

Any Google search will present numerous studies showing that kids with active exposure to language have social and educational advantages over their peers. In fact, a student's reading level in first grade is an astonishingly good predictor of reading achievement into high school. Reading failure begins early, takes root quickly and affects students for life. Reading with parents sets the foundation for independent reading later on in life. Kids need to read and they look to you as an example.

Children need repeated exposure to letters and sounds to begin ingraining them in their little memories. Average readers require being exposed to a word four to 14 times before it becomes a sight word, whereas students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia, may need up to be exposed 40 to 100 times to retain word meaning. Children who have experienced an abundance of language in the form of talk and read-alouds will have heard 32 million more words by the time they are 4 than children who haven't had a language-rich environment. Yes, I said 32 million.

Lap time teaches children about the value of books. You are the first reading teacher that your child will ever have. If we begin at birth, children who receive half an hour of lap time each day will have the developmental skills they need to read when they come to kindergarten. If we wait until they are 2 or 3, it will take an hour a day of lap time to prepare children with skills they need to read. If we wait until they are 5 and about to start school, it will take three hours a day of lap time to catch up to their peers.

Study says reading aloud to children, more than talking, builds literacy

JULY 8, 2015 | SUSAN FREY

In “The Pout-Pout Fish” children’s picture book, the author weaves words like “aghost” and “grimace” into a story about a fish who thought he was destined to “spread the dreary-wearies all over the place” until...well, no need to spoil the ending.

Finding such rich language in a picture book is not unusual, and reading those stories aloud will introduce children to an extensive vocabulary, according to new research conducted by Dominic Massaro, a professor emeritus in psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He said although parents can build their children’s vocabularies by talking to them, reading to them is more effective.

Reading aloud is the best way to help children develop word mastery and grammatical understanding, which form the basis for learning how to read, said Massaro, who studies language acquisition and literacy. He found that picture books are two to three times as likely as parent-child conversations to include a word that isn’t among the 5,000 most common English words.

Picture books even include more uncommon words than conversations among adults, he said.

“We talk with a lazy tongue,” Massaro said. “We tend to point at something or use a pronoun and the context tells you what it is. We talk at a basic level.”



Books by Dr. Seuss are popular with children.

Massaro said the limited vocabulary in ordinary, informal speech means what has been dubbed “the talking cure” – encouraging parents to talk more to their children to increase their vocabularies – has its drawbacks. Reading picture books to children would not only expose them to more words, he said, but it also would have a leveling effect for families with less education and a more limited vocabulary.

“Given the fact that word mastery in adulthood is correlated with early acquisition of words, shared picture book reading offers a potentially powerful strategy to prepare children for competent literacy skills,” Massaro said in the study.

The emphasis on talking more to children to increase their vocabularies is based on research by Betty Hart and Todd Risley at the University of Kansas. They found that parents on welfare spoke about 620 words to their children in an average hour compared with 2,150 words an hour spoken by parents with professional jobs. By age 3, the children with professional parents had heard 30 million more words than the children whose parents were on welfare. Hart and Risley concluded that the more parents talked to their children, the faster the children’s vocabularies grew and the higher the children’s I.Q. test scores were at age 3 and later. Since their research was published, there has been a push to encourage low-income parents to talk more to their children as a way to improve literacy.

“Reading takes you beyond the easy way to communicate,” said Dominic Massaro, psychology professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz. “It takes you to another world and challenges you.”

But more picture book reading would be beneficial to children from every social class, Massaro said. What limits the tongue of even well-educated adults are “certain rules of discourse,” such as responding quickly, he said. That reduces word choices to those acquired early and used more frequently. In conversation, people also repeat words that have been recently spoken, further restricting the variety of words used.

Writing, on the other hand, is more formal, Massaro said, even in children’s books.

“Reading takes you beyond the easy way to communicate,” he said. “It takes you to another world and challenges you.”

Reading picture books to babies and toddlers is important, he said, because the earlier children acquire language, the more likely they are to master it.

“You are stretching them in vocabulary and grammar at an early age,” Massaro said. “You are preparing them to be expert language users, and indirectly you are going to facilitate their learning to read.”

GOING DEEPER

“Two Different Communication Genres and Implications for Vocabulary Development and Learning to Read”
by Dominic W. Massaro, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2015

“The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3” by Betty Hart and Todd Risley, University of Kansas, 1995

“The Talking Cure” by Margaret Talbot, The New Yorker, Jan. 12, 2005

Massaro said encouraging older children to sound out words and explaining what a word means if it isn't clear in the context of the story will help build children's vocabularies. Allowing children to pick the books they are interested in and turn the pages themselves keeps them active and engaged in learning, he said.

Reading to children also teaches them to listen, and “good listeners are going to be good readers,” Massaro said.

Massaro said that 95 percent of the time when adults are reading to children, the children are looking at the pictures, partly because picture books tend to have small or fancy fonts that are hard to read. If picture book publishers would use larger and simpler fonts, then children would be more likely to also focus on the words, helping them to become independent readers, he said.

In the study, Massaro compared the words in 112 popular picture books to adult-to-child conversations and adult-to-adult conversations. The picture books, which were recommended by librarians and chosen by him, included such favorites as “Goodnight Moon” and “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie.”

Most of the books Massaro used were fiction, but children's picture books can also be nonfiction and discuss topics such as earthquakes or ocean life that would likely include a larger number of uncommon words, he said, giving them an even greater advantage over conversation.

To analyze the conversations, Massaro used two databases of words. One database involved 64 conversations with 32 mothers. The mothers had one conversation with their baby, age 2 to 5 months, while interacting with toys, and another "casual conversation" with an adult experimenter. The second database consisted of more than 2.5 million words spoken by parents, caregivers and experimenters in the presence of children with a mean age of 36 months.

In his comparison, Massaro identified the number of uncommon words, and he determined that the picture books he analyzed contained more of them than the language used in conversation.

Massaro's study has been accepted for publication in [The Journal of Literacy Research](#).

Comments

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Margaret McKeown

5 months ago

The issue should never be talking *to* vs reading *to* children, but interacting with children around language. Talk in a way that signals you expect a response; read as if in a conversation – comment, ask questions, talk about words in the book.

A well-known finding in the literacy field: interacting with children around books is more beneficial than simply reading aloud. See for example, Dickinson & Smith 1994; Teale & Martinez 1996; Beck & McKeown 2001)

Charris

11 months ago

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326630284_The_impact_of_a_writing_programme_on_reading_acquisition_of_at-risk_first_grade_children here is a fantastic study for those looking for ways to help children gain better reading

1000 HOURS OF LAP-TIME TO BE READY TO LEARN TO READ

**It takes 1000 hours of “lap-time”
for young children to have the
readiness skills in place to learn to
read.**

*—National Institute for Children’s Health and
Development*

If we begin at **birth**, children who receive one-
half hour a day of lap-time will have the
developmental skills they need to read when
they come to kindergarten.

If we wait until they are **two to three years old**,
it will take an hour a day of lap-time to prepare
children with the readiness skills they need to
read.

**“Lap-time” means one-on-one
interaction between a parent or
caregiver and a child where
meaningful language interactions
take place. Types of lap-time
activities include: talking, singing,
rhyming, chanting, and, of course,
reading.**

If we wait until they are **four years old**, it will
take two hours a day of lap-time to prepare
children with the readiness skills they need to
read.

If we wait until children are **five years old** and
entering kindergarten, it will take three hours a
day of lap-time to catch these children up with
their peers in order to be ready to read.

Find joy in every journey

This message brought to you from the Chinook Elementary Literacy Team