognizant of the types of activities which parents provide for their children.

It seems necessary to discover the most effective means of stimulating parental involvement so that positive help can be insured. In many instances past efforts to educate parents have been restricted to the lecture method; that is, the parents have been told what to do and what not to do. Telling parents how to help is ineffective as a means of insuring healthy teaching-learning situations at home. Wilson and Pfau offer the following possibilities:

First, educators should be interested in having parents realize that there are portions of instruction which need reinforcing by parents at home and other portions which are better left to the educator. Involving parents in areas where they can fruitfully assist may serve to disinvolve them from areas in which their help will prove less profitable.

Second, educators should make certain that parents not only be told which activities would benefit their child and which would not but also that they be shown the method involved. For example, a common area of suggestion for parents is that they listen to their child read. While most teachers agree that this is sound advice, it does not follow that parents understand precisely what makes a good listener, nor that they realize the benefits to be accrued from good listening.

Third, once a good technique is demonstrated, parents should have an opportunity to practice the techniques under the watchful eye of an educator. The total process here would allow the parents to learn what to do, to see how to do it, and to try it under observation.

Finally, educators should be interested in seeing that parents discover for themselves whether or not they are well-suited to work with their children. A supervised situation with positive educator reaction in which the parents work with their child allows for better self-evaluation. For those parents who are unable to establish the rapport necessary for effective learning to occur, the ground-work has been established for guiding them to other types of cooperative effort. When the parent cannot effectively control his frustrations with the child or when the parent loses control of his emotions, then it must be assumed that further efforts to assist will be of little value.¹

Parents do have an interest in the school's reading program.

Artley analyzed the questions and reactions that parents have to a school's reading program. He arrived at certain generalizations.

In the first place, it appears that parents are asking a lot of questions that they shouldn't have to ask. They are asking questions that should have been answered by school people as part of a good program of school interpretation. Parents should not have to ask, "What is a readiness program?" or "Why are children grouped for reading?" Schools that are sensitive to the need for good parent relationships anticipate such basic questions and through a positive program of exploration and interpretation acquaint the parents with

¹Robert Wilson and Donald Pfau, "Parents Can Help!", Reading Teacher, XXI, (May, 1968), p. 758.

what their schools are doing and why.¹

Before school people can interpret and explain, they must be sure that what they have in their reading program is the best they can provide. They must be sure that its psychology is sound, and that it is getting results. In some places, it would be difficult to explain to parents either the logic behind or the results obtained from some types of programs. It would be embarrassing to explain the absence of a systematic program in word-attack, or difficult to defend a word-attack program which is narrow in scope. It would be equally difficult to justify a program where activity in one form or another is substituted for instruction. Artley states:

Admittedly standardized test norms have limitations when it comes to interpreting the reading growth in a given classroom. Yet it is important to know how reading achievement in a school compares to the achievement of a hypothetical standardization group, and what may be the explanation if it does not compare favorably.²

Often in their anxiety to have their children succeed, parents take on the role of the school or condemn the methods used to teach their children. Often, parents clamor for a return to the method by which they were taught, using the good-old-days approach, and, in most instances, they have no recollection of the learning to read process. Therefore, an active campaign can be most helpful which informs parents about how reading is taught as a thinking process, a process of getting meaning.

¹A. Sterl Artley, "What Do Parents' Questions Mean?", Reading Teacher, X, (October, 1956), p. 17.

²Ibid.

How can such a campaign be carried out? This may be done through classroom visits, demonstration lessons, PTA talks, and a viewing of reading score statistics which compare children of twenty years ago with those of today. School publications may be prepared which present to parents a pictured or printed story of how their children learn to read.

In one school the reading supervisor has prepared an excellent series of slides with accompanying explanation describing the reading program of the first grade. She presents the series of slides and gives her talk to parent groups, service clubs, and PTA meetings.¹

DeBoer and Dallman offer the following suggestions for communicating with parents:

1. Personal interview. Meet each parent and explain the method of reading instruction followed in each grade or school.
2. Teacher-Parent Conference.
3. Publish attractive leaflets setting forth the rationale of the reading program in the schools.
4. Invite parents to visit the schools and observe the reading program in action.
5. Prepare colored slides and tape recordings of the actual reading lesson.
6. Invite parents to an afternoon program in the auditorium. Set up the stage like a classroom. Allow parents to examine the books, both basal and supplemental. Go over lists of children's books that parents can purchase.
7. Prepare a chatty newsletter each month explaining to the parents what is being accomplished in the reading program.²

H. Alan Robinson discusses an in-service project conducted by a school system in which several faculty members were chosen to make up a reading committee. This committee presented demonstrations of reading lessons to adult audiences with the cooperation of the PTA

¹Ibid, p. 19.

²John DeBoer and Martha Dallman, The Teaching of Reading, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), pp. 345-46.

and the Faculty Association of their school. The committee first agreed upon major reading practices at each grade level. These were communicated to the audience along with the practices emphasized at all other levels. The reading committee selected various objectives from each grade level and suggested that these objectives be used as guides in the preparation of demonstration reading lessons. These demonstration lessons were followed by question and answer periods, after which the parents filled out an evaluation sheet of the school's reading program. Comments from the evaluation sheets were used to establish the next demonstration lesson.¹

Reading is a cooperative process. Educators need the help and involvement of the parents, but to make this involvement worthwhile, educators must take the time and the initiative in informing parents of what they can do to help the child in the learning-to-read process.

Parent Education Programs

While there are innumerable parent education programs in the United States, there are few directly focussed on helping parents improve reading achievement of their children. One such program that has proven itself successful is a project carried on in the Denver, Colorado Public Schools. The Denver Public Schools, with the aid of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, began a study to determine how effectively parents could prepare their pre-

¹H. Alan Robinson, "Does Your Community Know Your Reading Program?", Journal of Developmental Reading, I, (October, 1957), pp. 7-16.

school children for reading.

Parents have for years been carrying on informal activities which contribute to their children's early and effective reading. The Denver study was designed to find out whether parents, with suitable professional assistance and direction, could systematize and accentuate such activities to their children's benefit.

Three research groups were established. The parents of the first group, Group X, received no instruction in teaching the basic reading skills. They were encouraged to continue with the types of activities normally carried on within their families. However, the children in this group took the same tests as those in the other groups so that it would be possible to distinguish between reading development which might occur as a result of maturation and normal family life and reading development occurring when children were taught at home by parents using a specially prepared guidebook. In Group Y the parents were provided instruction in teaching the skills which are basic to beginning reading. They taught their children at home using a specially prepared guidebook and programs presented on educational television. The parents in Group Z were provided instruction in teaching the basic skills to their children by use of the guidebook, along with the guidance of experienced teachers, using kinescopes of the television programs in small parent-discussion groups.

The guidebook for parents, entitled Preparing Your Child for Reading, presented the basic instructional plan. The book contained the necessary special materials normally not found in the home. The suggestions and materials were organized in sixteen chapters or sections designed to enable parents to follow the sixteen television programs. Instructional content of the television programs and films were geared to the lessons in the guidebook. To determine the values for parents of this adult education program, the amount and kind of instruction given to children, and parent judgment about the worth of these activities, several evaluative instruments were administered during the period when the children were being tested.¹

The study indicated that a preschool child can be taught certain beginning reading skills provided he has a mental age of at least four and a half years. The amount a child learned was related

¹Joseph E. Brzeinski, "Beginning Reading in Denver," Reading Teacher, XVIII (October, 1964), pp. 22-26.

directly to the amount of time someone practiced the beginning reading activities with him. The minimum amount of practice established as necessary was thirty minutes per week. Reading to the child was also found to have a significant effect, whether or not the child was in one of the groups who practiced the beginning reading activities. In fact, many of the parents in the control group read to their children and produced an increase in test scores. The best performance on the test was made by the children who had both practiced the beginning reading activities more than thirty minutes per week and who had been read to more than sixty minutes per week. It appeared that reading to the child should be recommended along with the program of beginning reading activities. The information obtained from the parent education study appeared to indicate that parents are eager to teach their children beginning reading skills.¹

A major aspect of New York City's assault on its staggering problems in reading has been the recruitment, involvement, and guidance of parents in a program described as a seven-pronged action program for developing the role of parents in reading progress. The prongs include:

1. Kinescopes. As a by-product of an open-circuit television series for teacher training in reading, the Elementary Division developed a set of kinescopes based on questions that parents had been asking the city's primary teachers. The portions of the television programs in which experts answered these and other questions were clipped from the kinescopes of the television series, edited to remove extraneous discussion, and reassembled for use in parent meetings.
2. Special Films. Another prong has been the development of

¹Ibid.

professional color 16mm films to answer parents' inquiries and recruit parent cooperation. These films are chosen to closely resemble the pattern of living of the parents watching them. Other films explain the use of some teaching techniques for building language ability as a basis of reading.

3. Radio Programs. New York City's commercial radio stations have eagerly programmed time for reading specialists to meet with parents and other panelists in lively discussions on topics of parental interest.
4. Reading Exhibit. A central point in the city was picked for setting up an exhibit of materials and procedures for reading instruction. Reading consultants served as guides and answered questions. Effective displays of experience charts, teacher-made material, commercial publications, audio-visual equipment, textbooks, supplemental materials, interspersed with classroom photographs, gave parents a new and broad view of the reading spectrum.
5. Commitment. The impact of New York City's special reading services is doubled because parent involvement is specifically planned. No child is admitted into one of the city's reading clinics unless the parent is willing to work with the clinic staff in helping the child. Parent approval and pledge of support is required before a child is accepted into an after-school study center. Experience indicates that the progress of most children in the reading services assistance program is directly proportionate to the extent and enthusiasm of parental commitment.
6. In New Projects. Because parent involvement is so essential, all new projects in behalf of the disadvantaged elementary school children incorporate parent participation in their basic design. These children are sorely handicapped by lack of common experiences, the need for concept growth, and the absence of listening-speaking skills. No school system can possibly begin to handle the gigantic task of filling these voids without parent involvement.
7. Field Action. Not a day goes by without reading workshops for parents being carried on in schools or in superintendents' offices. These workshops are conducted by principals, reading consultants, corrective reading teachers, librarians, and reading improvement teachers.¹

Two reasons explain the top priority being given to the parental role in reading in New York City. One is obvious: the desire, the need, for helping parents help their children. The second: so pro-

¹Helene M. Lloyd, "New York City's Program for Developing the Role of Parents in Reading Progress," Reading Teacher, XVIII, (May, 1965), pp. 629-33.

mising is parent reinforcement in reading that the specialists in other curriculum areas are watching these successes with hungry, contemplative interest.¹

One of the boldest new projects currently in the planning stage is the development of a new town under the auspices of Arizona State University, several school districts, and a Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company subsidiary. The town, to be called Litchfield Park, will be near Phoenix, Arizona. Some of the guiding principles on which there is apparent agreement are: Three or four years of age is the proper age to begin school, early schooling might be in small structures about the size of a one-bedroom house, and the parents' knowledgeable participation can have a major effect on the enjoyment value of the school experience.² Research on this new project is limited at this time.

Summary

Education of a child begins the moment he is born. Parents can take an active interest in their child's education, not only once this child proceeds to formal education, but perhaps moreso before this time. The daily experiences that a child meets and shares with his family and friends are especially lucrative to him. When formal education does begin, parents and school need to work together to help this child become successful. Schools and educators need to

¹Ibid.

²Gabriel Della-Piana, Robert F. Stahmann, and John E. Allen, "Parents and Reading Achievement: A Review of Research," Elementary English, XLV, (February, 1968), p. 191.

inform parents of what they can do to be of profitable help. Several school systems have developed systematic pre-school and parent education programs for their communities. The role of the parent in facilitating school learning is slowly receiving increased attention throughout the world.

CHAPTER III

INFORMATION REGARDING THE COMMUNITY

Factors Unique to the Community

Mequon is the second largest city in area in the state, second only to Milwaukee, with an area of fifty square miles. It is bordered on the east by Lake Michigan, on the west by the Village of Germantown, on the north by Cedarburg, and on the south by Milwaukee, Brown Deer, River Hills, and Bayside. Mequon, in Ozaukee County, surrounds the Village of Thiensville. Thiensville is an approximately five square mile area and Mequon is an approximately fifty square mile area.

The population of Mequon has shown consistent growth. Mequon had a population of 4065 in 1950, 8543 in 1960, and 12,085 in 1970. Originally Mequon had been thought of as an older age community, but with the trend to suburbia all age groups are represented. A long range master plan for future development anticipates an ultimate population of 55,000 persons.

A high percentage of the residents of Mequon have moved there from a section of Milwaukee. Larger land acreages have been an asset in bringing people to the city of Mequon.

Business is in its infancy in this area, but there are a few flourishing small businesses. Approximately ninety percent of the people derive their living in Milwaukee or another nearby town. Of this ninety percent, seventy-five percent hold executive or managerial

positions in the city of Milwaukee. The average income is higher than the national average and this is being reflected in receipts from shared income tax from the state, giving Mequon a good economic base.¹

Mequon and Thiensville are a joint common school district consisting of Joint District 10 and Joint District 3. Joint District 10 is composed of Lake Shore Middle School, Range Line Elementary School, Donges Bay Elementary School, and Oriole Lane Elementary School. Joint District 3 consists of Wilson Avenue and Grand Avenue Elementary Schools, and Harry Steffan Middle School. All students continue their education at Homestead High School, which is Joint District 1.

In all of the elementary and middle schools, policies are determined by a five-membered, elected and salaried school board. Any qualified voter can be nominated for the school board. The three year terms are staggered; voting takes place at an annual meeting in July at which time the school budget is also approved.

The rapid population growth of Mequon is reflected in the school growth. The first school in Joint District 10, Range Line, was opened to students in the fall of 1950 with an enrollment of 320. An addition was attached to this building, and in 1954 the school enrollment increased to 415. Need for another addition quickly arose, and in 1958 the entire Range Line School opened its doors to 650 students in grades kindergarten through eight. The second elementary school, Oriole Lane, with grades kindergarten through four, was opened in

¹Walter M. Anderson, City Administrator, personal interview held at Mequon City Hall, March 18, 1970.

1962, with an enrollment of 240 students, bringing the total enrollment of District 10 to 820 students. Oriole Lane School had only ten classrooms; plans included attaching additional classrooms to it as the need arose. As the population increased and the need for more classrooms arose, it was decided that, instead of adding on to Oriole Lane School, located in the northern part of the district, a need existed in the southern section of the district, and in January of 1966, Donges Bay School opened with 300 students in grades kindergarten through four. Enrollment in September, 1965, was 925, and make-shift classrooms had been established in the gymnasium and cafeteria of Range Line School to house all the students. The opening of Donges Bay School in January alleviated this condition.

Student population growth continued, and in September, 1969, Lake Shore Middle School opened to accommodate its 485 students, and the District 10 enrollment stood at 1370. Future plans include the addition of a wing to Lake Shore Middle School when and if the need arises.¹

The student population of 1,370 is provided for by one District Administrator, three principals, fifty-five classroom teachers, two special education teachers, four physical education teachers, two art teachers, four music or band teachers, one home arts and one manual arts teacher, one half-time school social worker, one psychologist, one speech teacher shared with the other districts, one librarian and two library clerks, and one reading supervisor.

¹Harry Thompto, District 10 Administrator, private interview held at Donges Bay School, Mequon, on February 19, 1970.

Table 1 illustrates the growth of the District 10 schools from 1950 to 1969.

TABLE 1
SCHOOL POPULATION GROWTH TABLE

Name of School	Year Opened	Enrollment of School	Total Enrollment of District
Range Line	1950	320	320
Range Line*	1954	415	415
Range Line**	1958	650	650
Oriole Lane	1962	240	820
Donges Bay	1966	300	925
Lake Shore	1969	485	1370

*First Addition
**Second Addition

Present Reading Program

The reading instruction of the students in Joint District #10 has been the responsibility of the classroom teacher, for the most part. The three-group, basal reader-workbook approach has been the most common method used in the system. In the previous two years, fourth through eighth grades have used variations of the Joplin plan.

From the fall of 1950 until the fall of 1966 all aspects of the reading instruction of the students were determined by the classroom teacher. In 1966 the first special reading teacher was employed to

assume duties as a remedial reading teacher of grades six through eight. It was felt that she could do the most good by helping these children. The following year the same remedial reading teacher did work with a few isolated cases in the primary grades, but the area of concentration was in the elementary grades four through eight. This special reading teacher left the district in June, 1968.

With an increase in classroom teachers and pupil enrollment, a decision was reached by the administration and the school board that a reading supervisor would best meet the needs of the district. In the summer of 1968 a young man with a master's degree in reading joined the staff. The main objectives assigned to the reading supervisor were:

- A. To reorganize and develop a total reading program.
- B. To advise classroom teachers as to proper procedures in reading instruction.
- C. To purchase and be responsible for reading materials.

The master plan included the idea that the reading supervisor would have several people working with him in the ensuing years to do the actual remedial teaching.

The school philosophy of Joint District #10 is "To help the child to know himself and to guide him toward the development of his greatest potential and to promote an understanding and appreciation for a democratic way of life so he grows to be a loyal, responsible, contributing member of our society."¹ There is no reading syllabus in

¹Professional Handbook, Joint District 10 Schools, Mequon, Wisconsin, 1969, p. 6.

the district. The objectives and philosophy listed in each basal reader are followed. Since the arrival of the reading supervisor, the emphasis has been put on prevention rather than remediation.

Because of the tremendous lack of reading materials in the district, the reading supervisor was budgeted \$7000 during the 1968-69 school year for the purpose of ordering materials that he felt were necessary to carry on a successful reading program. During the school year 1969-70 the budget request for reading materials was \$6000. Much of the 1968-69 budget was used to obtain texts and materials for use in grades seven and eight, the area showing the most critical shortage of materials. The task of deciding upon the reading materials needed in the district was left to the discretion of the reading supervisor.¹

In addition to the above, the reading supervisor's responsibilities also included:

- A. To coordinate the entire reading program, grades kindergarten through eight.
- B. To work with the special services staff, i.e., special education teachers, psychologist, social worker. Formal staff meetings never became a reality.
- C. To keep a record of where all reading materials are located.
- D. To organize and carry out the summer school remedial reading program.
- E. To take care of all correspondence with Cardinal Stritch College and Notre Dame of the Lake records for all children who attend special classes at these schools.
- F. To handle all correspondence with book companies and confer with their salesmen.
- G. Plan activities for fall in-service week that would help teachers become familiar with new materials.
- H. To do all scheduling for intra-class grouping in the new Lake Shore Middle School. This is done in cooperation with the school principal.

¹Michael Dunn, Reading Supervisor, personal interview held at Donges Bay School, April 8, 1970.

- I. To work with the Instructional Materials Center director in the Title II program.
- J. To work with students at all grade levels, one through eight, who were greatly in need of remedial help in reading.¹

Because the reading supervisor had so many responsibilities, he felt overburdened and limited as to the priorities that he could successfully carry out. Since he will be pursuing a doctorate, the reading supervisor resigned his position as of June 12, 1970.

An overview of the reading education situation in the District 10 Schools brought speculation by the present reading supervisor that there are perhaps several students in each classroom who possess very severe reading problems, reading at least two to three years below grade level, with a good possibility of at least an additional five students who would benefit from individual or small group work with a remedial reading teacher. Many of these students need daily help. In lieu of this speculation, he suggested that the district employ at a minimum one full time and one part time remedial reading teacher or, at best, a reading supervisor who would not be responsible for any teaching, and two full time remedial reading teachers. The reading supervisor's job should then consist of coordinating and implementing new reading programs in the district, ordering materials and keeping record of their location, communicating with the special services staff, and relating to the remedial reading teachers. A system using a one basal reader series, supplemented with many enrichment materials to fit the needs of all students, might be an appropriate program for the school district. The reading supervisor also

¹Ibid.

feels the need for more successful and profitable use of test results in the district.¹

District 10's testing program includes the administration of the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test in kindergarten, the Metropolitan Achievement Test in spring in grade one, the Metropolitan Achievement Test in fall and spring in grades two and three, the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in grades four through eight, the Otis-Lennon Test of Mental Ability in grades one and three, and the Lorge Thorndike Intelligence Test in grades five and seven. Classroom teachers administer all tests.

Individual reading tests are administered by the reading supervisor. Classroom teachers recommend students who are having reading difficulty.

Supervisory Aspect of Parent-School Relations

The parents of children attending District 10 Schools have limited involvement with the schools. Parent-teacher conferences are held every November with nearly all the parents responding to the conference notices. If the need arises because of an academic or behavioral problem, conferences are called by the teacher. Parents respond to these conferences very well. Each student takes home a report card four times during the school year. Each school in the district has its own Parent-Teacher Association, and there is a joint organization composed of parents from all schools in the district. Attendance at the bi-monthly meetings has been very poor.

¹Ibid.

Many parents do ask during the fall conferences for suggestions as to what they can do to help their children at home. Classroom teachers suggest ways that a child may be helped. This indicates that many parents do have an interest in their child's education.

In the fall of 1969, a new reading program was initiated in the first and second grades. The first grades were beginning a linguistic approach to reading, and the second grades were using programmed reading materials. Letters were sent to parents of the first and second grade children indicating that new reading programs were being initiated in grades one and two, and that these programs would be explained to interested parents at an afternoon meeting on a specified date in October. Because of the afternoon time, mostly mothers attended, but attendance was excellent and the audience was most interested in the new programs. The parents were so pleased and so enthusiastic about the meeting that they asked the reading supervisor to schedule monthly afternoon meetings to discuss various aspects of the curriculum. Due to more pressing responsibilities, these meetings never occurred. No other reading meeting with parents was scheduled during the remainder of the year.

The reading supervisor also has presented an overview of the school's reading program at various Parent-Teacher meetings held at the different schools. This was done mostly during the 1968-69 school year.

The remedial reading teacher employed from the fall of 1966 to June of 1968 attempted to carry on correspondence with the parents of children that she was working with through written reports. She did not have regular conferences scheduled during parent-teacher con-

ference days. Parents were free to drop in to discuss their child's progress with her if they wished. Very few parents did this.

The present reading supervisor worked with a small number of students. He feels that there needs to be better communications established between himself and the student's parents. In this way, the parents could follow up the reading supervisor's work with the student.¹

In early June, parents of primary children are given a bibliography of books that would be interesting to their children for summer reading. This list is prepared by the reading supervisor. The librarians also prepare a list of books for primary and elementary students.

A summer school remedial reading program has been carried on each summer during the past six years. The summer of 1970 was the first time that this remedial program was open to students of grades two and three. Previous to this time, enrollment was limited to grades four through eight, with grades five through seven having priority. Classroom teachers suggest those students who would benefit from a summer reading program. This is followed up by a letter to parents stating that the child's teacher has suggested that he be enrolled in the summer reading program. Parents must give their permission and provide their own transportation for the children to this summer reading session.

¹Ibid.

Development of a Parent Education Program

Many school systems focus their program for home-school communication and involvement on one or more of the following types of activities: parent-teacher conferences, open houses, reporting to parents, parent-teacher association, citizen-advisory committee, publicity releases, or budget information meetings. Some schools have added specific personnel to their staff, such as an assistant superintendent, a public relations director, or a social worker, whose main responsibility is the development of a closer relationship between the home and the school. All of these projects are commendable actions, but usually do not result in as much direct assimilation with the school's community as having a particular program established in a system.

One method that has been tried and used successfully in some school districts which could be of great value to parents of students in the Mequon schools is the involvement of parents through in-service programs in reading. This program should be designed to meet the needs of the specific parent groups and differentiated in terms of their children's reading and general school program.

Because evening meetings in Mequon have most often resulted in an extreme lack of interest on the part of the parents, afternoon meetings would probably be the key to success of the program. This would involve mostly mothers, although many fathers are able to arrange their work schedule in order to attend these meetings.

The first in-service meeting might possibly be held early in the school year for each individual grade level. During this first

session, a general overview of the reading program could be discussed. Materials that will be used in that particular grade level should be available for parents to handle. Perhaps having on hand the material used at the previous and following grade levels would also be beneficial for parents to see. Explanations of the relative merits of various materials could be made. Perhaps many parents would appreciate an explanation of the different approaches to teaching reading that are available. This could be accomplished at a separate meeting, and reading materials should also be available for the parents to read about the various methods.

The sequence of skill development in terms of levels or grades could be explored. The aims of the reading program should be introduced.

With the proper handling of this information, parents will leave this first meeting feeling more secure about their child's progress and more confident of the school's reading program. Hereafter, monthly or bi-monthly meetings should be established. Other topics for these meetings might include reading readiness and individualized development, grouping procedures used and why they are necessary, skills developed in a reading program, parent contributions to reading success, testing and reporting that is carried on in the reading program, and the use and analysis of supplementary reading materials.

Another very important aspect of the in-service programs for parents would be the presentation of demonstration reading lessons, the type that actually are carried on in the primary and elementary classroom. These demonstrations could involve the regular classroom

atmosphere moved into the gym with the reading materials on display. After this, perhaps the parents could play the part of the students, taking advantage of the opportunity to learn about reading along with their child.

If time and the budget permitted, slide sequences or movies of actual classroom reading situations could be organized by the reading supervisor and be presented to the parents, discussing with them the concepts being taught. This would have to be a clearly organized followup of what has already been discussed in the in-service meeting since there would be no actual sound presented with the lesson. Explanations by the classroom teacher or the reading supervisor would accompany the slides or movies.

A program of this nature, carried out for each grade level, would involve the concentration and organization of a full time reading supervisor, but it would serve to raise that invisible curtain that hangs between parent and school and would allow parents to understand that what goes on at school is not such a deep, dark secret after all. If parents are to take a keen interest in and contribute to the outcomes, and cooperate in the preparation for a school program, they must understand what it is and why it is that way.

Summary

Mequon, a community composed of over eleven thousand people, is located at the southern tip of Ozaukee County. The families of East Mequon make up Joint District 10 Schools, with a school population in 1970 of 1370 students. Parents in Mequon tend to take an active interest in their children's education, particularly in their

reading instruction.

There has never been concentrated help for children with reading problems at the primary level, and only limited help for students of the elementary level. Most reading difficulties are handled by the classroom teacher, with the help in the previous two years of a reading supervisor. District 10 needs to employ additional reading personnel to help with the reading difficulties of its students, both at the primary and the elementary levels, and to supervise classroom instruction in reading.

To get parents actively involved in their children's education, and to acquaint them with the school's reading program, a specific parent education program needs to be developed. One method of doing this would be to initiate monthly parent in-service meetings at which the various grade level reading programs would be presented to the parents. Direct involvement by the parents rather than only observation can lead to a better understanding of their child's progress in school, especially in reading.

Parent involvement is time consuming. Yet, many dividends can be expected of a program that is handled in a gradual, effective manner.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

Restatement of the Problem

The purpose of this investigation was to present in concise form the findings of outstanding specialists in the field of reading regarding the role of parents in the reading education program. Also included was a review of some of the major parent education programs undertaken by several of the larger school systems in the United States for the purpose of acquainting parents with the reading program in their child's school.

A brief study of the community of Mequon with which the writer was associated was also included, reviewing the socio-economic background, population growth pattern, and school growth pattern of the community. The writer attempted to associate this information with the role of the suburban parent in the reading education program.

Findings of Research

There seems to be much available information regarding the role of parents in the reading education of their children. Research appears to be limited pertaining to parent education programs presently being carried on by school systems in the United States.

Of the research that was included in this study, authors were unanimous in the following points:

1. Children learn to read at their own rate. There is no

timetable for learning.

2. The most beneficial activities that a parent can provide for the pre-school child are the activities associated with everyday life, doing things and going places, listening and speaking, taking part in family living and family sharing, whether these experiences are happy or sad.
3. Children need to see their parents and members of their families reading. There need to be books and magazines in the home from which the family members may choose.
4. When a child asks a question, he needs to be answered in an honest, matter-of-fact manner.
5. Children need to be part of a conversation. They need to be helped to express their ideas early in life.
6. Children need to be respected and need to learn to respect others.
7. A school reading program cannot be entirely successful without the assistance of parents, but parents need to be assisted in the role expected of them. Various methods including in-service meetings, classroom demonstration lessons, and informal meetings are available for helping parents learn what they can to help their child.
8. Parents need to take an active interest in school, its events, and its curriculum. Their children need to know that they are interested.
9. Schools need to take more responsibility in helping the public become aware of the school reading program.
10. Parents should be involved in as many situations as the

school will permit.

Implications and Conclusions

If children are to be successful readers, their reading education needs to begin before they enter school. Successful readers need to develop a good language background as a prerequisite to the reading process. Successful communication experiences during his pre-school years are extremely valuable to the child. Visits to the zoo, the doctor, the grocery store, the church--all help to create new experiences for the child. Parents can be instrumental in making these experiences meaningful to a child.

Schools need to involve parents in the total reading program. Parents are eager to help, but they do need guidance in order to know exactly how they can help. Educators need to accept the responsibility of explaining the school's reading program to the public.

Parent involvement is time-consuming. Yet many dividends can be expected if the various parent education programs are handled in a gradual, effective manner. Direct involvement by parents can lead to an appreciation of the daily problems and a better understanding of their own child's reading progress.

As parents and educators, the real commitment must be to the child, to the actualization of optimal achievement for him, to his right to be the most that he potentially could be. If parents and educators work together, this will become a reality.

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Michael Dunn, Reading Supervisor, Joint District #10 Public Schools, Mequon, Wisconsin, private interview held at Donges Bay School, April 8, 1970.

Harry Thompto, District Administrator, Joint District #10 Public Schools, Mequon, Wisconsin, private interview held at Donges Bay School, February 19, 1970.