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Valerie A. Pearson  
Warrenville, Illinois

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# PARENT/TEACHER READING INSTRUCTION: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

*Valerie A. Pearson*  
WARRENVILLE, ILLINOIS

Parents are often baffled and anxious when teachers explain that, in their opinion, a child is not ready to cope with the academic demands of the next grade level, due to the child's lack of progress in learning how to read. The parents' perception of their child is that s/he has shown normal development. Yet, they are told the child is unable to perform successfully in the classroom. Haunted by childhood memories of frequent pupil retentions in the schoolrooms of years ago, the parents cautiously receive the teacher's judgment. In order to help with this situation, the parents inquire about the purposes of the classroom instruction and how they can become more involved in their child's education.

During this critical time the teacher's responsibility is to advise parents how they can make a direct and unique contribution to the development of their children. In many instances parents desire to have an active role in guiding the academic progress of their children. No longer willing to be simply receivers of information, parents need to be guided in reviewing their own reading attitudes, home environment, and the intent and extent of school and home support.

To make conference time with the parent optimally beneficial for the student and encourage the parent to respond to the teacher's ideas, preparation is necessary. A successful conference can occur with a preplanned course of action. Initially, teachers should confer with the reading specialist to brainstorm on an appropriate set of activities for assisting the pupil. Together, they should determine the range of possible activities, making careful plans for parent conference.

The activities suggested on the following pages

are results of successful planning conferences, ideas to which parents have responded favorably. Teachers should consider the following guidelines in communicating these specific activities to the parent(s):

FIRST. Teachers should be prepared to offer numerous suggestions to the parents. A teacher could propose the simple, frequently offered suggestion of reading with their children. However, we should remember that several activities based on a single suggestion are more effective than offering one idea. Thus, the basic activity could be expanded into three or four, from which the parents could choose.

Reading with a child can include listening to him read; asking questions before, during, or after the reading; or reading to a child. The following may expand the basic concept of "reading with your child."

1. If the suggestion is to have the parent read with the child, then guidance should be given concerning selection of a book from the library or newsstand. A useful technique the parent might use is the "five finger approach" in selecting a book, as to level of difficulty:

- Have the child select an attractive or interesting book.
- Flip to the middle of the book.
- Ask the child to read a page orally, noting the errors by raising one finger per error.
- If fewer than five fingers have been raised, then the book should be suitable to check out or purchase.
- If all five fingers are extended before the child finishes the page, the child should choose another book, less difficult.
- If the child is extremely interested in the book that he cannot read comfortably and resists looking for another, the parent can still check out the book and use the following activity.

2. The teacher should advise the parent to choose a book or short story, familiar to the child but which he cannot read on his own. Before beginning to read, the parent should ask the child to predict what will happen in the story. Having read a page orally, the parent can ask the child if the first guess about the story was correct. As the parent reads the book or short story, he/she should stop periodically and ask the child to offer another prediction based on the story line or main character. Following this type of questioning, different aspects of the plot can be included, to encourage purposeful listening and promote active involvement on the part of the child.

3. Before the conference could compile a list of children's magazine publishers' addresses. A ready-made list may be found among the local librarian's purchase order requests or in such books as Good Reading for Poor Readers by George D. Spache. The teacher can then collect copies of each of the magazines and have them on display for the parents to preview. The parents should be advised that the variety of activities found in the magazines may pique their children's interests and provide them with opportunities to read poems, short stories, or letters. Experience has shown that many children are thrilled to receive their own personal copy of a magazine in the mail. Having access to a variety of magazines in this way will allow the parents to follow-up the teacher's recommendation to read with the child.

4. Teachers might suggest expanding the child's home library as a means of providing some additional materials for parents to read with their children. An example of this would be to begin the tradition of a birthday or Christmas book. Teachers could suggest to parents titles which reflect the child's personal interests. In order to guide the parents further in the selection of these books, a handout listing popular books by title should be made available to them at conference time. The teacher with the help of the school librarian can compile this list of frequently read books for each age level. Later the titles can be sorted out according to subject. The exceptional books that have received the Caldecott Medal and Newberry Award can be listed separately. A bibliography of these books can be found in such sources as Children and Books by Zena Sutherland and May Hill Arbuthnot.

SECOND. While explaining the ideas or activities, the teacher should be clear. He should provide concrete examples of the activities and be prepared to role play. If the teacher gathers together a collection of the type of books being suggested, this display will give parents an opportunity after the conference to browse leisurely through appropriate titles. Teachers should prepare an example of the game or activity and be ready to list the materials a parent will need to duplicate it. After suggesting the specific game or activity, the teacher should take the time to begin to play it with them. The parents will have a better idea of the procedure used to play it at home as well as give them an opportunity to ask specific and pertinent questions. In this way the teacher will promote further understanding.

THIRD. The teacher should try to offer activities that will produce minimal conflict or interference with the family's routine. Many families have both

parents working outside the home. During the workweek, parents may not have the energy to consistently carry out complex, lengthy activities. Teachers need to tailor their suggestions to meet parents' time schedules--some of the following activities take little preparation; therefore, may appeal to busy, yet concerned parents.

1. Tape a word a week on the medicine cabinet door. The parents should try to use the word deliberately when speaking with the child. Each time the child hears the parent say the word, the child should try to give a synonym or definition.
2. Before the child leaves the breakfast table, have him supply the missing word to similes; i.e., As fresh as \_\_\_\_\_.
3. On the refrigerator door place multiple-choice statements about food. For example: Corned beef is beef that has been a)cooked with corn, b)smoked, c)cooked quickly, d)pickled in brine.
4. On the TV set leave a picture of a plant or animal that has an article associated with it, and have the child write the name of it in the margin.

FOURTH. The suggestions given should build upon the positive educational elements found in the home, and utilize the resources of the family; such as traveling experiences, home libraries, traditional celebrations, etc. When the teacher learns that a child has the opportunity to travel, she should have the child share the experience with classmates. In this way, the child will learn to understand that the subjects in school are valuable in his world.

1. Collect articles from the area and be ready to explain their importance to the class.
2. Bring a map and connect the cities traveled through with yarn so that children can see their classmate's route.
3. Bring pictures that illustrate the geographical landscape.
4. Identify sports or games of the area.
5. Imitate the language and dialect of the people met on the trip.

FIFTH. Activities suggested for the home should be different from those at school. The home experiences should deal with the academic areas in a new format, not simply repeat that which has been assigned at school. Prior to the conference the teacher should make a list of skills being taught in each subject area. The teacher should place the child's name next

to each skill in which he needs further practice. It will be necessary for the teacher to be familiar with the kinds of homework that have been assigned, to avoid duplicating those reviewed or extended activities at home. For the skills in which the majority of children are needing review, the teacher can supply the parent with a teacher-made game. The teacher can trace on a spirit master simple game boards that have not been used in class, and can therefore be used at home with assistance from the parents.

Each game has three components. The first of these is attached to the game cover and consists of clearly written directions which explain how to play the game and how to put it together. The second section supplies the actual game board which is run off on colored construction paper. The final component includes the construction sheets that have the cards, spinners, and additional blank pieces for the game printed on them.

In order to facilitate a smooth and orderly documentation of home activities, the teacher should keep a notebook which gives the name of each child, title of the game, and date it was given to the parent. With this kind of record keeping system the teacher will have an accurate account of the assistance provided to each parent as well as an indication of the skills needing reinforcement at home.

SIXTH The teacher should be ready to offer alternative activities for joint consideration and be prepared to accept parent suggestions. The conference should allow ample time for discussion of the ideas for methods and materials. Suggestions from the teacher may be developed and refined as discussion proceeds. Certain ideas may need modification as a tentative plan takes shape between parent and teacher. For example, during the discussion the teacher may discover that the parent does not enjoy playing games with the child; therefore, an alternative such as a peer or older child playing the game with the child is agreed upon.

In families where there is a history of reading failure, a frank discussion with the parents about the factors that encourage good readers will make them aware of certain tendencies in the family structure which should be promoted or eliminated. For example, there is a tendency among good readers to come from homes where reading is a valued activity and frequent discussions about school related activities occur. In addition, these children seem to enjoy a position of importance within the family structure. However, when children feel unloved, anxious, and constantly ridiculed, it is difficult for them to adjust to both

the academic and social demands at school. Their progress in reading will be affected accordingly.

Teachers should assist in helping parents organize to teach the mutually agreed upon activities. If the parents feel organized, their teaching behavior will significantly influence and enhance the activities designed for use in the home. Therefore, the suggestions should be directed to the parent in a non-threatening, open manner. These suggestions will help organize the parents as well as influence the way in which the activities are presented.

1. Spend time orienting the child to the task. A child's attention needs to be focused slowly yet deliberately away from play to the subject at hand.
2. Try not to control or direct. Let the child manipulate the materials and explore activities. For example, allow the child to hold the book or game pieces.
3. Give words of sincere praise; use positive reinforcement.
4. Allow the child to solve problems through the use of questioning strategies.
5. Depending on the nature of the individual child, set a specific time in the day or week for participating in the activities. Some children, however, may become tense as the activity time approaches and use a variety of avoidance techniques. Both parent and child may then look upon this session as something less than enjoyable and gradually avoid working with each other.

As a result of this conference the parent becomes a true participant in the teaching/learning process. Cooperative action has become possible because of the following three factors:

1. coordination and development of the ideas between the reading specialist and the classroom teacher;
2. careful and thorough preparation by the teacher for the parent/teacher conference;
3. supportive guidance to the parent as s/he assumes the role of teacher. With this kind of partnership parents will become sensitive to their child's progress in reading.