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The Parent's Role in Developing Children's Comprehension

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Five-day-old Robbie begins to cry. Quickly, his mom responds, her high-pitch, exaggerated sing-song speech called parentese is music and comfort to his ears. He has been listening to her voice since he was 6 months in utero. Her voice is something he knows, something he understands. As he looks into her face, he begins to recognize her features and will soon automatically recognize her face.

Robbie, as young as he is, comprehends. He is learning that when he cries, his family will respond to his needs. This cause-and-effect relationship is the start of the many facets of comprehension. He and his family have begun a remarkable journey together. So we begin our discussion of the parent's role in supporting children's prereading comprehension.

Comprehension is not a unitary activity. Rather, it is a set of complex and inter-related skills and actions (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005) that begin to develop prior to birth (Tsao, Liu, & Kuhl, 2004). For comprehension/learning to occur, a child's brain has to develop multiple concurrent and hierarchical functions, such as the following: perceiving and integrating sensory information, learning and interpreting new information and connecting to prior knowledge, and adapting behavior and/or changing the environment. This cycle is constant; learning and behavior are refined continuously and almost instantaneously (Liston, McEwen, & Casey, 2009).

Parents are their child's first teachers. Beginning at birth, parents help to provide the support and stimuli that children need to begin to make sense of the world. By talking to and interacting with their children and by labeling the thousands of objects in the home with words, parents help them build the uniquely human gift and cognitive tool of language. This chapter will explore several aspects of parental support of comprehension in prereaders by intertwining child language and literacy development with research regarding the following:

- The results of a national survey regarding parental involvement in storybook reading
- The impact of shared reading on children's language, literacy skills, and comprehension

- The research regarding the content and impact of parent literacy programs
- Conditions that affect access to age-appropriate books

LANGUAGE: THE FOUNDATION FOR COMPREHENSION

We define prereading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with “text.” We broadly describe text as verbal conversation or printed texts such as books, magazines, and newspapers. We also include electronic tools such as computers, notebooks, pads, and smartphones (see Chapter 5 by Dooley and Welch). In addition, we extend text to include illustrations, pictures, television, videos, and music. We also base our definition of the word *literate* on its Latin origin: the pursuit of information and knowledge, not simply decoding symbols. With these clarifications, we begin our discussion of parents’ role in helping to support children’s prereading comprehension.

During the first month of an infant’s life, most of oral communication consists of crying. The greatest challenge parents face is interpreting the subtle variations in their child’s cries. During the second to third months after birth, infants begin to respond to their parents’ voices nonverbally with coy smiles and body wiggles. From 4 to 6 months, infants mimic the facial movements of their parents. Delighting in the sound of their own voice, most developing infants can make almost all the vowel and consonant sounds. Infants coo and gurgle endlessly, joyfully experimenting with phonemic variations, pitch, and volume. When spoken to, most infants begin a stream of conversation—called *sound play*—that parallels the adult speaker.

From 6 to 9 months, infants’ muscle strength, balance, and coordination allow them to have greater independent control over the environment as they master the fine art of crawling and stumble-walking around furniture. These physical accomplishments stimulate further cognitive development, as infants now have the ability to explore the world under their own power (Glenberg & Gallese, 2012). At the same time, infants’ babbling increases dramatically. However, the sounds they produce begin to resemble words. Called *echolalia*, these repeated sounds are still not words with a cognitive connection or meaning. Around the seventh month, most children begin to distinguish syllables, which enable them to detect word boundaries. Prior to this, “whereisyourtoy?” is a pleasant tune but not explicit communication. After auditory boundaries become apparent, infants will hear distinct words: “Where / is / your / toy?” As sounds become words that are frequently used in context to label a specific object, the acquisition of word meaning and comprehension begins (Thiessen & Saffran, 2003). Reading storybooks with simple illustrations appears to help infants hear the word boundaries through repeated reading (Karrass & Braungart-Rieker, 2005; Trivette, Dunst, & Gorman, 2010).

Soon after, babbling begins to exhibit conversation-like tones and behaviors. This pattern of speech is called *vocables*. This form of prelanguage is play-like in nature and not a deliberate use of language to communicate a need or accomplish a goal.

Between 9 months to 1 year, most children use real, goal-oriented language as they speak their first word. During this time, expressive and receptive vocabularies grow rapidly. In addition, infants’ command of nonverbal gestures and facial expressions expand

from waving. *Holophrastic words*, in which one word carries the semantic burden for a whole sentence or phrase, begin to emerge, as the following example illustrates:

Eleven-month old Briar pats the garage door, garnering her mom's attention.

Briar: Ide.

Mom: Do you want to go outside?

Briar: [shaking her head] Ide!

Mom: [opening the garage door] Ide?

Briar: [pointing at the stroller] Ide.

Mom: Stroller! You want to go for ride in the stroller?

Briar: [raising her arms, nodding her head vigorously] Ide!

As Briar's mother (and most mothers) begins to make sense of her child's speech, she also begins to comprehend her child's meaning and/or intent. Malloch and Trevarthen (2010) studied these interactions between parents and infants who were too young to speak. They concluded that the turn-taking structure of conversation is developed through games and nonverbal communications long before actual words are uttered. In the preceding example, the mother's questions supported and enabled Briar to successfully communicate her intentions using a one-word sentence, something she could not have done on her own.

By the time most children are crawling/walking, they begin pointing at new and unfamiliar objects; "Dat?" is a common question. As parents follow their child's pointing gesture, they share a moment of joint attention, and the goal of pointing is to learn the name of the object (Butterworth, 2003). Pointing things out for other people seems like a very simple act, but it turns out that this is a uniquely human form of communication. Important skills in joint attention are following eye gaze and identifying intention, as the two communicators must interpret the goal or purpose of pointing. The ability to identify intention is important for many aspects of language development including comprehension, production, and word learning (Tomasello, Carpenter, & Lizskowski, 2007). Shared attention with another person allows a young child to either request information or offer information, depending on the communication context. Take the following as an example:

Nolan (11 months): Reading with his mother, Nolan points to a large, gray creature with a great hose of a nose. Mom interprets his pointing as wanting to know the name of the large creature. "That's an elephant, Nolan." Mom infers Nolan's pointing as a request for information—the animal's name.

Nora (12 months): Grandma has folded Nora's clothes and is walking into Nora's bedroom. Nora, who is playing on the floor, observes her grandma and points to the chest of drawers to indicate where the clothes should go. Nora correctly interprets her grandma's intentions.

With the support of parents and family members, a child's linguistic abilities undergo rapid changes during the second year of life. By 16 months, his or her production

vocabulary is more than 50 words, and by 24 months, most children are typically combining words to make small sentences. Most of their words identify or label the people, pets, and objects that are familiar and meaningful to them. Research suggests that young children will learn and remember approximately nine new words a day (Sabbagh & Baldwin, 2005). This amazing comprehension ability to relate new words to preexisting internalized concepts and then remember and use them after only one exposure is called *fast mapping* (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 1999). Research also suggests storybook reading facilitates this process (Hepburn, Egan, & Flynn, 2010).

Comprehension also requires the activation of prior knowledge. The parent often serves as a bridge to help create the connection between the new and the known (Enz & Foley, 2009). When new information enters a child's working memory, it sets off a search throughout the brain's memories for related patterns or information including images or content (Fuster, 2003). Parents can enhance this process by providing their child with multiple forms of information, such as expository and/or storybooks, videos, television, movies, and photos (Christakis & Zimmerman, 2013). See Chapter 5 by Dooley and Welch for an excellent discussion on comprehension in the digital world. The following example illustrates of how several forms of information are integrated in the mind of a young learner.

Annie, 30 months, has been watching a science television show with her father. During the program, Annie watches a sequence where a chick hatches from an egg. Annie, thinking for a moment, goes to her bookshelf and finds two books she has seen previously, The Egg (Jeunesse & de Bourgoing, 1989) and A Nest Full of Eggs (Jenkins, 1995). The expository texts provide more information about how chicks and birds develop in the egg. Over the next few days, Annie requests these books to be read again and again.

Later in the week, in the middle of the night, Annie's parents awake to sounds in the kitchen. When they investigate, they find Annie sitting on the floor, surrounded by nearly a dozen cracked eggs. With a look of puzzlement, Annie asks, "Daddy, where are the chicks?"

Annie comprehended a number of concepts from watching television and reading books with her parents. Her inferences and new mental connections inspired her to conduct her own scientific investigation. Annie's hypothesis, though disproved this time, was a masterpiece of connecting old information with new. To learn more about informational texts and comprehension, see Chapter 6 by Hall-Kenyon, Culatta, and Duke.

By the time most children enter preschool, they are fairly competent language users, able to use language to accomplish personal goals and able to listen to language to learn new information, as the following vignette illustrates:

On a very warm afternoon, 40-month-old Bree and Gigi (her grandmother) are snuggled together in a comfortable rocking chair reading Leo Lionni's A Color of His Own (1975) for the first time.

*Gigi: Bree, look at the special animal. [pointing to the cover illustration]
What do you think it is?*

Bree: It's a lizard.

Gigi: Yes, you are right, but he is a special lizard called a chameleon. A chameleon can change colors. What colors does he have?

Bree: He is lots of colors, yellow, purple, blue, red. He looks mad. Gi, why he mad?

Gigi: I don't know, but the title says A Color of His Own—maybe the chameleon wants . . . ?

Bree: His own color?

Gigi: That is a great guess. But I wonder what color that would be? Can you turn the page, Bree? We can start to read to find out what is going on.

Sharing books aloud with children is a wonderful activity for both the adult and child. In that quick interaction, Bree continues her apprenticeship with text as a source of entertainment, enjoyment, and new knowledge. Children develop literacy skills and an awareness of language long before they are able to read. Because language development is fundamental to all areas of learning, skills developed early in life can help set the stage for later school success. See Chapter 4 by van Kleeck for an excellent review on academic talk. By reading aloud to their young children, parents help them acquire the skills they will need to be ready for school (Bus, van IJzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; Dickinson, Griffith, Michnick-Golinsk, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2012; Duursma, Augustyn, & Zuckerman, 2008; Stamm, 2007). However, shared reading is not an activity that has the same expectations or dimensions for all families. To better understand how families engage in literacy practices in the home, we review national survey research.

HOME LITERACY PRACTICES: A NATIONAL SURVEY

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations. It fulfills a congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States. In 2007, NCES conducted a phone survey to determine the literacy practices conducted in the home. The survey, called the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), used a random, stratified sample and collected data from parents of 2,633 children ages 3 to 6. The NHES provided national cross-sectional estimates for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The design also yielded estimates for subgroups of interest, including the child's age, parents' socioeconomic status, parental education, and ethnicity. In addition to providing cross-sectional estimates, the NHES also provides estimates of change over time in key statistics. The survey (Herrold & O'Donnell, 2008) revealed the following results:

- The percentage of young children who are read aloud to every day by a family member has shown little change between 1993 and 2007. In 2007, 55% of 3- to 5-year-old

children (who had not yet entered kindergarten) were read to every day, compared with 53% in 1993.

- Young children who are Caucasian or Asian are more likely to be read to than children who are either Hispanic or African American. In 2007, 67% of Caucasian and 60% of Asian 3- to 5-year-olds were read to every day by a family member, compared with 35% of African American children and 37% of Hispanic children.
- Young children are more likely to be read to if their mothers have completed higher levels of education. In 2007, 74% of young children whose mothers had graduated from college were read to every day by a family member. In contrast, 55% of children whose mothers had some college education were read to every day, compared with 39% whose mothers had only finished high school and 31% whose mothers had not finished high school.
- Young children living in poverty are less likely to be read to every day by a family member than are children living at or above the poverty line. In 2007, 40% of poor 3- to 5-year-olds were read to every day, compared with 50% of children in families at 100%–199% of poverty and 64% of children in families at 200% of poverty and above. As of 2012, in the United States, the poverty threshold for a family of four, including two children, was \$23,550 (Adamson, 2012).
- Children living with two married parents are more likely to be read to every day than children with one or two unmarried parents. In 2007, 62% of children with two married parents were read to every day versus 43% of children with one unmarried parent and 24% of children with two unmarried parents.
- Children with mothers working part time (fewer than 35 hours a week) or not in the labor force are more likely than other children to be read to every day. In 2007, 63% of children with mothers working part time and 58% of children with mothers not in the labor force were read to every day, compared with 51% of children with mothers who worked full time and 40% of children with mothers looking for work.

In terms of accumulated amount of exposure, researchers Hart and Risley (1996) discovered that this means the average child growing up in a low-income family has only been exposed to 25 hours of one-to-one reading, whereas the average child growing up in a middle-class family has been exposed to 1,000 to 1,700 hours of one-to-one picture book reading. Beyond entertainment, what effect does shared reading have on preschool children's literacy development, including vocabulary, early literacy skills, and comprehension?

IMPACT OF SHARED READING: A REVIEW OF META-ANALYSIS RESEARCH STUDIES

Since the mid-1980s, a tremendous amount of research has been conducted regarding the impact of shared reading on children's language and literacy. These studies most often include the following:

- Qualitative studies that explore and document the interactions between a parent and child during shared reading time. Often, the investigators observe specific populations,

such as families from different educational, cultural, or socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g., Heath, 1982).

- National surveys using telephones or mail to collect data from a random stratified population, such as the NCES (2007, 2012).
- Experimental intervention studies where parents are *randomly* assigned to either a control or intervention group. The intervention group learns and then applies specific shared reading strategies (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).
- Quasi-experimental studies involving *intact groups*, such as parents of children in a preschool classroom or parent-education group. These participants are taught shared reading strategies. In these studies, it is common for Group A to receive Treatment 1, whereas Group B might receive Treatment 2 (see Valdez-Menchaca & Whitehurst, 1992).

The children involved in these studies are typically evaluated using multiple measures of standardized emergent literacy assessments, including vocabulary, concepts of print, and comprehension measures. The outcomes of the experimental groups are compared with the control group, or the outcomes of different treatments are compared.

To help understand the outcomes of the thousands of shared reading interventions, we have chosen to review several meta-analysis studies that looked at the impact of shared reading on vocabulary, early literacy skills, and comprehension. Meta-analysis studies statistically combine all the relevant research on a given person in order to determine the aggregated results of the selected research, identifying patterns among study results, sources of disagreement among those results, or other interesting relationships that may emerge in the context of multiple studies. In its simplest form, meta-analysis is normally done by identification of a common measure of effect size. A weighted average of that common measure is the output of a meta-analysis. The weighting is related to sample sizes within the individual studies and provides the reader with extensive information on whether a treatment effect exists (Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981).

A review of the meta-analysis research on the impact of shared reading revealed several facts about shared reading with young children from birth to preschool, which we discuss in the following sections.

Develops Vocabulary, Expanding Both Expressive and Receptive Language

The effects of reading to infants and toddlers were examined in a meta-analysis conducted by Dunst, Simkus, and Hamby (2012a) of six intervention studies using experimental and quasi-experimental designs and involving 408 participants. Results indicated that interventions were effective in promoting the children's expressive and receptive language.

Another meta-analysis conducted in 2008 used 16 studies, of which 8 studies reported measures of both receptive and expressive vocabulary. Of the remaining studies, seven tested only receptive vocabulary, whereas one focused solely on expressive vocabulary. A total of 626 parent-child dyads were included. Researchers found the benefits of the vocabulary interventions increased when interventions began sooner and were implemented over longer durations (Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008).

One reason researchers offered for the finding relates to the nature of children's books. Books contain many words, especially the more sophisticated words that children are unlikely to encounter frequently in daily spoken language. For example, children's books contain 50% more rare words than prime-time television or most adult conversation (Dunst, Simkus, & Hamby, 2012b). Furthermore, qualitative studies have consistently observed parents, typically mothers, pointing to and labeling illustrations/pictures while reading to their young children. These activities greatly increase children's expressive and receptive vocabularies (DeLoache & DeMendoza, 1987; Shapiro, Anderson, & Anderson, 1997).

“Shared Reading Does Not Always Translate into Explicit Improvement in Letter–Sound Knowledge or Concepts of Print”?

Meta-analysis studies about the impact of shared reading on early reading readiness skills such as the development of phonological awareness and letter/sound recognition show less positive results. A meta-analysis conducted by Scarborough and Dobrich (1994) was based on 30 years of research. Using 20 correlational and 11 experimental studies, the investigators found that although shared story reading positively influenced language, it had a limited effect on the development of early literacy skills. This finding could be explained by subsequent qualitative studies (Shapiro et al., 1997) that used videotape data on 12 middle-class mothers interacting with their children during shared read-alouds. For content consistency, each mother read the same two books. Over 24 videotaped sessions, researchers found that “scant attention, either verbally or by gesture, was paid to print or print concepts in this study” (p. 52). Furthermore, in a subsequent study, Phillips, Norris, and Anderson (2008) analyzed the findings of several meta-analyses and qualitative studies. Phillips et al. concluded that adults without specific training typically did not draw the children's attention to the features of the print, and children most often attended to the illustrations. Therefore, it appears that when parents engage in shared reading activities with their young children, they do not automatically teach letter–sound relationships or concepts about print.

Specific Interactions During Shared Reading Time Have Positive Outcomes on Comprehension Skills

The effects of children's story retelling on early literacy and language development were examined in a meta-analysis conducted by Dunst et al. (2012a). The researchers reviewed 11 studies including 687 toddlers and preschoolers. Results indicated that children's story retelling influenced story-related comprehension and expressive vocabulary, as well as nonstory-related receptive language and early literacy development. However, the studies under review used specific interactive storybook reading techniques for parents as part of the treatment.

Nearly all studies reviewed for this chapter found shared reading to have a significant effect on both receptive and expressive language (Bus et al., 1995; Dunst et al., 2012b; Shapiro et al., 1997). These findings may be due to the fact that in nearly all cases, parents discuss the illustrations as they read the story, introducing and reinforcing new vocabulary. In most situations, unless parents had explicit training with interactive, shared book practices, they rarely included a focus on letters, sounds, or concepts about print or spent

a great deal of time asking questions that would prompt or teach comprehension (Phillips et al., 2008). However, researchers found parent training in dialogic reading techniques, which teaches adults how to prompt children with questions and engage them in discussions while reading to them, can have a significant impact on the ways that parents conduct shared book time.

By expanding on the child's responses, encouraging children to retell stories, and reiterating the names, objects, and events in the book, dialogic reading helps young children build and reinforce the basic language and literacy skills that will make them successful readers (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998; DeBruin-Parecki & Gear, 2013; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). Therefore, we will review the impact of parent literacy programs and their impact on children's outcomes.

IMPACT OF FAMILY LITERACY AND PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The meta-analysis conducted by Jaynes (2012) included 51 studies of school-based parental involvement programs, serving students from prekindergarten through 12th grade and comprising approximately 15,000 students. The study included analyses of the effects of all the parental involvement programs combined and of each type of parental involvement program. The purpose was to determine whether certain types of programs had greater effects on student achievement. A review of the 51 studies allowed for six distinct types of parental involvement program:

1. *Shared reading program*: Programs that encourage parents and their children to read together
2. *Emphasized partnership program*: Efforts designed to help parents and teachers collaborate with one another as equal partners in improving children's academic and/or behavior outcomes
3. *Checking homework program*: School-based parental involvement initiatives that encourage parents to make daily checks on whether their children have completed their homework
4. *Communication between parents and teachers program*: Programs incorporating efforts by schools to foster increased communication between parents and teachers
5. *Head Start program*: Head Start programs that place a special emphasis on parental involvement
6. *English as a second language (ESL) teaching program*: School-based efforts to raise parental involvement levels by teaching parents English via ESL programs

The key findings of the meta-analysis are as follows.

Parental Involvement Programs Are Associated with Higher Student Academic Outcomes

The results of the meta-analysis indicate that school-based parental involvement programs are associated with higher student achievement outcomes. There is a positive relationship

between parental involvement programs *overall* and student outcomes, as well as between most of the specific program types included in the analysis and student outcomes. Overall, parental involvement programs yielded a statistically significant effect size of .30 of a standard deviation, which is equivalent to approximately .35–.40 of a grade point on student outcomes (e.g., the difference between a grade of B to a grade of A). The effect sizes were quite similar for the studies in the meta-analysis that used control variables, such as race, socioeconomic status (SES), and gender, and those that did not. What this means is that the academic achievement of children whose schools had parental involvement programs was substantially higher than that of their counterparts whose schools did not, even controlling for factors such as race, SES, and gender. Therefore it appears that when parents know how to explicitly support children's efforts in school, children's learning is enhanced.

Programs that Require Parental Involvement Actions Had Statistically Significant, Positive Effects on Student Outcomes

This meta-analysis found that there were statistically significant, positive effects on student outcomes for those school-based programs that emphasized parental involvement actions such as shared reading (.51), teacher–parent partnership (.35), checking homework (.27), and teacher–parent communication (.28).

The effect for school-based programs may have been due to the benefit of parents' receiving guidance from teachers about reading strategies, book selection, and so forth, which may have enhanced the benefit of parent–child shared reading practices.

School-based programs are just one way parent educational programs are delivered. Programs may be offered in libraries, community centers, book stores, churches, and online. Regardless of the place, a goal of most family literacy intervention programs includes teaching parents to use dialogic/interactive strategies through using age-appropriate books (DeBruin-Parecki, 2007; DeTemple & Snow, 2003; Jay & Rohl, 2005; Paratore, 2005; van Kleeck, 2006). Table 11.1 provides a brief overview of the most successful read-aloud strategies.

Outcomes of these programs have revealed generally positive results. Parents and caregivers of all socioeconomic levels are able to learn new strategies and engage their children more successfully during read-alouds (Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005; Sénéchal & Young, 2008). A study conducted by Blom-Hoffman, O'Neil-Pirozzi, and Cutting (2006) also found that parents could successfully learn to use dialogic strategies via videotape instruction. Likewise, DeBruin-Parecki and Gear (2013) found parents to be highly responsive to observational assessment and specific coaching using the Adult-Child Interactive Reading Inventory (ACIRI).

It is important to remember that children arrive in our classroom with different individual language and literacy experiences (Hart & Risley, 1996; Heath, 1982). Family conceptions of literacy learning and practices vary widely, and given our increasingly diverse communities, composed of many different cultures, languages, religions, races, and complex family systems, teachers are more challenged than ever before to understand what this diversity means for supporting children's learning (Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2011). Since the mid-1980s, research has consistently determined that teachers who use culturally sensitive pedagogy, teaching in ways that allow their students to work to

Table 11.1. Description of three shared reading strategies

The basic components of shared reading strategies involve teaching parents to converse by listening and responding to children during read-alouds, whether the text is narrative or expository. The outcomes of shared reading are active engagement, extended learning opportunities, and increased vocabulary and background knowledge (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; DeBruin-Parecki & Gear, 2013; Wasik & Bond, 2001; Whitehurst et al., 1994).

Dialogic reading is an interactive, sustained conversation between an adult and a child about the content of a storybook. The fundamental reading technique in dialogic reading is the **PEER** sequence. This is a short interaction between a parent and child. The adult does the following:

- Prompts the child to say something about the book
- Evaluates the child's response
- Expands the child's response by rephrasing and adding information to it
- Repeats the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion

Imagine that the parent and child are looking at the page of a book that has a picture of a dog on it. The parent says, "What is this?" (prompt) while pointing to the dog. The child says, "Dog," and the parent follows with, "That's right (evaluation). It's a shaggy brown dog (expansion). Can you say shaggy dog (repetition)?"

In **dialogic reading**, the adult helps the child become the teller of the story. The adult becomes the listener, the questioner, and the audience for the child. To ensure a rich exchange, adults should use the following prompts, referred to as **CROWD**:

- **Completion prompts:** Leave a blank at the end of a sentence for children to fill in. For example, "Mary had a little lamb, his fleece was white as _____." This prompt uses a child's sensitivity to the structure of language.
- **Recall prompts:** These prompts encourage children to remember what happened in the book. For example, you say, "The first little pig made his house of hay. Do you remember what happened when he finished his house?" Use this prompt to help children organize the story and remember its sequence.
- **Open-ended prompts:** These prompts focus on the pictures in books. You might say, "It's your turn to read the story. What is happening on this page?" When you encourage children to help tell the story, you provide practice in expressive fluency and attention to detail in illustrations.
- **What, where, when, and why prompts:** These questions also focus on the pictures in books. When you ask, "What's this?" you are teaching children new words. When you ask, "Why do you think the snail was being silly?" you are encouraging them to retrieve words from their own vocabulary store to express their opinions.
- **Distancing prompts:** These prompts guide children to make connections between the book and their experience. For example, reading *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, you ask, "Have you ever had someone break one of your toys?" Distancing allows children to practice their conversational and storytelling skills.

The goal of **interactive reading**, such as dialogic reading, is for parents to engage together with the child by sharing a book. One of the many interactive strategies is Before, During, and After (BDA).

Before strategies activate children's prior knowledge and set a purpose for reading:

- Read an age-appropriate book that the child selected (see Table 11.2).
- Encourage children's understanding of concepts of print by allowing them to hold the book and turn the pages.
- Activate children's interest by posing open-ended questions about the title and front cover illustration.
- Introduce any new or interesting vocabulary words.

During strategies help children make connections, monitor their understanding, generate questions, and stay focused.

- Help relate the book's content to the child's real-life experiences.
- Prompt questions and predictions using visual/picture cues.
- Pause and listen as the child answers questions.
- Confirm and expand the child's answers.
- Insert brief definitions for new vocabulary—for example, "Pram is another name for a stroller."

After strategies provide children the opportunity to summarize, question, reflect, discuss, and respond to text.

- Review the story by asking the child to retell the story: "What happened first?" "Then what?" "How did it end?"
- Ask open-ended questions that encourage the child to share opinions: "What was your favorite part of the story?" "Who was your favorite character?" "Why?"
- When the child is interested, identify a letter or word to talk about.
- Invite the child to dramatize stories with simple props.

their strengths—and these strengths are going to be related to children’s cultural backgrounds—achieve better academic results (Gay, 2010).

At their best, parent education programs are an extension of classroom literacy instruction. The same respect and understanding teachers offer their young students should be given to their families. Establishing meaningful, positive relationships with parents and teaching them how to integrate research-based practices into their home environment will positively affect children’s learning (Paratore, 2005; Sénéchal & Young, 2008).

ACCESS TO AGE-APPROPRIATE BOOKS

Another feature of parent educational programs is enhancing family access to age-appropriate books. Researchers Smith, Constantino, and Krashen (1997) found significant differences in children’s access to books in different socioeconomic communities. They studied three neighboring communities in Southern California:

- Beverly Hills, with a median income of \$83,000 (family of four), had an average of 199 age-appropriate books in the home.
- Compton, with a median income of \$20,000 (family of four), had 2.7 age-appropriate books in the home.
- Watts, with a median income of \$15,000 (family of four), had only 0.04 age-appropriate books available in the home.

These findings suggest that in addition to knowing how to read to children, families must also have access to age-appropriate books to read. In fact, it appears that the home environment, specifically the availability of reading material, is a stronger predictor of later academic achievement than socioeconomic status (Britto, Brooks-Gunn, & Griffin, 2006).

Likewise, a multivariate study by McQuillan (1998) and a replication study by Krashen and McQuillan (2012) examined the relation between access to reading material and scores on the 1992 NAEP reading test, given to samples of fourth graders in the United States. The measure of access was a combination of three measures of access to reading material at home, two measures of access to reading in school, and three measures of access to reading in the community library. Their findings revealed that even after controlling for the effect of poverty, access to print was a significant and strong predictor of performance on the NAEP reading test: Children with more access to reading material scored higher. Table 11.2 presents a guideline for selecting age-appropriate books and a synthesis of parental support by child’s age.

CONCLUSION

A review of recent research that synthesizes the impact of parental interactive reading with young children found that this activity, done frequently, interactively, and consistently, enhances the concurrent development of language and the multifaceted aspects of comprehension (Baumann, 2005; Hannon, Morgan, & Nutbrown, 2006; Nyhout & O’Neill, 2013). The most effective read-alouds are those in which children are actively

Table 11.2. Parental support and best books by age

Age	Key features	Book examples	Adult support
0–6 months	<p>Are made of sturdy cardboard or cloth or soft plastic, as first books will need to withstand a great deal of love and chewing</p> <p>Feature simple pictures so infants may focus their eyes on the object and examine the illustration closely</p> <p>Have high contrasting colors such as black/white or red/yellow, as infants' vision is not fully developed; therefore, they respond best to bold contrasting colors</p>	<p>Hoban, T. (1993). <i>White on black</i>. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.</p> <p>Priddy, R. (2003). <i>Fuzzy bee and friends</i>. New York, NY: Macmillan/Priddy Books.</p> <p>Priddy, R. (2013). <i>Hello baby: Faces</i>. New York, NY: Macmillan/Priddy Books.</p>	<p>Hold books 10–12 inches from the infant's face, as initially an infants' vision and focus is best at this distance. By 4 months the infants' vision has nearly adult acuity. Infants are hardwired to focus on faces and will study real faces and pictures and drawings of faces.</p> <p>Point to and label objects using <i>parentese</i>, the exaggerated, drawn-out form of speech that people use to communicate with infants. The use of parentese plays a vital role in helping infants to analyze and absorb the phonetic elements of their parents' language.</p> <p>Read and reread books for 5–10 minutes, at least daily.</p>
6–12 months	<p>Have simple illustrations and bold colors to stimulate infant's vision and focus infant's interest</p> <p>Encourage infants to reach out and touch the pages and enjoy reading as a tactile experience; textures allow infants to build on their sensory exploratory approach to objects around them</p>	<p>Carle, E. (1992). <i>Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?</i> New York, NY: Henry Holt.</p> <p>Kindersley, D. (1999). <i>Touch and feel: Baby animals</i>. New York, NY: Dorling Kindersley Publishing.</p> <p>Kunhardt, D. (1940). <i>Pat the bunny</i>. New York, NY: Golden Books.</p>	<p>Point to and label objects. After several readings, ask the infant to point to familiar objects—for example, <i>Can you point to the ladybug?</i> This activity, called rehearsal, strengthens short-term memory.</p> <p>Use descriptive language to describe the textures they are feeling—for example, <i>The blue blanket is so soft and fuzzy</i>.</p> <p>Joint attention between the child and adult helps to develop the child's vocabulary.</p> <p>Read and reread books for 5 to 15 minutes (depending on the child's engaged attention span), at least daily.</p>
12–24 months	<p>Develop children's understanding of story—a beginning, middle, and end with interesting characters that are trying to solve a problem that young children can relate to; story/narrative books have illustrations that help tell the story</p> <p>Provide children with a deeper understanding about the world; expository (fact or nonfiction) texts for young children often describe plants, animals, and cars/trucks/trains/planes/ships and may use detailed, realistic photos or illustrations</p> <p>Have opportunities to directly interact with the pages—for example, sturdy lift-the-flap books and texture books</p>	<p>London, J. (1992). <i>Froggy gets dressed</i>. New York, NY: Scholastic.</p> <p>Boynton, S. (2007). <i>Bathtime</i>. New York, NY: Workman Publishing.</p> <p>Carle, E. (1969). <i>The very hungry caterpillar</i>. New York, NY: Penguin Books.</p> <p>Stanley, M. (2002). <i>The wheels on the bus</i>. Bristol, PA: Baby's First Book Club.</p> <p>Bauer, M.D. (2003). <i>Toes, ears, & nose!</i> New York, NY: Little Simon.</p>	<p>Children begin to experience a language explosion at this time as short- and long-term memory begins to develop; therefore, parents can begin to ask the child to name the familiar objects on the page—for example, [point to an object] <i>What is this?</i></p> <p>Encourage the child to hold the book and turn pages, as this allows the child to</p> <p>Read and reread books for 10–15 minutes (depending on the child's engaged attention span), at least daily or as often as the child is interested.</p> <p>Remember, children love their books and want to read them over and over again.</p>

(continued)

Table 11.2. (continued)

Age	Key features	Book examples	Adult support
24–36 months	<p>Encourage children to label/discuss emotions</p> <p>Have story plots that reflect real-life events that children often experience—for example, sibling rivalry, getting into trouble, being fearful</p> <p>Offer opportunities to learn about colors and shapes</p> <p>Provide occasions to count and begin to learn to recognize numbers</p>	<p>Henkes, K. (1990). <i>Julius, the baby of the world</i>. New York, NY: HarperCollins.</p> <p>Sendak, M. (1988). <i>Where the wild things are</i>. New York, NY: HarperTrophy.</p> <p>Shannon, D. (1998). <i>No David!</i> New York, NY: Scholastic Trade.</p> <p>Mayer, M. (1968). <i>There's a nightmare in my closet</i>. New York, NY: Dial Books.</p> <p>Carle, E. (2011). <i>The artist who painted the blue horse</i>. New York, NY: Penguin Books.</p> <p>Lionni, L. (1959). <i>Little blue and little yellow</i>. New York, NY: Random House.</p> <p>Gerth, M. (2000). <i>Ten little ladybugs</i>. Franklin, TN: Dalmatian Press.</p>	<p>Comprehension, at its most basic, relies on a child's interest, attention, and memory. To help stimulate all three, parents need to engage children with interactive questions before, during, and after reading.</p> <p><i>Literal/fact questions</i> ask the child to locate, remember, and/or recognize key facts about the story that can be found in the text:</p> <p><i>What is the name of this character?</i></p> <p><i>What happened first in the story?</i></p> <p><i>Where do penguins lay their eggs?</i></p> <p><i>Inferential and interpretative questions</i> ask the child to draw on prior knowledge and experience and the hints in the text to make sense of the story:</p> <p><i>Why do you think he _____?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think will happen next? Why?</i></p> <p><i>How do you think that character felt? Why?</i></p> <p><i>Application questions</i> ask children to connect the story to their own experiences. Application questions help children to transfer knowledge learned in one context to another:</p> <p><i>What other book talks about this?</i></p> <p><i>Is there another character who acted this way?</i></p> <p><i>Have you ever had an experience like this? Tell me about it!</i></p> <p><i>Analysis and evaluation questions</i> allow children to offer their own opinion, make judgments, compare and contrast, and develop reasoning skills.</p> <p><i>What is your favorite wild thing? Why?</i></p> <p><i>If you could change one thing in the story, what would it be? Why?</i></p>
36–60 months	<p>Teach information and basic skills—for example, teaching the alphabet (books that teach the alphabet in joyful rhymes are a favorite)</p> <p>Offer time to sing and move, including fingerplays</p> <p>Continue to teach about science, nature, and math</p> <p>Talk about feelings and behavior; these stories also encourage dramatic play, which allows children to practice emotional responses</p>	<p>Ehlert, L. (2007). <i>Eating the alphabet: Fruits and vegetables from A to Z</i>. New York, NY: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt.</p> <p>Trapani, I. (1993). <i>The itty bitty spider</i>. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.</p> <p>Carle, E. (2004). <i>Mister seahorse</i>. New York, NY: Penguin Books.</p> <p>Henkes, K. (1996). <i>Lilly's purple plastic purse</i>. New York, NY: HarperCollins.</p>	
Additional advice			
<p>Shared reading time should be fun and relaxed.</p> <p>Children will remember these happy moments with love and joy, and it sets the stage for later learning!</p>			

involved, by both asking and answering questions and making predictions rather than passively listening (Dickinson et al., 2012; Duke, Pearson, Strachan, & Billman, 2011; Lennox, 2013). Essentially, reading becomes a shared, social experience with rich opportunities for learning about language and literacy. Regardless of SES, race, education, or culture, most parents do not apply these interactive reading techniques spontaneously (Britto et al., 2006). Therefore, the need for parental training is essential for all parents, regardless of SES, culture, or ethnicity. Programs should focus on teaching strategies that increase children's understanding about book concepts and comprehension methods, such as open- versus close-ended questions and predicting and confirming procedures—all of which help to maintain child engagement. Parents also need support in knowing how to introduce letter-sound relationships as well as vocabulary. Parents should also learn more about how to select age-appropriate books and how to read texts multiple times with their children.

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