

## **Chapter One: For Parents Interested in Helping their Child Read**

As parents interested in their child's reading progress, you may ask yourself, "What can I do to help my child improve in reading?"

To answer this questions, first let me explain that in the teaching profession, as is true in many other service professions such as medicine, the professional has a prescription for your child that suits your child's own particular instructional needs. This fact and the degree to which it is true, or carried out, has limited many parents from being involved in their children's instructional progress in reading.

Let me, however, propose a model of working with your child which should not interfere with the classroom teacher's prescriptions but, in fact, enhance the chances of succeeding.

It would be a model which for example in medicine would be a parent feeding their child certain foods at home that made the doctor's medicine more effective. Plus the model that I would propose involves the parent becoming more aware of what types of instruction there are in reading and which type claims to do what. This in the medicine analogy would be a parent knowing what the drug prescribed was and what it claimed to be able to do.

So with great concern about maintaining only the highest professional and ethical standards of the teaching profession, I would like to suggest the following model for your helping your child to learn to read.

The model consists of:

- I. Background knowledge on language development
- II. Early childhood reading behaviors
- III. Beginning reading behaviors
- IV. Awareness of what prescriptions are most popular and for what 'ills'

Reading is a portion of language. Not all societies have it. There are groups of people who have not formed a written language and therefore do not have any reading problems. This is an interesting side thought for some of you parents who may wonder about the great 'woe' of your child not reading on grade level. Even though the target of this model of parent involvement is to get your child on grade level or above in reading, I want to make perfectly clear that your child's reading success is only a small portion of the success needed in language development.

### **I. Background Knowledge on Language Development**

Your child's first approach to language was through imitation. He/she heard sounds before he/she spoke them. He heard sentences before he said them and as to be seen later, most certainly heard those sentences enough times to very clearly effect the manner

in which he would write them later in his life. The child hears sounds, sentences, paragraphs, and compositions of thoughts. He, in fact, hears arguments, laughter, joys, sorrows, worries, hopes and dreams **long before he speaks them.**

The listening skill, then, is the first skill developed. It is a crucial skill in learning language and ultimately in learning to read properly. Armed with good listening skills, your child then proceeds to imitate those sounds that he has heard most frequently repeated to him. The words usually do not come out in sentences since the child thinks that the outside world will understand that he is the 'subject' of the sentence. A young child assumes the 'I'. She/he assumes that you know when he/she speaks that it is him or her speaking. Therefore the child speaks **only** in predicates. He/she says things like..."dog...doggie' instead of saying "I see the dog or doggie". This 'leaving out the subject' is a natural developmental stage in language acquisition. However, some children do not outgrow baby talk. Those children even at age 6 will say, "give me book" rather than "give me the book." They might say, "not this one" instead of saying "I don't want this one." Since a child is learning through imitation, consistent speaking in full sentences will help all children outgrow baby talk earlier.

Imitation through repetitions being the manner in which the child is learning means that a great importance should be placed on controlling what the child is hearing to imitate. It starts right from crib language. The child models your sounds as articulated in words.

You might be asking yourself at this point, why is Dr. Tudor talking about crib language when I am interested in helping my child get on grade level in reading? The answer to that is simple to explain. Do you realize that studies have been done which show that the child's oral (speaking) level is reflected in his/her reading level? That means that it has been studied and proven that children who say, "I don't want any no how!" read a sentence that is printed as "I don't want any, any how" **as** "I don't want any no how".

In the analysis of children's errors, studies have shown that children make the same mistakes in reading what is printed in front of them as they make when they speak.

The language that your child is hearing is important for you to understand for two reading reasons:

One, it helps you understand that some of his/her reading errors are from his natural speaking of language and that when you need to correct him in those errors, keep in mind that he might be reading in error as many times as he has heard adults speaking those errors.

Two, it can help your child if you are aware of how important it is that you do talk to him/her, and read to him/ her at early age. The more complete the sentence that the child hears read to him/her, the more he/she will eventually read. **No longer questioned is the fact that children who are read to read better.**

They have a head start on other children. They have learned the significance of words, sentences, and paragraphs by having those elements of language read to them long before they themselves could possibly be expected to read such material.

Imitation is the process for learning the words. But learning what those words mean comes from experience. The child does not have beginning language developed until he knows both the words and meanings of a great number of words. Learning the meanings of words is the first step in the skill that you will hear a lot about later called reading comprehension skill.

At age three, the child starts learning meanings of the words that were imitated. This is seen in its 'charming cute form' when you hear a three year old say a word that he has heard but you know very well that he does not know what the word means!

The degree to which a child develops his new vocabulary is related to his/her experiences. This is the juncture when thought and language merge. How does one separate thought and language? Can you? How do you give your child a thought? Usually you give it through an experience that is shared with the use of language.

Therefore, the next stage in language development is the child's language experience stage. Language experiences are instances where the child learns new concepts and words to relate to each other. It happens when he /she first gets pushed in his carriage to the park and hears a dog barking and you say, "Bow Wow, listen to those doggies barking at each other!" He learns: doggies, barking, and the concept that dogs use barking as their language since they are doing the barking at each other.

Language experience learning occurs every moment of every day with mothers, sisters, brothers, baby-sitters, household helpers, school staff and children. The members of the child's environment who are talking to him constantly are giving the basic language experience education and building the foundation of your child's future reading comprehension skills.

The first teaching of reading comes in at this language experience stage. One can teach language experience instead of leaving it to chance.

Instead of leaving it completely up to the chance of what your family might do or not do to develop your child's language, language experience activities can be deliberately designed by you to build up certain concepts and vocabulary in you child.

This is the point at which your help starts! This is where your knowledge of various instructional strategies in language experience will help your child get maximum support from you. The next chapter on **Approaches to Teaching Language Experience** will help you be more informed.