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THE ROLE OF THE HOME IN PROMOTING READING

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The first teacher of a child, for better or worse, is the parent or parents. Morally and legally, the responsibility rests entirely and completely upon their shoulders. The parents can be guided and counseled, but in the final analysis they must be prepared to take the credit for success or the blame for failure.

Educational facilities are provided for all children. However, these should not be a substitute but a supplement to the parents' own teaching. Good parent-teacher relationship lessens home problems and gains respect for parents as they encourage respect for teachers. This kind of character building pays dividends all through life. Especially is this true during the junior and senior high school age. The teenager goes through a period of rebellion against adult authority. It is at this stage that the parents' attitude toward school and teacher is most important. Teachers have a right to expect and a duty to insist upon obedience from students. If the parents also insist upon the child's treating the teacher with respect and obedience, then there is a much better foundation upon which to carry out the further education of the child.

Mrs. James C. Parker says that in order to have a truly successful education, the home must contribute a basic foundation and the school must support it.³ Every school needs a vigorous program to build constructive relationships with parents; to gain understanding of the aspirations, values, and problems of parents and the community; to deepen parents' insight into their children's need for guidance, discipline, affection and good example; to raise the level of public understanding of education; and to gain community support for school improvements.

The most important activity between home and school is that which brings parents and teachers together to learn about each other's problems and responsibilities in rearing and educating children. When parents understand and reinforce the school's efforts, children's learning increases.

Teaching is becoming more and more difficult. What do parents and teachers expect of each other in terms of the child? A teacher's success is often dependent upon the parents—their understanding, their cooperation, and sometimes their willingness to “face up” to the hard,

cold facts. If a parent always assumes that a child's complaint about his teacher is right, the teacher and the school may be accused of not teaching the three R's, of lack of discipline, or of "picking on" the child. The child nurtures these attitudes and becomes influenced by their bias. If, on the other hand, the parent questions the child and seeks the counsel of the teacher and the principal, the child immediately becomes aware of the lines of communication, and the home-school relationship takes on a new dimension. The home and the school then become focal points of common interest complementing each other, working in harmony.

The teachers also depend upon parents to encourage the continuing development of the skills which are initiated at school. Cooperation is needed because there is work to be done for children and youth—work that will not wait. Almost all children want to learn. They are curious and eager to explore, and they want to know. They are willing to work very hard to learn, but they want to learn those things that hold personal significance for them. What the teacher or parent has to offer must be related to the child, where and what he is, his interest, his growth and what he hopes to become. When this personal significance is present, then the child is motivated to learn.²

To find out what specific activities stimulate learning, parents of first graders in the Price Laboratory School, State University of Iowa, Cedar Falls, were asked to list the different things they had done that were closely allied to their children's interest in reading. The results of the questionnaire were revealing. According to their replies, parents, especially mothers, read to their children regularly. Especially important was the use of a quiet period in the day, resulting in a release from hurry and tension. This, it was found, was a time when child and parent were drawn closely together. The parents interviewed were unanimous in their belief that story time is a wonderful medium through which to have the children share in our heritage of great literature. Furthermore, story time can help children to think creatively and it will add many important and intriguing words to their vocabularies. Parents are consciously and sometimes unknowingly setting reading as a goal for their children when they frequently give books to their children on birthdays and holidays or as a special treat. Children who are in this type of stimulating environment are indeed fortunate.

Listening is another art that should be practiced. Fortunately, attentive listening on the part of parents and teachers will help make better listeners of children. Dictionaries, encyclopedias and almanacs

all have a place in homes where a sincere interest in reading is being developed. Parents can, and in many instances do, serve as parateachers in the intriguing task of helping children develop power in and a love for reading. It was found in nearly every instance that successful readers came from homes in which children were read to frequently and were given books on special occasions; parents read extensively and had a personal interest in reading; children had many enriching experiences which the family shared; dictionaries, almanacs, and encyclopedias were used extensively; children were involved in games played together by the family which required reading; incidental reading was encouraged; recognition of letter names was encouraged and the library habit was established early.¹

Most parents want their children to go to college. However, many qualified young men and women find it difficult to secure admission to a reputable college or university because of the great influx of students already taxing the physical facilities of our schools. Some universities are becoming more highly selective in their admission procedures, virtually limiting consideration to those whose high school records have been outstanding or to those who can give evidence of having mastered the special skills necessary for success in college. If he is to succeed, the student must meet the inevitable challenge of maintaining his place in college. He soon learns that there are more demands placed on intellectual skills than in his previous schooling. Reading ability becomes of paramount importance, and the whole environment demands of him a higher level of thinking. Gibbon says, "Let us read with method and propose to ourselves an end to what our studies may permit. The use of reading is to aid us in thinking." High school and college students are expected to generalize, draw inferences and conclusions, and appreciate subtleties of style and content. They apply ideas read to society and to personal problems. They find textbooks more difficult, study periods longer, and a high level of concentration required for achievement. The assignments are more difficult and complex, and these newcomers to the college campus must adapt their reading to meet their new needs. Most of these skills should be mastered at the grade and high school level. Reading is the most important learning skill.

Now, what is the role of the parent in today's reading program? The writer would like to point out some of the more important ways in which the parents of today's children can help in this situation. First, there is the need to become familiar and better acquainted with the school reading program. For example, do you know what

the philosophy of reading is in today's schools? Years ago, we defined it as recognizing words and being able to pronounce them correctly during oral reading and then we realized that this was not enough to expect from our children. Then we modified our definition of reading so that now we think of reading not only as a process of recognizing words and understanding their meanings but also thinking about what the author has said, actually reflecting upon it so that we can compare what he has said with our own past experiences or with materials that we have read from other sources. In other words, today's reading program is one that does emphasize thinking skills along with the mechanics of reading and understanding what is read.

In order to know whether your school has a well-balanced reading program, you will need to look into your school to see whether or not your school is offering three types of programs. First of all, is it teaching a developmental reading program? In other words, is the school paying attention to readiness for reading; is it developing the necessary skills for word recognition, comprehension, study skills? Is there a basic reading program which presents a systematic, well-outlined approach to the skills development which are needed by children? This does not mean that your school should be limited to a basic reading program in any way because the school should also be teaching the necessary skills for reading social studies and science, health and arithmetic. Skills can be and should be taught in relation to the content areas.

Next, you should check to find out if the recreational reading program in your school is a stimulating one. Do the children read independently? Do they enjoy reading and what kind of books are they reading? As Noah Porter has said, "No man can read with profit that which he cannot learn to read with pleasure." In other words, teachers and parents today are not only interested in how well Johnny reads but also in what reading is doing to and for Johnny himself. All of these are essential parts of a well-balanced reading program.

Both parents and teachers can help prevent some reading problems. Perhaps the greatest aid is helping the child to be confident. We also need to keep in mind that reading problems are not caused by any one deficiency. Therefore, when Johnny's teacher talks with you and indicates that he is having some difficulty in reading, by all means follow the suggestions of the teacher to help alleviate the problem, such as hearing, eye, or other examinations to detect defects. If the teacher suggests reading aloud at home, find the time to help him.

Have patience in teaching the child words. Try to build up in your child a stick-to-it-iveness, a sense of pleasure in accomplishment and in doing things right. Parents can also help in preventing reading problems by providing a background of varied experiences for their children. Find the time to take them to the zoo, airport, post office, and places of this nature. Then take the time to talk to them about these places and the various functions they serve, so that their vocabulary as well as their knowledge is increased. Parents can avoid problems in reading by refraining from tenseness and nervousness over the situation, thus imparting their fear to the child. Above all, do not compare the child with a sibling who is smarter or a neighbor's child who is smarter. This tends to lower Johnny's already low opinion of himself. Instead, encourage and praise and have patience. Give him work to do or books to read that he is capable of reading, so that he has an opportunity to experience a sense of achievement. Let him know that you know he has a reading problem and that you will help him and in time he will be a good reader.

Teenagers can also be helped by discussing various current events with them, some article in a magazine; by letting them know you are interested in their ideas, and by encouraging them to read more in order to have more ideas and topics to discuss with you. If after helping the child all you can by following the teacher's suggestions you still find no solutions, then by all means take the child to a reading clinic in order that he may have the additional help and instruction that a center has to offer.

One thing for you to remember is that Johnny's teacher and school are just as eager for him to succeed as you are yourself.

In conclusion, may I share with you an anonymously written poem, which will serve to summarize the theme of this paper.

Children Learn What They Live

- If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
- If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
- If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
- If a child lives with jealousy, he learns to feel guilty.
- If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
- If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.
- If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.
- If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.
- If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.
- If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship he learns
to find Love in the world.

Now, may I ask you, with what is your child living?

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