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THIS IS READING?

Alice Sleight

BATTLE CREEK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Billy's mother is coming in this afternoon to talk to me about his reading problems. She called on the phone and wants to help. What will I tell her? Will she expect to go home with an armload of books and materials and feel that the problem is well on the way to being solved? Since there is, for many reasons, as much variation in parents and home situations as there is in reading disabilities this is not an easy question to answer. There are no "pat" answers for all parents of disabled readers any more than there is one method of teaching reading that will work with all children.

Many parents, even the educated ones, fail to understand the important role they play in their child's ability to read. When their child is having trouble and the parents ask what they can do to help, they think in terms of flash cards, drills, and requiring him to read a certain length of time each day. They seem to be entirely unaware of what is really involved in making a good reader. No one has ever pointed out to them that reading is a developmental and on-going process beginning in the home and continuing throughout the years in both home and school. They look at it as something that begins the first day their child sets his foot in the school house door, so naturally when problems arise they look only to the school for causes and help. It is proper that they should. They have a right to know the school's objectives and methods in reading and why it is using certain procedures. They need to have a general understanding of the philosophy of the school and a clear picture of their child's progress, both his strengths and weaknesses. Most schools do a good job in this respect.

The communication failure seems to be in the area of lack of information to parents that may prevent many disabilities. The parents need to have an understanding of their part in the developmental process. How are they to gain this understanding if the school does not in some way take the initiative in informing them? The school should make it clear that it considers education a team project. Hopefully this education of the parents would not only prevent some reading disabilities but should stimulate the interest of parents whose children are having no problems in school but are not working anywhere near their capacity level. Parental understanding and interest could stimulate and help them.

Most parents want to help their children and would welcome information coming from the school. A publication by the school offering general suggestions to all parents in regard to improving reading would be informative and would also make them feel that the administration and teachers regard them as an important part of the educational process. Of course such a procedure would not be effective with all parents. To think that would be very unrealistic. Some would have neither the interest nor the capability of understanding. In these cases conferences with the teacher and reading therapist would be needed. This is the usual procedure. The teacher with the help of the therapist would have to choose and interpret the factors involved and decide which ones were material to the particular situation. The teacher would gauge her terminology and language to the ability of the parents to understand and endeavor to make practical and specific suggestions—therapy, clinical help, or whatever seemed to be indicated.

General suggestions for reading help for parents to consider might include the following ideas:

- * Be sure to let your child know that you love him and think of him as an important part of the family group.
- * Do not make all his decisions for him, but influence him to decide things for himself. This does not mean that he can always do exactly as he wishes. He must learn to consider others in his decision making.
- * Begin reading to him when he is very young. Show him that you enjoy reading to him and he will enjoy it with you.
- * Look at books with him and then talk about the stories and pictures you see.
- * So that he may learn to express himself and develop his use of language, listen to what he says and show an interest in it and in the way he puts his ideas into words.
- * Play games with him.
- * Encourage his special interests and call his attention to things you think he should be interested in.
- * Always give him the right names of people and things. Don't talk "baby talk" to him.
- * Help him to put people, places, times, and events into their proper relationship.
- * Encourage his creativity by giving him materials such as crayons, paper, paste, and paints.

- * Call his attention to reading outside of books—letters and words in magazines, newspapers, signs, labels on packages and cans, television, anywhere.
- * Take him to the library and spend some time in choosing interesting books to read to him or for him to read for himself as he gets old enough to do so. Some libraries have story hours for children. This would stimulate his interest.
- * Answer his questions.
- * Refrain from making comparisons with other children—brothers, sisters, or friends.
- * Have a positive attitude toward his following directions and paying attention when you talk to him.
- * Encourage his association with other children in play, clubs, camp, and at home.
- * Develop the idea that because he is a member of the family he has certain responsibilities for doing everyday tasks. Begin with the simplest ones, picking up toys or emptying a wastebasket. Be consistent and firm about it to establish the pattern. Later responsibilities will come easier then.
- * The more experiences that you can give him that mean something and are interesting to him the better. This increases his general knowledge and builds a better background for reading. These experiences do not have to be extensive trips, but everyday excursions while he is little will teach him many things.
- * Your own attitude toward school affects your child's attitude. If parents are interested and enthusiastic about school and respectful of teachers, their children are apt to be also.
- * If he does develop a problem, offer help rather than criticism. When he makes progress, show that you appreciate his efforts. Help him understand his own problems. This will give him a sense of security and lessen his confusion.
- * Never be derogatory, but try to build up his self confidence.
- * Keep in mind that children mature at different rates, and do not compare his rate of development with others and try to hurry him.
- * Take good care of his physical needs: proper food, rest, adequate clothing, general health, dental needs, vision and hearing checks.
- * Do not underestimate your influence. He spends many more hours at home than he does at school.

- * Have patience.
- * Leave the formal reading instruction to the teacher.

This is reading? Yes, parents, this is your part in helping your child to become a good reader.

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