

Read-Aloud: the Evidence

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A substantial body of research supports the benefits of reading aloud to young children, however applying this evidence to practice remains a challenge. It is estimated that nation-wide, less than half of children under age 4 are read to daily. As educators of young children the task is twofold: to integrate shared book-reading into daily classroom practice and to encourage and support families to make reading to their children part of their daily routine at home. The evidence is compelling, the solution is clear, and the benefits to children are substantial and long-lasting.

READING ALOUD SUPPORTS CHILDREN'S EMERGENT LITERACY AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

During read-aloud, children learn to recognize letters, understand that print represents the spoken word, and book mechanics such as how to hold a book and turn the page. Children also begin to understand the concept of story structures or that stories have a beginning, middle, and ending. Complex concepts such as the connection between written language and spoken language are essential for success in later reading. All of this knowledge is easily and naturally acquired during 1:1 shared book-reading.

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

The ability to manipulate the sounds of spoken language is another important prerequisite for learning to read. To read words, children need to know the rules for translating print into meaningful sounds. The language in children's books naturally promotes awareness of sound patterns with lots of rhyming, alliteration, and repetition. Children acquire phonological awareness just by listening, repeating phrases, and playing with the book language.

READING ALOUD AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Children's oral language skills including vocabulary, storytelling, and comprehension are stimulated by shared book-reading. Children learn the meaning of new words in the context of the story. Children's books contain 60% more rare words than educational children's television or everyday adult-child verbal interactions. In addition, shared book-reading sparks questions and conversation that continue to extend a child's vocabulary and comprehension.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE QUANTITY OF SHARED BOOK-READING

Researchers have identified risk factors related to socioeconomic status and parental education that can effect a child's development of emergent literacy and language skills. Associated with these lower levels of emergent literacy skills is less exposure to book-reading and print. According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 64% of families whose incomes were above the poverty level read to their preschoolers on a daily basis compared to 38% of families below the poverty level.

SIGNIFICANCE OF QUALITY OR STYLE OF SHARED BOOK-READING

When children's encounters with books and language are enjoyable, they are more likely to develop positive dispositions towards books and later reading. It is not only the reading itself that is important, but the emotional quality of the interactions that influence a child's interest in books and acquisition of pre-literacy skills. Adult language that is warm, responsive, and supportive has a positive influence on how children continue to engage with books.

SUMMARY

Reading aloud to young children, particularly in an engaging manner, promotes emergent literacy and language development and supports the relationship between child and parent. In addition, well-supported read-aloud can promote an ongoing, positive connection to books and reading. Educators, health care providers and community organizations can increase awareness and support for families to ensure that read-aloud begins for all children in infancy. It's never too early to start and the benefits last a lifetime.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Family Reading Partnership, www.familyreading.org

Reach Out and Read, www.reachoutandread.org

Read To Me, www.readtomeintl.org

Too Small to Fail, www.toosmall.org

Zero to Three, www.zerotothree.org