



## **The Importance of Sharing a Book**

*“Spending 15 minutes a day reading to a child will make a difference”.*

Parents have probably been told this message over and over and over again from teachers, doctors, the media, libraries and a variety of other sources. Research shows that reading to a child provides many benefits for both parent and child alike: giving them a head start in emerging literacy and language skills, helping them prepare for school, building a greater vocabulary and fostering a love for books and learning. By reading fifteen minutes a day for five years they would have listened for 27,375 minutes or 456.25 hours! So many words to help build their skills! How can we improve on this? By sharing the book with them rather than just reading to them.

Sharing a book with a child is something that parents may already be doing without thinking about it or even realizing the benefits. By sharing the book, they are:

- Engaging their children in the experience of learning. In taking the time to ask questions about what is happening in the book, they are checking their comprehension of the story or concept being shared and helping them develop higher thinking skills like analyzing information and problem-solving.
- Sharing and explaining new words and concepts. Book language differs from the spoken language that they hear every day. How many times in a day does one normally use words like splat, concept or upon? Strong language skills are the foundation for success as a reader and writer. Research also shows that children with advanced language and vocabulary skills when entering kindergarten are about a year ahead of the average child and those with lower skills are about a year behind average.
- Helping engage their ability to tell stories. Telling stories is often referred to as a bridge that moves a child from language to reading. This also leads to creativity, imagination and the ability to think in the abstract. There is evidence that the ability of a preschooler's ability to re-tell a story correctly has a direct relationship to their numeracy skills in grade two. The same areas of the brain are being stimulated when telling stories, doing math and even playing music.

- Developing knowledge of print. The squiggles on the page have meaning! There is a connection between the letters on the page and the words that they hear and see out in their environment.
- Realizing that the written word is made up of pieces of sound – otherwise known as phonological awareness. Being able to recognize the different sounds that make up words helps to encode the word.
- Showing children that they value the ability to read – that reading can be used for gathering and sharing new information, as a form of entertainment or to get things done. Reading is done at home, in school and out in the community and is a skill that will last them a lifetime.

Research also shows that the more literacy experiences (exposure to the world of print and language) a child has, the more likely they will become better readers and writers. That being said, literacy is about more than just reading and writing. Literacy encompasses:

- Communicating clear thoughts and ideas
- Introducing and explaining new information or concepts (such as numbers and colours)
- Relating what happens in books to real life
- Providing the opportunity to problem-solve or use higher thinking skills
- Developing strong interpersonal skills and the ability to work with others

So the next time you hear “read fifteen minutes a day”, share the experience instead!

For more information or additional resources check out:

The Centre for Family Literacy <http://www.famlit.ca>

The Canadian Literacy and Learning Network <http://www.literacy.ca>

Ellen Galinsky, *Mind in the Making*, HarperCollins Publishing, 2010

Mem Fox, *Reading Magic: Why reading aloud to our children will change their lives forever*, Harcourt Inc., 2001

Sharon E. Rosenkoetter and Joanne Knapp-Philo, *Learning to Read the World: language and literacy in the first three years*, Zero to Three Press, 2006