The Impact of Reading to Your Child from Birth to Five

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ABSTRACT

Reading development is a crucial part of a child’s ability to succeed in school. If a child is struggling to read at grade level, let alone being able to read at all, it can have a major impact on their ability to learn. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the effect reading to a child from birth to age five has on their readiness to read and learn when they begin school. The researcher investigated and researched literature that discussed the significance reading to a child at an early age has on their early literacy development. The teacher’s role in the development as well as the parent’s role was researched. A survey was sent to a random sampling of parents’ of Title 1 students and regular education students at Washington Elementary School. The parents answered questions about reading habits with their children birth to age five. This study did reveal a central phenomenon and themes about reading patterns with parents and children from age birth to age five.
Dedicated to my father, who encouraged me for years to get a Masters Degree
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

More and more primary teachers are encountering students who have few if any literary skills. Some children surprisingly are entering kindergarten without ever being exposed to any type of literary genre. Children are faced with the enormous task of beginning their public education with no reading skills or strategies or decoding and comprehending. Some parents appear to be negligent or ignorant about giving their children a good base for their reading development.

Parent involvement in a child’s early literacy is vital to their reading development. Many researchers suggest linking the home and school literacies especially in the early years (Duke, 2003). If the child is not receiving a base reading exposure at home it is extremely difficult for the teacher to begin teaching reading when they enter school. Studies prove that children learn as much at home about reading as they do at school (Duke, 2003). Children naturally learn to model what they hear (Ervin-Tripp, 1973) and consequently, if there is no modulation taking place, it is difficult for the child to learn.

There are many influences that add to the difficulties of a child’s early literacy development. One of the major reasons for lack of reading to a child is the television. Parents have adopted the tube as a babysitter and time filler. Today many preschool and primary grade level students spend as much time watching television as they do anything else during the day (van den Broek, 2005). A parent may actually believe that watching a
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video of a classic story, The Three Little Pigs being an example, is the same or better than reading the story to a child. Video games are also taking the place of reading a good story. Children develop a sense that reading is not vital to their education or that they can learn from the television or game. They become audio learners. Many hours that could be spent reading to a child are now being spent running from activity to activity so they can develop other skills in things like soccer, piano or gymnastics. Parents need to set priorities and make time for the development of their child’s early literacy skills and read to them.

Teachers are handed the daunting task of teaching children to read. This is difficult enough when the children have had some experiences with literature before entering school. Add the fact that a child has had no literary experiences before school and the teacher has to make up for years of lost time. This only emphasizes the need for the school and home to work together to provide the best educational experience for each child. This research has attempted to determine if exposure to literature from birth to five has an impact on a child’s reading development at a later age.
Statement of the Problem

This study attempted to give insight into the impact that reading to a child from birth to age five will have on the child’s reading development. Many of the children today lack the necessary pre reading skills to be able to develop their reading ability when they enter kindergarten. With the more academic curriculum in kindergartens today students who have not been exposed to literature are steps behind their classmates in reading development. According to current research not much has been done in the area of the impact of reading to a child from birth to five has on their literary development. Therefore an attempt has been made to find out if reading to a young child does have an impact on their early literacy skills.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study has been to explore and discover if reading to a child from birth to age five does have an impact on their reading development. This study did look at the effect parents exposing their children to literature at an early age has on the child’s early literacy development. How often did a parent read to a child? Another question could be what type of literature was read to the child? Questions like these are vital to determining if literature played a role in a child’s early literacy development.
Definition of Terms

1. Aliterate- The ability to read yet has no interest in reading.

2. Comprehension- The ability to grasp the meaning, nature or importance of understanding when reading.

3. Early Literacy- The early influences that aid in being literate.

4. Genre- A type of literature marked by a distinctive style.

5. Literate- The ability to read and write.

6. Literacy- The condition or quality of being literate, especially the ability to read and write.

7. Reading Fluency- The ability to read a text accurately and quickly.

8. Reading Skills- The skills that assist a reader when decoding and comprehending.
Every since the National Reading Panel released their findings in the *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching Children to Read: an Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*, educators, parents and school systems have begun to look at the teaching of reading in a different manner. With the implementation of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, educators have been given the deadline that every child in America should be reading at grade level by third grade. With educators scrambling to fulfill this mandate, many research studies have been conducted to determine the effect home environment and parents have on a child’s readiness to read when the child enters kindergarten. What ability does a child have when they arrive at school and what can the school do to enhance their ability so they are reading at grade level by third grade?

Studies have shown one of the main deterrents or enhancements to a child having a good reading background is the home literacy environment (HLE). Children come to school with diverse experiences in reading that separate them when reading formal instruction begins (Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1994). The idea that exposing children to a literature rich home environment will enable them to be better readers and influence their educational experiences has become quite popular in the last few years (Burgess, 2002). Parents are using many different educational paths to help their children
become better readers and ensuring the fact that their child will pass the “test” in their state and not be “left behind”.

Parents are asking what can they do to make sure my child will pass the test and be able to read. Many parents should follow their natural instincts when it comes to reading to their child. The simple exposure to books of any kind can be beneficial to their child’s reading development. Research has shown the following suggestions to be helpful to parents of preschool age children:

1. Provide a good role model-read yourself and read often to your child.
2. Provide varied reading material-some for reading enjoyment and some with information about hobbies and interest.
3. Encourage activities that require reading—or-example, cooking (reading a recipe), constructing a kite (reading directions), or identifying an interesting bird’s nest or shell collected at the beach (using a reference book).
4. Establish a reading time, even if it is only 10 minutes a day.
5. Establish one night a week as reading time (instead of watching television).
6. Take trips to the library and select books with your child (Swanson, 2004).

Children look to their parents as models. If the parents are not reading, then the child looks to others avenues to gain information they need. Children achieve more success with early reading skills if they have experience with books and other print media, and were read to as preschoolers (National Institute on Media and the Family, 2002).
The most important thing that parents can do is talk and read to their children (Schwab Foundation for learning, 1999). When parents spend time with their toddlers saying nursery rhymes and other finger plays they are beginning the foundation for their child’s reading development. According to Karoly and many other the first three years of a child’s life are the most important to their obtaining thinking skills. Children develop much of their ability to learn from birth to age three, their brain will grow 90 percent of its’ eventual adult weight (Karoly et al., 1998). A child at this age is like a sponge absorbing everything around them. Some of the easiest and cheapest activities to enhance reading are singing, playing games, reading story-telling, just talking and listening (Clinton, 1997). When parents talk, sing and read to a child their brain cells are engaged and strengthened (Shore, 1997). These home experiences should be enjoyable and spontaneous to create positive experiences for the child (Schwab Foundation for learning, 1999).

There are other factors that play a role in a young child’s early literacy development. The parent’s educational background plays a significant role in the child’s early exposure to literacy. According to the Educational Testing Service in 1995, the single most significant predictor of children’s literacy is their mother’s literacy level. A survey conducted by the National Household Education Foundation in 1996 showed that 77 percent of children whose mothers had a college education were read to daily while only 49 percent of children whose mother had a high school degree were read to daily. Some researchers say it is not what you do with your child to help them read, who you
are (Dubner and Levitt, 2005). Many parents are economically able to supply their children with books and other exposure to literature when some parents are struggling to put food on the table. A child with 50 books at home scores approximately 5 percentile points higher than a child with no books at home and a child with 100 books will score a 5 percentile higher than a child with 50 books (Early Child Longitudinal Study, 2000). This can show that the parents are well educated and therefore pass this success on to their children or the books themselves create a general feeling that reading is important and rewarding to help a child develop the notion that reading is important and fun at the same time.

Parents can enhance their time spent reading with their child by selecting books that are age appropriate and stimulate verbal interactions and curiosity (Zeece, 2002). Choosing good children’s literature can stimulate conversation about the book, enrich a child’s vocabulary and practice with sound structure that is age appropriate (National Association for the Education of Young Children & International Reading Association, 1998). Parents need to talk about the story they are sharing with their child not just ask superficial questions. When parents ask questions that require thinking and when they relate the story to every day events their children achieve better in reading (Anderson, et al, 1985). Researchers say the best way a parent can help their child become a better reader is to read to the child and discuss the stories, learn to identify letters and words, and talk about the meanings of the words (Anderson, et al, 1985). Reading to your child can build listening skills, increase their attention span and develops the ability to concentrate for a long period of time (Little Ones Resource, 2005). Stories that are
chosen with a lot of thought can expose a child to useful, entertaining and educational activities which can help children become better readers and enjoy literature (Kohl, 1995). In a study done in 2003, Duke and Purcell-Gates state that there is different genre in the school and the home therefore the reading that takes place is different. The study suggests that some home genre, such as magazines, comic books, can be combined with school genre, such as texts and worksheets, to enable learning to be more meaningful to a child.

One of the major factors that divert children from reading today is the television. Many parents use the television as a babysitter and have the children watch a classic movie instead of reading the story with them. When children watch too much television, it becomes a factor and is detrimental to a child’s reading development. There are studies that show “good” television watching like Sesame Street and Reading Rainbow can enhance a child’s literature and language development. Parents have to know when their child is spending too much time in front of the tube and not enough time immersed in books. Not having the television on for a couple of nights a week could coax a child to read more and parents could read to their child.

Another factor that can cause a child to not have a good literacy background before school is poverty (Feiler; 2005). Children of parents or single parents who are not able to provide exposure to literature are at a distinct disadvantage when they enter school. There are many free programs available all over the country for parents to get
books for their children. Beth McNeer, library director in Allendale, SC., states “we have schoolchildren who have never been to the library; we have lots of people in the community who don’t know we have free public access computer terminals and internet access”. South Carolina has started an initiative called “Children, Libraries, and Literacy” which will expose children to libraries through reading centers and mobile libraries (Drake, 2005). Another project in Florida allows access to library services in childcare homes of working class people. Volunteers select 10 books to be taken to the childcare home and provide an hour of story time in the home. The books are left in the home for one week so the children can experience them. This has become a volunteer service-learning requirement for students in children’s literature classes at the University of Florida (Lamme, Sabis-Burns, Gould, 2004). Programs like these help children with reading development as they are being exposed to some literature.

The impact of parent involvement in a child’s early literacy is being studied more today than ever before. Parents can help their child’s academic achievement at an early age (Senechal and LeFevre, 2002). Children are exposed to two different types of literary experiences in the home, informal and formal. Informal experiences would be a parent reading to a child and expanding upon the meaning of the story with the child asking questions. A formal experience would be reading an alphabet book and concentrating on the print in the book by talking about sounds of letters and their names (Senechal et al, 1998). In the Senechal et al study (1998), an average middle to upper class parent
reported reading to their child beginning at nine months, that they read storybooks often, their children had between 61 and 80 books at home. The parents also made frequent trips to the library with their children and the children often initiated shared reading time with their parents. Parents who read with their children often do not necessarily think they are teaching their children to read (Senechal, 1998). Early and frequent exposure to literature at home appears to help a child when they enter school.

All in all, reading to a child is the best thing a parent can do to enhance their child’s reading achievement (Becher, 1983). A Study by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1994 showed that between 1984 and 1994 more 9-year-olds than 13- and 17-year-old said they liked to read for fun almost every day. The report also stated that students who read every week recreationally had higher reading proficiency scores than students who never read for fun (Cromwell, 2002). When children come to school, especially those who have never been exposed to books, it is important for them to experience literature that is fun and entertaining (Perera, 1993). Children need to be read to, they need to see a parent reading, and they need exposure to literature at the earliest age possible to ensure they will be prepared to read when they enter school.
Chapter 3

METHOD

This study was a qualitative study attempting to determine the impact of reading to a child from birth to age five. An informal survey was conducted to allow the researcher to formulate different themes that relate to the topic of the research. The most logical influence on a child from birth to age five is a parent: therefore they were used to gain insight. The researcher did conduct a grounded theory procedure to explain the importance reading to a child has in the child’s ability to learn as they proceed through life.

Participants

The participants in this study were parents of students at Washington Elementary School in the Marietta City School District. Specifically, the participants were parents of Title 1 students and regular education students in third grade. The parents did participate in the research by filling out a survey at parent teacher conferences in February. All of the participants were random and not selected as the researcher did not have a choice as to who took and completed a survey.

Procedures

A survey was conducted at parent teacher conferences in February at Washington Elementary School. A cross-sectional survey design was used to determine the parent’s
attitude and practices about reading to their children from birth to age five. Parents were asked to fill out an open-ended question survey consisting of five questions. This was a collection of information at one point in time as the parents were asked to respond to the survey the evening of the conferences and return the completed form before they left.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study was the initial contact with the participants. Were the parents willing to fill out the survey and did they answer all the questions? Parents could have felt they were being judged as to their parenting ability and felt prone not to participate.

Another limitation could have been that the parents were not exactly truthful with their answers because they may have felt the researcher was judging them as parents. This may especially have been a factor with the parents of children who are struggling with their reading skill and ability. Parents may have also embellished their answers to appear to be favorable responses to imply they have done all the right things to help their children become the best readers they can be.
RESULTS

According to the results of the study, the majority of the third grade parents surveyed felt that reading to a child beginning at birth is a vital cog in the child’s reading development. Almost all of the respondents indicated they had read to their children from birth and continue to read to them or with them even through the third grade level. The parents surveyed overwhelmingly agreed that reading to a child before the age of five can have an impact on their ability to read and comprehend in the primary grades. One parent wrote, “just spending time with them this way and modeling reading as well as answering questions can influence their ability positively”.

The parents positively responded that they had read to their child since birth with a few stating that they had read during pregnancy. Spending time with the child and sharing a book was a factor that was pervasive throughout the parent’s responses. A parent stated, “it’s a great time together”. The time for a parent to bond with their child is irreplaceable and doing so with a book is a shared experience. The ease of quality time with a child and a book is an undeniable good way to spend time with a child.

Another positive view from the study is modeling a love for reading and the pleasure of a good book. So many children today are influenced by the media through
television and video games that reading takes a back step in a child’s early childhood. Parents surveyed felt the modeling of reading not only to the child but reading to themselves as a part of their adult life played a role in a child’s reading development. Exposing a child to reading at an early age could help spark their curiosity and led to a lifetime of pleasurable reading.

The enhancement of language development through reading to a child was a positive result from the study. Many of those surveyed felt the more they read to their child the better their language development as they grew older. The parents felt an important aspect of language development through reading was the increased acquisition of vocabulary. Also listening to a book shows a child that letters become words and words become sentences. Many of the respondents mentioned that through reading to their child helped the child to learn the alphabet and the different sounds that letters make. A parent noted, “if they know their shapes, colors and ABC’s it will help them read and understand things better”.

Another positive outcome of the survey was the idea that if children have been exposed to reading they will be better prepared to learn in school. A child who has been read to and apparently informed of different literary genre will be better able to adapt to learning. The importance was obvious as one parent noted, reading to a child “encourages expanding vocabulary and discussing the material helps them learn the process and make conclusions on their own”. The survey showed children who are read to before the age of
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five may be better able to listen in school because they are accustomed to listening to an adult read to them. In the kindergarten classroom a child who has been read to can adapt to the curriculum of today much better than a child who has never been exposed to literature.

A few negative thoughts about reading to a child before age five came to light in the survey. One parent felt that it didn’t matter if you read to a child because it would not have any effect on their ability to learn. Another stated that they had read almost daily since birth to their child and it had no influence on their ability to learn. The love for reading was not a factor with one parent who mentioned they had read to their child since birth and the child appears to avoid reading in any circumstance.

Themes

The parents surveyed agreed that reading to a child before the age of five had an impact on their reading development with the following qualitative statements:

**Reading to a child is time spent with child:**

“It’s great quiet time together.”

“I read to them every night before bed.”

“Just spending time with them this way.”

“From and early age, but just about daily since they were able to sit still.”

**Reading to a child helps to develop a love for reading:**

“It greatly increases their interest and love for reading.”

“By modeling a love for reading, the child develops that love early.”
“It encourages reading on their own.”

“Children learn about text and that reading is pleasurable.”

“The love to read when they get older.”

**Reading to a child develops the knowledge of language:**

“The more you help your child understand words the better they will be at reading.”

“It helps with their imagination and they learn words.”

“Plus texture books help with word association.”

“They hear full sentences.”

**Children learn from reading:**

“It helps with their imagination and they learn words.”

“Reading helps to expose a child to how stories work, to a wider vocabulary, prediction skills, etc.”

“Encourages expanding vocabulary and discussing the material to help them learn.”

“Helps them to learn the process and make conclusions on their own.”

*Conclusion*

The overwhelming majority of the third grade parents surveyed strongly felt that reading to a child before the age of five definitely has an impact on a child’s reading development. A love for reading can be developed when parents spend quality time reading to and with their children. Reading to a child also creates an atmosphere for further learning through the acquisition of language development that takes place. As one
parent stated, “the more you help your child understand words the better they’ll be at reading in the primary grades.”
The importance of reading to a child before the age of five has been researched for many years. With the curriculum in the primary grades in today's world any advantage a child has when they begin school will help them learn. Reading is a skill that will help a child attain just about every goal they may have in life. A child who has not been exposed to literature upon entering school could struggle to catch up the rest of their school years. A strong foundation of reading will only enhance a child’s ability to learn.

This study was done to show the importance a parent feels reading to a child before the age of five has on the child’s reading development. Parents of third grade students were asked to respond to a survey about reading to their children by the researcher. Through the responses to the survey the researcher determined that parents did feel there was a strong connection to the impact of reading to a child before age five and reading development or achievement.

As many studies have shown, this study found that reading to a child before the age of five does influence their reading development. The results showed that parents did read to their children from birth on, some even stating they read throughout their pregnancy. The time spent reading aided with the development of a love for reading and a feeling of pleasure from reading according to the study. Parents participating in the study
felt the time spent with their children not only help their reading skills, it was also quality time for them to spend with their children.

Many of the respondents to the survey indicated that reading to their children helped with language development. The time spent reading to the child also was an opportunity to point out letters, words and sentences and demonstrate how they work together to form stories. Some parents stated that they would talk with their children about what they had read to them to enhance comprehension. The discussion of words and their meanings in the text would enable a child to be better able to decode new words and detect new meanings of words in the future.

The study also showed that a child can learn from being read to before the age of five. The parents surveyed felt reading to their children helped the children learn about the world today, the world of the past and the world of the future. Reading can open the mind of a child and could encourage curiosity in a child. Reading to a child can prepare them for the new more stringent curriculum in kindergarten today.

A small portion of parents surveyed did feel that reading to a child had no effect on the child’s further reading development. One respondent stated that the schools were expecting too much form children today and reading should be more fun during the early years of school. Children are so influenced by television and video games today it is difficult to compete in today’s world.

Overall this study showed the importance of reading to a child before the age of five. Parents can play an extremely large role in a child’s reading development through the importance the parents place on reading. Modeling reading daily and reading to a
child or with a child daily can have a major impact on the child’s education and life as a whole. As one parent responded, “like anything, the more exposure you have to something before you do it yourself, the easier it will be”.

*Future Implications*

In a future study the researcher would the questions asked that would ask for more detail in response. Two of the questions in the survey with this study asked questions that evoked yes and no answers. More information could have been attained if the questions would have asked for more detail. The research could delve more into the impact of reading to a child before age five by studying a group of children from birth with different exposure to reading.
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Reading Survey

1. How many children do you have and what are their current ages?

2. How important is reading to a child before age five?

3. Did you or another adult read to your child before age five? At what age did you begin to read to your child and how often did you read to them?

4. Do you feel reading to a child before age five has an influence on reading readiness when they enter kindergarten?

5. Do you feel reading to a child has an influence on their ability to read and comprehend in primary grades?