

READING BOOKS TO YOUNG CHILDREN: WHAT IT DOES AND DOESN'T DO

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Abstract: The present report is an overview of six studies that share a common theme: What is the contribution of shared reading to child outcomes. The first three studies are experimental in nature and show that the number of times as well as the manner in which the adult reads to the child will affect children's acquisition of comprehension and spoken vocabulary. The fourth study is an intervention with children who have poor vocabulary skills. The findings revealed that care givers can enhance children's spoken vocabulary by reading books to them in an interactive manner, but that simply reading in their customary fashion may not promote vocabulary acquisition. Finally, the last two studies are correlation in nature. They provide converging evidence that shared reading predicts children's vocabulary, and that, children's vocabulary is a robust predictor of reading comprehension. These latter studies also show the limits of shared reading because parent reports of shared reading did not predict children's early literacy skills or word reading at the end of grade 1.

Key words: literacy skills, reading comprehension, storybook reading, vocabulary acquisition

French résumé. [Translation Laurence Pasa].

Dans cette contribution, l'auteur présente des résultats de six recherches relatives à l'influence des pratiques de lecture partagée sur les apprentissages ultérieurs. Les trois premières études sont expérimentales et montrent que le nombre de lectures ainsi que la manière de lire de l'adulte ont un effet sur le dévelop-

23

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pement de la compréhension et du vocabulaire. La quatrième étude est une intervention menée auprès d'enfants aux compétences langagières faibles. Les résultats suggèrent que les adultes peuvent permettre au vocabulaire des enfants de s'enrichir si la lecture est réalisée de façon interactive, tandis qu'une simple lecture ne semble pas avoir d'effet sur l'acquisition du vocabulaire. Enfin, les deux dernières recherches sont corrélationnelles. Leurs résultats confirment l'impact positif de la lecture de livre de jeunesse sur le développement du vocabulaire des enfants, et montrent que ces compétences langagières ont un rôle prédictif sur la compréhension en lecture. En revanche ces derniers travaux soulignent les limites de la lecture partagée dans la mesure où les pratiques déclarées de lecture partagée des parents n'ont pas d'effet directs sur le développement de la littéracie ni sur la lecture de mot en fin de première année.

Portuguese resumo. [Translation Pauloa Feytor-Pinto]

O presente relatório constitui uma apresentação geral de seis estudos que partilham um mesmo tema: o contributo de leituras partilhadas para o desempenho de crianças. Os três primeiros estudos são de natureza experimental e mostram que a frequência e o modo como os adultos lêem às crianças afectam o desenvolvimento, nas crianças, da compreensão e do vocabulário oral. O quarto estudo é uma intervenção junto de crianças com fracas competências lexicais. Os resultados revelaram que quem lida com crianças pode desenvolver o seu vocabulário oral através da leitura interactiva de livros e que a simples leitura tradicional pode não promover o desenvolvimento vocabular. Por fim, os dois últimos estudos estão relacionados pela sua natureza. Eles fornecem provas convergentes de que a leitura partilhada melhora o vocabulário do aluno e que este melhora fortemente a compreensão da escrita. Estes últimos estudos também mostram os limites da leitura partilhada, pois relatos de pais sobre leitura partilhada mostram que ela não contribuiu para o desenvolvimento das primeiras competências literácicas nem para a leitura até ao final do 1º ano.

Polish. [Translation Elzbieta Awramiuk]

Prezentowany artykuł stanowi przegląd sześciu studiów, które łączy wspólny temat: Jaki wpływ na wyniki dzieci ma wspólne czytanie? Pierwsze trzy studia są eksperymentalne i pokazują, że zarówno czas, jak i sposób, w jaki dorośli czytają dzieciom, wpływają na sposób rozumienia i przyswajania przez dziecko słownictwa. Czwarte studium poświęcone jest dzieciom o niskich umiejętnościach leksykalnych. Wyniki ujawniają, że opiekun może poprawić zasób słownictwa dzieci poprzez czytanie im książek w sposób interaktywny, jednak samo tradycyjne czytanie nie wspiera rozwoju słownictwa. Ostatnie dwa studia korelują ze sobą. Dostarczają zbieżnych dowodów, że wspólne czytanie kształtuje dziecięce słownictwo oraz że dziecięce słownictwo jest silnym predyktorem rozumienia podczas czytania. Te ostatnie studia pokazują także ograniczenia wynikające ze wspólnego czytania, ponieważ relacje rodziców o wspólnym czytaniu nie pozwalają przewidzieć początkowych umiejętności w zakresie czytania i pisania ani rozpoznawania wyrazów na koniec pierwszej klasy.

Greek. Περίληψη. [Translation Panatoya Papoulia-Tzelepi]

Η παρούσα έκθεση είναι περίληψη έξι μελετών που μοιράζονται ένα κοινό θέμα: Ποια είναι για το παιδί τα αποτελέσματα της ανάγνωσης από κοινού; Οι τρεις πρώτες είναι πειραματικές και δείχνουν ότι ο αριθμός των περιστάσεων και ο τρόπος με τον οποίο ο ενήλικος διαβάζει στο παιδί επιδρά στην κατάκτηση εκ μέρους του παιδιού της κατανόησης και του προφορικού λεξιλογίου. Η τέταρτη μελέτη είναι παρέμβαση σε παιδιά με φτωχές λεξιλογικές δεξιότητες. Τα ευρήματα αποκαλύπτουν ότι αυτοί που φροντίζουν τα παιδιά είναι δυνατόν να βελτιώσουν το προφορικό λεξιλόγιο των παιδιών με την ανάγνωση βιβλίων με διαδραστικό τρόπο, αλλά ότι απλό και συνηθισμένο διάβασμα ίσως να μην προωθήσει την κατάκτηση του λεξιλογίου.

Τελικά, οι δύο τελευταίες μελέτες είναι συσχετιστικές και παρέχουν συνδυασμένη απόδειξη ότι η από κοινού ανάγνωση προαναγγέλλει το λεξιλόγιο του παιδιού και ότι αυτό το λεξιλόγιο είναι ένας ισχυρός πρώιμος δείκτης της κατανόησης στην ανάγνωση. Αυτές οι τελευταίες μελέτες αποκαλύπτουν επίσης και τα όρια της από κοινού ανάγνωσης, διότι, όσα αναφέρουν οι γονείς για την από κοινού ανάγνωση δεν αποτελούν πρόβλεψη (πρώιμο δείκτη) για τις αρχικές αναγνωστικές δεξιότητες του παιδιού ή την ανάγνωση λέξεων στο τέλος της πρώτης τάξης.

German. Zusammenfassung [Translation Irene Pieper]

Dieser Bericht bietet einen Überblick über sechs Studien mit einem gemeinsamen Thema: Was trägt eine Vorlesepraxis zwischen Erwachsenem und Kind zum Outcome des jeweiligen Kindes bei? Die ersten drei Studien sind experimentell und zeigen, dass sowohl die Anzahl der Vorlesesituationen als auch die Art

und Weise, wie der Erwachsene dem Kind vorliest, den Erwerb von Verstehensfähigkeiten und den Wortschatz beeinflusst. Die vierte Studie ist eine Interventionsstudie mit Kindern, deren Wortschatz schwach entwickelt ist. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Betreuungspersonen den aktiven Wortschatz von Kindern vergrößern können, indem sie das Vorlesen in interaktiven Austausch einbetten, dass aber ein Vorlesen ohne solche Interaktionen den Wortschatzerwerb möglicherweise nicht stützt. Die letzten beiden Studien zeigen Korrelationen. Sie bieten übereinstimmend Evidenz dafür, dass Vorlesen ein Prädiktor für den Wortschatz von Kindern ist und dass der kindliche Wortschatz ein robuster Prädiktor für das Leseverständnis ist. Diese Studien zeigen aber auch die Grenzen des Vorlesens, denn die auf der Basis von Elternberichten erhobene Vorlesepraxis zeigte sich nicht als Prädiktor für frühe literale Fähigkeiten oder das Lesen von Wörtern am Ende des ersten Jahres.

Dutch. Samenvatting. [Translation Tanja Janssen]

Deze bijdrage biedt een overzicht van zes onderzoeken rond een gemeenschappelijk thema: welke bijdrage levert 'samen lezen' aan leerresultaten van kinderen? De eerste drie onderzoeken zijn experimenteel van aard. Deze onderzoeken laten zien dat zowel de frequentie waarmee als de manier waarop een volwassene voorleest van invloed is op het tekstbegrip en de woordenschat van het kind. Het vierde onderzoek betreft een interventie bij kinderen die over een beperkte woordenschat beschikken. De resultaten tonen aan dat verzorgers de gesproken woordenschat van kinderen kunnen vergroten door op een interactieve manier boeken voor te lezen, maar dat eenvoudig voorlezen zonder interactie de woordenschat niet beïnvloedt. De laatste twee studies zijn correlatief van aard. Hieruit komt naar voren dat samen lezen een voorspeller is van de woordenschat van kinderen die op zijn beurt een goede voorspeller is van tekstbegrip bij lezen. Deze onderzoeken maken ook duidelijk wat de beperkingen zijn van samen lezen: aan het eind van het eerste leerjaar werd geen invloed gevonden van samen lezen van ouder en kind op de vroege geletterdheid en het woorden kunnen lezen van kinderen.

1. SHARED READING: WHAT IT DOES DO

Shared book reading can be a source of entertainment and emotional proximity between an adult and a child. At the same time, children's books can be a rich source of knowledge about culture and language. Indeed, shared book reading can be an occasion for the young child to learn vocabulary. Novel words are often introduced in the text providing syntactic and semantic cues to their meaning. In addition, novel words are often illustrated providing a picture of the word meaning. Moreover, the adult reader can also facilitate word learning by providing certain verbal behaviors. In fact, it is often recommended that adult readers actively involve young children during book reading in order to enhance children's learning.

In this section, I describe research findings from my lab that show how young children can learn between 1 to 3 new words from shared book reading. This description, taken from Sénéchal (2003) with permission from the publisher, includes three experimental studies with children between the ages of 3 and 5 as well as one intervention study with children with language delays. A short integrative summary of the findings is presented at the end of this report.

The importance of early vocabulary development can be appreciated when we think that vocabulary measured early is one of the best predictors of eventual success in reading. Consider the following finding from a longitudinal study conducted in my lab (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). In this study, we found that vocabulary measured at the beginning of kindergarten predicted reading comprehension at the end of grade 3 after controlling for parent education, non-verbal intelligence, phoneme awareness, and grade 1 reading. Given the predictive relation between kinder-

garten vocabulary and grade 3 reading, it becomes of interest to understand how we can promote early vocabulary development.

Two types of vocabulary are considered in the present section: spoken and comprehension vocabulary. Spoken vocabulary refers to the words children can actually produce and is often labeled expressive vocabulary. In contrast, comprehension vocabulary refers to the words that children can understand, but not necessarily produce, and is often labeled receptive vocabulary. This distinction is useful because different factors might facilitate the acquisition of the two types of vocabulary.

Research on spoken vocabulary suggests that young children can learn spoken vocabulary through imitation because imitation provides children with opportunities to practice retrieving the labels for newly acquired words. In contrast, repeated exposure to new words might be sufficient for the acquisition of comprehension vocabulary. In the research presented below, we considered whether imitation and repeated exposure influence spoken and comprehension vocabulary differently.

In order to study the benefits of reading books, we developed a procedure that was used in our experimental studies. First, we selected picture books that would be attractive to young children. Second, we modified the text in the books to introduce novel words. To do so, we replaced words typically known to preschool children (for example, baby) with rarer synonyms (for example, infant). We modified the text to introduce 10 to 13 novel words. Third, we developed tests to measure comprehension and spoken vocabulary. In the comprehension vocabulary test, children were asked to choose the picture of a named item from a selection of four pictures. The illustrations for the novel words were different than those in the book. For example, the word *angling* was represented by a man fishing in the book, but was represented by a girl fishing in the test. Therefore, the test measured children's ability to learn new words and extend them to new examples of their meaning. Comprehension vocabulary was measured three times in most studies: once before, once immediately after the book reading, and once after one week. Spoken vocabulary was measured by asking children to label the words using the illustrations in the books because a pilot study revealed that children did not use the new words when labeling unfamiliar illustrations. Moreover, spoken vocabulary was not tested before the book reading because the pilot study also revealed that children did not use the novel words. After developing this procedure, we were equipped to test how children would learn from book reading events. For each study presented in this report, only the findings that were statistically reliable are described.

1.1 Study 1: Learning After Reading A Book Once

In this study, we were interested in measuring whether children would learn new vocabulary after a single exposure to a book (Sénéchal & Cornell, 1993). We were also interested in assessing whether active involvement in the form of answering questions would enhance vocabulary more than simply listening to the story. One hundred and sixty children, who were 4 and 5 year olds, participated in the study. Each child was seen individually. We found that, after a single reading of the book, active involvement did not promote vocabulary learning more than simply listening

to the book reading. Nonetheless, children did learn. Children, on average, could comprehend 1.6 new words as reflected by the difference between the number of words correctly identified before and after the book reading. Most interestingly, children could remember the new words learned one week after the book reading. We also found that 5-year-olds learned more comprehension vocabulary than did the 4-year-old children. It is important to note, however, that children could not speak any new words after a single book reading.

1.2 Study 2: Learning After Reading the Book Twice

In this study, we were interested in testing whether the benefits of active involvement would appear after two readings of the books (Sénéchal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995). We read the books in one of three ways: (1) the reader read the book, repeating the novel words once and pointing to them as they were introduced in the text; (2) the reader asked the children to point to the novel words; or (3) the reader asked the children to label the novel words, providing the answer when children failed to do so. Hence, in each book reading situation, children were exposed to each novel word twice for a total of four times across the two book readings. Forty-eight 4-year-old children participated in the study and they were read to individually.

The number of words learned for each book-reading situation is presented in Table 1. We found that children learned to comprehend new words in each situation, but that they learned more when they were actively involved in the book reading. Answering labeling or pointing questions was equally effective for the acquisition of comprehension vocabulary. The pattern was different for spoken vocabulary. Children did not learn to say the novel words after listening passively to two renditions of the book, but they did learn when they were actively involved. Moreover, children learned more when they had a chance to imitate the novel words by answering labeling questions as opposed to pointing to them.

Table 1. Mean number of words learned after two readings of a book

Reading condition	Vocabulary	
	Comprehension	Spoken
Listening to the story	1	0
Pointing to new words	2	1
Labeling the new words	2	2

In this study as in the previous, we measured whether children would remember the words learned after one week. Again, we found no evidence of forgetting because

children could comprehend and speak, on average, the same number of words as they did immediately after the second book reading.

In addition to measuring book vocabulary, we measured children's comprehension vocabulary with a standardized test, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Revised, to assess whether children who differ in vocabulary knowledge would also differ in how they learn from book reading events. We found that the manner of reading affected children with a greater or smaller vocabulary similarly, but that children with a smaller vocabulary learned less than did children with a greater vocabulary. These findings suggest that children with a poorer vocabulary benefit from book reading events, but that the amount they learn is attenuated.

1.3 Study 3: Learning After Reading the Book Three Times

In this study, we assessed the amount of vocabulary learning after repeating the book reading three times (Sénéchal, 1997). Sixty 3- and 4-year-old participated in one of three book reading events: (1) they listened to the book read once, (2) they listened to the book read three times, or (3) they answered labeling questions during three book reading events. As presented in Table 2, we found that children, on average, could not comprehend or speak any new words after a single reading of the book. However, children could comprehend and speak one new word after listening to the book three times, but most impressively, they could comprehend and speak three new words when they answered labeling questions during the three book reading events.

In this study as in Study 1, we found that the younger children learned less, overall, than did the older children. It is possible that the younger children need a greater number of repetitions to learn at a level similar to that of the older children.

Table 2. Mean number of words learned after three readings of a book

Reading Condition	Vocabulary	
	Comprehension	Spoken
Listening: 1 Reading	0.4	0
Listening: 3 Readings	1	1
Labeling: 3 Readings	3	3

In this study, as in the others, we assumed that answering labeling questions would promote vocabulary acquisition because it provided occasions to imitate the new words. If this is true, then children who answered the labeling questions more often, should learn more than children who were unable to answer the questions. Recall that children were read the book three times, and therefore, had three chances of answering the labeling questions, and that when they did not succeed, the reader provided the new word. It is of interest to examine whether children learned more

when they, and not the reader, provided the new words. I present, in Table 3, the percentage of times that children learned new words given the number of times they said the words during reading.

Table 3. Percentage of times that children learned a new word given that they said it three times, twice, once or never during the book reading

Child Speaks the Word	Vocabulary	
	Comprehension	Spoken
Three times	42	43
Twice	33	39
Once	44	26
Never	36	18

Studying the results of Table 3 is instructive because the findings support the notion that comprehension and spoken vocabulary may not be sensitive to the same types of interactions. We see that children were just as likely to comprehend a new word whether they said the word twice during the book reading (33%) or whether the reader always provided the new word (36%). Also, children were just as likely to comprehend a new word whether they said it three times or once during the reading. In contrast, the results for the spoken vocabulary show a different pattern: There was a gradual decrease in the percentage of words learned as a function of the number of times the child, not the reader, spoke the words. Children learned 43% of the words they themselves spoke three times, but only learned 18% of the words they heard the reader speak during the reading. The findings in Table 3 support the idea that imitation enhances spoken vocabulary more than comprehension vocabulary, and this demonstration advances our understanding of vocabulary acquisition. Nonetheless, early childhood educators who want to promote vocabulary acquisition may want to use labeling questions because they do not hinder the acquisition of comprehension vocabulary, and, certainly, foster the acquisition of spoken vocabulary.

1.4 Study 4: A Book Reading Intervention for Children with Language Delays

In this study, we tested whether book reading would enhance the vocabulary of children with language delays (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). The 36 children who participated were on average 4 years of age, but their spoken vocabulary was 13 months behind their chronological age. The children attended one of two day-care centres in which the early childhood educators occasionally read books during circle time (i.e., with a group of eight children). In one day-care we asked teachers to read in the customary fashion, while in the other, we trained teachers to use dialogic reading. Dialogic reading (Whitehurst and others, 1994) is a technique to promote language acquisition during book reading by the use of questions, recasts of children's verbal-

zations, praise, etc. Teachers were asked to read books daily during circle time for four weeks and to read each of the 10 books we provided at least twice during this period. The 10 books provided were selected because they (a) included illustrations of potential new words, (b) included short texts which ensured that teachers would have time to interact with the children, and (c) were borrowed from the neighbourhood library to encourage teachers to make use of the library given that they had very limited budgets to buy books.

We observed teachers book reading behaviors before the intervention and again during the intervention. We found that the teachers in the two day cares did not differ in the manner in which they read to the children before the intervention, and that the regular-reading teachers did not change their reading behaviors during the intervention. As indicated in Table 4, teachers in the regular reading did not interact much with the children during the book reading. In contrast, teachers trained in dialogic reading changed their interactions dramatically. The behavior that increased the most sharply was the frequency with which they used wh-questions (what, who, why) during book reading. This first set of findings confirms that we were able to promote changes in the way that teachers read to the children.

We found that children exposed to dialogic reading learned more spoken vocabulary than children exposed to regular reading. The spoken vocabulary gains for the dialogic-reading children corresponded to that expected in 4 months – that is, they gained in a single month, the amount of spoken vocabulary expected in 4 months as measured by a standardized test of spoken vocabulary (the Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test). The children exposed to dialogic or regular reading, however, did not show any gains on a standardized measure of comprehension vocabulary (the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Revised). Because standardized tests are general and do not test the specific vocabulary in the books, we also measured whether children were learning specific words introduced in the books by assessing their comprehension vocabulary before and after the intervention. We found that children in the two centres learned new book vocabulary: the dialogic-reading children comprehended two new words and the regular-reading children comprehended one new word. Taken together, the findings show that early childhood educators can promote vocabulary acquisition during circle time with up to 8 children.

Table 4. The average number of times that early childhood educators made various types of verbal interactions during book reading during the intervention

Teacher behaviors	Day- Care	
	Regular Reading	Dialogic Reading
Wh-Questions	2	37
Praise	0	7
Model	0	2
Repeat Child Utterances	0	7
Recast Child Utterances	2	14

2. SHARED READING: WHAT IT DOESN'T DO

In this section, I examine the limits of shared reading. To do so, I summarize two longitudinal studies from my lab in which we tested whether home literacy experiences such as shared reading and parent teaching would predict children's vocabulary, phoneme awareness, and early literacy in kindergarten, as well as reading in grades 1, 3 and 4.

Parents can make a significant contribution to their child's reading achievement through informal and formal literacy experiences (Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998). Informal literacy experiences refer to activities that involve print, but in which print per se is not the focus of the activities. For instance, parents do read the printed text during shared reading, but the focus of the activity is the story, not the print. In contrast to informal activities, formal literacy experiences are those in which print is the focus of the activity. For example, parents can tutor their child to learn the alphabet, print their names, or read and print other words. In the research presented in this section, informal and formal literacy experiences were assessed with measures of storybook exposure and parent teaching about literacy, respectively.

In the previous section, we saw that shared reading can enhance young child's vocabulary, and that early differences in vocabulary knowledge were a robust predictor of reading comprehension. Will it be the case that shared reading also predicts children's early literacy skills? Past research has shown convincingly that early literacy skills provide the building blocks for the successful acquisition of literacy skills (see the reviews by Scarborough, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001).

2.1 Study 5: Home Literacy and Child outcomes in English-speaking Families

We conducted a longitudinal study to test the long-term association among home literacy experiences in kindergarten and children's early literacy skills as well as their eventual success in reading in grades 1 and 3 (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Figure 1 captures the design of the study and the main findings. In this study, parents completed questionnaires about home literacy experiences at the beginning of kindergarten, and children completed language and literacy measures in kindergarten, at the beginning of grade 1, and at the end of grades 1 and 3. The longitudinal sample included 110 families in kindergarten, 93 until the end of grade 1, and 66 until the end of grade 3. The results depicted in Figure 1 are those for which stringent regression analyses revealed that the association between two variables was still present (and statistically significant) once we had controlled for the other variables. Each key finding is described in turn. The first finding of interest is that informal (shared reading) and formal (parent teaching) literacy experiences were unrelated to each other. The lack of relation suggests that some parents who read also tutor their child to learn early literacy skills, but some parents do not. This finding suggests that parents differ in the types of literacy activities that they include at home (Anderson, 1995; Teale, 1986).

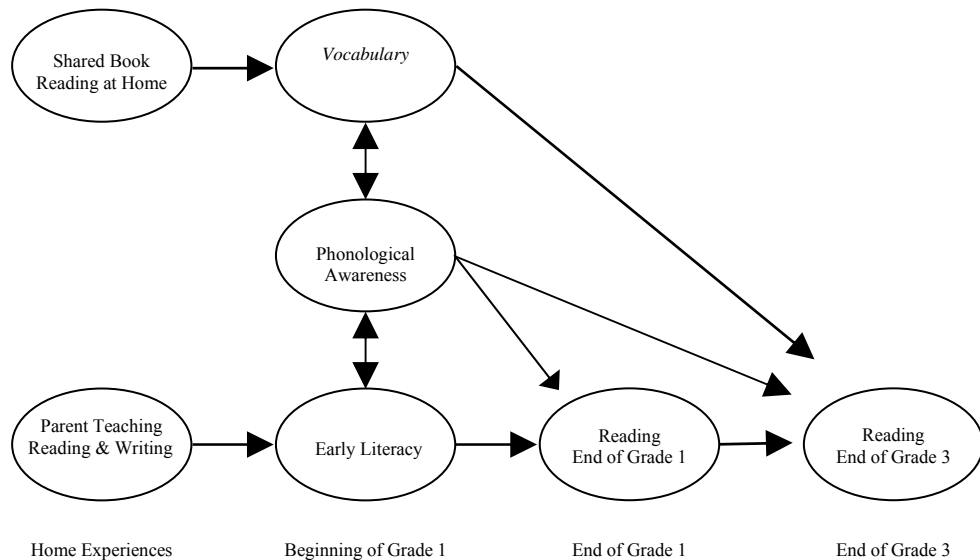


Figure 1. The relations among different home literacy experiences and child outcomes in an English sample (Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2002).

The remaining findings in Figure 1 concern the association among home experiences and child outcomes. Interestingly, the two types of literacy experiences were differentially related to language, early literacy, and phoneme awareness in kindergarten. As would be expected from past research, shared reading predicted children's oral language skills, whereas the frequency of parent teaching literacy was associated with the acquisition of early literacy skills. Shared reading and parent teaching, however, were not directly related to phoneme awareness. Specifically, the association between home literacy activities and phoneme awareness is mediated by children's language and early literacy skills.

The longitudinal relations between the home literacy activities measured prior to grade 1 and eventual reading outcomes are examined next. Figure 1 shows no direct or indirect link between informal literacy and reading in grade 1 (cf. de Jong & Leseman, 2001). It is not until more advanced reading skills were achieved that informal literacy experiences became indirectly associated to reading through their relation to early vocabulary skills. The pattern of findings was different for formal literacy activities. Figure 1 shows that parent teaching was directly related to early literacy, which, in turn, was associated to grade 1 reading, and grade 1 reading predicted more advanced reading skills. Taken together, these findings support the notion that informal (shared reading) and formal (parent teaching) home literacy experiences are differentially related to oral and written language.

2.2 Study 6: Home Literacy and Child outcomes in French-speaking Families

A second longitudinal study was conducted in my lab to assess whether the previous findings would extend to French-speaking families (Sénéchal, 2006). In this correlational study, parents reported on home literacy experiences at the end of kindergarten, and children were assessed on measures of oral language, phoneme awareness, and early literacy in kindergarten, as well as reading in grades 1 and 4. The sample included 90 families until the end of grade 1, and we were able to follow 65 of these until the end of grade 4.

As presented in Figure 2, parent reports of shared reading predicted directly kindergarten vocabulary as well as the frequency with which children reported reading for pleasure in grade 4. In contrast, parent teaching literacy in kindergarten directly predicted kindergarten alphabet knowledge and grade 4 reading fluency. Moreover, parent teaching predicted indirectly reading in grades 1 and 4, whereas shared reading predicted grade 4 reading comprehension indirectly. These findings replicate and extend those of Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002).

In sum, the two studies presented in this section capture a real distinction in the early literacy experiences of young children. The findings are consistent with the notion that informal literacy experiences (shared reading) enhance young children's oral language skills whereas more formal literacy experiences (parent teaching) promote the acquisition of early literacy skills. The findings also show that early differences in vocabulary and early literacy are solid predictors of children's eventual success in literacy.

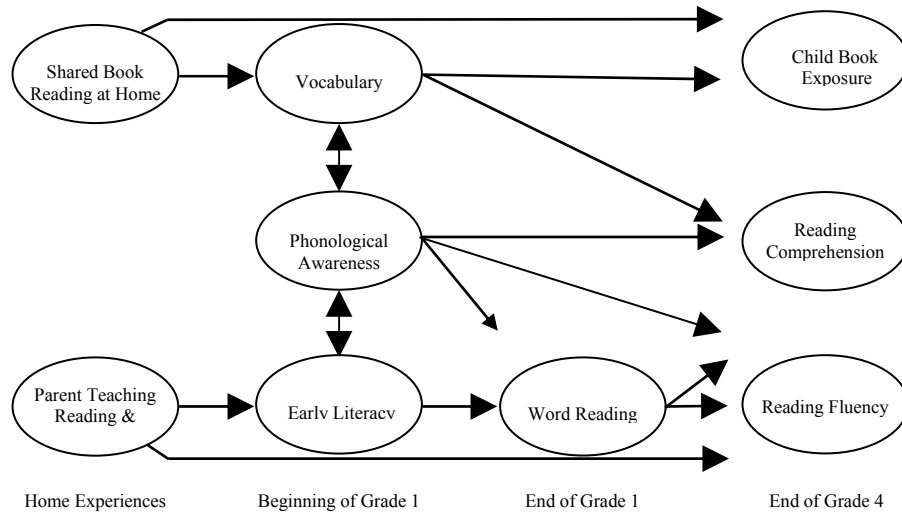


Figure 2. The relations among different home literacy experiences and child outcomes in a French sample (Sénéchal, 2006).

3. SUMMARY

In this report, I provided evidence on the contribution and limits of shared reading. The findings can be summarized succinctly under six headings:

The benefits of reading the same book repeatedly. Young children comprehended and spoke more new words after listening to three repeated readings of picture books than after a single or two exposures to the books. In fact, children did not learn to say new words after listening to a single or two renditions of the books.

The benefits of active involvement during repeated readings. Young children comprehended and spoke more new words when they were actively involved during the repeated book readings. Answering requests to label new words was particularly helpful.

Developmental and individual differences in vocabulary acquisition during shared reading. Older children learned more from book reading events than younger children. Five-year-old children learned more from book reading events than 4-year-old children, and 4-year-olds learned more than 3-year-old children. In addition, children with a larger vocabulary learned more during book reading than children with a smaller vocabulary. Younger children and children with a smaller vocabulary may need more exposures to the same books to learn at the same level as other children.

The role of early childhood educators. Early childhood educators could implement repeated book readings during circle time with 8 children or less. Most important, children with vocabulary delays, whose early childhood educators actively involved them during repeated readings, improved their spoken vocabulary more than children whose teachers involved them less during the book readings.

The limits of shared reading. In two large-scale longitudinal studies, shared reading at home, as reported by parents, was not a robust direct predictor of children early literacy skills, their phoneme awareness, or their eventual success in reading. These studies found that shared reading predicted children's vocabulary, and that, in turn, children's vocabulary predicted children's phoneme awareness and reading comprehension. Most interestingly, parent reports of shared reading in kindergarten predicted children's reports of reading for pleasure in grade 4.

The contribution of parent teaching. In two large-scale longitudinal studies, parent reports of the frequency with which they taught their child to read and print words were robust predictors of early literacy skills. In turn, early literacy skills were robust predictors of grade 1 reading, and grade 1 reading predicted grade 4 reading. Most interestingly, parent teaching predicted directly children's reading fluency in grade 4.

4. CONCLUSION

Parents and early childhood educators are encouraged to use books as a source of fun and learning for children. During shared reading, parents and early childhood educators can use simple techniques, such as asking labeling questions during repeated readings, to enhance the vocabulary of young children. Enhancing children's vocabulary is important because of the important role vocabulary plays in reading comprehension. In the present report as in others (e.g., Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000), shared reading was not a robust predictor of early literacy or reading. Therefore, early childhood educators should be cautious about the claims they make on the benefits of shared reading.

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