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Unlocking the Door: Is Parents' Reading to Children the Key to Early Literacy Development?

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Parents are encouraged to read to their children, and they frequently engage in shared book reading on the belief that the experience will foster their children's literacy development. In this article, the authors draw on a body of published studies to argue that shared book reading often does not lead to the benefits expected of it. The studies show that during parent–child shared reading, the adults typically do not draw the children's attention to features of the print and the children most often will attend to the illustrations and not to the print. As a consequence, shared book reading often does not advance children's early literacy development. However, the authors point to research showing that when shared book reading is enriched with explicit attention to the development of children's reading skills and strategies, then shared book reading is an effective vehicle for promoting the early literacy ability even of disadvantaged children.

Keywords: early literacy, literacy development, print concepts, reading skills and strategies, shared book reading

Reading to children can have a positive and lasting impact on emergent literacy development. The specific nature of that impact and the conditions required for its occurrence are, however, less well known. In this article, we will review some key studies showing that children do not learn print concepts simply by having a parent or other adult read to them (a commonly promoted version of family literacy called "shared reading"), but that there are shared-reading practises that can enhance children's emergent literacy development. We shall focus specifically on parent–child shared reading in this article and address three questions: (a) What happens during parent–child shared reading? (b) What are the reading skill outcomes of parent–child shared reading? and (c) How can parent–child shared reading be enriched? We close with some remarks on children's emergent literacy development.

What Happens During Parent–Child Shared Reading?

Parents reading to children is a cultural icon—so much so that it continues to be heavily promoted as *the* way into literacy (National Children's Reading Foundation, 2007; Pellegrini, 1991). Web sites, popular parent magazines, books, and academic and professional journals encourage and advise parents to read to their children. Most family literacy and early intervention programmes are no exception. Let us be clear from the outset that we endorse the practise of reading to children. The challenge is to make sense of the results of the research on shared reading so as to be perfectly clear about what shared reading accomplishes and what it does not accomplish.

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A meta-analysis completed by Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) was based on three decades of empirical research. They identified 31 research studies—20 were correlational and 11 studied the effects of interventions—on the influence of parent–preschooler reading experiences on the development of children's language and literacy skills. The contribution of parent–preschooler reading to literacy development accounted for only about 8% of the variance in early literacy achievement and indeed was "unexpectedly modest" (p. 245). They concluded that, "for now we think some parents would be reassured to know that there is no clear indication that literacy development depends crucially on shared reading experiences in the preschool years" (p. 295). A second study reported by Bus, van Ijzendorn, and Pellegrini (1995) was a meta-analysis on intergenerational transmission of literacy and included many of the same studies analysed in the Scarborough and Dobrich study. However, Bus, van Ijzendorn, and Pellegrini asserted that "book reading is as strong a predictor of reading achievement as phoneme awareness" (p. 17), even though they reported both that storybook reading makes for success in learning to read and explains only 8% of the variance. The tension between the conclusions drawn in these two studies signals the need for more research in order to resolve the frequently asked questions about the efficacy of storybook reading by parents to children. A subsequent follow-up review (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) pointed to the importance of specifying the link between children's emergent literacy environments (such as shared book reading) and the development of emergent literacy skills. This point is germane to this article, so we turn to the question of what happens during parent–child shared reading.

Shapiro, Anderson, and Anderson (1997) working at the University of British Columbia conducted an exploratory study to document the interactions that occur between parents and children as they read storybooks together. They videotaped 12 mothers and their 4-year-olds from middle-class homes as they read two well-

known children's books, *Mr. McMouse* and *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni (1963, 1992). These books were similar in style and quality of illustrations and provided opportunities to develop mathematical concepts such as size, shape, number, counting, and estimation (p. 51). Mothers were asked to read the books with their children as they normally would. Both books were read by the mothers to the children with an alternating order for a total of 24 videotaped reading sessions.

The findings show "scant attention, either verbal or by gesture, paid to print or print concepts in this study" (p. 52). The authors report that the ratio of attention to illustrations was at least 10:1 compared to print and mathematics. The illustrations in both books included multiple creatures (many fish, many mice) and thus opportunities for counting. Yet, few parents were observed attempting to teach their children how to count. Rather, when counting did occur, which was by only four parents (range = 1–5 instances), they used counting to clarify, elaborate upon, or extend references to a number printed in the book in order to help their children understand the text. Furthermore, Shapiro et al. (1997) noted that 8 of the 12 mothers did not read the title of at least one of the two books, and only six parents read the titles of both books. Little attention was paid to "grapho-phonic information (letter names and sounds)" (p. 53). Only one mother was observed to make frequent gestures to the print and the same mother accounted for seven of the eight recorded events in the grapho-phonic category. Parents tended to use the illustrations for labelling and for discussion. The Shapiro et al. (1997) study concluded, ". . . there was a relative lack of attention to print on the part of the mothers in this study" (p. 54).

In a subsequent study, Anderson, Anderson, Lynch, and Shapiro (2004) investigated whether fathers and mothers read differently to their 4-year-old sons and daughters, and examined the effect of text genre on the interactions that occurred in parent–child shared book reading. The recruitment letters asked for the participation of the parent who usually reads to the child. They videotaped 25 middle-class parents and their 4-year-old children (all of whom attended daycare) in the following dyad combinations: 7 mother–daughter, 5 mother–son, 8 father–daughter, and 5 father–son. Four popular high quality children's books were chosen. Two narratives, *Mr. McMouse* and *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni ((1963, 1992), and two informational books, A *New Butterfly* by Pamela Hickman and Heather Collins (1997) and *Halloween* by Gail Gibbons (1984). Each reading session was videotaped and both verbal and nonverbal gestures were analysed.

The results showed the fathers were significantly more interactive with the children than were the mothers and that there was significant variation in the number of interactions within groups across the 100 book sharing episodes (range of interactions between fathers and children was from 65 to 345, and between mothers and children was from 34 to 189). Fathers tended to engage in more clarification and confirmation strategies when reading the information books than did the mothers. Anderson et al. (2004) noted, "Whilst there were generally few instances of attention to print, it is interesting that there was no attention to print when parents read narratives to boys" (p. 10). The results of these two studies are confirmed by others (e.g., Yaden & McGee, 1984).

Given that parents do not draw children's attention to print during shared reading, to what do the children attend? An innovative and cross-disciplinary study sheds light on the answer. Mary Ann Evans at the University of Guelph and Jean Saint-Aubin at the Université de Moncton (2005) conducted two experiments to determine the extent to which young children fixate on the print of storybooks during shared book reading with their families. Since most trade books for young children include illustrations, they were interested in whether illustrations that included illuminated uppercase letters and some text in speech bubbles would attract children's attention more than regular text with print and text separate. Evans and Saint-Aubin (2005) examined five French-speaking children's eye movements (1 boy and 4 girls, ages 48 to 61 months) during shared book reading of popular storybooks with colourful illustrations, simple black-and-white drawings, and varied text features. The five storybooks included *Boule et Bill* (Roba, 1986), a story about a boy's adventures with different vehicles—the text was at the top and bottom of the pages and illustrations between; *Les Vaches Voyageuses* (Lebel & Daigneault, 1991), a story about four cows on a trip—the text was in a block on the left side of the page with a large decorated uppercase letter on the top of the page and a small relevant illustration on the bottom of the each page; and *Le Potiron du Jardin Potager de Madame Potier* (Pommaux, 1997), a story about planting and growing a pumpkin—the text was in speech bubbles within the illustrations. Two older monocolour storybooks with illustrations generally on the right-hand pages and the text on the left were *The Carrot Seed* (Krauss, 1947) and *The Happy Egg* (Krauss, 1967). These latter two English-language books were translated into French. The children knew on average 13 of the 26 randomly arranged uppercase alphabet letters (range = 0–22) but none of the children were able to read any of the nine simple words from the stories.

During shared reading by a parent, eye movements were tracked using sophisticated eye-tracking technology. The children wore a light headband (SR Research EyeLink II System, Mississaugua, Ontario, Canada). Three camera systems were used to track simultaneously both eye and head position through the Eyelink system for real-time tracking of saccade and gaze-position. In the first experiment, they concluded: "During shared book reading, young children's fixations are scarce and are unaffected by the spatial arrangement of the text and illustrations. Furthermore, when extra time is spent on a given page, this time is devoted to the illustration and not the text" (2005, p. 916).

In the second experiment, Evans and Saint-Aubin (2005) replicated the first experiment using 10 different children (6 boys and 4 girls ranging in ages 52 to 60 months). In particular, they were interested only in the book *Les Vaches Voyageuses*, the text left book, because in the first experiment children tended to fixate on some of the small and incidental objects in the illustrations of that book. The 10 children knew on average 8 alphabet letters (range = 0 to 20) but none of the children recognised five of the simple words in the story. This time the reading was done by a daycare teacher. Again, the results of the first experiment were replicated, and showed that "when young children are being read to, their visual attention is not on the printed text" (p. 918). Children's visual fixations were on the illustrations, and their visual attention to different areas of the illustrations was not in accord with the story line. These results provide explicit and objective evidence that children do not look at the print when engaged in shared storybook reading.

The converging evidence from these and other studies (Evans, Shaw, & Bell, 2007; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sénéchal et al., 1998) is that "storybook reading relates to oral language development but not to written language development" (Levy et al., 2006, pp. 90–91), and "Storybook listening at home has little impact on children's understanding of print" (Levy et al., 2006, p. 91). Shared reading is a wonderful time for parents and children to develop positive associations with reading (Lonigan, 1994; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994), contextualized uses of language in a familiar and sensitive setting (e.g., Dickinson & Tabors, 1991; Ninio & Bruner, 1978), knowledge of story (Beals et al., 1994) and literary register (Baker & Freebody, 1989), listening skills (Sulzby & Teale, 1991), and vocabulary and syntactic knowledge (Sénéchal et al., 1996; Stahl, Richek, & Vandevier, 1991). Does shared reading promote reading skill development, however?

What Are the Reading Skill Outcomes of Parent–Child Shared Reading?

Reading to children is sometimes compared to a miracle drug. Consider the eloquent excerpt from Hoffman, Roser, and Battle (1991), who were critiquing this mindset: "Reading to children is to literacy education what two aspirins and a little bed rest was to the family doctor in years gone by. Students have an impoverished vocabulary? Read to them. Students struggling with comprehension? Read to them. Students beset with negative attitudes or lack of motivation? Read to them. Students have second language acquisition problems? Read to them" (p. 1).

Is the "Read to Them" mantra fair to families looking for advice and guidance on how best to help their children to read? We think not. It implies a simplistic and magical answer to a complex and long-term process. Families in the Phillips and Sample (2005) study astutely recognised the lack of magic in mere reading to their children. However, they directed the problem at themselves: "I must not know how to read to my children"; "I must not be doing it right"; "My boys want to learn their ABCs, but they're not and I read to them everyday"; and "I am depressed, 'cause I read to Suzie all the time, but she's not learning to read, if she is, I don't see it". Nevertheless, they implied in their expressions of concern a belief that the answers to their children's reading problems lay in reading to them.

We are confident that those promoting mere reading to children did not anticipate that it would disadvantage and undermine the very people they were trying to enlist by confusing them and diminishing their self-confidence. The field is rife with the simple view of promoting passive reading to children by adults as one of the best-kept secrets of parenting, as the way to ensure success at school, and as the answer to all reading and learning problems (e.g., Meyer et al., 1992). Yet, as we have shown, the evidence does not support the claims. Evans et al. (2007) found that across socioeconomic levels, education levels, and rural and urban sites, young children's early literacy and oral language skills including letter name knowledge, letter sound knowledge, phonological sensitivity, and receptive vocabulary are not enhanced or developed via general reading activities at home.

Much that is known about the specific reading skill outcomes of parent–child shared reading is by implication. The research repeatedly confirms that parents do not direct children's attention to print. Parents are not using their shared story time to teach their children letter names, letter sounds, numbers, colour words, similarities in words, word reading, repeated readings of literary sentences, discussion of word meanings during reading, elaboration of possible points, questioning of key incidents, and reading strategies.

How Can Shared Reading Be Enriched?

It is critically important at this juncture to reiterate that we acknowledge and endorse many of the very fine attributes of shared reading despite the overwhelming evidence that parents do not draw attention to the print when reading with their children and, consequently, do not teach them specific reading skills and strategies requisite for reading. It is well documented that shared reading supports oral language and nonlanguage development as we have discussed. Nevertheless, "Being read *to* is not enough" (Meyer et al., 1992, p. 27).

Engaging children with the explicit purpose of expanding their knowledge is essential for cognitive, literacy, and numeracy development. The passive exposure and frequent opportunities to play with objects, which may include letters, shapes, and numbers, will not enhance children's development of alphabetic and numeric concepts. Rather, it is essential for parents/caregivers actively to name letters, to make their sounds, to spell the child's name, to name the shapes, to name numerals, and to teach their children songs and nursery rhymes (Levy et al., 2006; Phillips, Hayden, & Norris, 2006; Sample Gosse & Phillips, 2007).

High expectations for educational achievement are expressed by the parents/caregivers of children who read at an early age (Stainthorp & Hughes, 1999), and evidence suggests that children's emergent literacy development is constrained and enhanced by the ways in which families use print (Sénéchal, 2006; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Scarborough, Dobrich, & Hager, 1991). For example, Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, and Daley (1998) have shown that children may be exposed to informal and/or formal literacy experiences at home. In the case of informal literacy experiences, "the goal is the message contained in the print," such as what the story is about. In the formal literacy experiences, "the goal is to focus more on the print per se," such as the identification of particular letters (p. 102). The informal should precede the formal, but both are necessary if children are to acquire literacy. Otherwise, even if children's homes are rich in oral language and rich in story reading, they may have difficulty acquiring literacy and may not develop knowledge of written registers.

The work of Ellen Bialystok (1995) of York University points to many of the specific reading skills that might be taught in an enriched version of shared reading. She was interested in investigating the extent to which children are able to discriminate between print, cursive writing, and meaningless scribbles. She also wanted to explore their decisions about what kinds of things can be read, their attribution of readability to cursive writing, and their concepts of why things can be read. She studied 60 children (26 boys and 34 girls) ranging in age from 3 years 11 months to 6 years and 3 months and all at a similar stage of literacy development. The children were divided into an older ($\geq$5 years 6 months, N = 29) and younger group ($\leq$ 4 years 4 months, N = 31) for determination of developmental patterns and asked to complete four tasks.

Writing

Forty-eight children were tested informally to see whether they could produce writing. These children were asked to write something such as a word, a letter to a friend, or a story. When they finished, they were asked who could read what they had written. Some possible answers included themselves, a parent, or their teacher. The remaining 12 children were asked to engage in five different play activities that required writing: completing a transaction form at the bank; answering the telephone and writing a message; taking a written order at a restaurant and giving it to the cook; writing a letter to someone they liked; and describing in writing what they did that day. The writing in each case was given to the experimenter who was the pretend banker, cook, and so forth.

Judging Readability

The children were introduced to George, an adult doll who read to them. They were then given 24 cards with different textual objects on them such as the actual printing of a word, linear print, cursive writing of a word, linear writing, nonlinear-print, picture, and nonlinear-writing. Children were asked to give George what they thought he could read.

Sorting by Task

The children were given 12 cards in random order (4 with printed words, 4 with cursive words, and 4 with squiggles (2 print-like and 2 cursive-like). Three boxes were placed on a table in front of the children: one was placed with a child doll, another box with a mother doll, and the third box alone. Children were asked who could read each card. If a child could read it, then it went into the child's box, if a mother could read it, then it went into the mother's box, and if nobody could read it, then it belonged in the third box.

Matching Print and Cursive

As Bialystok (1995) wrote, "The real test of the alphabetic principle is understanding that writing represents the sounds of language by means of specific letters in a particular sequence" (p. 324). She was interested in whether the children understood "that writing represents language because of the presence and sequence of letters?" (p. 326). Children were shown a card that had a word printed on it, for example, "car." They were told the word, and the card was placed on the table in full view. Then, four cards with cursive writing were placed on the table (car, arc, cot, dip), and children were asked which card had the same word, "car" written in a different way.

The Bialystok study is fascinating from many perspectives. In response to the first and second tasks, almost all of the children were able to make pseudoscribbles and believed that pseudoscribbles could be read. The third task asked the children to decide whether a card could be read. She found that the older children knew the squiggles could not be read but the younger ones did not. The matching print and cursive writing in the fourth task was performed correctly 40% of the time and primarily by the older children. Bialystok concluded, "the knowledge these children have of the forms of writing does not include understanding the symbolic function by which these forms represent language" (p. 317). Of particular relevance to this article was the confirmatory result with a previous study (Bialystok, 1991) that children failed to grasp that the identity of a particular word comes from its letters and not from its physical or contextual properties. Children did not seem to understand that the word on a card remained the same even when it was moved to a different picture. The implication is that children are treating the written words as visual objects and have what Mason (1980) called a "contextual dependency." The finding that younger children were more likely to claim that nonalphabetic displays are readable than are older children is telling—but, that all of the children in the Bialystok (1995) study thought that pictures were readable is curious. However, as she points out, pictures provide information to children as words do and "children use them to convey meanings" (p. 332). Bialystok concluded, "just prior to learning how to read, children fail to appreciate the symbolic function of print. There is a gap between what these children know about writing and what is required for literacy. Knowing the letters is not enough; knowing what the letters do in words needs to be discovered" (p. 335). These results raise the question whether children know what on the page parents are reading and what children understand about the visual and orthographic features of print.

A team of researchers at McMaster University, and the Universities of Guelph and Western Ontario (Levy et al., 2006), explored the development of children's early understanding of visual and orthographic aspects of print and how this is related to early reading acquisition. They studied 474 children (240 females and 234 males) from 48 to 83 months of age. Parents were generally well educated with a family income that clustered around the community median of $69,000. The school programme combined a whole language approach with some focus on alphabetic and phonemic awareness training. By the end of grade one, for instance, children are expected to "read familiar words with picture support and to write simple words from alphabet and syllabic charts" (p. 70). Measures were made of children's phonological sensitivity, reading achievement, and visual/orthographic knowledge. Parents completed a home literacy questionnaire.

The visual/orthographic knowledge test was a two-alternative, forced-choice discrimination task—one version used single words and the other short sentences. Each version contained 130 flash cards with two alternatives per card, one with a correct version and the other with a single print violation that could be an alteration in word shape (scribbles, letter-like characters, pictures, linearity, spacing, and multiplicity), word elements (letter–number combination, variety, upside-down, backward), and spelling (vowels, consonants, pseudo homophone). For the sentence discrimination task the categories of violations were the same as for the word tasks. Half of the children did the word task first and the other half completed the sentence task first. For the word and sentence tasks, children were shown the flash cards one at a time and were told: "We are going to play a game. There are two things on the card. Can you tell me which one you think Mommy would like to read or which one you think is a better word/sentence to read? Point to it for me."

The results showed clear developmental trends in the acquisition of print knowledge from 48 to 83 months of age. The developmental trends began with an understanding of the figural and spatial aspects of writing (word shape), and then the more abstract

aspects such as letter orientation followed by acceptable spelling patterns. The relation between print knowledge and early reading skill showed that visual/orthographic skills are related to reading development over and above the relation to phonology. Furthermore, the relationship is not related to the figural, that is, word shape component, but rather is carried by the more abstract aspects of letter orientation, word constituents, and spelling which point to the "importance of early print exposure to allow children to learn how language is coded in the written display" (p. 90). Levy et al. (2006) emphasised "that prior to knowing how to read words, young children must closely examine the print and develop an understanding of written letters and how they encode words in the English writing system" (p. 90).

Based on parent responses to the home literacy questionnaire, the frequency of active involvement in literacy activities such as printing, reading, and spelling accounted for 24% of the variance in the development of children's early reading development. Based on parent responses, a hybrid of five activities that allow children "to examine letters and print, such as looking at picture dictionaries, using alphabet books, and playing with letters " (p. 84) was also significant for children's reading development. The emergent literacy variables suggest an overall picture that was summarized by Levy et al. as follows: "being read books, whether advanced text or more traditional children's books, was uncorrelated with the literacy variables, but activities in which children were directly involved with printing, reading, and writing, and to a lesser extent phonics/phonological sensitivity activities, were related to print knowledge and the ability to manipulate sounds in spoken words" (p. 87).

Monique Sénéchal at Carleton University and her colleagues have proposed a theoretical model wherein different literacy activities contribute differently to children's early literacy development (Sénéchal, LeFevre, Smith-Chant, & Colton, 2001). They propose that some activities (e.g., book reading) contribute to children's conceptual knowledge (e.g., concepts of print, vocabulary), but that other activities (e.g., teaching letter names and sounds) support children's procedural knowledge (e.g., decoding, phonological awareness). Tracking the development of kindergarten and grade one children from English-speaking, middle-class homes, Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) found that the amount and frequency of shared book reading contributed to children's receptive language development but not to their knowledge of print. They also found that parents' reports of teaching literacy skills such as the letters of the alphabet was related to children's print knowledge, which, as they point out, is essential for children's learning to read print independently.

A research team at the University of Alberta (Phillips et al., 2006) conducted a longitudinal quasi-experimental, control group, mixed-methods study extending across five years with parents and their preschool children 3+ years from low-income and low-educational backgrounds. The main objectives were to determine whether beneficial effects accrue to (1) children's literacy development, (2) parents' literacy development, and (3) parents' ability to assist in the development of their children's literacy from their involvement in a form of enriched shared reading. The focus in this article is on the children's literacy development.

The *Learning Together: Read and Write with Your Child Programme* is a three-part family literacy preschool programme: adult, child, and joint adult-child daily sessions. The programme includes eight units of study for 90 hours across 12 weeks of instruction. Units include importance of play (Christie, 1991; Gregory, 2001; Pellegrini & Galda, 1991), developing language and literacy (Heath, 1983; Whitehead, 1999), games (Brown, 1984; Stainthorp & Hughes, 2000), books (Doake, 1988; Sulzby, 1991), early reading (Goodman, 1984; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994), writing and drawing (Dyson, 1989; Kendrick, 2003), environmental print (Hill, 1989; Neuman & Roskos, 1993), and advice and guidance (Richgels, 2003).

The specific expectations of the programme related to the development of reading skills and strategies include: Drawing parents and children's attention to the print around them; matching letters with other letters, identifying letters, and making letter-sound matches; expecting children to engage in writing; encouraging children to spell and to listen to the sounds they hear; teaching children to count, to identify colours, and colour words; teaching child to write and spell their names; analyzing word meanings; teaching parents the difference between a book to be read to children and one that children can be expected to read; and helping children make explicit connections between their background knowledge and the story being read.

The design and sample included five treatment sites, three urban and two rural, and 158 children and 156 parents. The control families were matched on several factors including age, ethnicity, and sex of the children and received no intervention. The treatment families were taught the *Learning Together* programme prior to formal schooling for the children and all families were tested and interviewed at five points in time: pretest, posttest after 12 weeks, first-year follow-up, second-year follow-up and third-year follow-up. The children were tested using the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test* (3rd ed., Dunn & Dunn (1997) and the *Test of Early Reading Ability* (TERA-2; TERA-3). Of particular interest to the topic of this article is what the TERA measures. The TERA (Reid, Hresko, & Hammill, 1989,) is designed to measure children's (ages 3–9 years) ability to attribute meaning to printed symbols, their knowledge of the alphabet and its functions, and their understanding of the conventions of print.

One year after the programme ended, the intervention group outperformed the control group on the TERA for those children in the bottom 79% of the TERA at the pretest. For children with the lowest TERA Pretest scores, their first follow-up scores were boosted from the 16th to 35th percentile. The children in the top 21% of the TERA Pretest received no boost, suggesting that these children did not need the intervention.

The *Learning Together* programme worked for children regardless of gender and no matter their beginning reading age between 36 and 60 months. In essence, there was no time better than another to intervene if the children did not know the concepts of print necessary to advance in their reading development. Time was not the factor; rather, what the children knew, or, more specifically, what they did not know was the factor! This study showed that when taught specific skills and strategies to read and write, children learn. The *Learning Together* programme continued to have a positive influence for children in the lowest 70% to 80% of scores at the pretest until up to three years after the programme ended. These children and their families demonstrated that letter knowledge, phoneme awareness, word recognition, and story comprehension can be learned with direct instruction, explicit expectations, and active engagement in print that matters.

Concluding Remarks

Reading to children is important. Is it the key to emergent literacy development? Capitalizing upon the research of our international colleagues provided an excellent foundation upon which to build a vibrant and complementary body of Canadian research addressing precisely this question. The Canadian research has made a significant contribution by clarifying the possibilities for, and shortcomings of, parent–child shared reading. The major shortcoming is that shared-book reading by itself, although potentially interesting for children and facilitative of their oral language development, does not foster emergent literacy development. The chief possibility of shared-book reading is that, supplemented with explicitly teaching children about print, it has proven benefits for future reading ability.

Résumé

On encourage les parents à faire la lecture à leurs enfants. Et les parents invitent régulièrement leurs enfants à des activités de lecture, croyant ainsi favoriser le développement de leurs compétences en lecture et en écriture. Toutefois, dans bien des cas, faire la lecture aux enfants ne donne pas les résultats attendus, et c'est ce que nous soutenons dans cet article. En effet, les études ont révélé qu'en général, les adultes n'attirent pas l'attention des enfants sur le texte imprimé dans le cadre des activités de lecture parent-enfant. La plupart du temps, les enfants s'intéressent aux illustrations plutôt qu'au texte. Par conséquent, ce genre d'activité ne tend pas à accélérer l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture à moins que l'atttention de l'enfant soit dirigée vers le développement de ses compétences et de ses stratégies de lecture, auquel cas la recherche indique que même l'enfant venant d'un milieu défavorisé en bénéficiera.

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