CHILDREN’S LITERATURE SUPPORTING EMERGENT LITERACY SKILLS FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

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Abstract

Children's literature supports emergent literacy skills in many ways. It is important for families to understand how critical it is to read aloud and share books with their children. Parents also have to know how to select quality literature and appropriate books for their child according to their age levels. General evaluation criteria has been established for the selection of books for young children. By sharing criteria we can help families choose quality literature for their children. Sharing books with the children help children to acquire emergent literacy skills naturally. Children learn how to handle a book understand that print carries meaning and discovers literary element of a story. They learn that a story has a beginning, middle and end. But one of the most important elements of sharing books is that children learn to value literacy and begin a journey of lifelong learning that is enjoyable. After all if young children love to listen to stories and read they are already paving the path for success in later school years.

Keywords: Early reading&writing, children's literature, families, oral reading

INTRODUCTION

Children's Literature is vital because it plays an important role in supporting emergent literacy. It is important for families to realize the significance of reading quality books to young children. What are quality books for the young child and what are some of the benefits of reading books to the young child? I will discuss some of the evaluation criteria of what makes a good book for a young child and also discuss the importance sharing books and reading aloud to your child. I will be looking at what we already know about emergent literacy and books for children.

Emergent Literacy is referred to as a time where children first notice print and begin to wonder what people are doing when interacting with print. We know that learning to read is a complex process that includes a plethora of abilities and competence. We are aware that children come to school with a set of experiences and knowledge in regards to what reading is. Some children have had more opportunities to interact with books than others and seem to be more familiar with print than their peers who have not had such interactions with books. We know that learning to read is related to phonological awareness and knowledge of letters as well as their knowledge about the functions of print (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anhony, 2000, Wagner et al., 1997, Ehri, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996). If children come from a household where reading and writing is part of the daily routine and often done then we know that by the time children enter school they
have a great deal of knowledge in regards to Literacy. This is also true if they come from a community where reading and writing is done often the result is that children acquire a vast amount of knowledge in regards to literacy (Temple, Ogle, Crawford &Freppton 2011). We now know how important it is to surround children in a print rich environment and to read to them on a regular basis along with giving them ample opportunities to explore and attempt reading and writing on their own. When we think of all these factors then we can state emergent literacy is the time where children first notice print and the early informal and formal teaching that children get when they are in preschool and kindergarten. What we also know is that early language and literacy development begins from the time the child enters this world. This is closely connected (language and literacy development) with a child’s first experiences with stories and books. Parents need to realize that the foundational blocks for language, reading and writing are based on the interactions that the child has with literacy materials and the adults in their lives. Another important aspect is that the new understanding that we have about emergent literacy development is that it parallels the current research that supports the vital role of early experiences in shaping the child’s brain meaning brain development. We have the knowledge that children gain a vast amount of knowledge in writing, reading and language before they enter school. Before children come to school, they can talk, write, read and participate in social literacy interactions with adults and their peers. Social literacy interactions are developed by using literacy materials such as books, paper, crayons, pencils, and markers just to name a few. Literacy research has demonstrated that reading and writing develop at the same time and this is a process that is continuous which is initially started in the first years of life. Emergent literacy skills develop in authentic situations with authentic experiences and through positive interactions with peers and adults. An important factor here is that all of this should be developmentally appropriate. In young children, we want children to learn in a more natural way and this can occur through the sharing and enjoyment of quality children’s literature books and with authentic literacy rich experiences. It is important to choose appropriate books for young children so that a love of reading, enjoyment and sharing of books can be instilled in the child. We do have certain evaluation criteria guidelines that help us to select quality literature for young children.

Here are some of the criteria or guidelines for choosing books for young children. The best type of books for infants and toddlers should relate to usual types of experiences that children have. Pictures should be clear and not busy. The background of the pictures should be clear and not distracting to the child. The pages of the book should be strong and able to last, as we know children who are teething put everything in their mouth. The language should be and authentic and the stories should be predictable. Humor in the stories will help children to feel superior and stories should offer children the option to interact and participate with the story. Finally but not last the book should be able to keep the child’s attention and as we know young children have a short attention span (Huck, Hickman Kiefer, 2011).

Another type of book for toddlers are alphabet books. Usually alphabet books provide children with big bright pictures. These types of books besides teaching about letters also allows for the discussion of the solitary object or the animal that may be in the picture. Chicka Chicka Boom Boom illustrated by Lois Ehlert and written by Bill Martin Junior and John Archambault is an exceptional alphabet book, which helps children, learn the alphabet through chants and rhyme. Another unique aspect of this book is instead of having an animal or a single object the letters are active and embark upon climbing up the coconut tree by inviting each other up (Huck Hickman and Heplar, 2011). Some guidelines for evaluating alphabet books are that the illustrations of animals or objects should be clear and for the very young child one or two objects should be in the picture. Common types of animals or familiar objects that young children can recognize should be used. Objects that have several different names should be avoided. The purpose of the book should be transparent. The pictures of the book should go hand in hand with the text and reflect the overall mood of the book. The organization of the alphabet book should be transparent (Huck Hepler, Kiefer, 2011). For young children there are many types of books such as wordless books, books about common life experiences, naming books for babies, toy books, mother goose books, concept books, wordless picture books, predictable books, and big books.

Reading aloud to your child provides time for you and your child to cuddle, share quality time together and allows your child to learn quite a bit about emergent literacy skills. The National Early Literacy Panel did research and from this research, they found that there are certain factors that help to predict success in reading for children five and younger in regards to learning how to read. There are language factors such as the ability to hear sounds, vocabulary and grammar and along with these print criteria such as recognizing letters knowing the way print is arranged on a page and being able to write their own names. First of all a child has to learn the concept of a word..... Example Luckycomeherenow. Children must be able to figure out this sentence is made up of four words and that the words are made up of letters and separated by a space. Actually this is quite an accomplishment. If a child does not know this then when trying to read their eyes will scan the whole sentence rather than focus on the word. Your child will learn about how to handle a
book that print carries meaning and the directionality of how to read. Your child will learn about words and that words have spaces between them plus words make up sentences. He/she will also learn about language and written language and literary elements such as the beginning middle and end to a story. However, the single most important element that your child should acquire is the love of reading this is crucial to your child's success in school and life long learning.

Sharing books with your child is an important step in having your child develop emergent literacy skills and instilling in your child love of reading. Many different types of genres and books are available for your young children and if properly selected the impact of sharing quality literature in later years will beneficial for the child in many ways. One of the most important gifts we can give to children as parents and educators is to instill the love of reading in our children.

REFERENCES


