

Repeated Read Alouds May Lead to Reading Success for Young Children

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Over 50 years ago Dr. Dolores Durkin studied children who learned to read before starting school. She reported that one of the most consistent findings among these children were parents who read to their children regularly during their preschool years. This finding has since manifested itself in the advice we give to parents to read to their children. Over the years I have discovered that there is a type of parent-child read aloud experience that seems to be evident when children are quite young. Children have that one special book that they have their parents read to them daily. I have come to wonder if there is something quite powerful about this rereading experience that helps children become readers.

As a person interested in reading fluency, a foundational reading competency according to the Common Core State Standards, I have learned that re-readings or repeated readings of texts can lead to significant and generalized improvements in students' word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. Indeed, repeated readings has become a mainstay of many reading fluency instructional programs.

Does the repeated readings that parents often engage in with their young children also have a beneficial effect on children's early reading development? I think it does. As parents repeatedly read a text chosen as special by the child, the child eventually comes to the point where he or she has the oral text memorized. During most read aloud experiences children sit next to their parents so that they can actually view the text itself and pictures as the parent reads. Through repeated readings and viewings the child begins to map the words that he or she hears with the words that he or she sees in the text. The sight and sound of the words eventually get locked into the child's brain. This is the beginning of sight vocabulary and reading itself. More of these repeated experiences at home will lead to the development of a large sight vocabulary and through analysis of the learned sight words, the child will begin to make generalizations about phonics in particular and reading in general.

Given the possible connection between repeated reading in early childhood and children's positive literacy outcomes it seems that it would not be unwise to recommend to parents that they allow themselves to read and reread favorite books and other texts (e.g. songs and poetry) to their children - even to the point of memorization. Many children have a natural inclination to one or a few books that they love to hear repeatedly. I am beginning to think that there is something incredibly powerful in children's apparent and innate desire to hear a story read to them again and again. We should take advantage of this inclination at home as well as in school as we move children ever closer to the goal of conventional reading.