Building Better Readers Through Early Collaborative Partnerships

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Dr. Shari Robertson, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
- Professor of Speech-Language Pathology
- Associate Dean for Graduate Studies & Research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- President for Academic Affairs in Speech-Language Pathology for ASHA
- Presented hundreds of workshops and seminars nationally
- Internationally recognized as a thought leader for effective intervention for communication and literacy as well as innovation, leadership, and personal development
- CEO of Dynamic Resources, which specializes in evidence-based clinical materials for developing language and literacy, including children's literature targeting specific oral and written language skills

My Background
- Writer, publisher, teacher and speaker on topics related to language and literacy development.
- Owner of Dynamic Resources publishing company, that publishes resources related to literacy development.

Why Collaborate?
Parents and teachers are arguably the most important adults in a child's life. Research tells us that young learners benefit when all of the adults in their lives work together to support language and literacy development. Collaboration among teachers and between parents and educators is cited as an effective approach to improving instruction in chronically low-performing schools that have achieved dramatic turnarounds (substantial gains in student achievement within three years).

Children whose oral language skills are weak during the preschool years are at increased risk for developing reading problems (Snowling, 2005). Among children with reduced oral language skills in Kindergarten, 70% were identified with a reading disability in first or second grade (Catts et al., 2002).

Children with weak oral language skills at 5 ½ were found to have poor reading comprehension at 8 ½ and 15 ½ (Stothard et al., 1998).

Language and Literacy

Results of research with preschoolers is clear in the message that early experiences with language and literacy provide children with the foundation they need to become good readers once they reach school. This is supported by research findings that suggest that children who demonstrate early delays in language and literacy persist without adequate intervention.

Language and Literacy Hierarchy

GASKIN

Is this in your oral vocabulary?
Most People Believe Children Go to School to Learn to Read
But reading starts long before children begin formal reading instruction.

1. Learning to love books
2. Enjoying the meaning of books
3. Learning how books work
4. Discovering that print has meaning
5. Memorizing books
6. Rehearsing books
7. Recognizing the words
8. Developing fluency
9. Reading independently

Steven Bialstock, Raising Readers

Children need strong oral language skills to have strong reading skills!
Children learn to talk by talking, they learn to read by talking and reading.

Parent
What can I do to help support my child's learning at home?

Educator
Read to them!
Research tells us that:

- Early experiences with language and literacy provide children with the foundation they need to become good readers when they reach school.
- Parent involvement is critical to providing quality early educational experiences for young learners.

**But What About…**

**What** to read to children  
**How** to read to children

**Answering the “How” and “What” Questions**

Children learn to read by being read to.

- Facilitates the development of oral language and pre-literacy skills that have been proven to support reading success.
- Helps children learn to view reading as a pleasurable activity and help them grow into lifelong readers.
- Teaches specific, and empirically-proven, strategies to promote interactive reading with young children in the home and school environment.
- Identifies characteristics of children’s literature that supports the use of interactive reading strategies.

1. Echo Reading  
2. Paired Reading  
3. Questioning Strategies  
4. Predicting  
5. Wordless Books  
6. Reader’s Theatre

**Reading with Children**

Reading with children should be first and foremost a pleasurable reading experience for both participants.
Reading with Children should be...

Fun!

Stress Free

Let's Read!

Read With Me! Strategies: Echo Reading

- Adult reads a short amount of text and cues the child to “Copy me!” or “Say what I say!”
- Helps children understand that what we say matches the words on the page.
- Highlights and facilitates vocabulary development (when paired with the correct kinds of books).
- Builds confidence and encourages interactions.
- Not a natural strategy, but very effective.
- Best for books with short phrases, bright pictures, and engaging story lines.

Important!

- Children should not be “forced” to participate in echo reading (or any other interactive reading strategy).
- Simply invite, pause, and move on.
- Errors are not an issue.
- Goal is participation, not perfection!
This strategy is used naturally by most adults. Best for books that have strong rhythm and rhyme or a repetitive phrase. Be sure to read the book at least five times before asking a child to pair read. Use pausing, stress, and information to cue child when it is his or her turn. Vary the amount of material you ask the child to read.

Important!

If the child does not take a turn, pause, then fill in the words and move on. Continue to provide opportunities for the child to take a turn, but NO PRESSURE. Try using echo and paired reading in groups—attending skills often increase as children anticipate “their turn” to read.
How NOT to Ask a Question:

- Many parents know that asking questions is a good way to involve children in the story.
- Unfortunately, most parents use close-ended questions almost exclusively and push children to provide the “right” answer.
- This is actually counterproductive to building early language and literacy skills!

**Q:** What did Nick find in his breakfast cereal box?
**A:** Junior Undercover Agent Code Ring

**Q:** What did Albert get in his lunch bag?
**A:** Hershey bar with almonds

**Q:** What colors shoes did Alex want?
**A:** Blue with red stripes
Let’s Build Some Good Questions!

Read With Me! Strategies: Questioning

How to Ask Good Questions:
• Avoid “scary questions” (closed-ended) that have only one right answer. This limits interactions and can interfere with comprehension.
• Use “friendly questions” (open-ended) to encourage participation, facilitate longer verbalizations, and help the child to think critically.
• Accept all answers!

Review Questions

Q: Where did Alexander want to move?
A: (rote response; correct answer = 1 word)

Q: Why did Alexander want to move to Australia?
A: (pause; consider; answer = longer utterance, more linguistically complex)
Look-Alikes
“Discover a World Where Things are Not as They Seem”

Books can provide both auditory and visual prediction. Be sure to preview books before reading them to children (so you don’t miss prediction cues). Accept all answers!
Provide for numerous opportunities to use questioning and predicting strategies.

Build critical thinking and language skills by encouraging children to develop storylines on their own.

Encourages children to engage more than just their eyes and ears in reading.

Can be as simple as choosing books that encourage movement to acting out the complete story like with commercial props (and anything in between!)
Run Turkey Run!

- Lots of fun to act out
- Also Great for Echo and Paired Reading
- Surprise Ending

Building Reading Partnerships

More Readers Theatre Books

Program Delivery

Total Training Time is Approximately 4 hours. This may be split up in a variety of ways:

- Single training session – all 6 strategies (1/2 day)
- 2 sessions – 3 strategies each (2 hours)
- 3 sessions – 2 strategies each (90 minutes)
- 6 sessions – 1 strategy each (45 minutes)
#SPEDAhead

## Who to Train?
- Early Childhood Educators
- Headstart Teachers
- Day Care Providers
- Special Educators
- Primary Classroom Teachers
- Parents and Families

## Working with Parents/Families
- Poll for preferred meeting times
- Employ multiple reminders (especially for first session)
- Secure funds for free books if possible (but not required)
- For parent training: Provide babysitting and transportation when possible.

## Working with Parents/Families
- Train in multiple sessions – but not too far apart (to keep the momentum going)
- Try to provide at least some books that families can take home and keep each session.
- Provide incentives for those attending all sessions (special books, gift certificates to book store, etc.)
- Keep the atmosphere as informal and non-threatening as possible.
- Maintain your sense of humor at all times.

## Favorite Quotes
- “The doctor told me I have pneumonia, but I told him I couldn’t be sick until after the last reading workshop. I don’t want to miss anything!”
- “And to think I used to spend my money on food when I could have been buying more books!”
- “Mommy, don’t forget to go to your class and don’t forget to get me more books!!!”
- “I’ve been having so much fun the past three weeks, my husband thinks I must be having an affair!”
- “When there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.”
- “Never doubt that a group of committed, like-minded people can change the world. It is the only thing that ever has.”
- “Sharing knowledge occurs when people are genuinely interested in helping others develop. It’s about creating learning capacities.”

## Even Better Quotes
- “When there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.” — Martin Seligman
- “Together we can do so much.” — Helen Keller
- “Never doubt that a group of committed, like-minded people can change the world. It is the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead
- “Sharing knowledge occurs when people are genuinely interested in helping others develop. It’s about creating learning capacities.” — Peter Senge

## Thanks For Listening
- Children learn to read by being read to. They keep reading because they learn to love to read!

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