

VEGETABLES OR COOKIES

USING STORYBOOKS TO TEACH READING

What is the most effective method of teaching your Pre-kindergarten child to eat healthy? Would you cook broccoli or cabbage and insist that your child eat it. Or, would you have your child come in the kitchen and help you put ingredients together to make yummy cookies, then later add something healthier like oatmeal and nuts? What is the most effective method of teaching Pre-kindergarten through early elementary age children the early skills needed to read? Would you sit children down and start teaching word recognition? Or, would you start at a lower level with fun activities based on fun stories?

This is the decade of *No Child Left Behind* as mandated by the government. There is approximately 20% - 25% of the population (depending on the source) that is unable to read at a level that affords the opportunities to a quality life. It may seem like an insurmountable task to decrease that percentage. However, we can make great strides toward decreasing those at risk if the prevailing research is applied at an early age in an effective way.

This research indicates that some of the emergent literacy skills are learned prior to school age. Therefore, parents and early childhood teachers play a large role in teaching these skills. These early skills are phonemic awareness, print literacy, and language concepts.

The storybook is a great resource for teaching the skill of phonological/phonemic awareness. Phonological awareness simply refers to the ability to understand how to manipulate parts of words to create new words. Phonemic awareness is one category of phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness refers to the skill of perceiving that speech sounds are different and manipulating these speech sounds (adding, deleting, shifting, and substituting) to create new words. Rhyming words and blending and segmenting words are all a part of phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is considered to be the supporting base for the higher level skills of phonics, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Examples of phonemic awareness:

- Mat, delete /m/ = at.
- Mat, add /s/ = mats.
- Mats with the /t/ and /s/ shifted = mast.
- Mat with /k/ (sound, letter "c") substituted for /m/ = cat.

There are many phonemic awareness activities you can do in conjunction with a story. Allow your child to complete sentences for you after s/he knows the story. Play word games with your child to count the words and syllables. You can do this by clapping out the words in a sentence or the syllables in a word. Or, you can help your four or five year old child count the words or syllables by dropping tokens in a can for each word or syllable. Play rhyming activities by substituting a different sound at the beginning of a word you are reading. Your child will correct you. Sometimes pretend you cannot remember all the word and allow your child to add the last syllable. A fun activity is to play the robot game. You speak 2- or 3-syllable words with a slight pause between syllables and your child guesses the word you say. Do the same with sounds. Say words with a pause between the sounds; i.e. d-o-g (dog), and your child guesses the word you say.

When reading to a young child the adult should help the child develop print awareness. This includes understanding that a word represents a picture or concept, knowing front and back of the book, understanding when to turn a page, understanding that print goes left-to-right.

There are specific things one can do while reading to the children to increase print awareness. Talk about the name of the book before reading it. Talk about the author. Show a picture of the author if it is available. If the book has print embedded in pictures, make a point of showing this as you read. Run your finger under the print as you read or have your child help your finger move. The print awareness can be extended outside of the book reading by drawing pictures or cutting book related pictures out of magazines. These pictures with the text labeling can then be posted on the bulletin board at the children's eye-level. Make reference to them from time-to-time. Make a book of "Book Memories" by listing the books that are read to the child. Find available pictures of the books or make pictures that will help the children think of the book. Put these in a spiral bound book and from time to time make references to it.

Although there are many language concepts to address for the preschooler, there are several terms that are specific to reading. It is important that the terms first, middle, and last are understood in a left-to-right progression. If there are pictures on the page, you can ask, "What (who) is the first you see, the middle, the last?" Talk about same and different and number concepts. Begin with concrete objects like animals or objects of interest to the children. The two cows are the same. The two cows make the same sound. The cow and the horse are different because they make different sounds. To facilitate language (and later reading comprehension) ask who, what, where, when, and why questions. If your child has difficulty answering these "wh" questions, present them with choices. For example, you can ask, "Was she wearing a blue or red dress?" Ask open-ended questions for critical thinking skills sometimes. You can phrase your questions as, "What do you think she will do?" Be willing to accept different answers other than those you think are correct. Encourage your child to ask questions by praising them for asking questions.

Talk about word, syllable, and sound. Have the children clap and count the words in lines from nursery rhymes. Teach the children to become aware of syllables. It is not that you will be teaching the child the definition of syllable. The child will become aware of the syllable by the method you teach it. Count the syllables. Have the children put their hand under their chin and look in the mirror as they say a two- to three-syllable word. You can even count the number of times their mouth opens and give mini M & M's of the same number. Do sound blending and segmenting of compound and two- to three-syllable words. The children love to play the robot game and guess what you will say as you pause between each syllable. Tell the children to guess what you will say. Say fireman with a pause between the fire and man. In talking about sound, you can begin with animal sounds and play games finding the animal sound or deciding which animal is heard first or last. Then at a later time you can progress to speech sounds.

There are some specific suggestions and activities to use during story time to teach emergent literacy. Repetition is important. Read a story as many times as your child enjoys it. Make it fun by allowing your child to choose books that s/he likes. Reading should be an interactive activity with your child participating and taking turns. Allow him/her to re-tell a favorite book while you write it. Then your child can take the re-written version and pretend to read it. If your child does not want to sit and listen to a story, do not make him/her. You can come up with some tricks to get your child to look at books. For example, if your child has too much energy to sit for a reading and you

know he likes trains, get a book of train pictures and ask him to look up a favorite train. At some point you can get him/her to look for more items in a book at one sitting.

Some of the children's books lend themselves to teaching the emergent reading skills. In choosing books look for large print, some print embedded in the pictures, lots of repetition, and lots of rhyming. Choose books with a length that matches the attention of your child. Buy books that lend themselves to comprehension questions of who, what, when, where, and why. If you can find some of the children's books that are now being published that contain activity suggestions for parents, it will help you make the most of story time. The most important criteria of a good children's book is that it is relevant to your child, has a silly sense of humor. It should also be one that your child enjoys. The *Phonemic Awareness Tales* are written to provide phonemic awareness practice for young children and to also provide suggestions and tips for parents and early childhood teachers on activities to develop this critical skill.

The use of storybooks as a teaching tool can be effective because it is fun and stimulating. There is no drill work that can produce the broccoli effect of hating reading later. We can teach the skill of phonemic awareness along with the other emergent literacy skills of print awareness and language concepts during the reading of storybooks and activities based on the storybooks. Reading storybooks and using activities that utilize phonemic awareness, print awareness, and language skills will increase a young child's chance of being more successful at reading. Storybooks are an effective method of teaching vocabulary. It is developmentally appropriate and does not entail drill work. It is possible to make the storybooks delicious cookies with a little imagination and training.

Although there are other skills that are important for reading success, it is important that speech-language pathologists, parents and early childhood educators address these beginning skills to prepare the children for success with the higher skills. Children who are at greater risk (those with a family history of dyslexia, those who have had little exposure to oral language and print awareness, and those who have had many ear infections that have lasted for extended periods) may need more intensive one-on-one help from a professional.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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