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TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

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Introduction

This is the final article in the series devoted to parents and reading. The first article described typical school reading programs. The second article described different types, purposes and scores of reading tests. The third article focused upon parental involvement in reading and presented activities that could be used at home and school. This article will focus upon recent technological advances, such as television, VCRs and computers, and how parents can use these tools to help their children.

Technology and Your Child

Two of the most recent innovative trends in schooling have to do with technology. The introduction and use of television and computers have had a profound impact upon the development of children. Let's examine television first. Nationally, television sets are turned on in the homes of preschoolers approximately forty-four hours a week. The national average of television viewing for all children is twenty-five hours a week. When one considers that chil-



dren spend as much time watching television as attending school, we need to examine the effects of this practice and utilize this resource wisely. Research shows that television has a profound effect on children's social learning and behavioral modeling. If television is not used as a baby sitter, but as a tool for discussion, inquiry and interaction, we can greatly enhance our children's learning. Psychologists talk about incidental learning, meaning simply what children learn by chance. Much of what children learn from television is of this nature.

Studies have been done that indicate when parents watch television with their children, they tend to perform better on tests of comprehension. This is most likely due to the discussion and expansion of ideas and concepts that are presented in the program.

Let's examine some suggestions for using television to improve your child's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. First, encourage your child to listen carefully to the spoken word. Second, reinforce their listening by speaking some of the words or phrases they are likely to have heard.

Third, give the child practice in repeating and speaking those words and phrases. You can do this by making a game out of this activity. Fourth, try to incorporate some of these words into their regular vocabulary, whether spoken or written. Fifth, have a sharing period devoted to television so your child can describe any interesting programs they have seen. Not only will you enhance your child's verbalization skills, but you can assist them with any misconceptions, fears or fantasies they have acquired as a result of viewing the program.

Sixth, collect books, magazines, articles, posters and newspaper accounts of favorite television stars and programs. Seventh, for younger children, look for coloring books dealing with current television favorites, which usually provide large pictures and brief captions consisting of very simple words beneath the illustrations. Kindergarten and primary children can color the picture, tell about it and read all or part of the caption.

Eighth, obtain the lyrics of popular songs and give each child a copy. What a great way to help children

learn basic sight words. Basic sight words are those words a child should know instantly (the, a, boy, all, when, where, etc.). Learning unusual and difficult words in an interesting, meaningful context will help children learn more quickly and efficiently and will transfer to new situations. This activity can also help show children that reading can be fun.

Ninth, to help children develop their comprehension skills, assign them different purposes when watching their favorite television show. For example, you might ask them to summarize the plot, describe the characters, evaluate the likelihood of the episode, suggest an alternate ending to the program, note how the characters dress and talk and discuss which segments are the funniest and most exciting.

Tenth, look for technical terms or scientific terms used in their favorite shows. Mention these terms and have your child make educated guesses as to what the terms mean. Then have them evaluate their guesses by checking the dictionary. Frequently these words are not understood by children and you can greatly enhance their vocabulary and concept development by talking about these terms.

For writing, you can have your child find out as much information as possible about a television star and write their biography. Many educationally oriented programs are also available through noncommercial educational television (ETV) station in many areas. ETV stations are generally licensed to nonprofit educational organizations and primarily serve the educational needs of the community and the advancement of educational programs. Funds for ETV come from public contributions, foundation grants, educational institutions and other revenue sources and children's programming on ETV are generally teaching, learning oriented and of interest to most children.

Finally, the introduction of the video cassette recorder has given another powerful resource for developing the cognitive level of children. Resources such as Video Rainbow Limited of Hartsdale, New York, are available to help you locate tapes for children and young people, develop youngsters' critical viewing skills and teach adults

how young people respond to television. This organization is a national clearinghouse and information for young people's video. It is produced by independent artist-producers and lists all genres of video such as documentary, fantasy, art, dance, and comedy. Many public libraries now have video tape rentals, and film librarians can assist with programming and special videos also.

Television is frequently accused of being the maker of illiterate America, contributing to juvenile delinquency, crime, and poverty. Television can transmit the bad as well as the good, the mediocre as well as the superior. Television is not the bane that has created the ills of America nor is it a panacea that will solve its problems. It has been described as an important educational tool, and as such it can be misused. But if it is wisely and imaginatively used, can play a major role in broadening and enriching the education of our children.

COMPUTERS

The second technological invention to impact upon children and education is the computer. Public schools have become increasingly involved with computer applications. Computer assisted instruction (CAI) had become a fact of life during the decade of the sixties. With the decade of the seventies and the eighties and the technology of the microcomputer, even more schools, classrooms, teachers and students are using computers. Names such as Apple, Commodore, Tandy, IBM, Radio Shack are familiar to both schools and parents.

At first few people knew what to do with the machines --it was simply fashionable to have them. But it wasn't long before educators began experimenting with them and learning about them. States and schools began talking about "computer literacy" and training programs were developed to help teachers learn about computers and how to integrate them into classrooms and the school curriculum. Many parents are now as familiar with computers as their children and have watched their children learn to read, write, and compute on the machines.

Microcomputers are increasingly popular in private homes also. Home computers are located in about ten

percent of the private homes in the United States. That amounts to eight or nine million homes and if the trend continues up to twenty-five million machines could be in homes by 1990.

There are many different types of software programs available for children. Games, tutoring, drill and practice, simulations and problem solving are the most frequently used programs. Let's examine each of these programs, for they are designed for different purposes.

The most common type of software package for children, in the home, is the microcomputer game. Microcomputer games may be designed to teach an instructional objective, review material or provide drill and practice activities. Some games are not designed to teach anything --such games as one finds in the video-arcade are some examples of non-teaching games. Recent research on the use of games has shown that games can teach content effectively.

Tutoring programs are any programs that teach new information to students. They may also provide some drill and practice, but the key ingredient is teaching new material. There are basically three steps to a tutorial. First, the information is presented, then an assessment is made of the information and finally corrective measures are provided if the child does not understand the information.

Drill and practice refers to programs in which the same kind of exercise or problem is presented repeatedly. For example, students may be asked to add two digit numbers with no carrying or to write the contraction for two words. One way this is done in classrooms is through students completing worksheets. Another way is through using the computer. One advantage to using the computer is that the machine can be programmed to provide immediate feedback and reinforcement for each exercise.

Simulation programs are intended to help children understand relationships between variables. They typically include a few features of a real-world situation and present a model of the situation. Then children are asked to manipulate, then watch the results of interactions. Simulations frequently require fairly good reading skills

as a part of the interaction, and young people may not have sufficient skills to read or interpret the relationships being presented in the simulation. In the intermediate grades, students are more likely to profit from instruction and be able to operate programs that involve two to three variables.

Problem solving involves a variety of processes that includes gathering and synthesizing information or data to explain something or develop something new. Problem solving is very different from solving problems. When students are asked to complete a set of exercises in mathematics, they are engaged in solving problems, but when students are presented with unusual tasks and asked to figure out ways to complete them they are engaged in problem solving. The microcomputer is one tool that can be used to help develop children's problem solving abilities. When students are asked to write a working program that will accomplish a goal they are involved in problem solving. They must design, write, debug and test the program to produce the end result. Many young children are introduced to Logo and Basic, computer languages and asked to develop and produce their own programs.

Another common use of the computer for young children is word processing. Word processing programs allow children to write stories and edit materials they have created. Children will draft a story, examine the story on the screen, make corrections and then print out a final copy. Today's programs frequently have spelling and grammar checkers that can allow students to correct their material and present near perfect copies for book reports and other school related projects.

There are a number of resources available for parents to help them select the computer and software packages that would best meet their child's needs. Many parents have found Choosing Educational Software: A Buyer's Guide to be most helpful. The unique problems involved in selecting microcomputers software are discussed in detail and sample evaluation forms and lists of criteria developed by researchers and educational groups are provided. An index of hardware, software, organizations, publications and forms are provided.

The Index to Computer Assisted Instruction is another excellent source that identifies programs and projects related to the computer. The public library also has resources and some have developed a collection of literature from the leading distributors of microcomputer hardware and software. Sources such as those listed above can be most helpful for understanding and using this new technology.

Unfortunately, the use of many home computers for young children is limited to playing video games and not the educative function that computers can provide. The research indicates that children not only enjoy using computers; they learn from them as well. Children and adults get caught up in the fascination of running the computer. We don't know enough yet about the effectiveness of the computer as the major or sole means of instruction, but we are aware of the support and reinforcement they can provide children and the positive affective results.
