

Reading to Children in the Home Environment

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Abstract: Time spent reading with children is one of the most impactful activities a parent or guardian can be doing. Professionals in the field of education are in the position to guide guardians towards creating a literacy-rich home environment. By doing so, educators are assisting guardians in setting their child up for the most success in life. Educators can host parent/guardian nights, develop classroom libraries, and use additional community resources to support parents or guardians in developing a literacy rich home environment. By building this bridge for parents and guardians, educators are able to ensure all students reach their greatest potential. Reading to children in the home environment can impact students' chances of becoming successful in more ways than one.

Introduction

Partnerships in education between the home and school foster student growth mindset. Within the world of language arts instruction, there have been countless research studies done on effective tools for educators. Each of the tools educators use has been proven as an effective method for student growth. However, not nearly enough information is widely shared on how a student's home life can be used to benefit their growth in life. In 1929, Whitehead stated, "Education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge." If the end goal of education is for our students to use the material we are teaching them, then we must begin exposing them to literacy as early as possible. As an educator that has made the jump into parenthood, I have found my toddler to be extremely impressionable. We, as educators, are responsible for encouraging parents to create a literacy rich home environment. There are many ways educators can support parents and guardians with transitioning their home into a literacy-rich playground for their children. In doing so, they are setting up their child to have the highest chances of becoming successful.

When educators show parents and guardians the windows that begin to open with literacy-fluent children, we can begin to build a society of successful citizens who effectively use their knowledge for the betterment of their community. With this being the long-term goal of all educators, it makes the most sense to begin this process with the end in mind. We must jump headfirst into changing the world through standing tall on our platform as educators and show parents and guardians the impact of reading daily with children. By doing this, we are beginning to build each child's foundation of becoming a lifelong learner and successful active citizen in their community.

A Vignette: The Paraprofessional

A few years ago, I worked with a young paraprofessional. She was 19 years old at the time, and she just found out she was with child. Initially she was overwhelmed with joy, fear, happiness, sadness, and confusion about parenting. One day she came to me asking

about how she can give her daughter the best life possible. With such a heavy question being presented, I asked for some time to think about my answer.

The next few days we talked in-depth about education. We unpacked several of the learning standards in the kindergarten curriculum, and in doing so, we came to the final conclusion that preschoolers need to have exposure to literacy before kindergarten to be successful in kindergarten. Over time our discussions turned to how, as a parent, she could set her daughter up for the most success. As our conversations continued, she revealed she and her partner both struggled with reading. The act of reading was not enjoyable for either of them, and it had been years since either had picked up a book to read for leisure. These facts intrigued the educator in me. I remember thinking, "What? Years since reading a book!" The educator in me began explaining nearly every day how important reading was for her to do with her daughter coming into the world. The paraprofessional was intrigued with how reading with a baby, toddler, and preschooler could have such an impact on a child. Throughout the next few years, collaboratively we read, we learned, and we developed supports for the parents and guardians of the children we worked with.

Home Environment and Impact

According to Schellman (2016), parenting over socioeconomic status continues to be the most important factor in early childhood capital formation. Shellman researched for several years the impact of parent involvement across a variety of nations compared to the countries' socioeconomic status. His work has reinforced the commonly accepted notion here in the United States of parental involvement being of the utmost importance in a child's life and development.

A recent study published by The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) concluded there is a role of noncognitive factors in students' success later in life (Farrington et al., 2012). This study looked at how academic behaviors, academic perseverance, academic mindsets, learning strategies, and social skills affected students later in life. The study revealed how each of these five pillars may give students advantages over others. All five pillars directly relate back to reading in the home environment.

Academic behaviors are modeled and directly taught when parents and guardians read with their child. These behaviors include sustained attention, intrinsic motivation, cooperation, active listening, and countless others. Mastery of academic behaviors leads to increased time available for learning in a formal school setting. Parents and guardians have the ability to teach this simple skill of academic behaviors at home prior to formal schooling by actively reading with their child daily.

Academic perseverance can also be taught and modeled daily by parents and guardians. Children learn directly by watching those in their environment. When parents and guardians are able to model academic perseverance through exposing their child to literacy outlets early on in life, they are building a foundation of academic stamina that will continue to grow over time. Exposing children to books, concepts of print, and read alouds impacts a student's early literacy skills. By engaging in these literacy activities daily with children, parents and guardians are able

to persevere through perhaps challenges they face in the area of literacy. Through modeling parents and guardians are directly teaching children perseverance. For parents and guardians who struggle with reading, instilling in their child academic perseverance may be a critical element they did not receive when they were younger. Children need to see how parents and guardians can have strengths and weaknesses in learning too. I encourage parents and guardians to normalize deficits, learning, growing, and not idolizing perfection. This can be done by reading with children on topics of academic perseverance and can be modeled by persevering themselves. Children all around learn by imitating what they see. Encouraging academic perseverance can be done by reading with children.

Creating a home rich with literacy activities not only creates and models academic behaviors and builds academic perseverance, but it also sets the framework for an academic mindset. This academic mindset might be one of the most important factors in creating a literacy rich home. The development of an inquiring mind begins with this first teaching practice of reading with children. Through reading with children, parents and guardians are able to lay a literacy foundation and the framework for an academic mindset. An academic mindset is established when children begin to connect printed words with meaning and literature with purpose. By beginning this at home with young children, parents and guardians are able to set their children up on a path towards becoming an active, involved, and successful citizen.

Learning strategies are also modeled and taught through the partnership of reading a book with a child. Adults in the home can easily teach a child to listen to a story, engage in a conversation on a topic, retell a story, and discuss feelings of characters all by reading them a book. Teaching by modeling these strategies prior to school will lay the groundwork for the kindergarten student to be successful. The Kindergarten Standard R.L. 2 states: "With prompting and support, retell familiar stories including key details" (Ohio's Learning Standards, 2021). By exposing children to this earlier on than kindergarten, children will not be learning how to retell in kindergarten children will be learning how to retell with detail, with emphasis, voice, and expression. Teaching the simple skill of retelling in advance of formal schooling by reading with a child daily, can encourage and foster an endless love for literacy and learning.

Social skills develop when there is time to discuss a book at length with a fluent reader and modeling further discussion. When engaging in this social instruction, parents and guardians are modeling, teaching, and guiding children how to ask and answer questions. Having an informal guided setting like this teaches children the necessary academic behaviors and strategies to have a social conversation about a topic. Developmentally, it is most appropriate to do this type of informal teaching through a shared learning experience such as reading a book with a child.

In the article *The Importance of Storybook Reading to Emergent Literacy: A Review of Research* by Rae Lynn McCarthy (1995), she discusses the importance of reading to children at an early age. It is not just reading to children but rather in homes where parents and guardians read to children often, they also have the ability to expose their children to multiple writing and reading outlets. For example, chalkboards, painting, movies, songs, and books all were found for children in these types of homes. Parents and guardians in this environment made literacy exposure

a priority, whether intentionally or not, it became one in their home. Reading to children is important, however, giving them additional outlets to be exposed to literacy is also important for growth and development (McCarthy, 1995). Reading with children and exposing them to literacy in the home environment is of the utmost importance. By doing so parents are providing their child with the highest chances of success. Exposing children to literacy in the home is the non-cognitive factor all parents in the 21-st century should be doing with their children.

Classroom Libraries

For some students, the books they come in contact with during the school day may be the only books they see for the day. Setting up a classroom library for your students to take books home is a must-do in today's world. Educators can create a weekly exchange system or bi-weekly system for the students to select books to be brought home. With Covid-19 restrictions, I have found using disposable books from Reading A-Z to be the best option. A teacher can easily print them off, send them home, and then discard them if needed. Creating a weekly book exchange has been extremely beneficial in increasing students' engagement with text and fluency. Providing students that extra time with books outside of school can help establish the non-cognitive pillars for success.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly Parton has leveled the playing field for countless children who previously might not have access to high-quality literature. Dolly is not just an unbelievable artist, she is a trailblazer in the field of literacy. In 1995, she created the Imagination Library. Her original goal was to “foster a love of reading among her county's preschool children and their families” (The Dollywood Foundation, 2020). Dolly set out on a mission to deliver specially selected books to each child each month. As of March 2021, Dolly's program is distributing books to children nationwide in the United States of America. Currently they are distributing more than 1 million books per month to children in need (The Dollywood Foundation [TDF], 2020). International growth began in 2006 with adding distribution to Canada. Since then, the program has expanded to Australia, The United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland. All parents or guardians can receive a free book for their child each month through this program. Parents and guardians can begin to create a literacy rich home environment through programs like this and classroom libraries. Educators must take on the part of responsibility of showing parents and guardians how their home environment can impact their children.

School Wide Book Drives

An additional strategy for educators to support parents and guardians in creating a literacy rich home environment is using book drives. Often towards the end of a school year, educators are clearing out their classroom libraries and discarding countless books. Instead of throwing away these items, educators can develop a book drive collection program. In doing so, educators can advertise free books to

parents and guardians. By providing parents and guardians with multiple means of increasing the text options in their home, educators have begun fostering the relationship between home and school that is necessary for children to succeed. Within the five non-cognitive pillars, opportunities for growth begin with creating a literacy rich home environment. By educators showing parents this window, we are giving them the tools in their home to set their child up for success in their future.

A Vignette: The Paraprofessional

Fortunately for the paraprofessional previously mentioned, working in a school district opened several doors on her journey through parenthood. Fast forward four years, her preschooler is about to enter Kindergarten. Each day, she read with her daughter and talked about how it is okay if something is challenging for her, most importantly to never give up. Her daughter's birthday is coming up this June and all she has asked for is more books.

The impact of reading and overcoming something challenging for this parent has been monumental in her daughter's success thus far. The paraprofessional was able to teach her daughter what academic behaviors are, academic perseverance, academic mindset, learning strategies, and social skills all through reading with her daily. A foundation in all of the five of the pillars has been laid and will be her structural base for all future education to come.

Conclusion

Children who are read to often at home have increased oral skills later in life (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998). Exposing children to literacy in the home can increase their skills in all five pillars for success. If the end goal of all education is a more involved, educated, citizen who actively participates in their community, everyone should have a right to the information of the impact of early literacy exposure. This impact should be widely known, not just for those in the field of education. It is so important to teach students how to use the knowledge they have learned, more so than just rote memorization. "There is only one subject matter for education, and that is life in all its manifestations" (Whitehead, 1929, p. 3), for it accurately sums up the entire goal of all education. The goal is not mastery of content but a true understanding of skills with goals and intentions of application in the real world. For our true goal of education being involved citizens, we must begin to expose and educate our youth as soon as possible. All children can learn and succeed with the right foundation. Parent involvement outweighs all socioeconomic levels of children's academic growth. (Schellman, 2016). We as educators truly have a responsibility to our communities to do everything within our power to convince and supply parents and guardians with the necessary tools to equip their children with the foundation needed to build a commitment to lifelong learning.

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Biography

Miranda Evans currently teaches students with moderate to severe disabilities in kindergarten & second grade. She has been working with this population at Perrysburg School district for six years. In 2012, she graduated from Bloomsburg University with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education (K-6) and Special Education (K-12).