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Abstract

Guiding children into the world of quality literature is one of the greatest gifts parents and teachers can give to their children. Enjoyment of a piece is the first purpose of literature. Literature develops imagination, offers vicarious experiences, and develops insight into human behavior. Through quality literature, one can respond to the universality of human conflict. Literature can constitute a curricular base as it provides models of language and exposure to the meanings provided by the various genres and offers natural connections between the comprehension/composition processes (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987).

Value of Reading Aloud to Children

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Guiding children into the world of quality literature is one of the greatest gifts parents and teachers can give to their children. Enjoyment of a piece is the first purpose of literature. Literature develops imagination, offers vicarious experiences, and develops insight into human behavior. Through quality literature, one can respond to the universality of human conflict. Literature can constitute a curricular base as it provides models of language and exposure to the meanings provided by the various genres and offers natural connections between the comprehension/composition processes (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987).

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to consider the value of reading aloud to children. Professional literature supporting this practice as part of the school instructional program and home life will be presented. From this review, implementation into a second grade classroom will be considered.

Review of Literature

A foremost proponent of reading aloud, Trelease (1989), sees reading literature works aloud as a means of inviting children to read. Trelease proposes that through reading aloud, teachers and librarians can nurture lifetime readers, not just schooltime readers. Once this appreciation of reading is established it will continue to be passed on from one generation to another,

affecting literacy levels, personal fulfillment, and participation in the culture.

Huck et al. (1987) also relate that teachers, modeling an appreciation of literature and introducing quality literature to their students through reading aloud, play a vital part in fostering students' desire to learn. They say that reading and discussing good books are ways to humanize children.

Hickman and Cullinan (1989) find that reading aloud sessions support teachers in promoting the aesthetic and personal values of literature and in nurturing a response-centered learning environment.

Developing an appreciation of literature and the reading process was once seen as a responsibility of the home. Due to the prevalence of television and the fast pace of contemporary life, the classroom now must provide the impetus. Teachers, through modeling in a read aloud session can convey to their students that reading holds a high priority in the classrooms (Hickman & Cullinan, 1989).

In *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985), the Commission on Reading placed a high value on reading aloud: "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for the eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (p. 23). Numerous studies have been done on the effect of reading aloud on children's emerging literacy. Studying young

readers, Chomsky (1972), Durkin (1966), and Teale (1978) concluded that rapid growth in reading and language development is enhanced by regular reading aloud. This activity nurtures children's literacy by supporting their abilities in all the aspects of language--listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Sandra McCormick (1977) reviewed many research studies on the value of reading aloud and concluded that it significantly improves children's vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension as well as affecting the child's quality of language development and reading interests. She points out that in the past such experiences were considered in the realms of the subjective and the aesthetic rather than for nurturing literacy. She summarizes her review by stating, "In this age of accountability, time spent reading aloud to children can be justified since the activity does promote measurable growth in achievement" (p. 143).

Studies in other countries also confirm the value of reading aloud. Studies by Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986), done in Israel, showed gains in students' comprehension and overall understanding of story schema. The impact of reading aloud affects their active use of language. In New Zealand, Elley's study (1989) indicated that oral story reading was a significant contributor to enhancing vocabulary acquisition.

Both Graves (1983) and Calkins (1986) stress the value of reading aloud as an important component in establishing classroom communities in which students and teachers are collaborating as learners.

Taylor and Strickland (1986) promote family reading aloud as a time when children and parents learn about each other, themselves, and the world they live in. Within the context of their family life, children are provided opportunities to develop language abilities in ways that are meaningful to them. Experiences with books help children amass a storehouse of information that will benefit them as they learn to read and write. Storybook reading helps children develop a sense of how stories are constructed and provides them with a reservoir of words whose meanings have been learned through repeated readings and discussions. From this experience, they are exposed to language patterns that are not usually a part of everyday speech. Also family storybook reading fosters the ability to listen for extended periods of time.

Wells (1986) conducted a longitudinal study following students from age fifteen months through the end of elementary school. He concluded that listening to stories read aloud in the home was the best predictor of school achievement.

Durkin (1966) found that home factors were more important than socioeconomic ones for children who read early. Parents

who demonstrated that reading was a source of contentment and relaxation provided a foundation for early readers.

Implementation Into a Classroom and Community Setting

Ways reading aloud experiences can be introduced into children's lives by parents, teachers, and others in the community will be presented.

Parents

The impact of parents reading aloud on a child's learning is poignantly shown in the Butler case study (1980) of Cushla Yeoman. The child in early infancy was diagnosed as mentally and physically retarded due to chromosome damage. Specialists advised the parents to institutionalize the child, but they chose another course of action: They put her on an intensive read aloud program. Her mother read to her in the course of taking care of her during many acute illnesses up to 14 books a day. By the time she was five years of age, Cushla was assessed to have above average intelligence.

In fostering literacy, Taylor and Strickland (1986) advise parents to discuss the stories they read together. Parents can provide informal ways of learning about print as they share stories and model reading and writing behavior.

At a young age children begin responding to literature read aloud to them. A special feeling toward books and reading

is developed as parents read to their child. Copperman (1986) suggests that the physical contact of sitting on the parent's lap deepens the parent/child bond. Reading aloud becomes an expression of love and security that carries over in a positive feeling toward books.

Barton (1986) offers parents and teachers practical suggestions for reading aloud sessions to young children. Selecting an appropriate story and setting the stage carefully before reading commences will enhance the literature experience. Single sitting books are common but one should not overlook the use of excerpts from longer works, serialization, and poetry. Practicing the story aloud will help the reader convey the natural rhythm of the story and select a sensitive interpretation. The reader can bring the experiences, ideas, and characters of the story to life by visualizing the characters within the actions of the story. The reader can prune the story a bit by passing over some unimportant details and shortening lengthy passages to match the developmental level of the children.

Daly, Freitag, Ouellette, Porell, and Steimel (1987) have compiled a guide for parents, Clues About Reading Enrichment (C.A.R.E.), that gives suggestions for developing a language-rich home environment. In reading aloud to children, Daly et al. suggest that a wide variety of reading materials

need to be presented. Interesting bits of information from newspapers and magazines of interest to children can spur the desire to know more.

Teachers

Studies show that teachers can heighten emerging literacy when they continue to read to students daily. As Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) state: "There is no substitute for a teacher who reads children good stories. It whets the appetite of children for reading and provides a model of skillful oral reading. It is a practice that should continue throughout the grades" (p. 51). Sharing literature provides students a model of writing techniques used by successful authors. Teachers can share quality literature representing specific literary elements to encourage students to use them in their own writing.

Teachers should begin reading to students on the very first day of school and continue reading daily on several occasions. Trelease (1989) discusses the value of reading aloud experiences in school programs. He says, "When children love books, it ripples through every part of the curriculum," (p. 35). Benefits that come from reading aloud help develop the entire curriculum.

Friedberg and Strong (1989) encourage daily reading aloud as a way to keep children interested in books and to kindle

their desire to read on their own. The teacher then plays the role of the reading facilitator. Reading aloud can be the springboard for further independent or partner reading and expressive activity--drama, writing, or art.

Trelease (1989) offers many techniques to teachers on reading aloud to their students: It is important to preview a book before reading it to children. By so doing, the teacher can discover the parts of the story that need to be shortened, eliminated, or elaborated upon. Sometimes stories, or parts of stories, need to be practiced aloud to allow for ease in the flow of the language patterns and to extend the interpretation of the meaning. In preparing to read poetry, it always needs to be read aloud to capitalize on the sound of the language and the unique meanings.

While reading aloud, the emotion in the story needs to be relayed. The rate of reading needs to be adjusted to the ideas being conveyed and for the audience's enjoyment.

Sharing information about the author in the read aloud period stresses that writers are real people responding to real needs and interests. Authors can serve as genuine models for young writers.

Allowing time for discussion after reading aloud encourages a comprehension-composition connection. Quality literature can promote discoveries that can help children make connections

with their own lives and with the real world. Also sharing ideas generated during a read aloud session can build a community of learners and can form a basis for much collaborative dialogue.

Routman (1988) suggests as the teacher reads, elements of reading language can be pointed out as a natural part of the process. Quality pieces lend themselves to discussing character development, foreshadowing in the plot, setting description, effective use of dialogue, and the author's consideration for the intended audience. Occasionally the teacher can encourage children to predict actions in the plot and then check on the outcomes, thus encouraging attention to the reading experience.

Trelease (1989) encourages teachers to allow time for follow-up discussion after reading aloud to extend the value of the literature experience. Friedberg and Strong (1989), supported by Wells (1986), ascertain that the talk that accompanies read aloud sessions can be collaborative in nature, allowing students to extend and enrich their lives. Children develop larger vocabularies as they use the story's context to discover the meaning of new words and to learn additional meanings for familiar words. Teachers can guide discussion so that students can relate their real life experiences to literature. Links like these make stories and poems more memorable. Read aloud sessions provide children the opportunity

to make connections with other poems and stories. As Yolen (1981) proposes, this helps children build a frame of reference for the literature they will continue to encounter. Yolen's phrase "stories lean on stories" indicates how these literary references and connections can help foster the child's literacy development.

Reading (and being read to) and responding are active processes fitting in with the need children have to be active learners. Students listening to stories are actively creating their own meaning as they predict, interpret, make connections, and reflect. The words they hear are the cues offered by the writer, but as Rosenblatt (1978) proposes, the listener has to bring his/her own experiences and personal knowledge to the experience in order to reach true comprehension.

The value of the read aloud experience can be extended through opportunities to retell stories. Brown and Cambourne (1987) have devised a retelling procedure that uses all four common forms of language behavior (reading, writing, talking, listening) in ways that mutually support and develop each other. Using these strategies, students not only focus on meaning, but recreate meaning and then discuss and reflect on these newly created meanings. Of the four general forms and two sub-categories of the retelling procedure, the ones most useful in a read aloud session would be the oral-to-oral-retelling, the

oral-to-written-retelling, and the oral-to-drawing-retelling. Using this technique, the child first listens to the teacher read the text aloud and then retells it through speaking, writing, or illustrating. In this retelling procedure, the reading aloud by the teacher is an important component as the children are receiving demonstrations on how the text sounds by an expert reader, thereby adding to their linguistic data pools.

Harms and Lettow (1992) offer numerous suggestions of ways to retell a story. Stories can be retold through illustrating, such as designing book jackets, filmstrips, mapmaking, dioramas, transparencies, and puppets. Written retellings can take the form of rebus stories, telegrams, riddles, letters from a character or to one, and newspaper articles. Oral retellings can be accompanied by feltboard pieces and sound effects. They can take the form of dialogues, monologues, and group storytelling. Students can sell books by giving booktalks, making broadcasts on tape or using the intercom, or composing advertisements. Stories can be retold through acting with costumes. The class can engage in narrative pantomime by responding through bodily movements to the action in the story as it is read or retold.

Reading response journals are another way in which students can react to what is being read aloud. Fulwiler (1982) and Atwell (1987) suggest that reading response journals can be used

to foster students' critical thinking skills as they make predictions, comment on character development, make connections with other literary works or their own experiences and note an author's technique. Following journal writing, students can be encouraged to voluntarily share their comments. As a result of this reflecting and sharing, the community of learners will be strengthened, as classmates begin to value one another's comments. When students are reassured that there are no right or wrong answers, they are more willing to take risks in sharing their thoughts.

Literary letters are another way that teachers and students can dialogue about reading aloud. The student writes a letter to the teacher expressing ideas and feelings about the selection. Students can include their reactions to the characters or plot as well as comments on the author's style. The teacher then responds to the student's comments in a letter.

Community

As Iowa continues to work toward world class schools, the need to reach parents of young children long before they come to school becomes apparent. Watt (1989) advises that obstetricians, pediatricians, clinics, prenatal classes, and young mothers' groups can be powerful sources of information stressing the value of reading aloud. Secondary caretakers need education

about reading aloud as many children spend much of their preschool time in such facilities.

Research done by Cohen (1968), Bailey (1970), Chomsky (1972), and Teale (1978) show that reading aloud to children of low socioeconomic status has great impact on their comprehension and vocabulary development. This research should be taken seriously, and a concentrated effort needs to be made to reach these parents through social service programs such as parenting classes and home intervention programs.

Story hours by public libraries provide reading aloud experiences to children of all ages. Knowledgeable librarians can be invaluable resources for parents and teachers in helping to select suitable reading aloud materials.

Summary

Reading aloud to children builds a body of shared literature that is pertinent to the development of a community of readers and writers. As part of this literary community, parents/children and teachers/students can learn from each other and share the joy that literature brings to their lives. The result of this interaction in children's lives is the nurturing of their emerging literacy.

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