

# Parents and Literacy

Helping Parents Get Involved in Education

November 2009

Volume 1, Issue 1

## Our Purpose:

- To help parents understand their importance in their child's education.
- Specific to this issue, to show how simply reading aloud will help their children develop

## Inside this issue:

Children as Owners of Books	2
Organizations to Support Parents	2
Fostering a Warm Literary Environment	3
Reading Aloud Checklist	3
Babies Love Books	3
Newsletter Sources	4
Image Credits	4

## Crisis in Literacy

The literacy level of American children and adults is currently an enormous societal problem. In 2004, approximately 90 million Americans lacked the ability to read adequately, and two-thirds of children in the United States had below grade level reading skills (Weitzman, et al.1248). Studies have shown that the failure to read at grade level leads to frustration and low self-esteem (M. Weitzman and Siegel 55).

In a study from the year

2000, the National Research Council concluded that most of the reading problems faced by today's adolescents and adults might have been avoided or resolved in their early childhood years. The National Research Council found that "reading is typically acquired relatively predictably by children



Literacy in America is in decline.

who... have had experiences in early childhood that fostered motivation and provided exposure to literacy in use." Since early childhood experiences with literacy are vital, parents must help foster this exposure to literacy by reading aloud to them while children are young, especially before they start formal education.

## Children Learn from Reading Aloud

Reading aloud with children is vital because it helps them "learn new words, . . . learn about written language and see the connection between words that are spoken and words



that are written" (National Institute for Literacy).

Children start building vocabulary and grammatical structure by hearing speech, but conversational speaking can only take children so far in this learning process.

Without frequent exposure to books, children cannot gain knowledge of language beyond that which is spoken in day to day life (Bus, van Ijzendoorn and Pellegrini 2). Parents are critical in beginning this process of learning, since they are there from the moment of birth, ready to begin reading to their children.

## Children as Owners of Books

In order to read aloud at home, parents and children need access to books. The importance of owning books cannot be overstated. Studies prove a strong correlation between book ownership and literacy achievement.

Jeff McQuillan's book, *The Literacy Crisis: False Claims, Real Solutions*, which examines 275 literacy studies, aimed at discovering how and why children achieve proficiency in literacy. He

concludes that "The only behavior measure that correlates significantly with reading scores is the number of books in the home" (McQuillan). McQuillan maintains that owning books is more important than the style of teaching or any other of the myriad of variables in each child's educational experience. In addition, McQuillan points out that it can be very difficult to read when there is no reading material available (McQuillan).



Children need to own books.

When this happens, children read books over and over again, getting important reading time that contributes to proficiency and achievement.

Without commitment of parents, children have little chance of having their own books and living in a literary environment. Parents can purchase books or suggest them as birthday and holiday gifts from relatives and friends. If that is not feasible, there are many programs, such as the First Foundation for Childhood Literacy, (see *Organizations to Support Parents*), which will help parents and children obtain books for their home.

"The importance of owning books cannot be overstated."



In addition to having books available to them, children also benefit from the pride of book ownership. Mem Fox, a university professor and an author of over 30 children's books, describes the importance of book ownership as being essential (Fox). She says that children need "books and bookshelves of their own so that favourite books can be owned and read over and over again" (Fox).

## Organizations To Support Parents

- **Public Libraries**  
<http://www.publiclibraries.com>
- **Reach Out and Read**  
<http://www.reachoutandread.org>
- **Raising a Reader**  
<http://www.theunitedway.com/matters/rar/index.php>
- **Children's Book List**  
<http://librarybooklists.org/fiction/children/jindex.htm>
- **Mem Fox's Website**  
<http://www.memfox.com/welcome.html>

## Fostering a Warm Literary Environment

**M**em Fox is an advocate for literacy. As an educator and children’s book writer, her whole purpose is to help children enjoy reading, since that is a good base for future achievement.

She advises parents to create a warm literary environment in their home to make children into readers. She explains that children from a warm literary environment are:

Caught up in a bookish world. At bedtime, they are warm and safe with a big, loving, protective parent beside the bed reading them stories night after night. In the daytime, they squeeze onto a comforting lap and in the security of a parent’s loving warmth listen to all manner of horrors and joys coming out of books. The relationship between parent and child during the stories is one of warmth and love, which makes the child associate books with warmth and love and pleasure and security. How attractive books become! (Fox 100).



Children will come to love books by parents reading aloud to them.

“The relationship between parent and child during the stories is one of warmth and love.”

## Reading Aloud Checklist



- Parents need to get excited while they read.
- Parents should *not* read things they don’t find interesting.
- They should read with passion, enthusiasm and drama (Fox).
- Reading too quickly is the most common mistake made while reading aloud
- Jim Trelease advises to “read slowly enough for the child to build mental pictures of what he just heard you read. Slow down enough for the children to see the pictures in the book without feeling hurried.”

## Babies Love Books

**B**abies love the rhythms, repetitions and cadences of language. Even though babies do not understand the meaning of the words, they will respond to the sounds and rhythms, building a foundation for later growth.

Reading to infants does not always feel rewarding for parents, and too few start early (de Groot and

Bus). Indeed, I. de Groot and Andrea Bus found that reading to infants may be the key factor in showing the family’s commitment and passion for literature, and in establishing a

literary family culture (de Groot and Bus).



## Newsletter Sources

### English 252

Parents and Literacy  
Kara Henry  
Orem, UT

Phone: 801-555-5555  
Fax: 801-555-5555  
E-mail:  
ste01036@byui.edu

Helping Parents Get  
Involved in Education

Bus, Adriana G., Marinus H. van Ijzendoorn and Anthony D. Pellegrini. "Joint Book Reading Makes for Success in Learning to Read: A Meta-Analysis on Intergenerational Transmission of Literacy." Review of Educational Research Vol. 65, No. 1 (Spring, 1995): 1-21. Web.

De Groot, I., and Bus, Adriana G. Book-fun for Babies: Final Report on a Project to Stimulate Emergent Literacy. Leiden/The Hague: Leiden University/SARDES. 1995. Web.

Fox, Mem. Radical Reflections. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company. 1994. Print.

Fox, Mem. "Ten Read Aloud Commandments." Mem Fox. Oct 17, 2009. Web.

McQuillan, Jeff. The Literacy Crisis: False Claims, Real Solutions. Portsmouth: Heinemann. 1998. Web.

National Institute for Literacy. (2003). A Child Becomes a Reader. 17 October 2009. Web.

Weitzman, C. C., Roy, L., Walls, T., & Tomlin, R. "More evidence for Reach Out and Read: A home-based study." Pediatrics Vol. 113. 2004. 19 October 2009. Web.

## Image Credits

Page 1, Boy with Pencil: <http://www.lvqresearch.com/clientUploads/LVQResearch/uploads/radEditor/images/Product%20Testing%202.jpg>

Page 1, Mom and Girl Reading: <http://singingmama.files.wordpress.com/2009/07/mom-reading.jpg>

Page 2, Children Reading Together: <http://www.butlerpubliclibrary.net/images/storytime/children%20reading%20storybook.jpg>

Page 2, Stack of Books: [http://upsenglish.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/stack\\_of\\_books2.jpg](http://upsenglish.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/stack_of_books2.jpg)

Page 3, Girl with Books: <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/79366515>

Page 3, Father and Son Reading: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tuckett/2628447693/>

Page 3, Mother Reading to Baby: <http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/200300397-001/Photographers-Choice>

Page 4, Baby Reading: [https://www.huggies.co.in/\\_templates/images/activity\\_playhouse/BooksAndPuzzles/BabyMade\\_Books.jpg](https://www.huggies.co.in/_templates/images/activity_playhouse/BooksAndPuzzles/BabyMade_Books.jpg)

