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ABSTRACT

Noting that much research has been done on many aspects of parents' involvement in their children's education, this literature review focuses on the ways parents develop their children's reading skills. Topics discussed in the literature review are existing literature reviews (no comprehensive reviews of research have been conducted since 1986), literacy development, effects of reading to children, and parent and child interactions. Contains 27 references. (RS)

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Parental Involvement as a Variable in Reading Readiness
A Review of Related Literature

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Introduction

Much research has been done on many aspects of parents' involvement in their children's education. This review focuses on the ways parents develop their children's reading skills. Two terms need to be defined. Reading readiness is the point at which an individual's skills and the instructional strategies used make it possible for the student to acquire reading ability efficiently (Stoodt p.457). Literacy refers to the reading and skills required by the average person to function in our society (Stoodt p.456).

This topic is important to educators because learning takes place both at school and at home. Educators need to know how that connection is made and how to keep an existing connection. The subheadings of this paper are: review of research, literacy development, effects of reading to children, and parent and child interactions.

Review of Research

No comprehensive reviews of research have been conducted since 1986. One (Gillis, 1986) had a particularly misleading title, "Critical Re-examination of Research in Early Reading Instruction and Its Implications." The author compared three studies that dealt with five year olds beginning to read. The author did not analyze the results, but attempted to discuss the unanswered question in each study.

Becher (1985) was much stronger in her review of research. She had a clearly stated purpose. She discussed how parents read to their children, the benefits, the amount of time spent reading. She cited the available research that supports having reading material available in the home, as well as whether or not parents had positive attitudes about reading to their children.

Three reading journals included articles that gave excellent, practical suggestions for parents (Trelease, 1989, Valerie-Gold, 1989 and Vukelich, 1984). However, it leaves the ultimate responsibility of reporting these findings to the parents on the teachers. Vukelich reviewed the professional literature available from 1973-1983, yet emphasizes only the strong points of each study. Trelease utilized one research study to support his article. He answered two objections that parents give to reading aloud at home, but gave no indications where these objections came from.

One review of literature was looking for support of how young children acquire language skills by having picture books read to them (Moerk, 1985). The researcher reports what he believes about the subject and then relates relevant literature. These articles are not critically evaluated. In the research that is included, the author refers to himself and his studies 16 times, which makes the review bias and unreliable.

Literacy Development

A study that examined mother-infant dyads and vocabulary development sampled 20 middle class families at home (Ninio, 1983). As a field study conducted in home setting, with average families, the results are probably widely generalized. It had a testable hypothesis, and verbal and non-verbal actions were described.

There was also a study that observed children with physical and speech impairments (McWilliam and Pierce, 1993). These researchers included the many parts of a good study: theoretical rationales, operational definitions, data and procedures explained, and clearly presented conclusions. They include a most important finding not included in other studies, that "more is gained from storybook reading than emergent literacy skills" (p. 55). Namely, laughter, conversation and physical affection.

Some researchers based their findings on interviews with parents (Hannon and James, 1990). The researchers did admit that they felt the parents may have been telling them what they wanted to hear, but felt that the parents had been putting in the effort all along. No statistics were used to support the findings, but a lengthy discussion followed. This discussion included vague words such as would appear, seems, perhaps, some of the, and it may be.

In one case study (Snow, 1983) a researcher studied literacy and language development with a young boy for three

years. The study is complete except for the fact that no background information is given about the boy. The researcher did not also take into consideration that each child develops at his/her own pace and many children may develop in a different way. The original hypothesis is not testable, and thus supports the need to further study the problem.

One aspect of literacy development is that children acquire language skills necessary to write (Purcell-Gates, 1988). While testing the implications of previous studies, Purcell-Gates chose a small sample of children with a wide variety of backgrounds. One criteria was that the children had to have been read to at least five times a week for the two years preceding kindergarten. There is no way to verify this information. The study is impressive in many other ways: the researcher became familiar with the children, conducted a pilot study and clear instructions were given to the participants. Hypothesis was testable and the results supported this.

Effects of Reading to Children

Ninio (1980) also conducted a research study involving mother-infant dyads where the middle class families were of European descent, and the lower class families were of Asian/North African descent. There were 40 dyads, and they were observed only once at home. The sessions were audiotaped, and notes were taken by hand. The transcripts

were prepared by one experimenter and then two independent coders (it is not known who these coders were) analyzed the transcripts. The results of this study support the need for intervention programs for low socio-economic families.

A similiar study that seems to be based in part on the mother-infant study involved black head start children and their mothers (Brody, Galda, Pellegrini and Perlmutter, 1990). The subjects may have been highly motivated since they were paid \$40 for 10 home visits and given "numerous" children's books. The researchers stated that they were repeating an earlier study because of a small sample size, yet there were only 13 dyads that participated in this study. Other than these shortcomings, the research had a clearly stated hypothesis, understandable data and the conclusions are consistent with the findings.

Another study with low income families investigated how parents and teachers extended the talk that naturally occurs when books are read aloud (DeTemple, Dickinson, Hirschler, and Smith, 1992). The researchers looked at the types of books that were read, and then analyzed the quality and nature of the talk that took place during readings. Results were separated by the age of the child, perhaps because the language development is noticably different. In both the home and school situations, the adults were responsible for picking out the books, yet it is my belief that the children should be encouraged to do this.

When looking at parental influences on reading (Greaney, 1986) the author did not initiate his own experiment. He cited other studies that had already been completed and supported his opinions. His support is substantial, but he failed to consider low income families who do not have access to books, nor parents who are too busy to read for pleasure.

Two researchers looked specifically at the types of questions preschoolers ask when their parents read to them (Conlon, Smolkin, and Yadin, 1989). The best that the researchers could offer was a description, not an explanation, of the behavior. The researchers used unreliable samples for two studies. The first were the two sons of one of the researchers and the second were volunteers from a university preschool.

In a study of ten middle class New Zealand families (McNaughton and Philips, 1990) researchers looked at the practice of storybook reading at home. The first study was very general- $\frac{1}{2}$ of the participants were read to a bedtime the other $\frac{1}{2}$ at any time during the day. The data was used to conduct a more controlled second study. The researchers did not control when the book was read or how many times it was read. The transcripts of these interactions were then critically analyzed. The researchers did not discuss the fact that this study was limited to a small sample size.

Researchers extended what was already known about how

parents read to both communicatively handicapped and non-communicatively handicapped children (Brody, Pellegrini, and Sigel, 1985). The sample included 120 families, where both parents were involved with reading to their children. The study took place in a lab setting with a one way mirror that allowed videotaping. The results were analyzed three ways, but it is not stated how many times the researchers watched the videos to analyze them.

Parent and Child Interactions

While investigating the relationship between prior experiences with print and reading readiness (McHaney and Poulos, 1988) the researchers stated their hypothesis as a negative so that it could be disproved. A small but diverse sample was chosen. Two instruments were used to determine this relationship. One was a parent questionnaire, in which parents were asked what they thought their children knew. This could have been highly unreliable if the parents were not completely honest. The second instrument was the Stone (concepts about print) which the researchers gave to the children, and the answers were either right or wrong. The procedure was well thought out, including permission slips. The Stone was given to the participants within the first three weeks of school in a separate room and the administrator of this experiment had 10 years teaching experience.

Some programs are specifically designed to help develop

literacy skills at home and at school. To test one such program, a series entitled "Little Books" was used with a group of children at home and at school, at home only, at school only, and not at all (Philips and others, 1990). Pretests and posttests were given to all participants. Guidelines were given to both teachers and parents. The sample consisted of 40 schools in rural, suburban and urban communities. The social, political and economic factors that may have influenced the literacy levels of the children were discussed. The researchers were able to draw four conclusions from the data provided.

One researcher set out with the very sensible purpose of developing emerging literacy skills that could be both low cost and widely employed (Toomey, 1991). This study is a repeat of an earlier study. Unfortunately, it lacked many aspects of a valid study. The preschool teachers were asked to carry out the study. The only description of the subjects were school teachers in four low income areas, who read to their classes (not described at all). The parents were asked to read three books twice a week but this was not followed up on, and the researchers did not verify that the parents could even read. 55 families were involved in this study, and they were compared to a relatively smaller group of 36 families from a previous study done by the same researcher a year earlier. The same instruments were used to evaluate the home background and literacy development

for both groups. Despite the lack of quality, the results support that parents and preschools working together help children to develop letter and word recognition skills.

Three completely diverse communities and its story reading interactions were being researched with the intent of finding out more about this topic (Heath, 1982). This was not an experimental study. The article was a critical and analytical description of the subjects. It could be beneficial to the reader because there is a complete understanding of the language skills acquired in this group of preschool children. This research supports the need to further study cross cultural patterns of oral and written language development.

One important aspect of storybook reading is how the children respond to what is being read to them (Martinez and Roser, 1985). There was a theoretical rationale for this study and the problem was clearly stated. Martinez and Roser found both similarities and differences in children's responses to literature at both home and school. The authors used examples from the transcripts to support their findings.

In an original longitudinal study where immigrant families were asked to demonstrate their emerging literacy skills across two languages (Sulzby and Teale, 1987), researchers found that the central focus of these families is closeness, not teaching reading. One researcher did not

completely follow the procedure that was established, so some of the data was lost. The conclusion discuss classroom implications, not an original purpose of the study. It also continues to describe related studies that were also being conducted, two of which were being sponsored by the same agency that sponsored this one.

In a cross sectional survey that investigates how parents prepare their children for reading (Dzama and Gilstrap, 1985) researchers asked parents of preschool children 16 questions. This survey was conducted thoroughly, except for the fact that only about half of the surveys were returned. Most importantly, researchers assumed that the parents are involved in certain activities that help their children to get ready to read.

Conclusion

There were a wide variety of articles presented to generate a well rounded review. Unfortunately, no research has been conducted simply on father child dyads. This is one area where more research clearly needs to be done. All articles support the importance of parents reading to their children.

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