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Parents nurturing literacy through literature experiences

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Parents nurturing literacy through literature experiences

Abstract

Parents as their children's first teachers play a significant role in nurturing their literacy. Children who come from home environments in which they have frequent and varied experiences with print material and observe adults interacting with print material for their own purpose usually achieve literacy with ease. Parents who present literature experiences through read aloud sessions to their young children not only extend their conceptual development, sense of story, and knowledge of print, but model an appreciation of language. Picture books, specifically nursery rhymes, alphabet books, predictable texts, books with little or no text, and concept books, can nurture children's emerging literacy. These literature experiences can provide children opportunities to predict the author's message and to share their constructs created through viewing, listening, and reading experiences.

Parents Nurturing Literacy
Through Literature Experiences

A Graduate Project
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by
Leslie K. Titler

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Abstract

Parents as their children's first teachers play a significant role in nurturing their literacy. Children who come from home environments in which they have frequent and varied experiences with print material and observe adults interacting with print material for their own purpose usually achieve literacy with ease.

Parents who present literature experiences through read aloud sessions to their young children not only extend their conceptual development, sense of story, and knowledge of print, but model an appreciation of language. Picture books, specifically nursery rhymes, alphabet books, predictable texts, books with little or no text, and concept books, can nurture children's emerging literacy. These literature experiences can provide children opportunities to predict the author's message and to share their constructs created through viewing, listening, and reading experiences.

Parents as their children's first teachers are in a special position to support their emergent literacy because this development is the result of children's numerous and varied experiences with print from birth (Strickland & Morrow, 1989; Taylor, 1983). The role of parents as partners in children's emergent literacy is not a new concept. In 1862, Tolstoy wrote about the rational teaching of reading as being similar to that of a mother reading with her child. In 1908, Edmond Huey reaffirmed that belief when he expressed the opinion that "the secret of it all lies in parents' reading aloud to and with their children" (cited in Taylor, 1983, p. 97).

Children who come from home environments where books are available to them, where they have been read to frequently, and where they see adults interacting with print material for their own purposes usually learn to read (Taylor, 1983). Unfortunately, not all children enter school with the same awareness and knowledge about written language.

For parents to be effective partners in their children's literacy, they need to recognize the significance of their role and to understand effective strategies to use in daily life that will foster emergent literacy. Parents need to become aware of the transactions that will facilitate the process of emergent literacy, the interaction of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and the unique functions of literature.

Literature experiences provide children with opportunities to construct meaning based on their prior experience as well as occasions to share these constructs with others. These experiences can supply information and raise questions that contribute to intellectual growth. Experiences with literature can stimulate the imagination and enable children to view situations, people and concepts in many ways (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993).

Experiences with picture books can enable parents to assist children not only in their language development, but also in other areas of growth--personal-social, intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic. Nursery rhymes, alphabet books, predictable books, books with little or no text, and concept books particularly facilitate children's awareness of language patterns and nurture children's emergent literacy (Huck et al., 1993).

What Parents Need to Know About Emergent Literacy Cognitive Development

For parents to become effective partners in their children's emerging literacy, they need to understand their children's thinking and language responses. Children are natural learners who are eager to understand their world. They construct knowledge by observing and experimenting to create their own theory of the world, or schematas. These schematas are

continually modified as children create meaning from their experiences. Children's questioning, testing, and evaluating of information lead to more sophisticated thinking-language abilities (Holt, 1989; Smith, 1994).

Oral Language Development

A learning partnership between parents and their children develops from infancy (Holt, 1989). It begins with parents and other caring individuals talking to infants because it seems natural to do so. Adults do not talk to infants to provide a model for speech but to share ideas with them. Adults respond through language for infants until they are able to make their own responses (Smith, 1994).

By hearing speech all around them, young children get ready to speak (Jett-Simpson, 1984). They soon learn that language has a purpose. By listening to the language of others, children begin to realize that some of the purposes for language include: sharing information, discussing issues, and even disagreeing. As a result, they learn that it is a process worth engaging in (Holt, 1989).

Parents can supply significant support for their children as their language emerges, for children's language is strongly influenced by the language they hear (Cullinan, 1989). Children experiment with aspects of parents' speaking patterns, such as dialect, rhythm, and intonation. Through conversing with others,

children also experiment with language and as a result construct language rules (Jett-Simpson, 1984).

According to Piaget, young children acquire language in association with their activities. Piaget believes that all learning, not just language, occurs as a result of activity and interaction (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). For example, exposure to literature experiences enhances children's verbal development. Parents reading aloud to their children can encourage them to respond to the ideas presented, thus stimulating language growth. Poetry, rhymes, songs, and participation stories help to immerse children in related language activities. These works have language that is repetitive and predictable so children are able to become part of the activity (Huck et al., 1993).

Reading Development

Children's oral language experiences and a print-rich environment greatly facilitate young children's emerging reading ability (Smith, 1994). Just as children surrounded with language learn to speak, they need to be exposed to print in order to learn to read (Holt, 1989; Smith, 1994). Early readers come from homes in which literacy is a functional component. In these homes, reading to create meaning is a natural part of daily activity (Taylor, 1983). These interactions take many forms and give children different insights into the world of print.

Parents reading aloud quality pieces of literature to their children promote a sense of story or the schema for the structure of a story. This understanding is a key element in reading because it enhances children's ability to predict. This ability gives readers the capacity to anticipate the meaning of the text and the language that represents it (Smith, 1994).

Each rereading of a story contributes to children's theory of language. As children listen to repeated readings of a story, they gain new information that merges with what they already know. Also, rereading helps to verify information previously received (Holt, 1989). Young children who have heard their favorite book reread several times will retell the story in its correct sequence using many phrases of the story. While they are retelling the story in their own words, they rarely change the author's overall meaning (Holt, 1989).

Many parents have noticed that after rereading a favorite story several times, children are reading with them or can read the selection without them. Children learn to read by attending to written language while hearing it (Holt, 1989; Taylor, 1983).

By listening to stories and interacting with them, children gain many concepts of print. They learn where to begin reading on a page, how to move through the text (the directionality of print), what constitutes a word, and how to match spoken words to printed ones (the one-to-one correspondence) (Huck, 1992; Hill,

1989). Awareness that words are individual units does not occur spontaneously. By pointing to words as a story is read, children develop this awareness (Adams, 1990).

What Parents Need to Know About Literature to Foster Emergent Literacy

Nursery Rhymes

Children's first exposure to literature is often to nursery rhymes which include Mother Goose verses. These short units of literature appeal to young children who tend to have limited attention spans and a desire to respond overtly to the elements of a story. Children enjoy listening and responding verbally and kinesthetically to nursery rhymes. The rhythm of nursery rhymes appeals to young children. As children recite them, their patterns become part of children's oral language. Nursery rhymes can advance children's language development as well as provide interactions with literature (Emans, 1978).

As children listen to nursery rhymes and eventually memorize them, they are learning to hear similarities and differences in the sounds of language. They also begin to experiment by saying combinations of real and nonsense rhyming words (Jett-Simpson, 1984).

These brief stories introduce children to a variety of literary elements. Nursery rhymes often have interesting and

memorable characters, such as those depicted in the popular Mother Goose rhyme, "Hey Diddle Diddle." Sometimes, the concept of setting is presented in unusual ways, such as the shoe as a home in "The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe" and the pumpkin shell that was home for Peter Pumpkin Eater's wife (Lukens, 1990).

Eventually, these experiences with nursery rhymes serve as a connection between oral and written language; for a significant relationship exists between phonological awareness and learning to read. The more aware children are of the component sounds in words, the more likely they will be successful in reading (Adams, 1990; Maclean, Bryant, & Bradley, 1987). The ability to recognize and produce rhyme is an example of phonological ability (Maclean et al., 1987). There is a strong correlation between children's knowledge of nursery rhymes and phonological ability that fosters and supports emergent literacy (Adams, 1990).

Nursery rhyme books can be timeless, and personal preference tends to be the guide for the selection of a collection (Huck et al., 1993). However, the sound of the language is a crucial factor in selecting a collection. The verses should contain strong poetic language which will captivate young children's attention (Cullinan, 1989).

This selected list of nursery rhymes represent quality pieces:

de Paola, Tomie, Illus. (1985). Tomie de Paola's Mother Goose. New York: Putnam. A large collection of rhymes illustrated with bright, bold colors. Characters of many races are included in the illustrations.

de Paola, Tomie, Illus. (1985). Hey Diddle, Diddle & Other Mother Goose Rhymes. New York: Putnam. Simple, eye catching artwork with whimsical touches. This book is also available in a big book format for large group presentation. This work is a small compilation of his larger collection.

Eisen, Armand, Editor (1988). The Classic Mother Goose. Philadelphia, PA: Courage Books. A collection of classic Mother Goose rhymes, illustrated by eight illustrators on large pages. The illustrations offer a variety of styles to amplify the text.

Geeson, Andrew, Illus. (1994). Mother Goose Picture Rhymes. New York: Derrydale Books. Classic Mother Goose rhymes written in a rebus style offering potential for interactive experiences with young children.

Offen, Hilda, Illus. (1992). My First Book of Nursery Rhymes. London: Grisewood and Dempsey, Ltd. Nursery rhymes are categorized into sections: lullabies, baby games, first songs, learning rhymes, story rhymes, rhymes and riddles.

Polacco, Patricia. (1995). Babushka's Mother Goose. New York: Philomel Books. A collection of traditional rhymes, many from Polacco's Russian heritage.

Alphabet Books

These books present the letters of the alphabet in a sequence. They are usually focused on a specific concept or theme, thus they can be characterized as mini reference works (Chaney, 1993). Alphabet books can be fiction or nonfiction and are written in narrative, expository, or poetic styles. Both upper case and lower case letters or only a single form of letters may be used (Jett-Simpson, 1984). They can also be

categorized by their patterns of language: accumulation, alliteration, repetition, rhyme, refrains, letter-object-word arrangement, or word association. Each of these patterns can foster different types of responses from children (Roberts, 1987). Illustrations are also a significant feature of alphabet books because they amplify the simple text (Chaney, 1993).

Through experiences with alphabet books, children are able to attend to object identification, letter identification, and letter-to-sound correspondence, as well as concepts. They also provide opportunities to develop new vocabulary, understand new concepts, recognize and match upper and lower case letters, and become familiar with letter-sound relationships (Jett-Simpson, 1984).

A selected list of alphabet books is presented below:

Narrative Alphabet Books

Aylesworth, Jim (1992). Old Black Fly. New York: Henry Holt. Rhyming text and illustrations take a mischievous old black fly through the alphabet as he has a very bad day landing where he should not be.

Martin, Bill (1989). Chicka Chicka Boom Boom. New York: Simon & Schuster. Packed with rhythm and rhyme, this alphabet story personifies the letters of the alphabet as they try to climb to the top of a coconut tree.

Alphabet Books with Alliteration

Bayer, Jane (1984). A My Name is Alice. New York: Penguin Books. This playground game presents names, places, and items to sell for each letter of the alphabet.

Letter-Object Alphabet Books

Duke, Katie (1983). The Guinea Pig ABC. New York: Penguin Books. Illustrations depict adjectives matched with upper case letters.

Ehlert, Lois (1989). Eating the Alphabet. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, Inc. A colorful selection of fruits and vegetables is presented in alphabetical order.

Kitamura, Satoshi (1992). from ACORN to ZOO. New York: Trumpet Club. Each letter is presented with an illustration containing many objects that begin with the same letter. Each page presents a question related to the illustration that brings the reader back to the illustration to note more details.

Expository Alphabet Books

Pallotta, Jerry (1986). The Icky Bug Alphabet Book. New York: Trumpet Club. The characteristics and activities of insects from A to Z are introduced.

Pallotta, Jerry (1989). The Yucky Reptile Alphabet Book. New York: Trumpet Club. The characteristics and activities of reptiles from A to Z are presented.

Pallotta, Jerry (1991). The Underwater Alphabet Book. New York: Trumpet Club. This book takes the audience underwater to explore the coral reef and its creatures.

Pallotta, Jerry (1993). The Extinct Alphabet Book. New York: Trumpet Club. From A to Z, interesting facts and information are presented about creatures that no longer exist in our world.

Predictable Texts

Repetition of words, phrases, sentences, refrains, and rhymes assist in conveying the messages of predictable books. The structure of these works may be cumulative, sequential, cyclical, or repeated text (Jett-Simpson, 1984). Many predictable stories are built around familiar sequences in children's lives, such as

the days of the week, months of the year, or number concepts. With the familiar structure and content of predictable books, children can grasp the direction of the story more easily and then can predict what will come next, thus nurturing their comprehension abilities (Goodman, 1986).

The structure of predictable books encourages children to join in the reading process (Jett-Simpson, 1984). This positive interaction with text indicates to children that they are capable of reading (Walton, 1989). A selected list of different types of predictable texts is presented below:

Predictable Books With Repetitive Words and Phrases or Story Patterns

Fox, Mem (1993). Time For Bed. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. A rhyming bedtime story that gently calls each character to sleep for the night.

Guarino, Deborah (1989). Is Your Mama a Llama? New York: Scholastic. Lloyd, the llama, meets many different animals as he asks his question. As each animal explains characteristics of their mother, children are able to predict the type of animal that is being described.

Lindbergh, Reeve (1990). The Day the Goose Got Loose. New York: Dial. A rhyming narrative tells about a series of problems that happened the day the goose got loose.

Martin, Bill (1967). Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? New York: Henry Holt & Company. A rhyming story in which children see different animals, each one of a different color with a teacher looking at each one.

Martin, Bill (1991). Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear? New York: Henry Holt & Company. Zoo animals from the polar bear to the walrus make their distinctive sounds for each other while children imitate the sounds for the zookeeper.

Predictable Books With a Cumulative Story Pattern

Fox, Mem (1986). Hattie and the Fox. New York: Bradbury Press. Hattie, the hen, spots danger which is unimportant to her friends as they voice their opinions. The surprise ending will delight young children.

Galdone, Paul (1975). The Gingerbread Man. New York: Clarion Books. In this folk tale, the gingerbread man eludes the hungry grasp of everyone he meets until a fox outwits him.

Neitzel, Shirley (1989). The Jacket I Wear in the Snow. New York: Greenwillow. Getting ready to play in the snow is always a big task for children. Children will easily identify with this rebus story describing the task of dressing for the cold of winter.

Silverman, Erica (1992). Big Pumpkin. New York: Scholastic. Written with a strong sense of rhyme and rhythm, this story tells a witch's desire for pumpkin pie which is thwarted by an enormous pumpkin that has grown too big to be plucked from the vine.

Wood, Audrey (1984). The Napping House. New York: Harcourt. In this cumulative tale, a number of images collect on a bed to sleep, and then a wakeful flea with one bite causes them to awaken.

Works with Little or No Text

For the most part, these stories are told through their illustrations. Books with little or no text provide children with opportunities to attend visually to the structure of a story (Lukens, 1990; Jett-Simpson, 1984). By attending to the sequence of ideas presented through the illustrations, children's comprehension abilities are fostered. In a sense, children become the author for the text (Huck et al., 1993; Jett-Simpson, 1984).

Picture books with little or no text also provide an opportunity for children to engage in oral language activity. In retelling the story, they can focus on the major elements while constructing their own meaning. This activity allows them to interpret the actions, feelings, and thoughts of characters. As children become more familiar with the elements of the story, their retelling will include details, cause and effect relationship, and inferences about the outcome of the character's actions (Jett-Simpson, 1984).

This selected list of works with little or no text represents quality pieces:

Carle, Eric (1971). Do You Want To Be My Friend? New York: HarperCollins. A mouse searches everywhere for a friend. Each page foreshadows the next character the little mouse will meet.

Carle, Eric (1982). One, Two, Three to the Zoo. New York: Philomel Books. Each car on the train has one more zoo animal than the one before. This wordless book draws the audience into a story as well as presenting number concepts.

Day, Alexandra (1985). Good Dog Carl. New York: Scholastic. A rottweiler, named Carl, is left to take care of the baby. They have a series of adventures and mishaps in the house but manage to clean everything up before the mother returns, none the wiser about their adventures.

Dupasquier, Philippe (1987). Our House on the Hill. New York: Puffin. The months of the year and seasonal changes are presented through the lives of the family who live on the hill.

Hutchins, Pat (1968). Rosie's Walk. New York: Macmillan. Rosie, the hen, goes for a walk unaware that she is being

followed by a hungry fox. Without knowing it, she is able to prevent the fox from eating her.

Spier, Peter (1977). Noah's Ark. New York: Doubleday. The pilgrimage of the animals onto the ark and their long wait for the rain to stop is artfully told through pictures.

Concept Books

These books are also significant to the development of literacy. They differ from other picture books because their purpose is to present a concept rather than to tell a story. Concept books can extend children's vocabularies and enlarge children's understanding of the world by presenting relationships and similarities and differences among ideas and abstract concepts (Huck et al., 1993). Important concepts for children, such as numbers, colors, days of the week, sizes, shapes and opposites are presented in these informational works (Jett-Simpson, 1984).

Some examples of concept books are given below:

Books Presenting the Concept of Number

Ehlert, Lois (1990). Fish Eyes: A Book You Can Count On. New York: Harcourt Brace. A rhymed text illustrated with a brightly colored fish explores counting and addition concepts.

Sloat, Teri (1991). From One To One Hundred. New York: Puffin Unicorn. Each illustration for a specific number concept contains the given number of images represented by several different objects. At the bottom of the page, rebus pictures indicate the objects presented on the page.

Wise, William (1993). Ten Sly Piranhas. New York: Scholastic. A rhyming, counting story in reverse about

cunning piranhas wicked enough to eat unsuspecting members of their group.

Books Presenting the Concept of Color

Ehlert, Lois (1988). Planting a Rainbow. New York: Trumpet Club. Using bright, bold illustrations, the sequential steps to planting a garden are presented. Color concepts are introduced through the specific varieties of flowers planted in the garden.

Hoban, Tana (1989). Of Colors and Things. New York: Greenwillow. Photographs of items, such as toys, food, and other common objects, are presented.

Peek, Merle (1985). Mary Wore Her Red Dress. New York: Clarion. Based on a Texas folk song, color is introduced by describing the color of clothing each guest wears to a birthday party.

Books Presenting the Concept of Size

Kalan, Robert (1979). Blue Sea. New York: Trumpet Club. The simple text tells the story of a little fish's escape from a bigger fish using size comparison labels for each fish within an illustration.

Wylie, Joanne (1983). A Big Fish Story: Learning About Size. New York: Children's Press. As the narrator describes the fish he has caught, it becomes larger in size.

Books Presenting the Concept of Shape

Ehlert, Lois (1989). Color Zoo. New York: Harper & Row. Cutouts in pages of bright colors depict basic shapes that form individual zoo animals. This book provides visual and tactile experiences.

Knightley, Rosalinda (1988). Shapes. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Company. An image of a single shape is presented on a page. On the opposite side of the page spread, several examples of the shape are incorporated into the illustration.

Books Presenting the Concept of Opposites

Hoban, Tana (1990). Exactly the Opposite. New York: Trumpet Club. Colored photographs show opposite relationships.

Knightley, Rosalinda (1986). Opposites. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Company. On each page spread, the left side presents an illustration labeled with a single word. On the opposite page, a similar picture is presented depicting an opposite concept.

McMillan, Bruce (1983). Here A Chick, There A Chick. New York: William Morrow & Company. Colored photographs showing the hatching and development of yellow chicks are used to illustrate the concept of opposite relationships.

Summary

Parents as their children's first teachers are in a special position to pass on the pleasures and functions of language. Children value and model what they experience in their homes. By sharing a variety of books with children and providing interactive activities, parents can enhance their children's emergent literacy, concept development and intellectual ability. There is strong evidence that perhaps literacy emerges only after children have shared stories and experienced reading and writing as intrinsic cultural activities.

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