

**Learning About Print Naturally:  
Three Case Studies**

by

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LEARNING ABOUT PRINT NATURALLY: THREE CASE STUDIES

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## **Abstract**

This project investigated whether a selected sample of children could learn to read (and write) as naturally as they learned to speak. To that end the investigator took the role of participant-observer and gathered data on the question:

How will children respond when introduced to print in ways similar to the introduction of oral language -- that is, without direct instruction, phonics or vocabulary drill, but through the use of many meaningful and positive print experiences?

The investigator selected three five year-old children for the program based upon their parent's interest and support. She met with each of them for 1 - 1 1/2 hours (each), once a week, for a period of 12 months. All three children were simultaneously enrolled in a kindergarten class. The program for the children consisted of reading to them from good literature, allowing them the opportunity to retell favorite stories or to describe memorable parts and recording their own meaningful language as interest was shown. Instruction upon specific aspects of print was provided only in response to their request and attention. Careful and detailed notes were kept for each session with each youngster, highlighting procedures and materials used, and recording the full spectrum of affective and cognitive responses. The parents of each child were encouraged to read to them from the selection of books that had been left for them as well as from their own collections, and to follow a similar natural learning model of responding to their child's interest and attention to print.

The data were examined from nine perspectives: attitude towards books; frequency of listening to books; evaluation and selection of books;

attention to pictures in books; summarizing and retelling stories; attention to print in books; key words and language experience stories; other print developments; and perception of selves as readers. Several important observations could be made on the basis of that examination:

1. these children's positive attitude towards books continued to grow and develop;
2. they readily comprehended story meaning and preferred to hear more books rather than the same ones repeatedly;
3. their independence with books varied;
4. while they all enjoyed good, imaginative tales, their reading preferences were unique;
5. illustrations closely matching a story's text were vital;
6. they generally preferred not to discuss stories they had already heard; instead, they were anxious to hear new books;
7. as they desired to read, they showed an interest in retelling stories, as if reading, doing so fluently and expressively;
8. they became aware of how print works and sometimes pretended to read; but they could recognize some words in context and liked to search for distinct words within books;
9. they each fluently read several personally meaningful words;
10. they enjoyed making booklets and "reading" them;
11. they perceived themselves as successful beginning readers.

These observations support the findings of many authorities in the field of beginning reading, confirming that selected children can successfully learn about print without direct instruction when allowed to do so in their own time, in a print-rich and supportive environment.

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## Chapter 1

### Learning About Print Naturally: Introduction and Literature Review

"Say 's'," mother says to two-year-old Johnny.

Johnny says, "S."

"Good boy," says mother. "Now say 'i'."

"I," repeats Johnny.

"That's it," encourages mother. "Can you say 't'?"

Johnny smiles and says, "T."

"Now put them together," says mother. "Say s-i-t, sit."

"S-i-t, sit," repeats Johnny proudly.

"That's my boy!" praises mother.

When observing young children beginning to speak, such a method of sounding out words devoid of meaning seems absurd. Instead, young children are generally surrounded by language, and are spoken to in complete words and sentences. Their first words are often emotionally significant --- mamma, dad-da, --- words they have heard repeatedly and have come to know through cradling and play experiences. As they make further associations of words with experiences, as they are lovingly encouraged to attempt new words, and as they feel the desire to communicate, their speaking vocabulary develops. Later, words begin to be

connected to make phrases and sentences. No one has sat them down for a grammar lesson --- they have miraculously formed their own generalizations of language patterns based upon the modelling of the speech of significant others. Young children are such capable learners!

"P-a-t, P-a-t, Pat-the-R-a-t. Pat the Rat," reads Timmy. He pauses at the next word.

"This," prompts the teacher.

"This-is-M-i-ss, Miss-S---."

"Smith," the teacher offers.

"Smith," repeats Timmy.

"Now read the whole sentence again," requests the teacher.

"This-is -Miss-Smith." Timmy struggles on, "Miss-Smith-h-a-s, h-a-s, has a h-a-m, ham. Miss-Smith- has-a-ham. P-a-t, Pat-is-at-Miss Smith's. Pat-has---."

"The," fills in the teacher.

"The-ham. M-m-m. ---"

"That," says the teacher.

"That-ham.---"

"Hm," the teacher prompts again.

"Hm,---that-r-a-t, rat.--- That-rat-b-i-t, bit-the-ham."

As we observe young children beginning to read, we find that such a method of sounding out words and reading meaningless, stilted sentences is still quite common. I know. I have taught and sat through many similar scenarios. Young children are willing to struggle in order to learn something new. Later, though, they learn that reading means hard work --- contrived stories using unnatural language, skills lessons, and workbook pages, all in



the presence of constant correction of errors. The pleasure they may have anticipated from reading is in danger of being lost. Reading means the reader. The majority of children may learn to read through these methods, but the fear is great that many will not willingly pick up a book again. They do not all love to read, they are not all self-motivated or satisfied because they see no purpose in it. Many read only because they are required to do so at school. (Bettelheim and Zelan, 1982)

Given that the majority of children learn to speak without formal instruction --- in their own time, in a loving environment that surrounds them with language, where they meet with success and satisfaction --- cannot reading, too, be learned in such a way? If children are read to repeatedly from a variety of storybooks containing flowing language and magical stories, can they come to know the pleasures of print and be motivated to read? If children begin to read their own language, words and sentences that are within their experience and are emotionally significant for them, is it likely that they will read those words fluently, and begin to make their own phonic generalizations? If we as teachers are patient and develop awarenesses of meanings and skills based upon the needs of the children rather than upon a sequence developed by publishers and curriculum makers, is it likely that children will still learn to read, and love it? And, if the self-esteem of children is maintained --- by focusing upon what the child can do rather than upon the mistakes made by demanding accuracy at all times --- are they likely to feel supported and confident enough to tackle more challenging materials?

Many leading authorities in the fields of child development and beginning reading provide support for such hypotheses.

David Doake, based upon his observation of preschoolers involved in reading activities in their homes, came to believe that,

Given the opportunity, young children will go about learning to read (and write) in pretty much the same way they go about learning to speak and listen to their language. As a natural extension of this first principle, we find that pre-school children are able to direct, regulate and monitor their own learning to read strategies, just as they do in learning to talk and walk. Given the opportunity to operate with large chunks of whole, meaningful language, they will begin to manage their own learning in highly sophisticated and creative ways, just as they do in learning to speak their language... Finally, if you accept that learning to read can and should be a natural language learning task that can (and should be) controlled by the children themselves, you will begin to see that teachers have got to stop trying to direct and control children's learning in this area. Teachers have become so concerned with trying to teach their pupils to read, that they have failed to recognize the potential of their pupils to manage the task for themselves. We have got to place much more emphasis in our reading programs on approaches that allow children to self-direct and self-correct their own learning in this area of the curriculum. (Doake, 1979 pp.1-2)

Doake tape-recorded preschoolers as they attempted to reproduce the texts of books they had heard. He found that they were able to "read" their stories with fluency and expression, and that they would self-correct when their reading did not make sense or sound like language. With some children, misreadings were of such high quality that they did not interfere with the meaning of the text, and in some cases, improved upon its meaning and flow. Doake also noticed that one child began to stop frequently to look at words, even though the story had been memorized and told fluently on previous occasions. This child seemed to be focusing upon phonic information, and was beginning to attend to print as well as contextual and pictorial clues.

Doake believes that children learn to read by reading, by being immersed in entertaining written language. When children come from book-oriented homes their route to literacy is started in the warm, relaxed experience of bedtime stories. These positive, powerful associations with books develop an inner drive to learn to read. When stories have rhythmical language containing some repetition, reading-like behaviors emerge as the child retells the stories, reconstructing their meaning based upon his own interpretations and language competence. This memorized reading leads to real reading as the child begins to attend to graphophonic information and unlock the system. Doake contends that if letters and words are the focus of beginning reading instruction, reading fluency is lost. As well, he says, when we break reading down into small steps and skills, we remove all meaning and relevance.

Children should be introduced to good books from a very early age, Doake says, and should have a growing collection of favorite books to hear over and over again. Participation should be invited, not demanded. Awareness of written language can be developed by questions and comments, pointing out features of language when appropriate. But, the enjoyment of the story must never be interfered with.

Three case studies support Doake's observations.

The power of books and their effect on language and cognitive development from a very young age was documented in Dorothy Butler's study of her mentally and physically handicapped grandchild, Cushla. Cushla's parents did not accept the diagnosis of mental retardation given by doctors, nor their offer to find care for her. Instead, they decided to enrich her world by talking, singing, holding, touching objects, and reading with her during all her waking hours.

Books were introduced to Cushla at four months of age. By nine months old, these picture books held her attention for hour upon hour. She loved black and white illustrations with an uncluttered background; these she could see clearly and would examine closely. She would point to pictures showing approval and disapproval, and by eleven months could recognize when a book was opened upside down. A favorite book from this first year was Dick Bruna's, B is for Bear. At twelve months, Cushla would point to pictures in this book and make their beginning sounds; for example, she would point to a fish and say 'fff'.

Between eighteen months and three years of age, Cushla was introduced to more and more books. She loved to identify familiar objects and activities in pictures. While her speech was largely confined to nouns and verbs, the vocabulary she understood was more extensive. Storybooks containing familiar objects and backgrounds, that told a tale in precise language, and that proceeded in a clear sequence of events were particularly loved. Such books as Harry the Dirty Dog and Mr. Gumpy's Outing were favorites. Rhymes were also loved. During this time Cushla began to adopt phrases and words from stories into her own language, and would compare incidents from books to real life situations.

Over the next three months other book-related developments were observed. She began to show a liking for the absurd in stories, and would imitate the antics of story characters in her play. As well, she began to apply concepts of number and size referred to in books to real life situations. She knew many songs and rhymes by heart, and would at times study books on her own for as long as forty minutes.

From three years and three months to three years and nine months of age, Cushla's use of books was almost equally divided between being read to

by adults, and "reading" aloud to herself. During this time a large number of books were introduced; Cushla still loved the ridiculous, and texts containing rhythm, rhyme, repetition and invention. Fairy tales were new additions to her list of favorites.

When Cushla was four years and nine months old, her grandmother wrote,

Her handicaps, which will remain with her, impair her speech production, her dexterity, her capacity for responding instantaneously to the myriad facets that the word presents for the swift inspection of the alert well-equipped child.

But the content of her speech reveals a capacity for thought that outstrips that of the average five-year-old; her concentration is intense, her determination unwavering. It seems clear that access to such a wealth of words and pictures, in a setting of consistent love and support, has contributed greatly to her cognitive development in general, and her language in particular.

But most of all Cushla's books have surrounded her with friends; with people and warmth and colour during the days when her life was in almost constant pain and frustration. The adults who have loved her and have tried to represent the world to her when she could not do this for herself, have played their parts. But perhaps it was the characters themselves who went with her into the dark and lonely places that only she knew.

Cushla's own words, recorded on 18 August 1975, when she was three years eight months old may tell us all we need to know. They were spoken as she settled herself on the sofa, her rag doll in her arms, and the usual pile of books at her side. 'Now I can read to Looby Lou, 'cause she's tired and sad, and she needs a cuddle and a bottle and a book.'

Surely a prescription for any child, with or without handicaps. (Butler, 1977, pp. 32-33)

And at six-and-a-quarter, Dorothy Butler adds in postscript to her documentation of Cushla's development,

Cushla's fascination with the printed word has not flagged. She now reads fluently -- preferably silently, unless she is reading to Sanchia (there needs to be some point in reading aloud). She is currently enthusiastic about public signs and notices, treasure hunts which involve complicated written instructions, and receiving letters from obliging relations.

Phrases from books are still heard, but are often hard to identify now that she reads silently. 'Feathers and Foxgloves!' as an expletive baffled everyone until it turned up in Tom Fox and the Apple Pie, by Clyde Watson at next borrowing from the library. 'Good lack-a-day!' fell into constant use after Hoffmann's Tom Thumb was read aloud to both little girls.

Cushla was not 'taught' to read, unless the provision of language and story, in books and out of books, can be called a method.

I believe it can, and that it is the best method of all. It produces children who experience reading as a joyous process, natural to the human state; children who absorb ideas as sponges absorb water. That this eager ingestion helps such children to find meaning in the complex and contradictory experiences that constitute life is self-evident. (Butler, 1975, p.105)

Dorothy White's record of her daughter's responses to the books she was read and their influence upon her cognitive, language and emotional development also illustrates the power of books from a young age. (White, 1954)

At two, Carol White would name objects in picture books, and frequently asked about illustrations throughout the reading of a book. She would sometimes chime in with words from favorite rhymes, and began to adopt phrases into her daily language and play. Carol particularly enjoyed stories describing experiences similar to her own, and would request favorites repeatedly. She would, at times, compare book ideas to real experiences; White referred to this as "the backward and forward flow between books and life." (p. 13) Sometimes Carol would "read" part of a

favorite book back to her mother. Other times she would sit on her own, examining pictures within a storybook, talking to herself about them.

By two-and-a-half, Carol began to show distinct preferences when requesting books. Favorites were those depicting experiences she could identify with, whose pictures closely matched the text, and that presented no more than two characters at once. If a part of the text was changed from one reading to the next, she began to notice and comment upon the inconsistencies. She would frequently act out incidents from stories in her play, at times using direct quotes.

At three, Carol still had a need for literature that confirmed what she already knew, that told a tale close to her own experiences. She would study the details in pictures as a story was being read to her, and expected the illustrations to include all that the text described. More and more she would compare story life to her life, act out scenes from favorite books, and use literary language in her own conversation and play. She also began to tell long, elaborate narratives, communicating her sense of story and sequence.

By three-and-a-half, Carol began to accept some books that told of the unknown, asking questions throughout, trying to make sense of new concepts. She continued to be thrilled by stories that related experiences similar to her own, and would pour over the illustrations while listening to the text. She began to find humour in the absurd, and to show an interest in poetry. At this time, too, Carol began to request two or three different books at a sitting, rather than the same one repeatedly. Her vocabulary continued to grow as she heard more stories, questioned the unknown, and incorporated these new words and phrases into her storytelling and play.

At four, Carol still loved those books that touched close to her experiences, but was more and more interested in hearing those outside of

her experience. These latter books elicited many questions, and she would often try out the new ideas in her play. As well, she would frequently compare similarities and differences between stories and her world, establishing for herself which concepts were "real" or "pretendy". At this age Carol was able to concentrate on longer stories, would sit with a book and study its pictures on her own, and "read" stories to her dolls. Poetry continued to be loved, too, and she would chime in during readings, knowing many verses by heart. Noticeable, as well, was Carol's love of books, and her desire for more as she made such comments as, "I'm going to keep this book for ever and ever. And now we'll have 'The Man In The Moon'." (p. 154)

Between four-and-a-half and five years of age, Carol was a glutton for information, seeking to find what was "true" and "not true", held spellbound by stories and explanations of such things as dragons and dinosaurs. Two readings of a book would establish the story in her mind, which she could communicate in her conversations, storytelling, performances and play. A growing interest in print appeared as Carol began to spend some of her time copying words.

White's journal ends as Carol prepares to enter school. It is very likely that her love of books, print and her keen interest in learning would continue to be fostered at home. If Carol's growth as a result of book experiences before school is any indication, it is also very likely that she learned to read print as naturally and happily as she learned to read pictures, tell stories, and gain information about the world around her.

Like Dorothy White, Maureen and Hugh Crago documented their daughter Anna's development as it was influenced by books, tape recording storytime with her from the age of eleven months, and analysing her responses. (Crago and Crago, 1983) While the taping of Anna's exact



responses enabled their study to be more objective than White's, many similarities are apparent.

Anna was exposed to books from infancy, and from about fifteen months of age she began to point to familiar objects in pictures, naming them. Journal entries became more detailed when she was 2.5 years old. At this time it was noted that she would respond positively to books that related tales close to her own experiences. She preferred colorful illustrations, and expected consistency between the text and corresponding pictures. Her questions often related to details regarding humans and animals in pictures. At times she would study the illustrations on her own, commenting throughout in monologue. She was able to recall some phrases from favorite books, and would join in while predictable parts were being read. At this age, too, Anna insisted that stories be read, not told by discussing the pictures as was done when she was younger. She would empathize with happenings in stories, and was particularly moved by incidents of threat or suffering; she would evade or deny these when they were reread.

At three years of age, Anna relied on pictures to carry the meaning of a text, noting details, adding her opinions, and asking questions. She would take all that the story told quite literally, and was dissatisfied when the illustrations did not fully support the text or her preconceptions of something. Favorite stories were requested repeatedly, and Anna's ensuing monologues indicated her awareness that the pictures of a book were sequenced to tell a story. She frequently alluded to her books outside of the reading sessions, incorporating verbatim quotes from stories into her conversations, games, and role plays.

By four years of age, Anna was able to listen to much longer chapter books. As there were fewer pictures contained in these books, she would often study them in advance in order to predict what would happen, familiarize herself with key characters, and have an image that supported the text. She constantly questioned the unfamiliar, trying to establish reality. Her parents wrote, "She never ceased working on problems of how far the world of books corresponded to the world she lived in, or of how far different book words could be taken to be consistent." (p. 213) At this age, too, Anna would correct her parents if a part of a story was left out or misread during a rereading. In her play, she would act out episodes from stories, assuming the personality, voice and appearance of characters, and assigning roles to her friends. Again literary language was often heard in her conversations. Anna perceived herself as a reader during this year and proudly paraphrased storybooks, using the pictures as her guide. She also began to make up her own stories, often using various elements from various books that she had heard.

Anna's parents found that they had less access to her conversation and play when she entered school, and thus discontinued their detailed recording and analysis of her responses to books at 4.7 years of age. They do provide a clue, though, to the more long term effects of providing a literary environment for Anna from a young age.

As this book goes to press, Anna is ten years old. She has been a fluent reader since six, and not surprisingly has tackled books that are longer and more sophisticated than would be normal for a child of her age (she read all of C.S. Lewis's Narnia series at six, Caddie Woodlawn at eight). (p.253)

Liz Waterland would extend the home experiences of Cushla, Carol and Anna in her classroom. (Waterland, 1985) As a parent and teacher, she observed many children who scored well on reading tests, but who either found reading to be 'boring' and did not read out of school, or, even though they enjoyed reading, did not care about books in a deep sense. Still others, she found, would stumble through a text, reading word by word, but not gaining any meaning from it. These trends alarmed her and she began to investigate strategies that would produce those fluent, voracious readers that love books and learn in spite of instruction.

She became dissatisfied with the teaching of reading using schemes that present a sequenced hierarchy of skills, progressively more difficult texts that require the child to read each story perfectly before advancing to the next book, readiness activities, phonics drills, vocabulary development activities, and standardized tests that measure a child's performance without help. These reading schemes, she states,

...are all concentrating on the wrong things. They are obsessed with teaching decoding, not with helping children learn to be readers. This is why schools fail so many children who never discover the joy of reading; this is why children who do discover that joy do so, time and again, 'in spite of' the efforts of the schools. (p. 15)

This led her to consider an apprenticeship approach to reading where,

...the learner first undertakes the simplest parts of the job, then gradually more complex ones, increasing the share he can cope with and all the time working alongside, under the control of and with the help of, the craftsman. The apprentice does not sit passively with his mouth open; he works actively with the tools of his trade in his hand. (This is, I suggest, what 'learning to read by reading' really means.)

After all, how do little children learn everything they do before school; to speak, to play, even to walk or eat? By living

in the real world, wanting to join it, to achieve its competencies; and having adults as their models and supports. By trial and error, by correcting their own mistakes, they come closer and closer to the skills they see around them. But none of these skills has been 'taught' in the way that schools understand the word. Children have learned them by wanting to be talkers or walkers, by seeing and gradually understanding talking or walking and by trying to do it too, getting better as their physical and mental dexterity increases. (p.6)

Waterland's research and teaching experience led her to state five propositions that challenge most practices in our schools.

First of all she proposes that the learning of written language is comparable with the acquisition of oral language. Oral language, she suggests, is learned by imitation in an environment where the child is surrounded by speech. Gradually the child takes what language is meaningful and joins in, speaking a little at first, then attempting more and more, in the presence of sustained praise and support. Taking the ideas of imitation and support, and providing a print environment by reading to and with the child, Waterland has found that the child will gradually take over the reading of a text as it becomes meaningful.

Waterland's second proposition is that "reading cannot be taught in a formal, sequenced way any more that speech can be." (pp. 10-11) She suggests that children must learn how to read in order to use the formal skills of decoding, and quotes Kenneth Goodman to support this position:

...there are always two kinds of learners; one kind do well on skill drills because they have enough control of the reading process...They don't need the skill instruction. The second kind have great difficulty with the sequenced skills because they are dealing with them as abstractions...such learners can't profit from skill instruction. (p.11)

Waterland herself adds,

Learning to read is not a straightforward movement through time, one skill piled on another, one behaviour built on the first. And yet we have acted as if it is. We have lost the natural ebb and flow -- we have literally forced children into unnatural behaviour, making them always drive forward or fail...

Conventionally we have taught children the skills of decoding and hoped they would become readers. How much better to make them into readers and then help the skills to develop -- as they will, with children's increasing understanding of the purpose of reading and the pleasure it gives. (pp. 32-34)

Third, Waterland believes "reading is not a series of small skills fluently used; it is a process of getting meaning." (p.11) She believes that reading must be personally meaningful for the child, and that the text must be written in ordinary speech patterns where the reader can hear and understand what is read and be able to predict. Reading such passages as, "Go Tim. Go up. Go up Tim. Go up, up, up." are not emotionally or structurally meaningful. When taught to read with such texts, children learn to read words rather than ideas.

The fourth proposition is that "the text offered to a child is crucially important." (p.13) It is vital, Waterland says, that the teacher provide a wide range of real organic texts so that each child can find the ones that are meaningful. She describes organic books as having

...grown from the author's desire to write that particular story in that particular way: it is a natural, wholefood approach to writing. The opposite is a book that has been written only to teach reading -- it has no life of its own. Such a book is manufactured from additives labelled 'phonic approach' or 'controlled vocabulary' and preservatives labelled 'a complete language program for your school' or 'a complete introduction to vital skills'. The junk food of the print world. ( p.35)

Good, organic books are described by Waterland as those that read aloud well; that have natural language rhythms containing predictable linguistic clues; where there is a close match between the text and illustrations; that contain humour, tension, rhythm, pattern and familiarity within the text; and that are loved by children.

The last proposition is that the teacher's role is that of "guiding friend": choosing organic texts, reading to and with the child, and withdrawing all hint of failure or competition from reading. The evolution of a young reader that is guided is described by Waterland,

The adult first reads all the story while the child cannot read any, then the child will put in the words she or he knows while the adult reads the rest, then the child will take over the reading. All this with a known text first of all, rather as the child learnt to speak a little at a time in forms that were familiar until finally enough vocabulary is acquired to tackle new text (although still with an adult to help if needed). This, of course, at once negates the idea of books being 'too hard' for a child or the need for any form of colour coding, since the child can behave like a reader whatever the difficulty of the text and the adult will take over whatever the child cannot manage. We do not tell toddlers 'You may not try to say a word of three syllables until you can say all the words with two.' When a child tries to say 'vegetable' we praise, not prevent -- even if the word becomes 'vekble'. (pp.13-14)

When a child knows what he is going to read, has heard where the story is going and why, he is able to predict the sense and the language. This is not cheating; it guarantees success. Waterland quotes Edmund Huey, "Once children know a poem or a story it is surprising how quickly they can locate its parts on the printed page and read it." (p.14) She also adds that we must learn to accept mistakes and not expect perfection from the start. A particular word substituted for another within the text may have more meaning for the child; and, if a reading mistake does change the meaning of

the text, a child that has been taught to read for meaning will correct anything affecting the meaning.

In practice, Waterland reads individually with the beginning readers in her class from texts of their choice. Initially, she demonstrates the craft, reading the story and pointing to the words as she goes along, ensuring that the child can see the print and the pictures, using the pictures to extend story meaning, and allowing time for prediction and discussion. She also allows time for the child to "read" the story afterwards, even if it is "by heart", using the pictures as a guide. All attempts are praised. Participation is not forced; if the child does not want to read or is reluctant to join in, Waterland simply reads the story, making this a relaxed and enjoyable book experience.

Later, when the child is beginning to take over more of the reading, Waterland continues to read with him. She does not help or correct unless the child encounters difficulties and has lost the meaning of the text. Later still, even as the child can read more and more, he will still sometimes choose books that cannot be managed alone. These, then, are read by the teacher.

Waterland comments on this new role of the teacher,

This requires some difficult readjustment. The adult is required to let the child decide what she or he can read; the adult must accept that children are not 'cheating' if they read a text already known or if they ask the adult to read first and then follow; that the vital object of the exercise is not to see if the child can decode, build words, guess from context or exercise any other skill, but to get meaning and pleasure from the story. (p.29)

And later she adds,

It does not matter about sentence length, size of print, typeface, or any other details teachers' manuals are so dogmatic about.

All that matters is that the child wants to read the story, the drive is the child's...I provide the lap, the text and the time; the learning is the child's. (p.45)

Parents are viewed as equal partners in this apprenticeship approach. Waterland describes the conditions at home as being better in some ways than at school as the parent has more time with the child and has fewer interruptions. Thus, parents are trained to be partners in reading as the teacher is at school, and the children are encouraged to take home library books of their choice.

Marion Monroe, based upon her observations of children, agrees that favorable attitudes towards learning to read are developed when children have had many positive experiences with books at home and at school, when children are loved and accepted, and when they are permitted to progress at their own rate with guidance but without pressure. (Monroe, 1951) Teachers, she says, must read aloud from many interesting books, particularly for those children deprived of such pre-reading experiences. Language meanings are best developed when the children are given many opportunities to handle these books, to tell and retell these stories, and to tell their own stories.

Many five and six year-olds, Monroe says, are enthusiastic about books and would love to read if that could happen magically. Not all have the emotional maturity for prolonged effort, though, and may reject further reading if asked to discriminate letters and words too soon. Monroe believes that reading is based upon verbal understandings; before a child can comprehend a text, he must understand the language patterns and that print is "talk wrote down." The connection between speech and print can best be illustrated by recording the child's own language and by, for example,



counting the number of words heard in the title of a book then counting the words seen.

Reading errors, Monroe also says, must be regarded as a step in the right direction. "Six year-olds make many mistakes and do not mind doing so if they are not scolded or shamed." (p.29)

Roma Gans believes that if children have had many positive experiences with books, and are keen to learn, observe and discover, they will have a positive attitude towards learning to read. (Gans, 1963)

Gans suggests that early school experiences should be an extension of the home experiences where children have many positive encounters with print that are close to day-to-day living. They should be immersed in language. They should hear, discuss, handle, retell, and share a variety of fine library books. Recording the language of children as they dictate stories and reading this language back, labelling objects around the classroom, printing lists and instructions on charts, and calendar activities are other examples offered by Gans as ways to surround children with print, to develop their awareness.

Skills instruction should come out of this "personal-experience-centered program," after the children have had experience with whole words and sentences, and based upon individual needs, Gans believes. Children give clues as to what they know and do not know about print, and this should be the basis of phonics instruction rather than following a preplanned sequence. In this way, children can progress at their own rates without being held back in their learning or meeting with failure. Every child must meet with success and be given a positive feeling of self-worth, Gans strongly states.

Sharon Fox and Virginia Allen have observed that many young children enter school with a print awareness and beginning abilities that have grown out of meaningful contexts. (Fox and Allen, 1983) Many children see books as a source of pleasure as a result of hearing stories on their parents' laps. They see print as purposeful communication as they view their parents reading and writing lists, messages and instructions, and as they read signs and labels in their environment. Children can often be observed imitating adult behaviors as they look at books on their own, "read" to their dolls, retell stories and "write" messages.

These authors believe that formal reading instruction for beginning readers may hinder their search for meaning in print. Instead, they suggest, children should be immersed in language. They must hear many fine children's books, and must have opportunities to handle a variety of books, to share them with others, and to retell their stories. Objects around the classroom should be labelled, and recipes and instructions printed for all to see. And, following discussions and experiences, language experience stories should be recorded using the children's own language. As children read and reread these books, labels, charts and stories they will begin to associate print forms and meanings, and sight vocabulary will begin to evolve. Later, children will become more aware of sound-symbol correspondence.

In their observations, Fox and Allen also noticed ways in which young children go about learning about print. Some youngsters begin to read some words, then show an interest in writing words to make meaning. Others begin to write and read their own print before reading books and teacher-accepted dictation. Still others begin "reading back" the stories they have heard, approximating the text. Gradually they associate print with meanings, and develop a set of sight words.

When a teacher is aware of what each child's previous experiences with print have been, and of the different ways they discover how print works, she can extend their learning by providing new experiences.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner, working with Maori children, realized that the vocabulary found in beginning reading texts was not within their realm of experience and was not meaningful. (Ashton-Warner, 1963) She abandoned these books and used the language of her children for beginning reading materials instead. She made a time to talk with each child, and through these individual conversations, a "key" word would reveal itself -- a word that held intense personal meaning for that child. Ashton-Warner says,

...no time is too long spent talking to a child to find out his key words, the key that unlocks himself, for in them is the secret of reading, the realization that words can have intense meaning. Words having no emotional significance to him, no instinctive meaning, could be an imposition, doing more harm than not teaching him at all. They may teach him that words mean nothing and that reading is undesirable. (p.39)

These key words, Ashton-Warner found, were often related to domesticity, locomotion, fear and sex. They were not always respectable words, but they were always accepted and recorded on cards for the child to read. The child would watch as the word was being printed, the letters named, and perhaps some sounds discussed. Then he would trace over the letters with his finger, naming known letters and reading the word. The new key word was taken away to be printed and practiced on a lap chalkboard. Each day, previous words would be read; any that were not recognized were discreetly removed from the child's package because they failed to be one-look words, and the assumption was made that they could not have been truly important. The child was never made to feel a failure for not remembering a word; it was the teacher who had failed to select the correct

word. Once the child had accumulated ten words, they were recorded in an unillustrated booklet for his reading. After about twenty or thirty of these words were collected, the child's key phrases and sentences were recorded. Such skills as the use of capital letters, periods, contractions and spacing between words were discussed as these sentences were printed by the teacher. Using the child's key words, phrases and sentences, Ashton-Warner would make up stories. These stories were printed into a booklet that became the child's reader. Ashton-Warner testifies to the effectiveness of her approach to beginning reading:

To these first books, they must be made out of the stuff of the child itself. I reach a hand into the mind of the child, bring out a handful of the stuff I find there, and use that as our working material. Whether it is good or bad stuff, violent or placid stuff, coloured or dun. To effect an unbroken beginning. And in this dynamic material, within the familiarity and security of it, the child finds that words have intense meaning to him, from which cannot help but arise a love of reading. For it's here, right in this first word, that the love of reading is born and the longer his reading is organic, the stronger it becomes until by the time he arrives at the books of the new culture, he receives them as another joy rather than as a labour. I know all this because I've done it. (pp. 31-32)

Jeanette Veatch also strongly advocates that children learn to read by reading their own language first, the language they bring to school, the language that is personally meaningful to them. If the words and phrases they meet are emotionally significant, they will read them with great fluency. Veatch writes,

We know that interest is the prime motivator of learning. How can a child be interested in words, phrases, concepts, sentences, that are totally divorced from his own life?... There is no place for vocabulary drill upon words unrelated to the child. If they are truly related, no drill is necessary. (Veatch, 1966, p.274)

Through talk times with small groups, Veatch would listen for the main ideas of the discussion, recording words or phrases that captured those ideas. Then, a story would be developed, a dynamic story that contained the organic ideas and natural language patterns of the children. As she wrote the story, called an experience chart, Veatch would verbalize what she planned to write, verifying whether she was indeed printing what the children had intended. This method of recording ideas enabled the children to see the one-to-one correspondence of the words spoken with those being printed, and the top-to-bottom, left-to-right direction of the print. This method was also applied to the recording of "language experience stories" of individuals.

Next, the story was read back by the group or individual. Only *after* this reading had occurred using this organic reading material, did Veatch point out the parts -- the words, letters, and punctuation. She believes,

To begin reading with an exercise on discriminating initial letters in words is to deny the basic fact that reading is meaning. Such practices defy the laws of learning by defying the laws of readiness and motivation. Where does the matter of interest come in such drills?

Looked at from another angle, they do not use transfer of training because the elements of an exercise do not often correspond to the material that the child is supposed to be able to read. Yes, you may say, but children will learn to make generalizations that they can apply to specific situations later on. Not so. Generalizations come from meaningful situations. (Veatch, 1966, pp. 428-429)

Veatch also feels strongly that teachers must model good reading by reading aloud from books of literary merit. As well, children must have many opportunities to explore through a variety of books. As the child recognizes some words from experience charts and stories, he can begin to search for these words in trade books. Over many days his reading

vocabulary accumulates and other reading skills are developed, until one day the child finds himself able to read a part or the whole of a book. This is the beginning of the bridge between reading his own language and reading literature.

The goals of such an approach to reading should be enjoyment and personal satisfaction. Veatch writes, "The end product of reading instruction, without question, should be a child who loves reading, who seeks reading and who benefits from it." (Veatch, 1959, p.9) This love of reading cannot be achieved, Veatch believes, using texts that sacrifice interesting material to control vocabulary, that relate stories children know from experience to be untrue or trivialized, and that assume everyone will benefit from the same instruction and the same reading materials. Instead, children must be given opportunities to select their own reading materials, and should receive instruction related to their individual needs.

Beginning reading instruction with a child's own language is also recommended by Doris Lee and Joseph Rubin, who claim that children cannot read what they do not understand from experience. (Lee and Rubin, 1979) First, a child must see the relationship between what he says and what he reads, and this reading experience must have personal meaning if it is to be regarded as purposeful and valuable. They write,

Workbooks or ditto sheets that use other people's language may or may not have personal meaning for the child. The child may perform the task correctly without learning from it... These materials neither use nor develop the child's own language skills and seldom carry over usefully into reading. (p. 256)

These authors hypothesize that many programs teach reading using abstract processes that children are unable to understand until they are

seven, eight or nine years old. Instead, they propose, an effective program should depend on the intuitive, discovery learning of younger children.

There is overwhelming evidence that many children learn to read well with no explicit instruction in phonics. When we realize how effectively all children discover how oral language works, through their experiencing, it is certainly possible and quite probable that they also discover how written language works... Many children learn the phonics they need in their own way through reading. (p. 271)

Lee and Rubin describe important stages and elements of an effective beginning reading program. These steps are not sequential, they say, and children may choose to carry out activities within several stages. First of all, children need to become familiar with books, feel positive about them, and anticipate the pleasure they will bring. If children have not had many happy experiences with books, they are not likely to read successfully. It is suggested that teachers read aloud often from good books, and provide opportunities for children to use picture books for storytelling. Second, it is important to allow children to use their language freely. The teacher must be attentive -- accepting, respecting, and extending what is said. Next, the teacher should record the language of pupils as they relate their stories and experiences. The children see what they say being written down, and as the teacher reads back what they have said, they are welcome to join in. After many opportunities to see their language in print, the children will begin to recognize words and letters. Eventually they will be motivated to copy their own dictation and write their own stories. And if many, varied books are available, the children will find satisfaction in reading and telling about the stories they hold. Gradually, in the context of the stories the children have heard, words will be recognized. "Children will continue to progress in their own time," Lee and Rubin say. "No one can determine the sequence for any

particular child. Some learn faster, some more slowly or in a different sequence.” (p. 260)

Dan Kirby and Kate Kirby also describe conditions they see as most conducive to language growth. (Kirby and Kirby, 1985) First of all, children must be encouraged to read for enjoyment from material that has personal meaning. This personal reading material may include their own language written down, the writing of peers, and literature that is congruent with their experiences. They write,

No learning environment that forces children to forsake their own language experiences can succeed. Personal experience is the foundation on which language learning is built. All new knowledge about language use must be bonded to personal knowledge. (p. 346)

When meaning is the focus of reading, these authors have found that many errors made will be self-corrected. A tolerance for errors and approximations, and a relaxed and supportive environment that focuses upon what the children *can* do, will encourage children to take risks, risks necessary for growth. Kirby and Kirby believe that children must experiment with language to discover how it works. This experimentation helps them learn to draw from their own resources and to make connections for themselves. If accuracy is demanded from the start, children will not feel free to take the risks necessary to tackle more challenging materials. Accuracy will develop, they say, “from extended practice in a rich and supportive environment.” (p. 347)

Also important to language growth is the experiencing of “wholes.” If language learning is broken down into disjointed segments, into isolated skills, they believe that “children fail to develop intuitions about complete pieces and fail to see the goal of effective communication.” (p. 343) As well,



any skill instruction must allow for individual needs, at individual stages of development.

Kirby and Kirby also believe that children need to read to a real audience, using one another as well as the teacher as a listener. This strategy will encourage them to take risks to improve their skills. And they say, children must see their parents and teachers modeling reading and writing behaviors.

Bruno Bettelheim's and Karen Zelan's experiences working with severely disturbed children at the University of Chicago's Orthogenic School convinced them that attending to the unconscious processes of these children enabled many of them to overcome their learning handicaps. (Bettelheim and Zelan, 1982) They found that beginning reading needed to be personally meaningful and that first words should be of emotional importance. For instance, Zelan describes an autistic child who, when angry at the birth of a sibling, threw away her significant words "Mommy" and "Daddy", indicating her ability to read. She then went on to systematically read her remaining pile of some twenty words. These authors believed that if their methods worked with disturbed children, their success with normal children should be great.

For several years Bettelheim and Zelan worked in eight schools identified to be the best by administrators and knowledgeable members of the community. They set themselves the task of observing the responses of children to being taught reading, to the books used, and to the methods of correcting and evaluating reading.

After a trusting relationship had been established with children in several classrooms, some fourth-grade students admitted a dislike for reading in earlier grades because they found the stories to be demeaning

and in opposition to what they knew to be true in their personal experiences. One boy confessed that he hated reading aloud in first grade because he was embarrassed to say the stupid things the primer said. He claimed to dislike reading until third grade when he discovered some good books. Bettelheim and Zelan write,

Observing children who are learning to read in school convinces one that, far from reading being a beguiling diversion, it greatly adds to the tedious length of the day. Nothing is more boring than having to spend one's time and concentrate one's mental energy on such things as phonemes, sight recognition, decoding of words, and reading senseless combinations of tireless repetitions of words. All this -- when the child could spend the same time on the "beguiling diversion" of reading a truly engrossing story.

The reason for teaching reading by means of these tedious texts are based on two assumptions: never mind how the child acquires the skills necessary for reading, they will automatically make him literate in due course; and only through many repetitions can a child become able to recognize a word. Both assumptions are erroneous. If a child is truly interested in a word, he learns it easily and fast, as the graffiti written and readily read by children should have demonstrated long ago. (pp.20-21)

Bettelheim and Zelan believe that reading should be learned because of the child's desire to become literate, and that this desire arises because the child sees reading as meaningful and personally valuable. These attitudes are often developed at home as the child views his parents' interest and enjoyment in reading, and as he discovers the magic and pleasures of books read to him. Those children that do not come from a background that regards reading so positively are disadvantaged at school. Bettelheim and Zelan write,

One major difference between children who teach themselves to read at home and those who learn it only in school is that the

first group learn to read from texts that fascinate them, while the second learn to read by being drilled in skills of decoding and word recognition from texts devoid of meaningful content that are demeaning to the child's intelligence. (pp. 9-10)

These authors note that while children do learn to read and write using the basic programs found in our schools, these children are not all convinced that further reading will enrich their experience. The focus upon the technical aspects of reading, they say, is detrimental to the child's ability to enjoy reading. The beginning reader is proud to be able to read some words and happy to practice some skills in order to achieve reading goals; but this enjoyment fades when it does not lead to reading meaningful content. Instead, reading programs must expose children to materials of interest and emotional value, building an inner desire and drive to attain the literary goals of reading.

The observations of these researchers also led them to examine reading errors. They discovered that misreadings were most often an emotional response to the text, the result of specific unconscious or preconscious processes. Sometimes words in a text are substituted with others because the child's oral language patterns are different from those written, and he is telling an oral story. At other times he may change the text because his experiences are contrary to those in print. Or, he may change a word because the one in print elicits anxiety and fear related to previous experiences. Whatever the reason, mistakes should be regarded as meaningful, signalling an inner conflict, and should be respected and handled with empathy. If attention is given to the meaning of the error, rather than on the error itself, Bettelheim and Zelan found that the reader would very often reread the word correctly. Rather than focusing upon the child's

inadequacies, his personal meaning and his ability to think are acknowledged. The authors say,

We believe that the ability to read is seriously interfered with when purposeful behavior -- as we assume misreadings to be -- is regarded to be without deeper meaning, and is ascribed to ignorance, lack of skills, or neurological deficit, particularly when none of these is relevant. Second, we believe that teaching methods based on such erroneous assumptions are inappropriate and destructive to the enjoyment of reading. Finally, we think that learning to read can be facilitated, and the significance and enjoyment of reading greatly increased when all aspects of the child's personal involvement with his reading, including the errors he makes, are viewed as interesting events, and when misreadings are not neglected but handled constructively. (p.79)

The stilted, controlled language of most beginning texts is regarded by Bettelheim and Zelan as a major cause of reading errors. They cite a study done that found that 86% of word substitutions made equal or better sense than the text, and that another 6% of the errors were omissions or additions that made the text sound less stilted. They comment,

The result is that children are provoked to errors by discrepancies between the way people ordinarily talk and the way the characters are made to talk in these stories. (p.133)

Yetta and Kenneth Goodman believe that current reading materials and methods of instruction evolved before a rational and scientific base was established. (Goodman and Goodman, 1981) They claim that this technology of reading was developed based upon the experiences and intuitions of practitioners, and was grabbed up by publishers and curriculum makers who developed basal readers and skills sequences. These materials and methods of instruction are still in use in schools because of tradition, they say. Many teachers believe that what they are doing is sound because people have been doing it for a long time.

Goodman and Goodman outline a scientific base of knowledge upon which a reading program should be built. First of all, oral language and written language are not learned differently. They refer to research that shows that many children from literate backgrounds enter school with much knowledge of print, and have learned this without formal, systematic instruction. Secondly, they have learned that studying isolated parts of language, removed from the meaningful context of the whole, is not how children learn best. They write,

...our research in reading and writing suggests that in order to understand the parts of any aspect of learning, there must be an awareness and understanding of the purpose and function of the whole... Teaching sounding out, structural analysis and word recognition confuses the students about the function and purpose of reading. (p.438)

As well, research has shown that language is learned when there is a social need and when relevant reasons to learn are perceived. Reading must, these researchers have found, build upon meanings. Skills awareness comes as a result of learning to read, not as a prerequisite. And last, it is important not to insist upon accuracy at all stages as it gets in the way of meaning. Researchers are discovering that when errors are viewed positively, children are more actively and creatively involved in their *own* language learning. And, because we construct meaning as we read, "reading cannot be the accurate reproduction of what's on the written page." (p. 441)

These experts on beginning reading instruction generally agree on several points:

1. Children should have many opportunities to hear, retell and explore many good library books. When they have positive associations with books and anticipate the pleasure they will bring,

children will most likely desire to become literate and learn to read successfully.

2. When children repeatedly hear storybooks, they will begin to "read" these stories by memory. This memorized reading will eventually lead to "real reading" as the child begins to notice graphophonic information.
3. Modeling by significant others is important. When children view others enjoying reading and reading for information, they will likely perceive it as a purposeful and pleasurable activity and will likely be keen to acquire this ability, too.
4. Initial reading materials should use the child's own language, language that is personally meaningful and emotionally significant. If this language is truly significant, it will be read fluently.
5. As children acquire a sight vocabulary and begin to make skills generalizations (via key words, language experience charts and stories, labels around the classroom, etc.), they will eventually find that they can read trade books on their own.
6. Oral language and written language are not learned differently. When children are immersed in print they will begin to recognize words and print patterns, in their own time.
7. Basal texts are not personally meaningful, and their language patterns are often stilted in the attempt to control vocabulary.
8. Studying isolated parts of language removed from context is not how children learn best. Skills awareness comes as a result of learning to read, not as a prerequisite. Only after the whole has been read should the parts be studied. Language generalizations come from meaningful situations.
9. Often language generalizations can be discovered by children as they read, and do not require direct instruction.
10. Stressing the technical aspects of reading does not help children to see reading as meaningful and can be detrimental to the enjoyment of reading.

11. The ways in which children learn to read, and their rates of learning are all individual.

12. Misreadings should not be regarded as ignorance or lack of skills, but the result of an inner conflict causing the reader to alter the text. When misreadings are handled as interesting and meaningful, the reader is likely to self-correct.

13. Demanding accuracy at all times interferes with story meaning. Accuracy comes with practice in a rich and supportive environment.

14. An accepting, warm, relaxed learning environment allows children to take risks, to take on new challenges in order to grow in their reading abilities. Children must never be given a sense of failure.

15. Children learn to read by reading.

Many of these findings are in direct opposition to the opinions of advocates of direct instruction, and to the methods of reading instruction currently in practice in many kindergarten and primary classrooms.

Proponents of direct instruction believe that teacher-led lessons with large groups, based upon specified instructional objectives, are most effective. (Rosenshine, 1983) Such instruction follows a definite design:

1. a daily review of the previous day's work, reteaching skills and concepts if necessary;
2. teacher presentation of new material a thought at a time, providing detailed examples and detailed explanations of difficult points, and questioning to monitor student progress;
3. guided student practice, asking fact and process questions, prompting to ensure success, demonstrating how to answer higher level questions, and giving additional explanations;
4. checking for understanding, catching student errors and reteaching, acknowledging correct answers and letting students know how they are doing;

5. independent work, directing students through initial tasks, and providing a large number of successful repetitions;

6. weekly and monthly reviews.

Intensive instruction is provided for those who fall behind, while other students work independently on seatwork.

Such direct instruction effectively raises student scores on standardized achievement tests, but may sacrifice the benefits of a more natural learning model. Direct instruction de-emphasizes students experimenting and discovering, learning from materials that are personally meaningful and personally interesting, directing their learning as they are ready and in their own sequence, and self-evaluating in an environment that is open to a variety of answers. Perhaps the strongest counterproductive force is in the denial of the opportunity for children to develop autonomy as readers, to take responsibility for their own learning and to be self-motivated. It seems possible that children in such teacher-centered classrooms may not come to view learning as purposeful or pleasurable.

Current classroom practice clings to "packaged" forms of reading materials and methods for a variety of reasons. First, these programs continue to be used, as Kenneth and Yetta Goodman found, because they have been used for a long time and are therefore regarded as sound. (Goodman and Goodman, 1981) As well, they are thought to help ease the load of preparing lessons and materials for large numbers of children. They also alleviate the fears of teachers who are concerned that some children will not learn to read if their learning experiences are not controlled and if they are not all exposed to all of the skills and vocabulary contained in these programs. And, it is believed that the learning of reading is made easier for



children when the vocabulary is controlled and when learning is broken down into small, sequenced steps. It is a mystery that, given the evidence described in this chapter, traditional practices endure.

## Chapter 2

### Organic Reading: A Personal Narrative

For the first four of my seven years teaching primary classes, I used the Ginn 720 and Language Patterns basic reading programs. Learned during my teacher training, I divided the children into the traditional three reading groups -- top, middle, and bottom -- assigning to each group a reader suitable to their general reading level. Each day I would meet with each group for a skills' lesson and vocabulary review, trying to make it enjoyable with related games and songs. Then, we would read a story from the reader, each child in the group reading a short passage aloud. I would help them decode new words, correct their errors, and listen for their fluency. As well, I would ask questions to determine their comprehension of what was read.

Several members of the top group entered school able to read; others had had many positive experiences with books at home and were very keen and quick to learn. This group was always a pleasure to work with, and seemed to progress with little instruction. In fact, they often knew the vocabulary and skills before they were introduced, and read stories fluently from the start.

The middle group learned to read successfully, generally grasping new skills readily, and ably completing required assignments. While they successfully moved from reader to reader, these children rarely chose to

read when given the option. This was a key difference between this middle group and those voracious readers found in the top group.

For the bottom group, reading was hard work as they struggled through contrived accounts of Sam, Lad, and Pat the Rat. Sometimes it would take many days of review before new skills were grasped; then, there often seemed to be little transfer as they stumbled through a story employing the skills just practiced. Comprehension of the stories read was often poor, too. It seemed that the emphasis upon decoding had consumed their attention leaving little left for story meaning.

Upon reflection it seemed that these basic programs and suggested methods of instruction met the needs of only a few of the children. The top group, it seemed, would probably have read far more and progressed even further in their skills if their reading materials had not been restricted. Allowing them to choose library books to read on their own and to one another would most likely have improved their reading abilities and comprehension, and would have continued to foster their love for reading. The middle group, given similar opportunities to read from good library books, would likely learn to read from these texts, as well -- but would also discover the pleasures of reading. The children in the bottom group did not seem to be learning to love reading at all. As they struggled with sounding out and reading unnatural language patterns they seemed to be learning that reading had little purpose, that it did not even provide a good story. Based upon such observations it became important to find a way to provide reading experiences for them that guaranteed success and that motivated them to want to learn to read.

A colleague was using Sylvia Ashton-Warner's key vocabulary approach to beginning reading. This interested me because it used the

child's own language for reading materials, it allowed each child to progress at his own rate, and insured success. I decided to give it a try. Each morning, for the first ninety minutes, the children chose craft and play activities from a variety of centres. During this time I met with each child individually to chat about experiences, fears, joys and fantasies. From this conversation a "key word" would be chosen, a word that held intense personal meaning for that child. I would print this word on a card, naming its letters and sounds while the child watched. Then he would read this word, trace over the letters with a finger, and name the letters. This word was then added to his collection of words and read to me. Any words not remembered were discreetly removed from the package of words; the child was never to be given a sense of failure. Then these words were read to friends and practiced upon a lap chalkboard. I was overwhelmed by my observations of the success of this approach. From the very first day all of the children were eager to get new words and seemed very proud of their ability to read. Rarely were these important words forgotten -- words like mommy, daddy, baby, clowns, and ghost. Soon, too, many of these words could be spelled by memory as well as read -- not because I expected this, but because they had been read and printed so often. After each child had accumulated about thirty words, key phrases and sentences were recorded. As well as pointing out letters and sounds, spacing between words, capital letters, and punctuation were also discussed. Teaching reading skills using the children's own language was successful. Not only did they quickly learn about letters and sounds, words and sentences, and punctuation, but they were also reading words and sentences far more complex than those found in beginning basal readers. And they all seemed to enjoy reading.

In that first trial, I still needed the security of the reader to assure myself that I was not leaving any gaps. But, I approached this in a new way. We read the first few stories together, blending new words, practicing sight words, and discussing meanings. Then, I made activity cards related to each story in the reader, and allowed the children to individually choose any story they wished to read. They could read this story alone or with a friend, and then do the related activity card. One story and one card were the minimum requirements per day, but they were welcome to do more if they chose. Each day I would meet with six to eight individuals to hear them read a whole story that they had practiced, and to discuss the story. I also checked for fluency and skills awarenesses, and would provide individual or small group instruction based upon their skill needs. I checked each child's work every day in order to give immediate feedback and to ensure that everyone was progressing in this individualized process. Again, I was pleased with the results. They had all met with success when reading key words, and they happily tackled new words in the reader. They were eager to read lots of stories, and seemed more enthusiastic than former beginning readers, pleased to choose their own stories and to read as much as they wished. These children read far more than groups of children had when I controlled the choices and had reading groups. Their knowledge of letters and sounds learned from their key words transferred to these reading materials as they blended new words. Best of all, they were all reading different materials and seemed unaware of how they compared in ability with one another; they all chose materials they wanted to and could read, and there was always a sense of success. Eventually, they discovered they could read "real" books, too. The next year, I prepared materials so that the

children could choose from a varied selection of library books as well as reader stories for their reading materials.

My observations during these last two years of teaching caused me to further question prevalent reading instruction practices. There was some observable evidence that using the language of the children for initial reading materials, allowing children to choose their individual reading materials, and using interesting library books produced competent young readers who loved to read. There was also reason to believe that many children could happily and successfully learn to read as naturally as they learned to speak, in their own time and when provided with many positive experiences with print. I also suspected that this reading would be stronger if the child could make his own discoveries about how print works. These professional observations, rooted in "reflectives-in-action" (Schon, 1983), are the basis for undertaking this investigation:

How will children respond when introduced to print in ways similar to the introduction of oral language -- that is, without direct instruction, phonics or vocabulary drill, but through the use of many meaningful and positive print experiences?

The next step was to find a way to observe and record the results of such an organic, natural learning approach.

It seemed appropriate to begin work with preschoolers who had not yet been exposed to basal readers and formal reading instruction. While five year-olds might not be as ready for some print experiences as six year-olds, it seemed reasonable to expect that over an extended period of time it would still be possible to document their beginning print awarenesses, reading skills, and attitudes about reading.

The sample of children came from the Denman Island community where it seemed possible to find parents who would support a non-directive

approach to beginning reading, providing positive print experiences but not formally teaching their children to read. In May, 1984, letters were circulated to the Blackberry Lane Preschool parents outlining my teaching background, my rationale and question for study, and the process that would be used to gather data. Five of the six letters were answered by interested parents. I selected only three of these five children as one child's family was planning to move in a short time, and another child's family did not contact me until the project was well underway. The three children, then, were chosen for the project based upon their parents' interest and support.

Ethics approval was obtained and work began with the three project children in June, 1984. I met with each of them in their homes for sixty to ninety minutes every Saturday (except when their families were away on vacation) until June, 1985. Based upon the findings in the literature reviewed in Chapter 1, I set out to:

1. read four to six storybooks to each of the children per week, leaving the books, with audiotapes of the stories, to be "read" during the week as they chose;
2. focus upon the meanings of texts by providing opportunities for the children to retell their favorite stories or describe memorable parts of stories;
3. accept their interpretations of stories as they retold them, and interact with them in a supportive and respectful way;
4. follow the lead of the children, ascertaining what they had learned on their own, and instructing only in response to their desire to know about specific aspects of print;
5. have the children begin to read (as they showed an interest) their own language -- starting with key words and, if appropriate, building to key phrases and sentences, and language experience stories;

6. work with the children in their homes, where I assumed they would feel most secure, relaxed and comfortable.

My role in this study was as participant-observer. Each Saturday I met with each child. We would chat about his or her experiences and, if an interest was shown, a key word was recorded using the process described by Sylvia Ashton-Warner. (Ashton-Warner, 1963) As part of my systematic record-keeping, I recorded the child's new word, how readily previous words were recognized, and any new print awarenesses. Then, the books that had been read the previous week were discussed. As favorite stories were described or reread, I recorded the child's responses and noted any print awarenesses exhibited. Next, I read the new selection of books, leaving those requested by the child with accompanying audiotapes. Occasionally, following the child's lead, a language experience story was recorded.

The parents were asked to read the books I brought, and any others, whenever their child showed an interest. As bedtime stories were common practice in all three homes, this fit into established routines. These parents were also asked to follow their child's lead as to reading instruction; that is, if their child wanted to know how to print or read a particular word or sentence, they would provide this information, but would not teach reading skills or vocabulary unless requested. Parents were also asked to note any new language developments shown, their child's attitudes towards reading and our sessions, and the approximate frequency the books had been read or listened to.

All three families were extremely supportive and accommodating, fitting my visits into their Saturday routines and noting their child's developments. This allowed the study to progress smoothly throughout the year.



The data gathered on the effects of this non-directive, print-rich approach to reading will be presented in three case studies found in Chapter 3. These case studies reflect the participant-observer nature of this project.

Some specialized terms are used in these case studies, and require definition:

Key words -- words that hold intense meaning for a child, that come from his innermost feelings and thoughts, that are read fluently because they are so personally meaningful

Language experience stories -- stories that are recorded using the child's own language

Organic books -- books that read aloud well; that have natural language rhythms, containing predictable linguistic clues; that are loved by children; that contain humor, tension, rhythm, pattern and/or familiarity; where there is a close match between the text and illustrations (as defined by Waterland, 1985)

Big books -- large-sized books containing rhymes or songs, with one or two lines of print and an illustration per page

Organic reading -- reading that is learned naturally through frequent, positive, meaningful experiences with print, and which is self-directed by the child

## Chapter 3

### Three Case Studies

As described in Chapter 2, the intention of this project was to provide each of the three children with positive print experiences by reading to them from good, organic literature, and allowing them the opportunity to retell favorite stories or to describe memorable incidents; and by recording their key words and language experience stories as an interest was shown. Instruction upon specific aspects of print was provided only in response to the child's request and attention. While reading with each child I would share my enjoyment of stories and follow the print with my hand. The parents of these children were encouraged to read to them throughout the week from the selection of books I had left for them as well as from their own collections, and to follow a similar natural learning model of responding to their child's interest and attention to print.

The three case studies presented in this chapter describe in detail each child's responses to these beginning reading experiences during the year prior to formal instruction in grade one, from June, 1984, to June, 1985. The names of the children have been fictionalized to protect their anonymity.

#### Alice

Once upon a time there was a beautiful girl named Cinderella. She lived with her stepmother and two ugly sisters. Cinderella

did all the work but her stepsisters did not. They were so excited to go to the ball. Then Cinderella asked, 'Can I go, too?' But she only had rags to wear. Then the fairy Godmother came and the mice were happy. Then the fairy Godmother put a beautiful dress on Cinderella. Soon she was off in the magic coach to the palace. She went to the palace with the fairy Godmother right behind her waving her magic wand at the guards and the horses. Cinderella's stepsisters saw her and they didn't know that it was really Cinderella. Then it was midnight and she dashed downstairs and lost her magic slipper. So the duke brang it to every house and tried it on every lady and the lady who fit it would marry the prince. Then Cinderella wanted to try on the slipper, but she was locked upstairs. Quickly the mice unlocked it with the key. And she came to try on the slipper and it fit. And it fit perfectly. Cinderella's only hope was marrying the prince, so she married him and lived happily ever after. The mice were so happy and the birds sang so sweetly. They laughed so much that they cried. They got all the people to come and see their wedding, and the mice and the birds. And everyone lived happily ever after.

Alice retelling Cinderella, April, 1985

Often when I arrived at Alice's home for storytime, I would be greeted by a ballerina, a Polynesian dancer, or a little girl dressed in a party dress twirling a frilly umbrella. Alice loved to sing and dance and was always thrilled to perform on the "stage" of the bay window in her home. These recitals introduced me to the very happy, social and imaginative girl that I would be reading with.

Alice is an only child. Her mother, a nurse, has stayed home with her since infancy, and they have had extensive opportunities to talk, read, and play together. Her father is a fisherman, and although he is away for three or four months of the year, he is home for the rest of the time. He loves to tell stories, from books or from his imagination, changing his voice for

different characters and leaving opportunities for Alice to add her ideas. She loved these storytimes.

Most days Alice played with her toys, dolls and dollhouse, and colored or painted. She loved to have friends over and would play outside with them in her treefort, or inside in her bedroom. Very occasionally she would watch television. Beginning in September, 1984, she spent her afternoons at kindergarten.

Sometimes in the daytime, and always at bedtime, Alice's parents read to her. They reported that she had been read to frequently and regularly since about the age of one. She had an extensive collection of picture books, several with accompanying records, and had been selecting books from the public library since the age of two.

Both of Alice's parents regarded themselves as avid readers, and reported that she had had many opportunities to view them reading for information and pleasure.

Alice was five years and three months old when I began to meet with her in June, 1984. She was already able to memorize stories she had heard, and could retell them with fluency and expression, using the pictures as cues. She could not read words at this time.

During our first meeting, Alice dramatized, spoke and sang much of the dialogue and songs along with two records, and insisted that I follow along in the accompanying books. When I failed to turn the page at the correct time or did not attend to the storybook, she would direct my attention to the correct page. She also told me the story of Little Red Riding Hood (prompted at times with questions such as, "What happened next?"), dramatically changing her voice for each character.

Once upon a time there was a little girl and her name was Little Red Riding Hood because her mother had made a nice red cape for her and she wore it everywhere. Even if it was a spooky night, she always liked to. One day she went to visit her grandma. And Little Red Riding Hood's mother said, 'Be careful. Beware of the wolf. Stay on the track, don't go out. You might get eaten up. Okay?' Little Red Riding Hood said, 'Okay.' Then Little Red Riding Hood met a wolf that she thought was a dog. She said 'hi' to the wolf and gave him some of the cookies and tea that her mother had gave her to bring to her grandma. The wolf said, 'Why don't you go pick some flowers in the forest for your grandmother?' So she did. She didn't know that this was a trick. But the wolf knew. He went right into the little cottage fast as he could and jumped onto the bed and ate the grandma up. He put on some of the clothes so he looked like the little grandmother. When Little Red Riding Hood was finished she went to her grandmother's house. She knocked on the door and the wolf said in a voice like Grandmother, 'Come in, dear.' So she came in. Little Red Riding Hood was surprised. That did not look like her grandmother. She said, 'What big ears you have!' 'The better to hear with,' said the wolf. Then Little Red Riding Hood said, 'What big eyes you have!' 'Better to see you with,' said the wolf. Then Little Red Riding Hood said, 'What big teeth you have!' 'The better to eat you with.' With that he jumped out of bed and chased Little Red Riding Hood. He met the hunter who'd been looking for him. And he saw him and he'd been looking for wild animals. When he knew the wolf had eaten Little Red Riding Hood, he chopped him and out came sticky old Grandmother. Then Grandmother helped Little Red Riding Hood. And the hunter killed the wolf and had him for supper. And then they all had cupcakes and tea, and they all had a nice snack. And they all lived happily ever after.

We read two stories together during this first meeting, too. Alice's attention to story meaning was also evident in her ability to understand the subtle, unspoken parts of a story. For example, after hearing Where The Wild Things Are she remarked, "His *wom* brought him supper." And at the conclusion of Yummers she commented, "It was the *food*, not the *walking* that made her sick!"

## June to August, 1984

Soon into the program it became evident that the hour planned to read and discuss stories and to take key words had to be extended to include a social time. Alice was always very excited when I arrived at her home, keen to show me her new toys, dance steps and pictures. When I attempted to begin with books rather than focusing upon her needs, she often refused to discuss previous books and would be unfocused when listening to new ones.

Through modeling, Alice readily learned to turn the pages of the books when a bell sounded on the accompanying audiotape, and to locate the beginning page of the story differentiating it from the title page of the book. As well, she learned that the print on each page moved from top-to-bottom and left-to-right. Sometimes she would pretend to read, moving her hand along the print. Most times she looked at the pictures while listening to the text.

Alice showed distinct likes and dislikes when selecting books she wished to borrow to hear again during the week. She was not keen to hear non-fiction; instead, she wanted books that told good, imaginative stories, such as Yummers, Max, Six Foolish Fishermen, Where The Wild Things Are, and The Stupids Step Out. She also liked fairy tales such as One Fine Day and Little Red Riding Hood; books about friends, particularly girls, such as Bedtime For Francis, Belinda and Me, The Paper Bag Princess and Dinner At Auntie Rose's; and book of rhymes such as Each Peach, Pear Plum, An I Spy Story.

During the week, Alice requested that her parents read the books to her rather than listening to the tapes and reading the books on her own. Her

father explained that she wanted company while reading. He also noticed that she was reluctant to hear the same six books again towards the end of the week, and requested more books.

Alice was not generally interested in chatting about the books or in retelling their stories. Sometimes when asked what a story was about she would respond with, "I don't know" or "Nice story". Other times she would summarize the story in a single succinct statement. For example, after reading Gregory the Terrible Eater she commented, "It was about a goat that doesn't eat much, then he ate so much he got a terrible stomach ache." And following Six Foolish Fishermen she said, "They were so foolish! They were counting and they forgot to count themselves!" She was always happy to hear new books and wanted to keep them to read again -- but wanted to get onto the new stories rather than discussing the ones previously read. While listening to books, Alice was almost always attentive and absorbed by the story.

Alice was keen to have key words right from the start, enjoying the telling about her experiences, dreams and favorite things. By the end of August she had accumulated ten key words: sun, star, trapeze, clown, rainbow, fairy, doll, angel, dog, and princess. When these words were copied into her first book, Alice had some trouble reading them because some clues she had used on the cards (such as smudge marks, the thickness of the crayon used, her mother's printing as opposed to mine) were missing. By the next week she could recognize all the words in the booklet. Later in the year, she could spot these words within the text of a storybook.

Also by the end of August, Alice showed an interest in copying and printing letters and words, and liked to count the number of letters in words and number of words on a page.

## September to December, 1984

Each week when I arrived with a new batch of books, Alice loved to sneak off with my book bag for a peek. As before, she was not often interested in talking about or retelling the stories she had heard throughout the week. Instead, she wanted to get on with hearing the new ones. She continued to give clues and succinct summaries, though, indicating her understanding and enjoyment of the stories she had heard. For example, while hearing The Stupids Step Out, she made eye contact with me and laughed at the humorous parts. When I asked which part of the story she liked best, she smiled and commented, "I can't remember. I'm like Woof" (referring to Woof, the story of a forgetful dog). The next time we met, Alice exclaimed, "I loved The Stupids Step Out. I liked when the grandpa wears the little boy's clothes, and the man wore the socks on his ears, and Mrs. Stupid wears the cat, and Petunia tries to slide up the bannister." After hearing The Gingerbread Boy she said, "That was a pretty lucky fox. He got to have a nap and he got to have the gingerbread boy." Following Albert's Toothache she laughed and said, "He thinks he's got a toothache because he got bit by a gopher!" And, after a reading of Oink, she commented, "He stays up all night and he caught a cold. He was supposed to catch a fish! And he threw the whole fishing rod in the pond."

Alice began to attend to some print during this time. She liked to know what some title words said, would repeat the title and point out the words, then would try to find the same words in the text of the story. For example, she pointed out "stupid" throughout The Stupids Step Out, "Tyler" in Tyler Toad and the Thunder, and "turkey" in Farmer Goff and His Turkey Sam. At times, too, in the middle of a story, Alice would ask where we



were in the print, then would use her hand to follow along, pretending to read.

Alice also loved to read big books. These large-sized books contained rhymes and songs with one or two lines of print and an illustration on each page. She quickly learned these songs and poems by memory, and would "read" them, accurately following the text with her hand. She could recognize some words within the context of the story, but could not read these words out of context or in another context.

As well, Alice began to make booklets of her own, filled with her drawings and matching words. These words had been printed by Alice as her parents dictated the letters. Her interest in letters, the key words she had printed, and alphabet instruction at kindergarten had enabled her to recognize several letters and some of their sounds.

During this time, too, Alice began to request two kinds of books: those with a single line per page so that she could memorize and "read" them herself; and those with a more complex and interesting storyline (as the ones we had been reading all along) to satisfy her interest in meaning. Her parents reported that Alice no longer wanted to hear the books more than once or twice. Instead, she wanted even more library books, which they got for her in addition to my books.

By this time, too, Alice no longer wanted to use the tapes that accompanied the stories, even during our reading times. She requested that I read the books aloud to her as well as her parents.

Alice sometimes adopted the vocabulary from stories she had heard into her own speech. For example, after hearing Gus Was A Friendly Ghost she commented, "Gus ratted and clanked when the Chriss weren't there. And Gus and the mouse had a celebration when the Chriss went away for

the winter." And after hearing, Maggie And The Goodbye Gift she explained, "Maggie was transferred and her dad got everyone to come and eat what the goodbye gift did."

By the end of December Alice had accumulated ten more key words which she recognized readily when they were printed into a second book of words, and in other print settings such as storybooks and on the chalkboard. These words were: school bus, pumpkin, married, James, trick-or-treat, apple, climbing trees, love, and Cabbage Patch Kids. Alice was always pleased to read and print these words.

### January to May, 1985

As the program progressed, Alice requested more and more books that she could read. She consistently loved the big books, quickly memorizing the songs or rhymes they held, and reading them while pointing to specific words. She also enjoyed simple trade books such as Bill Martin's Instant Readers. Again, she would learn their rhymes and rhythms, and would "read" following the text with her hand. The most lengthy and complex text that she read word for word was The House That Jack Built. While Alice could not always identify specific words within the books she read, she enjoyed hunting for particular words using initial letters as clues.

During this time, too, Alice seemed more focused while listening to longer, more complex stories, and was more enthusiastic to tell about her favorites. For example, after hearing Leo The Late Bloomer, she retold the story, "He couldn't read. He couldn't draw. He couldn't write. He couldn't talk. He was a sloppy eater. And later her bloomed. He could write. He

could read. And he could also draw. And he was a neat eater." After Corduroy, she told the story,

The bear lost his button. A little girl wanted him but her mom said she couldn't get him because he didn't look like new because he had lost his button. So, he went on a (sic) escalator to the furniture department. He said he always wanted to live in a castle. He saw a button on a bed and tried to pull it off, and he fell on the floor and knocked over the lamp. Then the watchman found him and carried him down the stairs into the toy department. The little girl came back and bought him and took him home and sewed on his button. The little girl hugged him.

Several times, when asked her opinion of the books she had heard, Alice remarked, "I'd give them all awards!"

Alice loved to try to find words she could read within a text. For example, she decided to find the word "friend" in The Three Funny Friends, "Friend, that starts with 'f'." She was thrilled to find the word throughout the story. Such was the case with the word "monster" in Too Many Monsters, "dinosaur" in Long-Neck and Thunderfoot, "girls" and "space" in Marty McGee's Space Lab, No Girls Allowed, and "love", "kiss" and "valentine" in Arthur's Valentine.

She was also very pleased to spot her key words within the text of a book she was listening to. For instance, she found "love" and "valentine" in One Zillion Valentines and 'school' in Timothy Goes To School.

Alice was able to recognize all letters and their sound during these months, and began to spell and print words on her own. One Saturday she greeted me at the door with, "You know what? I can print 'James' without even looking, and fox." For her sixth birthday she got Elizabeth Cleaver's A-B-C, an illustrated dictionary with space to record new words. Alice liked to

print new words under each letter heading, and copied these words into her homemade booklets.

By the end of April, Alice was beginning to read some words by sight within the text of a book that she had heard. For example, after hearing Alligators Are Awful: And They Have Terrible Manners she pointed out and read alligator, jump, hat, splash, paper, bus and birthday. Again, after several readings of Rain Makes Applesauce, I asked her if she recognized any words. She readily pointed to and read dolls, monkey, wind, rain, house, just talking, applesauce, clouds, stars, and candy. She read some of these words (dolls, rain, applesauce, clouds, stars) out of context, too.

When we finished meeting regularly at the end of May, Alice could read another fourteen key words: birthday, peace, sit-ups, wrestle, Easter eggs, Disneyland, surprise, valentines, dance, mother, leprechaun, puppet, Holly Arntzen, and Cheryl. She wanted to print the words into her third key word book by herself.

At the conclusion of our reading program, Alice remarked, "Reading is fun. It's just reading. I'm a pretty good reader."

During a final meeting with Alice's parents regarding the reading procedure they adopted at home and any changes they had observed in her attitudes about books and reading, and her language abilities, they commented,

We read the books to Alice personally as she didn't want to use the tapes on her own, and even when we sat with her she seemed to prefer us to read. We played some games with the books to keep up her motivation to return to them. For example, we played 'I Spy' with items from the pictures, or found words using their beginning letters. The frequency of reading each book and the number of books read each day was

dependent on Alice's interest basically. We did encourage her somewhat but if she was really reluctant to cooperate we didn't pressure her strongly.

Alice has always had a very positive attitude toward reading. Initially she simply enjoyed the story but now she enjoys picking out words or reading simple books which repeat words, and have rhymes or pictures which help her connect the words to help her read. She loves to read the latter to everyone -- parents and friends.

A great interest in writing words has occurred since starting this program. Her knowledge of letters of the alphabet and their sounds has greatly improved. Her oral vocabulary has improved and she expresses herself better. Also, she now likes to pick out words she can recognize in a story. Initially she did not want to read a book more than once or twice -- she would comprehend the story and be satisfied. Now she will repeat books many times since she is actively involved in reading. Her listening ability has always been good but she no longer depends on pictures to keep her attention.

The desire to read and write has come from the pleasure she has had in reading and discussing books with you and ourselves. Picking out key words she could recognize, and the use of special books such as the ones you made with familiar songs or favorite stories (big books) has helped her participate more actively in reading and motivated her. This approach has been a very positive experience for Alice and has given her a solid foundation for further reading and language skills.

When asked to comment about Alice's own response to this reading program, they reported,

Alice loved your visits. She looked forward to the new books, and especially appreciated the books you made of songs and her own key words. When we asked Alice what she thought, she said, "I liked reading the books. I liked peeking at the new books when Cheryl wasn't looking. I liked to read the books myself. I liked to pick new words, learn to read them and make them into books. I liked learning how to write words."

## Summary

When this study began, Alice had had many positive experiences with books and loved to hear stories. She focused upon story meaning and could capably summarize and retell with fluency and expression those books she had heard and loved. She used pictures as clues when retelling stories, and clearly understood how a book worked from beginning to end. Beyond an understanding that a story was told from the non-picture part of a book, she had not yet developed an awareness of print.

Throughout this study, several developments were observed:

1. Alice began to attend to the print of books she had heard. At first, she exhibited the reading behaviors of moving her hand from top-to-bottom and left-to-right along the print, pretending to read. At a later time, she began to search for words found in the story title or frequently repeated within the text, using initial letters and word length as clues. And still later, she began to recognize some words by sight within the text of a story. Occasionally she recognized these words out of context as well.
2. Alice requested key words from the start of our year together. She accumulated thirty-four words which she could read by sight in a variety of contexts.
3. Via her interest in letters, key words, and instruction at kindergarten, she learned to recognize all letters of the alphabet and their sounds.
4. All along, Alice requested storybooks that held good tales. Later, she began to request big books and trade books with simpler texts that she could memorize and read herself.
5. She began to show an interest in printing and spelling words, and often made her own word booklets.
6. She added many words from stories to her speaking vocabulary.

Other observations of Alice in relation to this reading program included:

1. her need for a social time prior to reading;
2. her reluctance, for the first half of the year, to discuss and retell stories, yet her obvious comprehension of books she had heard. Alice was always more anxious to hear the new batch of books and did not want to spend time telling about the ones she had already heard;
3. her growing interest in "reading" and retelling stories as she began to recognize some words and perceive herself as a reader;
4. her desire to hear more and more books rather than the repeated readings of a few;
5. her preference to be read to by someone rather than listening to the stories on tape by herself;
6. her distinct criteria for selecting books. Alice did not like to read non-fiction. Instead, she wanted a good imaginative tale. She especially enjoyed fairy tales and rhymes, and stories with girls as main characters;
7. the clues she used when initially reading key words. At this time, she did not recognize many letters. In addition to the shape of the words, it was discovered that smudge marks, thickness of the print, and style of print (as both her parents and myself were recording words) were used as clues.

### **Postscript: Reading in Grade One**

I met again with Alice and her parents in May, 1986. Her parents reported that she was on the the verge of fluent reading when our year together ended the previous May, and seemed to pick up reading in first grade almost immediately and with ease. They described her reading as smooth and expressive, especially when she has heard the story at least

once. When she encounters a new word that she does not recognize at sight, she tends to sound through its syllables rather than sound by sound.

Reading instruction for Alice was facilitated at school with the Ginn 720 basal reading program. In addition to learning the sight vocabulary of these readers, letter sounds and blending were taught, then practiced with the Miami Linguistic Readers. These, and other primers, could be taken home and read to parents. For every ten read, a small prize could be earned, and a larger reward was awarded for reading one hundred of them. At first, Alice brought one of these primers home daily. Soon, she would bring one home once in a while, and eventually never.

Alice was reportedly thrilled to bring home school library books throughout first grade, and continued to make frequent visits to the public library with her parents. Book time continued to be an important part of each day, particularly at bedtime. Alice loved to be read to from longer, more difficult books, and her parents reported that they had a fairly long storytime each night. As well, Alice loved to read books to them, and to make up oral stories with her father. Her parents were very pleased that her attitude about reading and books had continued to be so positive.

Alice described how she learned to read, her response to the books used at school, and her perception of herself as a reader,

My teacher taught me how to read. We did reading after recess. We'd read one or two stories. At first we had paper books that had one or two words on each page, like 'Bill', 'Lad', and 'Lad ran'. I liked the readers because they had lots of stories in them. I liked getting library books, too. I'm an alright reader.

And in response to the book awards, Alice explained,



I got up to ten books, then I gave up. It was a nuisance to put your name on the slips all the time and I wanted to read other kinds of books.

Alice gladly read to me during this visit. The first book, Those Green Things, she had heard before, and read it fluently, expressively, and perfectly,

What are those green things? What green things? Those green things in the laundry basket. These green things in the laundry basket are your socks. Oh, I thought they were lizards eating my T-shirts. What are those green things? What green things? Those green things under my bed. Those green things under your bed are last week's pyjamas. Oh, I thought they were giant frogs Matthew squashed when he was jumping on my bed. What are those green things? What green things? Those green things in my scrambled eggs. Those green things in your scrambled eggs are spinach. Oh, I thought they were bugs and worms that weren't ripe yet. What are those green things? What green things? Those green things in the closet. Those green things in the closet are garbage bags full of old clothes. Oh, I thought they were lumpy bumpy monsters hiding until I came to find my boots...

The second book, Pelican, was new to her. Still her reading was fluent. Any new words encountered were blended through their syllables, and one word that was read incorrectly and did not make sense as such, was self-corrected,

Paul lived on a farm not far from the sea. One day he went out for a walk along a country road. At last he came to his favorite tree. When he had climbed to the top, he looked down. He saw a truck, full of all kinds of things, coming down the road. As the truck passed, it bounced over a bump in the road, and a small box fell off. Paul climbed down the tree and picked up the box carefully. He walked home and showed it to his father. Inside the box was a rather large egg. 'What sort of an egg is this?' he asked his father. 'I'm not sure,' said his father. 'Take it to the specked hen. She'll hatch it, along with her own eggs.' The

speckled hen wasn't very pleased. But it was an egg so she sat on it. After a while all her other eggs hatched...

Alice's teacher described her as creative, particularly in art, music and movement. She noted that Alice loved the social aspects of school, and while she completed all that was required of her and did well on tests, she did not challenge herself to do more.

Specific to print, her teacher reported that while Alice was a good reader, she was not always careful. She would make silly mistakes; she knew the phonics rules but did not always apply them. She also felt that Alice needed more opportunities to read orally. Her comprehension, as indicated by printed tasks, was fairly good. Alice was perceived as creative with her print, and liked to make booklets, cards and letters.

Her teacher did not seem to be aware of the amount of reading Alice did at home.

### James

There was a little gorilla. His mother loved him. His father loved him. His aunts and uncles loved him. He sat in a tree with the butterfly and the parrot, and they loved him. Giraffe loved him, 'If you need help, I'll be there.' Even boa constrictor loved him. One day Little Gorilla grew and grew and grew. And they all sang, 'Happy Birthday to you, Little Gorilla.' And they still loved him.

James retelling Little Gorilla, April, 1985

All the animals at the zoo got sick. The doctor came and said all the animals had been in their cages too long. So Mister Muster packed a little lunch and they went to the beach. They splashed and jumped and had fun. Then the animals saw the amusement park and ran to it. The roller coaster was rumbling so loud that no one could hear Mister Muster call. The ferris wheel was too fast and the parachute jump was so much fun that they forgot Mister Muster was there. He needed a chocolate ice cream soda to make him feel better. Then he popped up with an idea to get the animals back on the bus. He got hammers and nails and lights and painted the bus. He put a moustache on and called, 'This is the most exciting ride in the amusement park.' And all the animals got on the bus, and they all had fun going back home.

James retelling A Holiday For Mister Muster, April, 1985

James' curiosity could not keep him away from the field the day the bulldozer arrived to clear the new orchard. Just as fascinating to him was the burning of all the brush that had been cleared. When he wasn't exploring, it was not unusual to find him running in the orchard fields, playing in the treehouse (we sometimes read there, too), or helping his father in the shop.

His curiosity also extended to books, and James was always willing to leave his active play to hear stories. These times enabled me to also come to know the sensitive, honest and good-humored sides of his personality as he responded to the stories we read together.

James' family included his mother, father, and two-year-old brother, Toby. The family spent a large part of each day outside -- the parents working in the orchard and garden, the boys playing. James had many opportunities to talk with his parents throughout each day. His ideas were listened to and respected, and he was encouraged to speak, think and do for himself as much as possible. Very occasionally James was permitted to

watch television on their fuzzy, black and white set. James spent his afternoons at kindergarten beginning in September, 1985.

After dinner, and before bedtime, was book time for their family. James' parents reported that he had been read to regularly at bedtime since he was about two-and-a-half years of age. This storytime involved reading the books that he selected, pausing throughout to answer his questions. In addition to his own collection of books, he also selected books quite regularly from the public library.

James' parents regarded themselves as quite avid readers and, although they did most of their personal reading after he went to bed, said that he had had many opportunities to view them reading newspapers, magazines and books. They added that they thought he was aware that they learned from and enjoyed reading.

James was five years-old when we began to meet in June, 1984. During our first meeting, he acted shy for a while. He gladly showed me his shelf of books in his bedroom, and willingly sat with me to hear Albert's Toothache and Where the Wild Things Are. But each time I tried to engage him in conversation, he would just grin and look at me with a sideways glance.

Towards the end of the hour, James seemed more comfortable with me. He showed me his favorite books, Babar the King and Timmy and the Whales. He then proceeded to tell me the story of Timmy and the Whales by explaining what was happening in each picture,

Timmy the West Coast Tugboat is by the dock. Simon the Seagull is on the boat. Captain Jones and Mathilda the Cat are getting ready to go on Timmy. They're looking at a map. Now Timmy is sailing out of the harbor. There are lots of sailboats. Then they go by a ferry. There are lots of people, and lots of

seagulls overhead of them. Then Timmy is getting ready to tow a raft. There are people fishing and some fish are following Timmy. They go by a lighthouse. Then they see a whole buncha' seagulls and killer whales dancing and jumping up and down. Then all the seagulls are on top of the raft. Then they go by the wood mill, and another tugboat is just passing. Then they're home again.

From this time on, the shy side of James completely disappeared.

### June to August, 1984

From the beginning, James was always willing to join me to hear stories. Initially, one or two books at one sitting were often all that he could attend to before showing signs of losing interest -- lying down, interrupting the story to talk about something else, and leaving to investigate some other happenings around the house. He always wanted to keep all the books I had brought, though, "in case I (he) want to hear them later."

James' attentiveness and enthusiasm for the books brought increased from week to week, to the point where he was totally focused and absorbed while listening to all six or more stories. Some days our time together lasted as long as ninety minutes.

At the end of June, James' mother reported that he chose to listen to each storybook two or three times, but towards the end of the week grew tired of these and requested others from his library. She suggested that he needed shorter, action-type books such as those by Dick Bruna and John Burningham. And, she also noted that James preferred to be read to rather than listening to the stories on tape by himself. While reading with him, his parents would play such games as counting letters and words on a page.

Initially, James was not keen to discuss favorite stories he had heard. When asked what a particular book was about, he would respond with, "I

don't know" or "I don't remember". As his interest and enthusiasm for books increased, and perhaps, his trust and comfort level with me, so did his willingness to share his ideas and opinions. For example, at the end of July, James voluntarily explained, "We only read them a little bit this week. My favorite was Max; I liked when he hit the home run. I'll Fix Anthony was okay. I don't really like Lazy Jack; I like him but not the lady. It was in the olden days, not now. And I really liked Freight Train." Another time he offered, "I liked Jim and the Beanstalk the best, except when the giant said, 'I'll eat you up. You'd better get an axe and chop down the plant.' That part was scary!" He did not show any interest in retelling stories at this time.

James was very clear about the kinds of books he did not want to read. He did not care for non-fiction, or for those containing more unnatural, patterned language (such as When I'm Big and Where Have You Been?), preferring a good, imaginative tale. He also rejected stories he found to be sad (such as The Last Puppy) or scary (such as The Spooky Story and Do Not Open). Others (such as Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, Don't Forget the Bacon, and Happy Birthday Moon) did not appeal to his level of humor at this time.

Most notable by the end of August, though, was James' positive attitude towards hearing almost all books, long or short. He would declare, "I'll listen to that a hundred times" or "I liked it, I liked all of it!". Some favorite books from this time included A Pony For Linda, Days With Frog and Toad, Frog and Toad Together, Dinner at Alberta's, Max, Corduroy, A Pocket For Corduroy, Freight Train, Curious George Goes to the Hospital, Jelly Belly, George and Martha One Fine Day, Neigh, Trumpet, The Friend, and Carousel.

While listening to stories, James would study the pictures as I read and followed the text with my hand. He did not attend to the print at this time, but was aware that the story was held in the print and knew how the print worked from top-to-bottom and left-to-right. He also recognized that words were made up of letters, and that one word was separated from another by a space. He did not recognize letters or their sounds, yet.

Over the summer, James began to make a scrapbook. He would cut pictures from magazines, glue these into the scrapbook, and dictate captions for each, such as "spacemen fallen out of the spaceship into the water" or "ferry boat going across the ocean".

Following a trip to Calgary, he gladly told about his experiences, and willingly dictated a story: "I went in the airplane to Calgary. Then we drove to Saskatchewan. We swam in the lake. We built sandcastles. And we went in a canoe ride." He was pleased to have his words recorded, and added illustrations, but did not show an interest in "reading" it further.

Another time he requested that we make a book about colors, which we did with colored construction paper, labelling each page with a color word. He kept this booklet for several weeks, but did not choose to illustrate or read it with me again.

James was not interested in having key words recorded until August - he preferred to hear storybooks, and when that was over, he was usually eager to go outside to play. By the end of August, though, he proudly read four key words: Ryan, James, bike riding, and treehouse.

### **September to December, 1984**

James continued to be enthusiastic about our book time each week and would happily greet me at the door, eager to see and hear the new

stories. He would cuddle next to me, engrossed for an hour or more at a time. He was always eager to identify favorites, making such declarations as, "Do you know which one I liked best? This one!" or "I had this one before. I like this one!". He would often laugh during humorous parts of a story and make eye contact with me, communicating his pleasure. Some favorites during these months included: George and Martha, Crow Boy, Willaby, Harry the Dirty Dog, The Stupids Step Out, Albert's Toothache, Mouse Tails, Dawn, Moose, Morris's Disappearing Bag, The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash, An Anteater Named Arthur, Piggy in the Puddle, Cyrus the Unsinkable Sea Serpant, and Maggie and the Goodbye Gift.

James was always willing to listen to a story at least once before deciding whether he liked or disliked it. Good, imaginative picture books continued to be a must, regardless of length. Scary stories such as My Mamma Says were again rejected, as were those with a more stilted, patterned storyline such as I Know What I Like and The House That Jack Built. As well, he was not interested in hearing stories whose characters were younger than he, as was the case in A Kiss For Little Bear and On Mother's Lap. He would offer to keep these books for his younger brother, though.

Until the end of October, James willingly explained the gist of a story he had read, but continued to show little interest in elaborating upon the storyline, or in "reading" or retelling it to me. Yet, his short summaries clearly indicated his understanding and enjoyment of the stories. For example, after hearing Albert's Toothache he commented, "He couldn't have a toothache because he didn't have any teeth!" Following Harry The Dirty Dog he said, "He kept trying to lose his sweater cause he didn't like it." And in response to An Anteater Named Arthur he explained, "He didn't like red



ants cause he liked black ants better. And then he was a magician, and his mom asked him to do magic and make the things that shouldn't be in his room disappear."

By November, though, James began to take an interest in retelling some stories, as if reading the book, using the pictures as clues. One Saturday, for instance, he told the story of The Monkeys and the Pedlar:

The pedlar (sic) went for a walk. And then he went to sleep. Then the monkeys took everything out of his bag: a striped hat, a mirror, a pair of shoes, pots, a teddy bear, ribbons, a flute and a drum, a hat, a skirt, glasses, and raspberry syrup. They put on the clothes and played the drum, and danced around the pedlar. When he turned over, the monkeys put everything back in his bag and scrambled away. And when the pedlar woke up he said, 'I wish I could see some monkeys.'

Another story "read" by James was one from his own collection of books:

Morris's Disappearing Bag.

It was Christmas. All the little bunnies ran downstairs. Morris's brother got a hockey set. Morris's sister got a beauty kit. Morris's other sister got a chemical set. And Morris got a bear. All day long all the rabbits played with their toys. Then they all traded except Morris. Morris was too young to use the chemistry set or he might blow up the house. He was too young to play with the make-up cause he'd use up all the make-up. And he was too little to use the hockey set cause he might hurt himself. Mother said, 'Come on. Let's make a hat for your bear.' Morris said, 'No.' His dad said, 'Come on. Let's go for a walk with your bear.' And Morris said, 'No.' And he wouldn't eat dinner. And he sat by the Christmas tree and saw a package that hadn't been opened. And he opened it and it was a disappearing bag and he jumped into it. And all the rabbits came into the living room and they said, 'Where are you Morris?' Morris said, 'Right here.' And they said, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'Right here.' And one of the rabbits said, 'Dad, Morris is going so fast we can't see him.' And then he came out of his disappearing bag. And then, 'Can I use your disappearing bag? Can I use it? Can I use it?' And they all

jumped in. Then Morris played with the hockey suit, and the chemistry set, and the make-up kit. And it was bedtime. One of the rabbits said, 'Can I use your bag tomorrow?' And one of the rabbits said, 'Can I sleep in it?' But Morris was already asleep.

By November, too, James began to attend to some print. He memorized several big books word for word, then would "read" them, following the print with his hand. While what he was reciting did not generally correspond with the words he was pointing at, he was quite pleased to think he could read a book on his own. As well, James would occasionally hunt for distinct and frequently repeated words within the text of a storybook. For example, after reading, Hey, Elephant!, he was very pleased to spot the word "elephant" several times, as was the case with the word "moose" in Moose. And in Farmer Goff and his Turkey Sam, he found "turkey" throughout using the initial consonant and length of the word as clues. Once, too, James was looking at the scrapbook that he had made during the summer, recalling the captions he had dictated, this time pointing at the words and checking to see if he was reading them correctly.

At kindergarten, James' teacher was teaching the alphabet, and the children would make booklets containing pictures of objects beginning with the particular letter being studied. James enjoyed making and "reading" these booklets. One Saturday he read several of them to me, then added proudly, "I've got more. Don't worry!"

By the end of December, James had accumulated ten key words, and was thrilled to have these recorded into a booklet. His first ten words were: walkie-talkie, bike riding, forest, slide, Ryan, James, roly-polly, treehouse, Hallowe'en cat, and work.

## January to May, 1985

James' enthusiasm for our book time continued. Some mornings he would call and run to meet me before I was out of the car, eager to see the new collection of books. Often, we would read together for over an hour, and still he would make comments such as, "Do you have time to read these ones? I never get tired of hearing stories." He preferred to be read to almost all the time now, rarely choosing to listen to the stories on audiotape.

James was enthralled by story meaning. During these months he was not eager to hear stories more than a couple of times each, preferring to hear more stories rather than the same ones repeatedly. He enjoyed hearing almost all books brought. He still preferred those that told a good, imaginative tale, but also began to show an interest in some non-fiction. He was interested in such things as dinosaurs, reptiles, caterpillars and butterflies, and enjoyed those books that communicated their information in a story-like way such as More About Dinosaurs, Look, A Butterfly, and Chickens Aren't The Only Ones. Some other, of many favorites, included Watch Out For The Chicken Feet In Your Soup, Pig Pig Grows Up, Leo The Late Bloomer, One Zillion Valentines, Timothy Goes To School, The Bicycle Man, Pelican, Dandelion, The Stupids Die, Little Gorilla, Harriet and the Roller Coaster, Prince Bertram The Bad, and The Lady Who Saw The Good Side Of Everything.

He was very often pleased to summarize stories he enjoyed, demonstrating his ability to understand events, feelings, and even subtle ideas communicated. For example, after hearing Unforunately Harriet, he explained, "She spilled some varnish, and tried and tried to clean it up, but it was too hard. Every time she rubbed it, it spread. She tried to cover it up with furniture, but that looked funny. She didn't know what to do. Then

some men brought a new rug, and it covered up the varnish." He also clearly comprehended Henry and the Red Stripes, summarizing, "Henry painted himself with red stripes. And the fox saw him and caught him. But Mrs. Fox threw him out because she thought he might have a big disease. So Henry got away." Following a reading of The Big Fat Enormous Lie, he explained, "The lie was big, and it kept getting bigger and bigger with a bulging stomach, a bulging head and a dripping nose. It got smaller cause the boy told the truth." And after hearing Aunt Nina and Her Nephews and Nieces he commented, "All of the nephews and nieces wanted to go to different places. But all those things were in her house."

Most notable during these months was James' continued interest in retelling some stories, complete with different voices for different characters, and incorporating the story's vocabulary. Watch Out For The Chicken Feet In Your Soup, for example, was told with an Italian accent,

They went to Joey's grandma's. And Eugeney said, 'Joey, what's your grandma doing with our coats?' 'Thatsa to makea the bread rise.' They ate soupa and spaghetti. And Eugeney found a chicken foot in his soup. And Eugeney finished his spaghetti, and Joey's grandma said, 'Eugeney, come and helpa me makea the bread.' They made bread dolls and Eugeney got to take one home. And Joey got a big one to take home. And Eugeney said, 'Hey, Joey, I like your grandma.' And Joey said, 'Me, too.'

Another example was when James told the story of The Bremen-Town Musicians using the pictures as clues and using some direct phrases remembered from the text,

One day, the donkey heard his master say he wouldn't feed him, so he ran away. He was going to Bremen-Town to be a musician. He could sing, 'Ha-ha-ha.' And on the way he met a dog who looked like he was puffed out. The dog heard his master say he was going to kill him cause he was too old, so he ran away. The donkey said he could come to Bremen-Town to

be a musician. He could bark. Then they met a cat that was sad as a rainy day. The cat said, 'I heard my mistress say that she was going to drown me, so I ran away.' 'Come with me, cat, and we'll go to Bremen-Town. You can meow.' Then they met a rooster and he was crowing. They said, 'Why are you crowing?' 'Because my master said he was going to cut off my head and put me in the soup. So I ran away.' On the way they got to the forest, and the donkey said he saw a light. So they went over to the light and it was a window. And the dog said, 'What do you see?' And the donkey said, 'Food. And there's robbers in there.' And then they all thought what to do. And they all got on top of each other. And the donkey said, 'I'll neigh, and you bark, and you meow, and you crow. And let's all jump through the window.' And they did, and the robbers ran away into the forest. And then they had a good meal and put out the lights. And then one robber said, 'Let's go and rob back.' And one robber went back. He saw the cat's eyes and said, 'There's a few coals left in the fire.' And he got close and the cat spit at him and scratched him. And the dog bit his leg and the donkey kicked him and the rooster crowed. Then the robber got back and the rest of the robbers said, 'What's the problem?' And he said, 'A witch spit at me and scratched me, and a monster bit my leg, and a giant hit me with a club, and a ghost screamed at me.' Then they lived there. The donkey, the dog, the cat and the rooster liked it so much they never went to Bremen-Town. And they stayed there.

James retold some texts with almost complete accuracy, and at times perceived himself as a reader, proudly commenting, "I'm starting to read since you came here." He "read" these stories by memory, using pictures and sometimes initial consonants as clues. One such reading was from Tana Hoban's Push-Pull, Empty-Full: A Book Of Opposites, "push-pull-empty-full-wet-dry-in-out-up-down-thick-thin-whole-broken-front-back-big-little-first-last-many-few-heavy-light-together-apart-left-right-day-night." Another book that was proudly "read" was City Song, "Many windows. Many floors. Many people. Many doors. Many cars. Many streets. Many flavors. Many treats...." He also continued to enjoy reading big books that I had

made containing rhymes and songs, with one or two lines of print and an illustration per page. At times he would point to specific words as he was reading, recognizing them within context.

During these five months, James continued to locate some distinct words that appeared repeatedly within the text of a story he had heard. He found such words successfully, very often using the length of the word and initial consonant as clues. He could recognize many letters and their sounds by this time. After hearing Sloppy Kisses, James was pleased to recognize the word "kiss" throughout the story. He successfully located "Brenda", "Edward" and "dog" in the book Brenda and Edward. "Desmond" and "dinosaur" were words he found within the text of Desmond the Dinosaur, "reptile" in What is a Reptile?, and "butterfly" in Look, A Butterfly.

James often played with Alice, and it was during this time that he discovered that she had more key words than he. His competitiveness revealed itself and he became anxious about getting more words in order to catch up with Alice. During these months, I sometimes failed to select his true key words as indicated by his inability to recognize some from one week to the next. He was determined to keep all the words, though, and noticed if any cards were removed from his package. He especially found it difficult to recall some words when a series of them began with the same letter and were of similar length. As he became more frustrated when he was unable to read some of these unimportant words, I finally convinced him to keep those that he knew well and to discard the others. By the end of May, James had accumulated another twelve key words, which he read readily and confidently: swimming, skiing, school, play, helmet, love, valentine, Larry, snow, sun, friend, and Grandma. In total, he now read twenty-two key words.

At the finish of our year of reading together, James commented, "I liked the books and the (key) words. I learned a bit, quite a bit. I can read some things, not everything, just books I know good."

During a final meeting, James parents described the reading procedure they adopted at home, and commented upon changes they had observed in James' language abilities and attitudes about books and reading.

Book time was rather hit and miss. At bedtime we usually managed to read. Each book was always presented to us in his favorite order. Often we read through all of these favorites at one sitting, a minimum of three. This bedtime reading was probably done between five and seven times a week. James would occasionally listen to a tape on his own, often without a book. Lately, he is showing some interest in following the book on his own.

Your positive outlook -- it was always a great pleasure for him when you were coming -- has encouraged his natural liking of books. He has made a quantum leap in his positive attitude to books and learning.

A primary change was in James' comprehension -- his understanding of the intricacies of a story, feelings of the characters, and cause and effect of events. He can listen to longer and longer stories, and has just started to show an interest in non-fiction as well as imaginary stories. Also, he used to listen happily to the same book every night; now he doesn't want the same one more than three times. His vocabulary has widened, as well. Lately, too, he has been 'reading' books by memory to Toby.

The continuing variety of books has enlarged his vision of possible books. He definitely knows there are all sorts and types and I've noticed him bringing home certain types from the school library as he explores themes.

At this age James has been more interested in the personal contact of story reading rather than the mechanicalness of the tape-recorded stories. A person reading can always answer questions and explain as the story unfolds. Also, since he wasn't interested in hearing the same stories repeatedly, the tapes held little interest for him.

James loved your reading times. You were the highlight of his week, someone special who came to see just him.

Commenting upon kinds of instruction that might have contributed to greater success, James' parents suggested,

The only thing that could contribute to greater success would have been more contact -- which would have increased all aspects of language development. A week is a long time in a five-year-old's life, and our continuation of your level of input was sporadic and probably rather undirected.

### **Summary**

When this study began, James had had many opportunities to hear good storybooks, and already had a positive attitude towards them. His focus was upon story meaning as he followed the pictures and listened to the text. He had not yet developed an awareness of print beyond knowing that the story was told from the non-picture part of the book.

Several developments were observed throughout this year-long study:

1. James' enthusiasm for and interest in books grew. Initially books held his attention for only a short time, and he was easily distracted by other happenings around his home. Eventually, he became extremely focused and completely absorbed by the stories held in books. He willingly listened to all storybooks brought each week, and requested to borrow many of them to hear again throughout the week.
2. James became more and more enthralled by story meaning. He began to be critical of books that sacrificed a good story for unnatural, patterned language. The length of a picture book became less critical than the quality of the story; he was quite willing to listen to a fairly lengthy story that told a good tale.
3. James was usually keen to hear the new stories rather than spending too much time discussing the ones he had already read. He became more and more willing to offer his opinions, though, and



would summarize favorite parts of books, communicating his ability to take meaning from a story, including its intricacies. About half way through the year, he began to also take an interest in retelling some stories, "reading" them fluently and expressively, using the pictures as clues.

4. He became more aware of print. Sometimes he would pretend to read, following the text with his hand from top-to-bottom and left-to-right as I had modeled. Later in the year, he began to read big books and simple trade books by memory, following the print fairly accurately. He could sometimes point out specific words within the context of these books using initial letters and location on the page as clues. Towards the end of our year reading together, he also began to show an interest in locating words frequently repeated within a story he had heard. The shape of the words and initial consonants helped him to find these.

5. James learned most letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds. This learning was facilitated somewhat by key words, and mostly by direct instruction at kindergarten. He also came to recognize that letters made up words.

6. He enjoyed making booklets and having his words recorded. For example, he made a scrapbook filled with pictures cut from magazines and requested that captions be printed underneath each. He was making letter booklets at school, and began to make other booklets at home.

7. James proudly read twenty-two key words by sight. While I recorded these words, he liked to dictate letter sounds that he heard.

Other observations of James in relation to this reading program included:

1. his desire to hear more and more books rather than the same favorites repeatedly;

2. his desire to be read to rather than listening to the stories on tape; he not only wanted company while reading, but also liked the opportunity to discuss the stories throughout the reading;

3. his clear criteria when selecting books he wished to hear again. Consistently, James rejected books that contained unnatural and patterned language. Initially, he was not at all interested in non-fiction; later he began to enjoy non-fiction books that were well illustrated and communicated information in an interesting story-like way;
4. his lack of interest in language experience stories at this point in his development. One such story was recorded and, while he was pleased to observe his words recorded in print, he did not choose to reread this story. He also did not request to have any other such stories printed;
5. his beginning perception of himself as a reader;
6. his competitiveness. When he became aware that Alice had more key words than he, his concern was to get more words for the sake of catching up to her rather than for the love of and desire to read. This competitiveness appeared to inhibited his progress.

### **Postscript: Reading In Grade One**

When I met with James and his family again in May, 1986, his parents reported that he began to read quickly and easily in Grade One, noting that he was "very ready to read due to the extensive book experiences he had had prior to formal instruction."

The Ginn 720 program was used by James' teacher for reading instruction. In addition to the sight vocabulary introduced in this series, she also taught letter sounds and blending, and supplemented the reader with primers from the Miami Linguistic Series.

To promote reading at home as well as at school, a home reading club was established. For every ten primers read, the children could select a trinket prize; and for reading one hundred of these books, a large prize could be won. This competition had great appeal for James, and he began to bring

home several of these books each night. As an adult was required to listen to him and sign a paper indicating that each primer was read, his parents eventually limited these to two or three per night. James read one hundred and forty of these books. His parents reported that once he had reached one hundred, though, it was "anti-climactic" and his interest in these faded.

While in the thick of this book competition, James did not bring library books home. Once the competition was over, he quit reading at home altogether for a couple of months. His mother reported that he had recently begun to request that she read to him from his own collection of books, once again, and that they visit the public library. She said that James sometimes tries to read his books on his own, but that many of them are still too challenging.

When asked how he liked learning to read at school, James responded, "Reading was okay. But, you know it, then you go over it every day. I'm glad to spell cause I know what Mom and Dad are spelling."

James gladly read to me from a loved book of riddles, doing so fluently and perfectly.

What has four legs but can't fly?... A table. How does a monster count to thirteen?...On its fingers. What is black and white and has sixteen wheels?...A zebra on roller skates. What do you call a bull when it's sleeping?...a bulldozer. Where do you find a hippopotamus?...It depends where you left him. How does a dentist examine (blends this word) a crocodile's tooth?... Very carefully. When are cooks mean?... When they beat the eggs and whip the cream. When is a farmer mean?...When he pulls the ears off the corn...

He also chose to try to read another book which he had not read before. While he found this to be a challenging text, he was determined to read it and would not quit. He tended to read this book word by word, but

successfully decoded many new words that he encountered, blending through their syllables. Words printed in parentheses are those that I read.

One - green- and shiny- frog s-sits- blinking in the sun. He-jumps- up- right on (strong) back-legs. To be a frog is fun. Two (brightly)- colored (toucans), what very (peculiar) birds. They-can- see- as we-well as you can, but-their backs-beaks are quite ab- (absurd). Three lazy (jellyfish) floating on the -sea; along came a whale and took them home for tea. Four (cheeky) parrots living in the zoo, shout, 'Hello - Pretty - Polly', squ-squawk at you. Five sl-slithery- snails, they -never- need to - pack. When the snail- goes- out, he- takes his- house on his back....

James' teacher found him to be a fast learner and a pleasure to teach. She described him as being very competitive, but a good sport. She noted that he really enjoyed the book club that she had set up, and challenged himself to read well over one hundred books. She viewed him as a fairly fluent reader, and added that he had scored in the ninety-ninth percentile on the Gates-McGinitie test that had been administered at school. James' comprehension of what he read was apparently quite good, too, especially if the text told a straight-forward story. She said that the content of the story seemed important to James and determined whether he enjoyed reading it or found it to be 'boring'.

### Chris

Alexander got pushed in the mud, and the boy said, 'You're a crybaby.' Then Alexander said he'd be carsick when he couldn't get a seat by the window -- and then he got sick. And when he went to school, he was having a horrible, very bad day. I wish I could have this story back.

Chris telling about Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, August, 1984

Corduroy gets lost at the laundromat. And he gets in a man's laundry basket. Before he closes the door on the dryer, Corduroy falls out. So then he takes his clothes off and puts them in the dryer. He gets it out and dresses the bear. And I don't want to tell any more.

Chris summarizing A Pocket For Corduroy, August, 1984

Several acquaintances had commented, "You'll really like working with Chris, he's a really 'neat' kid." I soon learned what they were talking about as I came to know this very good-natured, sensitive, honest and thoughtful young person.

Some days when I arrived, he would have cookies baked and ready for our storytime, all broken in half so we would have more. Other times he would be hiding waiting for me to find him; once I found him under a blanket tickling himself trying to make himself laugh. Whatever the greeting, though, Chris, accompanied by his favorite blanket, was always ready to hear books.

Chris' family consisted of his mother, a lawyer, his father, a carpenter, and his three-year-old brother, Gavin. Both parents worked from their home, so Chris and Gavin had many opportunities to talk, read, work and play with them.

Most days Chris, Gavin, and sometimes friends, played independently -outside on bikes and in their fort; inside in their room with toys, listening to storybooks on audiotape, coloring or making booklets. Very occasionally, they watched television. Starting in September, 1984, Chris spent his afternoons at kindergarten.

Sometimes during the day, and almost always at bedtime, Chris' parents would sit with the boys to read books. This frequent and regular

storytime began when Chris was about two-and-a-half years old. The boys had several books in their collection, and loved visiting the public library to select others.

Both parents viewed themselves as avid readers, and reported that Chris had had many opportunities to observe them reading books, magazines and newspapers for information and pleasure.

Chris was four years and ten months old when I began to read with him in June, 1984. On my first visit, he gladly left the play he was involved in to join me for a storytime. He chose to hear George and Martha and George and Martha Encore, and listened attentively, engrossed by the stories these books told. He readily described what he liked about the books, and seemed to empathize with the characters. For example, he commented, "I like when George poured the soup in his loafers. He didn't like the soup but he didn't want to hurt Martha's feelings. And it was funny when Martha put the bathtub on George's head for peeking."

When asked if he would show me his favorite book from his collection, Chris selected Bambi. He did not want to tell me about this story, but requested that I read it to him. He studied the illustrations as the story was being told, and again was absorbed by the tale. He was aware that the story he was hearing was being told from the print, but was not aware of how the print worked and did not read words at this time.

When I offered to leave the books we had read so that he could hear them again, Chris smiled and said, "I'd like that."

### June to August, 1984

Chris was always pleased to hear new books each week. While he did not mind visiting for a minute or two, he was eager to get onto hearing the

stories. From the start, an hour or more of listening to good tales was never too long for him to sit and be happy and deeply engaged. He was proud to be able to operate the tape recorder, and preferred to listen to the stories on tape rather than being read to by me. He readily learned to distinguish the title page from the page the story began on, and to turn the page at the sound of the bell on the tape. As Chris listened to the tape and examined the corresponding pictures within the book, I followed the print with my hand. While he did not attend to the print, he could show me how the print worked from left-to-right and top-to-bottom as a result of this modeling.

Chris used very distinct criteria when selecting books he wished to hear again. He did not particularly care for non-fiction, explaining, "I didn't like it when it had all that other part like the real crab part. I like the cartoon kind of stuff." Good, color illustrations and a reasonably lengthy text containing a good story were a must. In response to Dick Bruna's, When I'm Big, Chris said, "I didn't like it because it didn't have nice pictures, and the words went too fast, there weren't enough of them." While he listened to A Pony For Linda four times, Chris concluded, "I didn't really like it because I didn't really like the pictures. I like color drawings." Another time he confided, "I didn't like the Francis books. They didn't have very nice pictures."

The many stories that Chris did like were listened to repeatedly throughout the week. He loved the independence that having the books on tape gave him. He no longer needed to find an adult to read him a story, but could follow along with the tape as often as he wished. Following our first meeting, his mother called to say that Chris was "enamoured" by the program, and that he had wound and rewound the tapes many times to listen to the stories. He had requested that she record his own books as well

During this time Chris listened to favorite books anywhere from six to seventeen times within a week. Some favorites during these summer months included: The April Fool, Yummers, Bea and Mr. Jones, The Guest, Jim and the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding Hood, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, Happy Birthday Moon, Corduroy, A Pocket For Corduroy, The Bremen-Town Musicians, Dr. DeSoto, Miss Nelson Is Missing, Miss Nelson Is Back, and The Stupids Step Out.

Chris was always willing to identify favorite books and to describe favorite parts of a story. One Saturday, he enthusiastically began our reading time with, "Do you know what one I liked best? Yummers! I liked Emily when she always said, 'Yummers'. And I liked Ming Lo Moves The Mountain when the lady said, 'You must move the mountain,' and the man said, 'How can I move such a big mountain?' " After hearing The April Fool, Chris remarked, "I liked it when he had twenty pounds of shoes and fifty galosh (sic), and when the people carried him around. And I thought it was funny when the man put a pie in his face."

Chris was not eager to retell complete stories, though. Instead of telling those he had already heard, he was most anxious to hear the new books. After hearing Happy Birthday Moon, he commented, "That was a good one. I want to hear the one about the dog now." And, another time, he remarked, "I liked The Stupids Step Out the best! I liked when the dog said, 'Your hat is meowing,' and she said, 'I know, I'm wearing the cat.' Can we read the other books now?" Chris' mother reported, though, that Chris had heard many of the stories so often that he could tell them word by word, which he did at times throughout the week.

Pictures provided Chris with information about story meaning, and at times facilitated predicting and self-correcting behaviors. For example, he



predicted some events that occurred in The Fat Cat by examining the illustrations, "I think this one will be pretty funny, the pictures look pretty funny with that fat cat. His shirt won't fit around and his pants are falling down. The lady looks mad. And he eats everybody!" While hearing another story, he started on the wrong page but soon noticed that the picture did not make sense in relation to the text he was hearing. He turned back to the correct page.

Several times Chris' empathy with story characters was apparent. After hearing The Guest he commented, "She was sad because he went away. When I go away I'm sad because my friends are at Denman Island." And following a reading of Nick Joins In, he remarked, "It would be sad to be Nick cause all the other kids are running and he's in a wheelchair. He's not sad all the time, but I would be."

Chris was not generally interested in having key words recorded during these months. Sometimes he would request a word, but most times said that he would rather not. By the end of August, he recognized five words: Superman, Batman, Dukes of Hazard, Robin, and jam. These words seemed unimportant, though, as he often chose not to reread them and misplaced the cards.

Once, Chris dictated a story that he was interested in telling, titled "All About Chris and Gavin." He was pleased to see his words printed, but showed no further interest in reading this story.

He recognized few letters of the alphabet and their sounds at this time. He did, however, show a beginning interest in letters and words. Once, he informed me that there were two words in the title of a book he was listening to, then proceeded to count and explain that there were sixteen letters in those two words.

## September to December, 1984

Chris continued to be enthusiastic about hearing good storybooks, always willingly leaving what he was doing to join me. He listened attentively to the stories on tape, following the pictures. Whenever there was a section of the story he enjoyed in particular, he would look up at me and smile, loving to share the pleasure he found in the story.

His understanding of story meaning, even the subtleties, was evident in his comments and story summaries. As before, his empathy with story characters was often present. After hearing George and Martha One Fine Day, he remarked, "Do you know the one I liked? The roller skate story when George lost his tooth, and he went to the dentist, and Martha thought he looked gorgeous with his new tooth." In response to Six Foolish Fishermen, Chris noted, "The fishermen were foolish because they forgot to count themselves. Only the little boy knew." Following a reading of Peabody he commented, "I thought it was funny when a spider web grew on Peabody's arm. Sometimes he was sad and sometimes he was happy. And sometimes he was jealous when Rita came." And, when telling about The Lazy Bear, he explained, "At first the bear called his friends and said, 'Come for a ride in my wagon.' After they all rode down the hill, they all got out but him, and they had to push him back up the hill. Then the goat had a (sic) idea, and they pushed the bear over the hill and he fell in the shallow pond. And all the animals laughed." And after hearing The Three Funny Friends, he remarked, "Those were in her imagination."

While Chris continued to be most anxious to hear the new stories rather than discussing the ones he had read throughout the week, he began

to occasionally retell complete stories, using the pictures as clues. One such story was We Are Best Friends.

Once upon a time there was two friends. They liked each other for a long time, except one day his friend had to leave. He got a letter from his friend and he wrote back. Then a new boy came to his school. In the end the two new friends went down to the garden to see the frogs. And they were happy.

Another story retold was Peabody.

Once upon a time there was a girl who got a present for her birthday, and it was a teddy bear. And she opened the present and saw it was a bear, and her brother said, 'Me want bear.' And when her brother said this the bear would growl at him. And Peabody got to sleep with the girl every night. Then she made some popsicle-stick skis for Peabody to use to ski. In springtime they went outside to make a garden. When the girl didn't want her brother to get into the garden, she said, 'Don't touch, electric wire.' But it was only red wool. In July, Peabody and the girl went to the beach. One day Peabody went on the shelf to show the other toys the shells he collected with the girl. When they went outside in the fall, Peabody got to stay in the girl's coat. On the bear's birthday he felt really happy, he couldn't sleep. In the morning Anne opened her present, and it was a doll named Rita. On the bear's birthday it was horrible cause Rita kept saying, 'I love you. I love you.' And when they went to sleep, the bear hit Rita's key and she said, 'I love you. I love you.' all the way until morning. The next morning Anne put Peabody up on the shelf and she played with Rita until night time. This time Peabody slept on the shelf. The next morning there were spider webs on him. He thought he was dead without the girl's love. Then the brother took Rita and gave her some coffee. After that he gave Rita a bath, and as soon as she hit the water, her batteries were broken. One day when the doll was broken, the girl said, 'Peabody, I need your help.' And he started dancing again.

During this time, the frequency of listening to the tapes and reading the books decreased. Instead of reading them from six to seventeen times per week, Chris only listened to each story about two or three times. His

mother reported that he still knew many of the stories "by heart", but that more of his time was being taken up by kindergarten. Also, he was keen to hear the library books that he was bringing home from school and was interested in making alphabet booklets at home, like those he was making at kindergarten.

Chris' criteria for selecting books did not waver during this period. Books without good, color illustrations, that did not tell a fairly extensive story, and that fell into the non-fiction category were not considered. As well, some comparison and evaluation of books based upon the quality of interactions between characters occurred. For example, after hearing Dawn, he remarked, "It was just like the one with the boy with the carrot seed because the words are short. But I think I like this one better because they weren't nice to tell the boy that his seed wouldn't grow." After a reading of The Monkeys and the Pedlar, he commented, "I didn't like it because it was just painting and I couldn't see his eyes." And, "I didn't like Albert's Toothache because I like when pictures are colorful, and those ones weren't."

Most times, though, Chris liked all of the books "the best." Some favorites during these months included We Are Best Friends, The Blanket That Had To Go, Lovable Lyle, Mine's The Best, No Roses For Harry, The Gingerbread Boy, Peabody, Owliver, Simple Pictures Are Best, The Lazy Bear, George and Martha One Fine Day, and Do Not Open.

Occasionally, during these months, Chris exhibited the reading behavior of following the print from top-to-bottom and left-to-right with his hand while looking at a storybook. While he could not actually read the words, and was not always following at the correct spot on the page, he was pretending to read and was proud to be able to do this.

Chris liked reading the big books I had made ("I like them so much I want to keep them."), and was pleased to be able to memorize and "read" them. Again, he would follow the print with his hand, pretending to read, but could not, as yet, recognize specific words. His mother reported that while reading a big book of nursery rhymes, she left out one part. Chris noticed this immediately, and pointed to the section of words she had missed.

Chris continued to show little interest in key words, and most times chose not to have one recorded. The three words he accumulated during this time period were: car, truck, and bus.

At times during these months, the continuity of the program was broken with two week gaps as Chris' family had other weekend plans. Then, we did not meet again for almost two months when they went away on holidays.

### **February to June, 1985**

Chris' enthusiasm for listening to good stories continued, and he anxiously waited for the new batch of books from one week to the next. While he listened to some favorite books repeatedly, for the most part he continued to listen to them only a couple of times each. As before, his attention was predominantly upon story meaning, and once he had discovered this he was keen to hear more, as indicated by such comments as, "That was funny. Okay, that story's over. Now I'd like one of those moose ones."

Chris readily told about his favorite books, offering short descriptions of memorable parts. Following a week of hearing Ira Sleeps Over he said, "That was my only best. I read it about seven times. He decided to take his

teddy bear, and his friend was fast asleep when he came to tell him his name." After hearing Sloppy Kisses he remarked, "That book was funny. My favorite part was when Rosemary called her papa, 'Papa, come back! You forgot to give me a kiss.' Then she gave him a great, big, sloppy kiss." And after Unfortunately Harriet he explained, "She spilled some varnish. Then a new rug came, and it went right over the varnish. Her mom would be mad if she saw the varnish!" Some other favorite books during these months included: The Stupids Die, Dandelion, Prince Bertram The Bad, The Giant John, Aunt Nina and Her Nephews and Nieces, The Forgetful Bears, Funnybones, Pippin and Pod, Arthur's Valentine, Hug Me, Alligators Are Awful, And They Have Terrible Manners and Arabella and Mr. Crack.

Occasionally Chris volunteered to read to me. Having heard the story before, and using the illustrations as a guide, he would tell the story fluently and expressively as if reading, often adopting the vocabulary of the text. An example of this is from his retelling of The Lady Who Saw The Good Side Of Everything.

She went for a picnic and it started to rain. So she went home and soon the stream got up to her house and the house left her. Then a log came and she said, 'Oh well, I wanted a new house anyway.' And she hopped on the log, and she sailed and sailed and sailed over the rounding seas. And she saw many sunsets go down and up. And she saw Chinese people, and they waved to her. And she saw a brick wall, and she found a new house. Then it started raining again.

Another time, Chris told the story of Funnybones.

Once upon a time there was a dog skeleton, a little skeleton, and a big skeleton. On a dark, dark night there was a dark, dark hill. On the dark, dark hill was a dark, dark house. In the dark, dark house there was a dark, dark staircase. Down the dark, dark staircase was a dark, dark cellar. And in the dark, dark

cellar lived some skeletons. The big skeleton scratches his skull and says, 'What shall we do tonight?' And the little skeleton said, 'Why don't we take the dog for a walk and frighten someone?' The big skeleton said, 'Good idea'. So they went up the dark, dark staircase and went to the dark, dark park. They played on the swings. And the dog skeleton was running after a stick and he bumped into a tree and was a pile of bones. The big skeleton and the little skeleton put him back together. 'The foot bone's connected to the leg bone. The leg bone's connected to the hip bone. The hip bone's connected to the back bone.' But they got all mixed up. Then they said, 'We forgot to frighten someone.' But everybody was in bed. Except the skeleton animals in the zoo. They rode on the elephant. And they talked to the parrot. They said, 'Keep out of the way of the crocodile skeleton.' Then the little skeleton said, 'Let's frighten each other.' And the big skeleton said, 'Good idea.' So they did. See the little skeleton's hiding in the clothes. Then they went home. In the dark, dark house was a dark, dark staircase. Down the dark, dark staircase was a dark, dark cellar. In the dark, dark cellar is where the skeletons lived. And they still do. The end.

In addition to occasionally pretending to read by moving his hand along the print, Chris began to notice specific aspects of print during the latter part of our year together. He was pleased to spot some frequently repeated and distinct words or phrases within the text of a story. Then, he would search for that word or phrase throughout the text usually using the initial consonant and place on the page, in the case of pattern books, as clues. For example, he located "baby calf" and "Buttercup" throughout The New Baby Calf, "butterflies" and "caterpillars" in Look, A Butterfly, "princess" in The Princess and the Pea, and "chicken soup with rice" in Chicken Soup With Rice.

Chris also began to show an interest in key words at this time, requesting one each week, and successfully reading almost all from one week to the next. By the end of May he had accumulated eleven words:

Vanya, park, bus, snowman, bike, car, ghost, witch, Mom, truck and swings.

By this time, too, he recognized most letters of the alphabet and their corresponding sounds and liked to identify sounds heard in his words as I recorded them.

Chris continued to enjoy reading big books. He observed the location of the words as I read and followed the text with my hand, and readily memorized the poems and songs these books contained. When retelling some of these by himself, he could "read" the text perfectly and would, at times, point to specific words within the context of the story.

During these latter months, Chris began to perceive himself as a beginning reader, commenting, "I can read some words from those big books and the cards (key words). Reading is reading the words and the pictures. With the books, I listen to the tape and look at the pictures. I don't look at the words. One day I'll know how to read those words."

In June, 1985, when asked to comment upon their observations of Chris' attitudes about books and language development as a result of this program, his parents noted,

Chris has always loved books. This love has grown to the point where he has a "current" book or books at all times now. He takes books from the school library regularly and attaches to favorites you have brought. We often find books in his bed which were not there at storytime the night before. He uses books as relaxation when he's tired, curling up with a favorite and enjoying it. He uses the tapes very little now, whereas last year he might listen to a story fifteen times over a period of a week. Now he wants to hear more and more stories rather than the same ones over and over again. Even when he's heard them only a couple of times, he still remembers the stories by heart.

Knowing someone outside the family would come to read with him each week and discuss the books gave him so much



pleasure. The tapes gave him autonomy with books -- he didn't always need someone to be there so he could enjoy the book. Now even though he's not yet reading, he seems to 'decipher' the book on his own. He also 'reads' quite frequently to his younger brother. The wonderful variety of books you brought couldn't help but increase his love for the world of books. And the discussion of content and feelings taught him to think about what he's reading. A big step.

There was a great increase in his vocabulary and his grammar has become much more complex during the course of this year. As well, Chris is now very interested in printing and letters. While he can read those big books by memory, he wants to be fluent with library books before he considers himself a reader. He doesn't take the leap with anything before he knows he can do it.

He didn't seem to hang onto his key words until the end, but now he wants them. Names are big, particularly family names. Near the end of the year he also showed more of an interest in writing his own books and dictating stories. We think he learned to read those words he'd written.

Chris loved this program. It was very successful and enriching for us all.

When describing the reading procedure followed at home, Chris' mother commented,

He's on his own most of the day. I'll often read him a story or two in the late afternoon (after kindergarten) and then Allan or I let each child pick a book for storytime. Sometimes, though, Allan sings songs with them rather than stories. I climb into the bottom bunk at night for these stories, and we spend approximately twenty minutes to half an hour. Chris and Gavin listen to the tapes alone -- they always have (and their friends listen with them, too). Whenever we get new books or books from the library, we read those right away. After you read the new set of books with Chris, Gavin and I would read them. Sometimes Chris would sit with us to hear them again.

## Summary

When this project began, Chris had already had many positive experiences with books, and happily joined me each week for storytime. He was aware that the stories in books were told from the print, but was not aware of how print worked. He did not recognize letters and could not read words at this time. During this year of reading together, several developments were noted:

1. Chris began to attend to some aspects of print. He could distinguish the title page from the page that the story began on as he prepared to follow along with the accompanying tape. For the most part he studied the pictures of books being read to him. Sometimes, though, he would pretend to read, following the print with his hand from top-to bottom and left-to-right as had been modeled. Towards the end of the year, he began to try to locate distinct and frequently repeated words within the text of a book. He would generally do this by searching for the initial letter of the word he was trying to find. Sometimes, in pattern books, he would remember the place of the word from one page to the next.

2. Throughout the year Chris learned to recognize almost all letters of the alphabet and many of their corresponding sounds. Some of these were learned through key words. Most, though, were learned at kindergarten where the teacher introduced a letter per week.

3. He could read several big books by memory. Sometimes he would point to specific words as he was reading, but did not read these words in isolation as yet.

4. For the first half of the year Chris was not generally interested in having key words, preferring to hear more storybooks instead. The few that were recorded, while readily recognized, seemed unimportant to him as he often chose not to reread them and misplaced the cards. During the last few months, though, he began to show more of an interest in these words and accumulated eleven of them, which he proudly read

by sight. He liked to identify letter sounds heard in his words as I recorded them.

5. Initially, Chris listened to favorite books over and over again. Later, he preferred to hear more books rather than the same ones repeatedly. Once he had discovered the tale a book told, he was anxious to hear more and more good stories.

Some other interesting observations related to this reading program were also noted:

1. From the start, Chris' attention was deeply engaged by the stories he was listening to. He would gladly sit and listen to all the books brought, which often took an hour or more.

2. Throughout the year, Chris demonstrated a good understanding of story meaning as he summarized and described favorite parts of books. He often noticed subtle things not clearly stated, was quick to empathize with the feelings of story characters, and at times rejected books where the interactions between characters seemed unkind. He was not always eager to retell stories as he was most anxious to hear the new books that had been brought for him. When he did retell a tale, he did so fluently and expressively, often adopting the book's language, using the pictures as a guide.

3. Chris preferred to listen to the stories on audiotape rather than being read to by myself or his parents. The tapes gave him autonomy with books, and he was pleased to be able to listen to stories without having to find an adult to read to him.

4. Sometimes Chris would study the pictures of books in advance of hearing them and could ably predict what would happen in the story. He also studied the pictures of a book while its story was being read. These pictures enriched his understanding of the tale, and at times facilitated self-correcting behaviors when he had accidentally skipped a page while reading along with a tape and discovered that the story and the picture did not match.

5. Chris showed distinct preferences in books. While he would listen to all books once, he would only reread those that told an imaginative, fairly lengthy story supported by colorful illustrations. He rejected

non-fiction and, at times, stories where the interactions between characters seemed hurtful.

6. Chris was not interested in having language experience stories recorded at this time in his development. While he was pleased to see his words in print, the one story that was dictated was not reread. He did not choose to have other stories recorded.

6. Towards the end of the year, Chris began to perceive himself as a beginning reader.

### **Postscript: Reading In Grade One**

When I met with Chris' mother in June, 1986, she reported that because Chris knew the world of books and was keen to learn to read, he did so fairly readily.

Reading instruction at school was primarily facilitated with the Ginn 720 basal program. As well as teaching the skills and sight words suggested in the guide, Chris' teacher also reinforced letter sounds and blending skills with primers from the Miami Linguistic Series. To encourage reading at home as well as at school, the children in Chris' class were awarded a trinket for reading ten primers, and a larger prize for reading one hundred of these books. Chris' mother said that he brought a couple of these primers home and recalls him sounding many of the words sound by sound, and guessing at those he could not decode. She felt that Chris had to sound out and guess because the unnatural language patterns in the stories made little sense to him. She felt, too, that this book club provided too remote a goal for him, and that he was not competitive, thus he chose not to participate.

At home, Chris' parents continued to read to him from good library books. Eventually, he realized that he could read some of these himself, and

began to read to Gavin. When he met a word that he could not read, Chris reportedly sounded through the syllables, rather than sound by sound.

Chris' mother perceives him as a good reader. She said that he cannot resist books and is extremely disappointed if there are no bedtime stories. She is very pleased with his attitude towards books and reading, and with his development. She added that he also likes to label his own drawings, and requested that he be allowed to print his own birthday invitations.

While visiting with Chris, he described how he learned to read, his feelings about books, and his abilities as a reader,

My teacher taught me how to sound out the words in my reader. The readers were pretty fun cause I was pretty good at them. I didn't read those other books (book club primers) because they were so hard. I just liked to check them out and read them but not for the prizes. I liked reading the library books, too. I'm a pretty good reader. I can read almost all the books now.

He also told me a story from one of his own books, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, doing so fluently and expressively,

In the light of the moon a little egg lay on a leaf. One Sunday morning the warm sun came up and -pop- out of the egg came a tiny and very hungry caterpillar. He started to look for some food. On Monday he ate through one apple, but he was still hungry. On Tuesday he ate through two pears, but he was still hungry. On Wednesday he ate through three plums, but he was still hungry. On Thursday he ate through four strawberries, but he was still hungry. On Friday he ate through five oranges, but he was still hungry. On Saturday he ate through one piece of cake, one ice-cream cone, one pickle, one slice of Swiss cheese, one slice of salami, one lollipop, one piece of cherry pie, one sausage, one cupcake, and one slice of watermelon. That night he had a stomachache. The next day was Sunday again. The caterpillar ate through once nice green leaf, and after that he felt much better. Now he wasn't hungry anymore, and he wasn't a little caterpillar any more. He was a big, fat caterpillar. He built a small house, called a cocoon, around himself. He

stayed inside for more than two weeks. Then he nibbled a hole in the cocoon, pushed his way out and he was a beautiful butterfly!

Chris' teacher described him as a "thinker" who took all of his work seriously. He was apparently very verbal, expressing himself thoughtfully and precisely. She also said that he loved to play with his friends and seemed happy at school.

She described him as a fairly good reader. While not as orally fluent as Alice and James, she explained that he understood far more about what was read than the others. She reported that he did not take part in the book club. She knew that he read at home, but was not sure how frequently this reading occurred.

## Chapter 4

### Findings and Implications

A year of working with Alice, Chris and James, reading from organic books containing magical stories and flowing language, laughing and talking about books, listening to their retelling of favorite stories, recording key words, and responding to their interest and attention to print has made it possible to collect data that addresses the question under investigation:

How will children respond when introduced to print in ways similar to the introduction of oral language -- that is, without direct instruction, phonics or vocabulary drill, but through the use of many meaningful and positive print experiences?

The responses of these three children have been categorized in nine main areas: attitude towards books; frequency of listening to books, and tape-recorded vs. personally read books; evaluation and selection of books; attention to pictures in books; summarizing and retelling stories; attention to print in books; key words and language experience stories; other print developments; and perception of selves as readers.

#### Attitude Towards Books

Alice, James and Chris had all discovered the pleasures of books prior to the start of this project. Storytime was a special part of each day's routines in all three homes.

Alice was always ready and waiting for me to arrive with new books each Saturday. After a short visit, she would examine all the books, deciding

the order in which they should be read. She gladly listened to all brought, and was attentive and focused for an hour or more throughout their readings. She borrowed almost all of them to hear again. Throughout the year, Alice requested more and more books, and loved to hear the tales they told. She was especially pleased when she discovered that she could read some simple stories by herself.

Chris happily left whatever he was doing for our storytime each week. While he would socialize briefly and willingly identified favorite books from those he had heard throughout the week, he was always eager to see the new set of books that had been brought. He would look through each, deciding which he wanted to hear first. These storybooks held his full attention and he was not satisfied until all had been read. He borrowed almost all of them to hear again.

James, too, was always willing to join me for stories. Like Chris, he gladly socialized for a minute or two, but was usually eager to see the new books. Initially, one or two stories at a sitting were all that he could attend to before losing interest and becoming distracted. Later, though, he was fully absorbed while listening to all books that had been brought. He usually wanted to borrow almost all of them to hear again.

All three of these children preferred to hear the new books each week to discussing the ones they had already heard and knew well. This behavior persisted throughout the course of the year.

Observations of such behavior pointed to not only the sustaining of these children's positive attitude towards books, but also to its continued growth and development.



### Frequency of Listening to Books: Tape-recorded vs. Personally Read Books

Chris was thrilled to have the stories recorded on audiotape. This gave him autonomy with books, allowing him the opportunity to hear stories whenever he wanted rather than waiting for an adult's time. As a result, he initially listened to favorite stories repeatedly.

Once he began kindergarten, though, he listened to favorites just one or two times each. Not only was more of his time taken by school and friends, but he also began to request more books rather than the same ones repeatedly.

From the start, Alice and James preferred to be read to by their parents, rather than listening to the audiotapes that accompanied each story. They wanted the personal contact that they had experienced with bedtime stories, and the opportunity to discuss books throughout their reading. By not choosing to listen to books independently, they tended to hear each story just two or three times each. As well, once they had discovered what a story was about, they were keen to hear other books.

These five year-olds were readily able to comprehend story meaning, and became increasingly enthusiastic to discover the pleasures of more and more books rather than listening to the same ones repeatedly. Their independence with books varied. While Chris liked to listen to stories using the tape recorder, Alice and James preferred to be read to by an adult.

### Evaluation and Selection of Books

While all three children had distinct criteria for selecting books they wished to read again, they were always willing to listen to all stories at least once.

Alice loved books that told good, imaginative tales. She particularly liked fairy tales, stories about friends, books with girls as main characters, and rhymes. She did not care for non-fiction. Later in the year, as she began to attend to the print, she began to also request some simple books containing a single line of print per page or a recurring pattern (such as The House That Jack Built) that she could memorize and read.

James rejected books he found to be scary or sad, and whose main characters were clearly younger than he. He also chose not to read stories that contained more unnatural, patterned language (such as The House That Jack Built), preferring a good, imaginative tale. Initially, James did not enjoy non-fiction; later in the year, though, he began to show an interest in those books that communicated their information in an interesting, story-like way and contained good, colorful illustrations.

Chris loved books that told an imaginative, fairly lengthy tale supported by good, colorful illustrations. He consistently rejected short stories, non-fiction, and books with black-and-white illustrations.

All three children enjoyed good, imaginative tales with flowing, natural language patterns. Beyond this, their preferences varied depending upon story meaning, characters, length of the text, illustrations, and their attention to print. For the most part, non-fiction was rejected by all three; although towards the end of the year, James began to show an interest in some well-written and beautifully illustrated books of this genre. Each of these children's book preferences were unique; while several titles appear on all three children's lists of favorites, some books loved by one were rejected by another.

### Attention to Pictures in Books

Alice, James and Chris all relied heavily upon pictures to reinforce story meaning. As a text was being read, they, for the most part, would study the details of the corresponding illustrations. These pictures prompted recall of story sequence, supporting details and literary language whenever they retold a tale.

Alice and Chris liked to look through the stack of new books prior to their reading, and in doing so, would occasionally predict what a book was about by examining its illustrations.

Chris, the only one to read books on his own, also used pictures to self-correct. Whenever he had accidentally skipped a page while listening to a tape-recorded story, he would turn back to the correct page when he realized that the picture and the story did not match.

For these children, illustrations that closely matched the text of a story were vital.

### Summarizing and Retelling Stories

During our first meeting, Alice gladly told me the story of Little Red Riding Hood, doing so fluently and expressively, and using literary language. The illustrations were used as a guide to this retelling.

For the first half of the year that we read together, though, Alice was not interested in describing favorite parts of stories, summarizing, or retelling. Sometimes, when asked about a particular story, she would smile mischievously and remark, "I can't remember." Other times, she would ably summarize the book and communicate her complete understanding of the story and its intricacies in one succinct statement. This reluctance to discuss books seemed to be the result of two things: first, Alice loved to tease and

"fool me" about what she knew; and second, she was usually most eager to hear the new set of books that had been brought and was not keen to discuss those she had already heard.

During the second half of the year, as she began to attend to print, Alice became more enthusiastic about retelling whole stories. She loved to read simple books by memory, and to retell more difficult, complex stories, as if reading, using the illustrations as her guide.

When I first met with James, he told me about his favorite book, Timmy and the Whales, describing what was happening in each picture, but not completely communicating what the story was about.

For the first few times we met, he was not keen to discuss the books he had heard, sometimes shrugging his shoulders and commenting, 'I can't remember.' As he felt more comfortable with me, and as his enthusiasm for hearing more and more books grew, he began to give his opinions of stories and to describe favorite parts.

After the first couple of months, James began to offer short succinct summaries of favorite books, communicating his understanding of their stories, including their subtleties. Still later, he showed more of an interest in retelling complete stories, using the pictures as a guide. Although, he had heard these books only one to three times each, his telling of them was full of language and detail from the text. Towards the end of the year, as James retold stories that he knew well, he began to perceive himself as a reader.

During our first meeting, Chris showed me his favorite book from his collection, Bambi. When I asked if he would tell me about this book, he said that he would rather not, and requested that I read it to him.

From the start, Chris was always willing to identify favorite books and to describe memorable parts. He was not eager, for the first few months, to

summarize or retell stories, preferring to get on with hearing the new books rather than discussing the ones he already knew. His mother reported, though, that he often "read" to his younger brother, retelling the stories using the pictures as a guide.

Over the next few months, although he listened to books just one to three times each, Chris began to occasionally summarize and retell complete stories, "reading" the pictures. His storytelling was fluent and expressive, and often incorporated details and language from the text.

While Alice, James and Chris could all capably communicate their understanding of story meaning by describing favorite parts and summarizing and retelling stories, they often preferred to hear more stories rather than discussing the ones they had already heard and knew well. As they desired to read and began to perceive themselves as beginning readers, they all showed more of an interest in retelling stories, as if reading. They did this with great fluency and expression. The inference can be drawn that even at age five, comprehension can be quite sophisticated as manifested in these children's abilities to retell, to add detail and to understand humor.

### Attention to Print in Books

For the first half of the year Alice examined the pictures of most books while listening to their stories. Occasionally she would pretend to read, moving her hand along the print from top-to-bottom and left-to-right. Sometimes, with her parents, she liked to play the game of counting the number of letters and words in the title of a book.

During the last six or seven months, while she still frequently studied the pictures, Alice's attention to print in books grew. She began to search for frequently repeated and distinct words throughout a book using initial

letters and word-shape as clues. She also began to request big books and simple library books that she could memorize and read herself. As she read these, she would follow the print. While to begin with, the words she was pointing at did not exactly match what she was reciting, she later came to recognize some specific words within the context of these books. Later still, she could sometimes read these words out of context as well. Alice's success with beginning reading prompted her to request more and more books for her independent reading.

While James and Chris would sometimes pretend to read by following the print with their hand, and also played the game of counting letters and words, for most of the year their attention was predominantly upon the pictures of books. Later in the year both boys began to show some interest in hunting for interesting and frequently repeated words within the text of a story. They would search for these words using their shape and initial letters as clues, and sometimes by recalling where the word was located on the page. These boys also liked to read big books. They readily memorized the rhymes and songs these books contained and would "read" them perfectly, at times pointing to some specific words in context. They were both very pleased to be able to read these books on their own.

Although they did not read together, there were several similar print awarenesses exhibited by all three children: they became aware of how print worked and would sometimes pretend to read; they learned to recognize that letters made up words; they memorized and "read" big books and became able to recognize some words in context; and they enjoyed searching for familiar words within the text of a book. The extent to which these behaviors occurred varied with each child, as did the time of the year of their occurrence.

## Key Words and Language Experience Stories

Alice requested key words right from the start of our year together. Her first ten words were recorded prior to an extensive awareness of letters and were recognized instantly and read proudly from one week to the next. When these words were first recorded into a booklet, she had difficulty reading a few as some clues she had relied upon on the cards (such as smudge marks, thickness and style of print) were gone. By the following week, though, she could read her first key word booklet fluently. After that, there was no stumbling, and she accumulated another twenty-four words which she could read instantly by sight. These first words that were read were likely far more meaningful, and certainly more difficult than those found in any beginning basal readers: sun, star, trapeze, clown, rainbow, fairy, doll, angel, dog, princess, school, bus, pumpkin, married, James, trick-or-treat, apple, climbing trees, love, Cabbage Patch Kids, birthday, peace, sit-ups, wrestle, Easter eggs, Disneyland, surprise, valentines, dance, mother, leprechaun, puppet, Holly Arntzen, and Cheryl.

Alice was thrilled to be reading and learning about print, and loved to copy her words onto a chalkboard, and into homemade booklets and an A-B-C book. Through these key words and direct instruction at kindergarten, she learned to recognize all letters of the alphabet and their sounds.

Later in the year, Alice began to spot her key words within the text of books that she was listening to.

James did not initially choose to have his key words recorded, preferring to hear the storybooks. Once these books had been read, he was usually eager to get back to his play.

After a couple of months, though, he began to request key words. His first ten words were learned readily and recognized instantly on the cards and when recorded into his first key word booklet.

The second set of words took a little longer to accumulate. James discovered that Alice had more words than he, and became anxious to get more words in order to catch up to her. I sometimes failed to select his true key words as indicated by his inability to recognize some from one week to the next. He was determined to keep all the words, though, and noticed if any cards were removed from his package. He especially found it difficult to recall some words when a series of them began with the same letter and were of similar length. As he became more frustrated when he could not read these unimportant words, I finally convinced him to keep those he knew well and to discard the others. Steady progress with key words resumed.

By the end of the year, James proudly and confidently read twenty-two words by sight. As with Alice, these first words were far more meaningful and challenging than those found in beginning basal texts: walkie-talkie, bike riding, slide, forest, Ryan, James, roly-polly, treehouse, Hallowe'en cat, work, swimming, skiing, school, play, helmet, love, valentine, Larry, snow, sun, friend, and Grandma.

James was learning about letters and their sounds at kindergarten and liked to dictate those letters that he heard in his key words as I recorded them.

Chris was not generally interested in key words for the first half of the year, preferring to hear more storybooks instead. The few that he did have recorded were recognized by sight but seemed unimportant to him at the time as he chose not to reread them and misplaced the cards.



During the latter five months, though, he became more interested in key words, and quite regularly requested to have one recorded. The eleven that he accumulated were read proudly by sight: Yanya, park, bus, snowman, bike, car, ghost, witch, mom, swings, and truck.

Like James, Chris was learning about letters at school and liked to dictate those he heard in his key words.

Alice, James and Chris each learned to read their personally meaningful key words fluently by sight. Their interest in having these words recorded occurred at different times, and their accumulation occurred at different rates. All three children showed an interest in letters as a result of key words and instruction at kindergarten. Again, the extent to which this interest was shown varied in frequency and time of the year.

None of these children were generally interested in having their language experience stories recorded at this time in their development. While they were pleased to see their words recorded in print, the one story that each dictated was not reread, and no further requests were made for the recording of such stories.

### Other Print Developments

As with the attention to print in books, the extent to which each child exhibited other print developments varied.

James was given a scrapbook for his fifth birthday which he proceeded to fill with magazine pictures, requesting that captions be printed underneath each. He enjoyed looking at these pictures, recalling what he had dictated, and "reading" the print. At kindergarten, the children made booklets for each letter of the alphabet; these booklets contained pictures of

objects beginning with a particular letter and a corresponding label. James was thrilled to read these, and occasionally made others like them at home.

Chris also enjoyed "reading" the booklets he made at school, and would make similar ones at home, pleased to be doing "homework" like the older children.

In addition to making such alphabet booklets, Alice also frequently made books filled with detailed and colorful drawings. These drawings illustrated key words that she had printed, and other words whose spellings were dictated by her parents. Alice loved to draw and print on her chalkboard, too, and later in the year, began to spell some meaningful and simple words such as James, Mom, Dad, Alice and fox. As well, she enjoyed printing her key words and other interesting words into an A-B-C booklet.

All three children enjoyed making booklets and "reading" them. They each made some booklets filled with pictures of words beginning with particular letter sounds, labelling each picture. Alice also used her key words extensively, printing them into booklets and onto a chalkboard. The extent to which they did their own printing and spelling varied, as did the frequency and time of the year that such print behaviors occurred.

### Perception Of Selves As Readers

"I'm a pretty good reader. I like to read the books by myself. I like to pick new words, learn to read them and make them into books. I like learning how to write words."

Alice, June 1985

"I'm starting to read since you came here... I like the books and the (key) words. I learned a bit, quite a bit. I can read some things, not everything, just books I know good."

James, May 1985

"I can read some words from those big books and those cards (key words). Reading is reading the words and the pictures. With books I listen to the tape and look at the pictures. I don't look at the words. One day I'll know how to read those words."

Chris, June 1985

All three children viewed themselves as successful beginning readers. This natural learning model allowed them the opportunity to attend to print as they were ready and interested, and to learn from materials that were meaningful. There was no element of competition (other than James' self-imposed race to get the same number of key words as Alice), no pressure to achieve standards established by each other or curriculum makers. Free to learn as they were ready and interested, there was a strong sense of enjoyment and success. While each of these children realized that they had much more to learn about print, they did not feel they had failed. Instead, they were confident that they would successfully achieve these skills in the future.

Three other observations must be included as they have important implications for the learning of print.

### Readiness for New Learning

While James and Chris did not mind visiting for a couple of minutes prior to our reading sessions each week, they were usually keen to get to work and hear the new stories.

Alice, on the other hand, demanded a social time prior to book time. She loved to show her pictures, toys, and new dance steps. If it was attempted to begin with books rather than allowing her this social, "breathing out" time, she would refuse to discuss previous books and would be unfocused while listening to new ones.

Alice required a "breathing out" time prior to book time, while James and Chris did not.

### Effect Of Competition And Extrinsic Reward

Two incidents demonstrated the disabling effect of competition and extrinsic reward upon learning.

When James became aware that Alice had more key words than he, he pressured himself to catch up. His focus became the number of words he had rather than whether he could read them or not. He struggled with some words that I had mistakenly chosen as meaningful to him, unable to read them fluently by sight. He refused to have those he could not read removed from his package. He became frustrated with not remembering these few words, and was finally convinced to keep those he could read well and to discard the others. Steady progress with key words resumed.

Another example, outside of the study, illustrates the inhibiting effect of reward. The appeal of reward drew James into the book club in Grade One. For every ten primers read a trinket prize could be won; for every one hundred, a larger prize was awarded. James read one hundred and forty of these primers. Not only did he not bring home library books all the while this competition was on, but when it was over, he did not read out of school at all for a couple of months. Neither Alice nor Chris took part in this book club, preferring to read library books.

### Parental Involvement

James, Chris and Alice had each had many opportunities to view their parents writing letters and lists, and reading a variety of materials for information and pleasure. As well, storytime was a frequent and regular

event in each home, and reading was regarded by these children as a highly pleasurable and desirable activity.

The intent of this study was to extend these happy book experiences and to respond to each child's attention and interest in story meaning and print. My influence was limited to ninety minutes per week. The parents were able to spend much more time reading with their children, discussing stories and responding to their interests.

Parental involvement for these three children was vital. Their modeling and their enthusiasm for reading good storybooks with their children helped to develop each child's positive attitude towards reading, ability to take meaning from stories, and beginning ability to read print.

The literature summarized in chapter one support the responses of Alice, Chris and James and have allowed the following conclusions to be drawn:

1. When read to frequently and regularly from organic texts, children are likely to learn to love books and to view reading as a desirable activity.
2. When significant adults are observed reading frequently and gaining information and pleasure from print, children are likely to view reading as a desirable activity.
3. It appears that it is not natural to discuss, summarize and answer questions about all that is read. A child who has learned to love books has likely learned to take meaning from them and will communicate his enthusiasm and understanding spontaneously. A natural response may be to request more stories.
4. Once five-year-old children have discovered the plentiful assortment of good books, they may choose to hear more stories rather than the same ones repeatedly.

5. Independence with books varies. Some children will willingly study and listen to books on their own, while others prefer to be cuddled and read to and allowed to ask questions throughout.
6. Every child's reading preferences are unique. A book loved by one may be rejected by another.
7. Good illustrations that support the text of a book appear to be vital. They reinforce story meaning, and provide clues for recall of story sequence, supporting details and literary language as the child "reads" independently. They also help the child to predict story meaning in advance of the reading of a book.
8. Children who have had many opportunities to hear good books are often held spellbound by story meaning. They appear able to empathize, summarize, understand intricacies and retell stories fluently and expressively -- and this occurs after just one or two readings and without the prompting of low-level recall-type questions in advance of these higher-level responses.
9. As children desire to read and/or perceive themselves as beginning readers, they retell favorite stories fluently and expressively, often incorporating literary language into their narratives.
10. In addition to the good, imaginative tales they have loved to hear, beginning readers may also choose books containing a more simple and predictable text that they can memorize and read by themselves.
11. At first, children are likely to attend to illustrations while listening to stories. Later, after many opportunities to hear and study good books, they will begin to attend to the print, a little at first (eg. pretending to read, hunting for interesting words heard), then more and more (eg. noticing words in context, "reading" simple books by memory), taking over the reading of books as they are able.
12. Children can learn to read their own key words fluently. These words are likely to be far more meaningful and difficult than those found in beginning basal texts.
13. Not all clues that children use when learning to read are print ones.

14. Experiences such as having key words recorded, observing others writing lists and notes, and reading stories and signs in their environment often motivates children to print their own words.

15. Language experience stories may not be appropriate for children at the key word stage of development. They may be more appropriate after children have had their key phrases and sentences recorded.

16. When children are allowed to learn as they are ready and interested, in a supportive, print-rich environment that is free from competition, they are more likely to perceive themselves as successful learners. Even knowing there is much more to learn, they do not feel that they have failed -- rather, they feel confident that they will successfully and competently achieve these goals in the future.

17. Competition and extrinsic rewards can be debilitating and inhibit learning.

18. Some children require a social, "breathing out" time before they are ready to take in new information.

19. Parental involvement seems important to the development of positive attitudes of children towards print and to their acquisition of print. When children view their parents reading for information and pleasure, they are likely to perceive reading as a highly desirable activity. When parents read with their children from good storybooks, their children will likely learn to love books, to take meaning from stories, and to develop a beginning ability to read print.

20. Every child is unique. The acquisition of print occurs at different rates and in different sequences for each child. To preserve that uniqueness, a reading program must be designed upon the needs of each individual, rather than upon the predetermined sequence developed by curriculum makers and publishers.

If our goal in schools is to produce functional readers, we are doing an adequate job. But if our goal is to produce those voracious readers that love books, that read outside of school and regard it as a highly desirable activity,

it may be in our best interest to reexamine beginning reading instruction as it currently exists in most classrooms.

It may be very much better to allow the children in our classrooms to learn about print from language that is meaningful and from books that fascinate them. Such an approach might insure their desire to read and write if they are surrounded by print and models that communicated that reading and writing are immensely pleasurable and meaningful activities. How much happier a learning environment could be provided if children were permitted to progress in their own time and in their own way without pressure and competition. Such an environment would honor each child's successes, providing them with the necessary support to take the risks to tackle new and more challenging learnings.

The observations of Alice, James and Chris support the findings of many leading authorities in the fields of beginning reading and child development confirming that children do learn to read and write, and love it, when permitted to learn about print in such a rich and supportive environment.



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