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Parents Modify the Home Literacy Environment According to Their Children's Progress in Learning to Read

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Developmental Relations Between Home Literacy Environment, Reading Interest, and Reading Skills: Evidence From a 3-Year Longitudinal Study

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Research across a wide range of languages shows that children's home literacy environment can often predict their language and literacy skills. However few studies, especially for English speaking children, examine how children's development affects what parents do and not just how parents affect their children's development. A new longitudinal study examined such bidirectional relationships between home literacy environment and children's progress in learning to read between grades 1 and 3. Results show that parents adjust their reading activities with their children over time, taking into account the level of difficulty the children are having in learning to read. These findings raise the important possibility that teachers could give more specific guidance to parents to help shape the home literacy environment according to children's progress in learning to read.

Results showed that access to literacy resources was a consistent predictor of emergent literacy over time. However, in addition, while parent-child reading comprehension activities and parent ratings of the child's interest in reading at the start of grade 1 predicted children's reading accuracy and comprehension in second grade, there was a switch at that point in the relationship of parent activities and children's development. From then on, parents started to engage in more frequent reading comprehension activities with their children when they realized their children were experiencing reading difficulties. Across ages, the findings point to the importance of reading comprehension activities as more important than the overall frequency of reading activities with parents.

The findings were published in a *Child Development* article, written by researchers at the University of Alberta, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Macquarie University.

“Our study showed that there is a bidirectional relationship between early access to literary resources at home, child interest and child’s reading skills in grade 2,” said George Georgiou, professor in the department of educational psychology at the University of Alberta. “These findings are important because they show that it is not only home literacy environment that predicts future reading, but that earlier reading also predicts future home literacy environment.”

The sample included 172 children recruited from six public elementary schools in Edmonton, Canada. The children were tested at the beginning of grade 1 and at the end of grades 2 and 3 to assess their reading accuracy and comprehension and asked to respond to a child- friendly measure of interest in reading. Measures included the following:

- **Reading interest:** feelings about reading for fun at home, getting a book, spending free time reading, starting a new book, reading through the weekend, reading instead of playing, going to a library or bookstore, and reading different kind of books.
- **Phonological awareness:** ability to repeat recording of a native English speaker and then remove a designated sound from it and say what was remaining.
- **Vocabulary:** capacity for defining words increasing in difficulty.
- **Reading accuracy:** ability to read out loud and pronounce pseudowords of increasing difficulty.
- **Reading comprehension:** skill level for reading short passages and providing an appropriate word to fill in the blank and sentence matching indicating understanding of meaning.

During grade 1, and at grades 2 and 3, parents completed questionnaires assessing different aspects of the home literacy environment including:

- **Direct teaching:** frequency of how often they or someone else at home taught their child to read or spell words.
- **Shared book reading:** regularity of reading a story to their child on a weeknight or weekend.
- **Access to literacy resources:** number of printed children’s books at home.
- **Reading comprehensive activities:** frequency of asking their child to talk about the content, characters/events in a story they read or summarize the story.
- **Reading interest:** rating of how often their child was reading alone for enjoyment and how much they enjoyed being read to.
- **Family socioeconomic status:** self-report of parents’ highest achieved education and their occupations.

The study showed that access to literacy resources was the main predictor of emergent literacy skills over time. The findings also showed that onward from grade 1, frequency of shared book reading was not significantly related to children's reading skills, which may indicate that quality of parent-child interactions is more important for children's language and literacy skills than the frequency of this activity after a certain point. Finally, in line with previous research, the findings also suggest that parents should engage frequently in reading comprehension activities with their children.

"The findings indicate that reading comprehension activities seem to play a key role in predicting reading skills and should be considered an important component in supporting literacy in the home," said Georgiou and his collaborators Tomohiro Inoue, assistant professor in the department of psychology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Rauno Parrila, professor in the school of education at Macquarie University. "Results from the study also allowed us to observe whether parents adjusted their home literacy practices depending on their children's reading performance. After a certain point in development, the findings indicate that parents are more likely to engage in reading comprehension activities when they realize their child is experiencing difficulties."

The authors note that the study is correlational, and relations do not imply causation. The authors also acknowledge several limitations around the measurements of the home literacy environment. Home literacy was measured by a self-reported questionnaire completed by parents which may be subject to social desirability bias (e.g., answering questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others.) The parent questionnaires also focused on the quantity, not quality of the parent-child interactions, and did not assess whether there were naturally occurring home literacy activities or parental involvement during homework. Finally, the authors did not directly assess how much independent reading the parents themselves were engaged in.

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Summarized from *Child Development*, Developmental Relations between Home Literacy Environment, Reading Interest and Reading Skills: Evidence from a 3-Year Longitudinal Study by Georgiou, G.K. (University of Alberta), Inoue, T. (The Chinese University of Hong Kong), and Parrila, R. (Macquarie University). Copyright 2021 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.