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ABSTRACT

To increase the reading level of students who come from homes where reading is not valued or modeled, a social context was created where inexperienced readers could interact with adults and books. Three students from homes where reading was not valued were read to by adults two to three times each day for six weeks. Discussion of the book was encouraged to take place in the easy natural fashion that occurs at home. The students were pre- and posttested. Anecdotal records were kept. Results indicated that: (1) one-to-one reading was more successful than reading to a small group because the child and adult could form a relationship; (2) if the adult and students had established a relationship the student showed greater interest in reading; (3) students who showed greater interest in reading showed the most growth in vocabulary and oral expression when reading pictures; and (4) students who showed greater interest in reading were less disruptive during whole group story time. Findings suggest that reading to a child daily on a one-to-one basis can change a student's value of reading and therefore increase the reading level of the student. (Contains 10 references.) (RS)

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HOW TO INCREASE THE READING LEVEL OF STUDENTS
WHO COME FROM HOMES WHERE READING IS NOT MODELED

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RESEARCH PROJECT
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ABSTRACT: To increase the reading level of my students who come from homes where reading is not valued or modeled I created a social context where inexperienced readers could interact with adults and books. I chose three students who came from homes where reading was not valued and adults read to them two to three times each day for six weeks. I encouraged discussion of the book to take place in that easy natural fashion that occurs at home. The students were pre and post tested. Anecdotal notes concerning behavior were kept. The findings follow:

1. One to one reading was more successful than reading to a small group because the child and adult could form a relationship.
 2. If the adult and student had established a relationship the student showed greater interest in reading.
 3. The students who showed greater interest in reading showed the most growth in vocabulary and oral expression when reading pictures.
 4. The students who showed greater interest in reading were less disruptive during whole group story time.
- The study concluded that reading to a child daily on a one to one basis can effect a change in the student's value of reading and therefore increase the reading level of the student.

A. How can I increase the reading level of my students who come from homes where reading is not valued or modeled?

B. "What we do is determined by what we know and what we know determines what we do" (Reynolds, 1993, p.77). If reading has no value in the home, children do not *know* reading and if they do not know reading they will not choose to read. Before I can increase the reading level of my students, I need to help them to know, value, and enjoy reading.

I considered two areas in my research cognition and emotion. My research of the brain led me to an article by DeEtta Kay Reynolds. The following is a summary of the points I considered to be of value to my topic. A child's success in learning is similar to that of a cell and its relationship and interaction with other cells. The being of a cell is "determined by the history of the cell's past interactions, not by the agent acting upon it" (1993, p.77). The parallel exists with humans, but humans are simply more complex. "Just as on the cellular level, this cognition, knowing-being has the ability to interact with its environment. Language is the medium of this interaction. Knowing occurs over time through the history of human interactions and in a social context. Language is learned through social interaction and is communicative in nature" (1993, p.77). Reynolds explains further the need for interaction and experience. "The world we bring forth is determined by what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls our prejudices" (1993, p.77). Our prejudices are the result of our learning and interaction with our environment. Each human is unique in that respect and yet we have many common prejudices. "Interaction whether it be in a conversation or with a literary text, involves the play of these prejudices over and against the truth of the text" (1993, p.77). I decided to create a social context where my inexperienced readers could interact with books and gain experience.

Reynolds concluded that "the prediction of how well a child will learn to read rests on how much he/she already knows before going to school" (1993, p.78). Since students who live in homes where adults do not read have very little experience with books before coming to school, I need to provide those experiences and help my students learn to value reading. Neither children nor adults will learn what is not important to them. Creating an environment to help students learn to value and experience books is a monumental task when you consider that many children have already spent countless hours interacting with books and the children I am studying have spent very little time with books.

I searched through some material I received last summer at the Primary Institute concerning Book Immersion, a first grade reading program used by Fred Hiltner and Debbie Fagnant at Capital School in Juneau. This is an "approach based on the theory that children learn how to read best by reading LOTS of books at their instructional level." The idea of "book immersion" made me ask myself if I could foster growth in my students without any home reading experiences by reading to them several times a day. The librarian at UAS provided two studies where the theory of reading immersion had been part of the plan. The Memphis Literacy Coalition directed both studies. The first study involved young adults. One of the positive results was that "the immersion reading program stimulated many to continue their learning. The study concluded that a reading immersion program can raise the reading level of adults" (Jones, 1987, abstract). The following year high school students participated in the study. Again the results were positive. If immersion could work at the adult level, it ought to work at the primary level. My version of immersion would not be that the students read many books, but that I read many books to them. I already provide ample time and books for independent reading. The young child who is without reading experience has different needs.

Further research led me to an article by Jana Mason, Carol Peterman and Bonnie Kerr (Strickland, 1989, chapter 5). Parents who read to their children positively influence their children's language and reading achievement. Teachers help children learn about reading by reading to them. Teachers read stories in an interactive manner similar to parents. I am not sure that we can be as effective as parents. I thought about the change in my students since I have dropped to the floor level. It is more intimate and family-like. The conversation has a more natural flow. However there are many more people taking part in the conversation at school. With a little observation on my part it was easy to notice that the interaction taking place did not include those inexperienced readers. Interaction is a critical part of learning to read and those who are the neediest are not being involved. "The informal discussions that inevitably accompany the story reading help establish children's understanding about the way in which people communicate through print. Exposed to loving and caring human beings as reading models, children demonstrate an ever increasing interest in books and stories as well as in the masses of print that surround them in their environment. Most important they begin to view themselves as becoming readers and writers too" (Taylor, Strickland, 1986, p.6).

There are so many reasons for parents and teachers to read to their children. "Reading aloud satisfies emotional needs. . . an opportunity for social development. . . learn about the act of reading. . . learn that print carries meaning. . . print is stable. . . the story remains the same unlike conversation" (Conlon, March 1992, p.5). The emotional needs of my inexperienced readers were a big concern for me. I observed my students and noticed behaviors that were not appropriate to school and perhaps stemmed from the children's discomfort in the academic world. "Give the student the thing she craves; attention and intellectual stimulation" (Fields, 1989, p.105). I decided to note changes in behavior patterns as part of my study.

"Hearing a story in a group at a library cannot compare to hearing a story read aloud by your own mother or father at home. The experiences are totally different. When *you* read to your children you are teaching them much more than just the material they are reading. You are telling them, 'You are important to me, you are safe and secure, I will always protect you'" (Cullinan, 1992, p.21). Reading to children carries many messages. I needed to devise a way to carry that positive message when reading to my inexperienced readers. In essence I had to find a time to read to them that was separate from our group reading time, but could not be construed as punitive. Not an easy task!

The more I researched, the more defined my project became. "Although reading to the whole class is the most common approach to reading to children in first through third grades, many skilled preschool and kindergarten teachers prefer to group children by listening levels and/or background knowledge" (Wolter, Nov. 1992, p.75). "Written language is not the same as spoken language. We use different words, different kinds of sentences, and different punctuation to express meaning. Children notice all these things as you read aloud, especially if they sit beside you and can see the page as you read" (Cullinan, 1992, p.25). I considered the appropriate place for reading to the students. I wanted them to be able to view the print as the reading happened. Interaction with the printed word and the pictures is vital.

"Other interested adults help children form attitudes about books and reading as they openly display their own enjoyment in sharing them. Learning starts with genuine interest those sharing the story have with one another" (Taylor, Strickland, 1986, p.16,17). "Important is frequency and high-quality time -- high quality of interaction between parent (reader) and child" (Fields, 1989, p.104). These comments led me to consider who else might be available to

read to my students. I did not have to be the only reading model for my students, but I needed to find someone with an established relationship to my students.

The following comments summarize the ideas I found repeated through out my research. "Thinking is the process of making connections.' And reading to our smallest children is one sure way to encourage and strengthen that process. Love of hearing the story is a great incentive for reading" (Boegehold, 1984, pp.30, 33).

C. My plan was to choose three students who came from homes where reading was not valued and to read to them at least three times each day. I determined that reading had no valued in the home if the child had not yet participated in the Read-a-thon. The Read-a-thon began in October and my study began in March. The children should read at home and keep track of the time on a special record sheet. Each station requires 300 minutes of reading and there are small rewards given for each pink sheet received. At the end of the year those students who travel to all eight stations receive a gold medal at a special ceremony.

I talk to my children about what reading is. Often first graders will complain that no one at home will read to them. I discuss with the students what reading is all about. Looking at the pictures, telling yourself the story, and locating words you recognize is reading. When I notice someone using these strategies at school, I point it out. While having mom and dad read is great, they do have other choices. Big brothers and sisters are good readers and this helps both children to complete the Read-a-thon and become better readers.

The second way I determined whether a child valued reading was through the child's involvement with books at quiet reading time. These children do not choose to read during their free time. The children choose activities that do not require reading. They avoid games that require reading. At quiet reading time they are usually looking around, watching the other children, talking, fidgeting with toys or walking back and forth exchanging books. When I read to the class the same disruptive behavior occurs. These children talk, pull at the rug, crawl around, and any number of behaviors designed to draw attention. Although I have chosen to focus on reading, I want to note that writing activities often spawn the same behaviors.

I have several children who qualify for Chapter one. I considered this in addition to the other criteria and I chose the three students I considered to be most in need of my help.

The Vision: I decided that the students would read with an adult at least three times a day. The reading would take place in a close comfortable setting where the children could see the pictures easily. I tried to replicate the home reading scenario. In the library and the classroom we have very comfortable chairs, cushions, and bean bags. The readers could choose any one of these places. I encouraged discussion of the book to take place in that easy natural fashion that occurs at home as opposed to the comprehension type of questioning you often find in school. The children were able to interject comments and ask questions on a nearly one-to-one basis. Children and adults took turns choosing the reading material.

Each day when I read to the group, I sat on the floor and placed one of the students on each side of me and the third student sat in the next closest spot. If I had multiple copies of the book I would distribute them, otherwise I would place the book on the floor for all to see.

During literacy center time a parent came to read with my children. I always made the reading optional though I encouraged as much as I could. This reading took place in the hall using beanbags for comfort. There were some distractions with other children walking to and from classes, but probably no more than in the classroom.

On days when this mom was not available, I asked the children if I could read to them. Again it was optional, though encouraged. I waited until they had been at centers for a while before I suggest that I would read to them. They seemed to be more willing to leave what they were doing and come with me if they had some opportunity for free time. We usually found a quiet place on the floor. One child would sit on each side of me with the third close by. Often all three of them rarely come at once.

My principal agreed to model reading with my children. He took the children to the library to read. We identified the second center time as a convenient time for him to be out of his office.

The Reality: The first two weeks my students were read to three times a day. The other four weeks were not as consistent. We were able to fit in two times a day with one of those times being whole group. Sometimes the mother would not be available or would come at a time that was not appropriate, for example right after I had just read to the class. She did not have a child in my classroom and without that bit of ownership she was less than enthusiastic. The principal had other commitments that prevented him from reading with my children regularly. Also this was the time of day when activities such as water, clay, and blocks were available. This

was not the best of times as the children would feel excluded from the *fun* activities.

My project lasted six weeks. I used several methods for documentation. I recorded the actual contact time for each student. I also kept notes of any actions or comments that I believed to be the result of this project. In the beginning Student A often chose not to come to listen to a story or after one story he would ask to leave. As the project progressed, Student A no longer asked to be excused. Student B and Student C always went to hear a story when given the opportunity. I pre and post tested my students during the first and last week of the project using some of the assessment tools I developed for use in my classroom (Appendix from final pp. 7,9,10,13, 31). Vocabulary is one area that should show growth if the immersion program was successful. I developed an assessment (attached) based upon a suggestion I read during my research (Boegehold, 1984, p.110). Student A's vocabulary is still at the same level it was at the beginning of the project. His responses indicate that he sees pictures as a series of separate items and does not have the vocabulary to explain actions. Student B moved from the first level of naming to the second level where he can give a simple description of an activity. He is just beginning to show an understanding of relationships which is the third level. Student C began at the second level using simple descriptions and is moving into the third level where she is beginning to notice and explain relationships.

Student A showed very little difference in the type and quality of responses to my interview and interest questions. On his pretest most of his answers focused on the teacher being in control. With the post test his answers focused on himself and what he could do to help himself become a better reader and writer. The percentage of words in his journal written correctly has increased from 0 to 30%. His attention span has also increased. None of these changes are significant enough for me to feel the project is responsible. His behavior while I am reading to the class is still disruptive though to a lesser degree. I have noted only one or two incidents where Student A has shown an interest in reading. On one occasion Student A entered into a discussion about a book with Student B. The book was one I had just finished reading to the class entitled Anna, Sunflower Child. Student A used a tone of voice that expressed criticism as he wondered if Student B liked the book. Student B said yes and began to point out the pictures and to discuss what he saw there -- insects, beetles, etc. Student A changed his tone of voice and began to participate in the conversation. When I introduced the

book I mentioned that it was by the same author who wrote Jesse Bear, What Will You Wear. Student B and Student C were beaming because they knew the book. I had read it to them the day before.

Student B has made some changes in his attitude. He used to feel bad when he could not figure out words, now he knows to ask for help and he knows which student he will ask for help. When I asked him how he would help himself learn to read better, he knew that letter sounds were important and he needed to practice. Previously he thought to "pick out an easy book and read". Which is not a bad idea, but I think he has begun to focus on print. There was not a great improvement in the number of words written or the correctness of his spelling. However he has taken the risk and moved from the sentence "I love (with a heart) cars" to communicating with me. Student B's behavior at story time has turned around. He pays attention, shows interest, and participates when appropriate. His attention span has increased at independent reading time.

Student B often maintains his behavior better when he is in my classroom. He often gets scolded in other classes for not being in control of his behavior. The following is a synopsis of a conversation I had with the Chapter I teacher.

Until recently, Student B would physically try to remove himself from the group when it was time for me to read a story. He would climb under the table or try to hide. He now actively listens to the stories and talks about the characters and pictures. After the book is read, he sometimes wants to take it and look through it again. Yesterday when he came into our Chapter I class, he came right over to the book set out to be read that morning, looked through it and said, "This looks good."

Student B really made big changes. About the second week, Student B began bringing me books and asking me to read to him. He wouldn't stop with one book. He usually brought several. Student B began to take an active part in our shared reading and daily journal activities. Previously he would not read with the group. It was joyful to hear his voice chime in when we read predictable books. He has chosen to write on the computer. We have written and read small books that he has written. Sometimes he makes me tired because he won't let me stop reading. We have read four and five books during center time. On secretary's day Mrs. Richie came and responded to my student's journals. This was the first time Student B wrote about something other than cars. He told her about his dogs. I observed him as he observed her. When she did not get to his journal fast enough, he got up and placed his on the top of the pile. He certainly

valued his work. Our special education teacher commented that Student B had a "softer" look about him. It is incredible what positive attention through reading can achieve.

The picture below shows Student B during partner reading. He chose not to have a partner, but to sit by himself. I could hear him singing and making up words to the story. Because of his involvement with the book he never noticed that I took this picture of him.

Student C has changed over the six weeks of the project. I have noticed many changes in her writing skills. She is writing more and the percentage of correctly spelled words has increased from 30% to 55%. She still has concerns about her ability to read. The biggest change is in her attitude. Student C used to just stare at me for long periods of time, whenever I asked her anything. She interacts with me very freely and has much more confidence in her ability. She believed that she would become a better reader by "going to listening to look at the words and sound them out." Student C would often look

in the listening area for a book I had read to her and spend several days listening to that book. Again the Chapter I teacher has noticed specific changes in Student C's behavior.

Over the course of the last few weeks I have noticed an improvement in Student C's listening skills and oral language usage. She has progressed from a non-participant to being one of the active contributors in our Chapter I Action Reading gang. Yesterday, she supplied several of the words we were collecting as a word bank for a patterning activity. She looked at our list and raised her hand and wanted to show me and the other students the ch, th digraphs in two of the words. She remembered it from previous lessons and wanted to share it with us.

These are all new behaviors for Student C. She also has demonstrated a longer attention span at quiet reading. In this photo you can see Student C receiving some support from her friends.

D. My goal was to create a social context where my inexperienced readers could interact with books and gain experience as readers. That experience would bring about an interest in reading. The project was highly successful with Student B and moderately successful with Student C. I did not notice any major change with Student A. All three students were read to several times daily and were exposed to many books. The place where the readings happened varied, but always encouraged interaction and comfort as at home. What could account for the differences? As I analyzed the whole process, it became clear to me that there was one powerful component that I read about in the research, but I did not place enough emphasis on this component. Repeatedly I read such comments as the following:

"intimate occasion that cannot be staged" (Taylor, Strickland, 1986, p.19)

"important is frequency and high-quality time -- high quality of interaction between parent (reader) and child" (Fields, 1989, p.104).

"interested adults help children form attitudes about books and reading" (Taylor, Strickland, 1986, p.16).

While I considered the people I had chosen to be "interested adults" I underestimated the value and power this interested person can hold. Student B was the only student who consistently received one to one reading interaction during the study. I had begun to read to Student B prior to the beginning of this study. At first I was reading to him to help calm him as he can be very active and disruptive. Later I read to him at his request. We established a relationship that centered on reading and focused only on his needs. We shared reading. These adults did not have the advantage that I had of establishing a one to one relationship centered on reading.

What would I do differently? I believe we would have had more success if each student could have formed a relationship with an adult during this reading interaction. Even if I could not reach as many students, I would establish adult-child pairs for reading. The relationship formed is critical to the success. Reading several books is not enough.

Another difference is "ownership". It was my project and these people were helping me, more than helping my students. As I recall what I observed when adults were reading to the children, I know what needed to change. I saw children surrounding an adult listening to a story, but I did not see the interaction taking place that is critical. Each adult had a time schedule to follow and this was just

one more activity on the list. When I read to the students we sat on the floor in my classroom and though there were interruptions occasionally, we didn't feel the time constraint that the other adults may have felt. I was free to encourage discussions. We would bring several books with us just in case we wanted to read more.

What would I do differently? I would take more time with my adult readers. I would create a vision of what worked with Student B. I would encourage them to build a relationship with the child. I would not structure a time, but rather encourage the adult to come whenever possible and plan to spend time reading and interacting.

I was not pleased with some of the changes I made at whole group reading time. It was very discriminating. Because two of the three students always sat next to me, other students lost an opportunity to experience that intimacy. Near the end of the project, Student B was beginning to avoid being next to me because the students had begun to comment. He still paid attention and interacted, but he kept himself outside the circle.

What would I do differently? I will have a whole group reading time as I have always done. I will also make myself available during literacy time as I did for Student B. Once I determine the students who have not experienced reading at home I will offer those students, one at a time, the opportunity to read with me as I did with Student B.

The result of this project is I now believe that I can make a difference for children who come from homes who do not value or model reading. Had I begun this project in September, perhaps Student B would be farther a long with his reading. I will implement this plan immediately in the fall keeping in mind the importance of the adult-child relationship.

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