

# CELLnotes

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## Children's active participation in reading and storytelling can enhance early literacy learning

Carol M. Trivette and Carl J. Dunst

### What is the practice?

Actively involving a young child in reading opportunities can be accomplished by asking and answering questions about a story being read or told. Active participation in "story time" begins with the child selecting a story of particular interest to him or her. This participation continues as the child answers different "Wh\_" questions asked by the adult where the child's response is used by the adult to prompt elaborations and expansions.

During this reading time, the adult and the child switch roles so that the child learns to become the storyteller with the help of the adult who is both a listener and questioner. This interactive book reading or story telling style occurs before, during, and after book read-



ing or story telling. These interactive techniques can be used with one child or several children and need not last more than 10 or 15 minutes at a time.

### What does the research tell us?

Three types of early reading practices were the focus of a research synthesis conducted by Carol M. Trivette and Carl J. Dunst. These investigators examined 13 studies that had been reviewed in three separate *What Works Clearinghouse* research syntheses to determine the characteristics of the interventions that were

most important in helping young children learn early skills for reading and writing.

Results from this synthesis showed that active reading experiences for young children were more likely to result in positive benefits for children in two areas: linguistic processes, which include listening comprehension, phonological awareness, and oral language; and print-related processes including alphabet knowledge, print awareness, written language, and text comprehension. The strategies for promoting active participation included elaboration, expansion, and use of "Wh\_" questions to broaden both print and linguistic concepts. The results showed that these reading strategies were most effective with older children (3 and 4 years of age) though younger children also benefited from these experiences. Shorter (15 minutes or less) reading episodes were more effective than longer sessions.



This *Cellnotes* summarizes findings reported in Trivette, C. M., & Dunst, C. J. (2007). Relative effectiveness of dialogic, interactive, and shared reading interventions, *Cellreviews* 1(2), 1-12.

# Acting on the Evidence

Findings from the synthesis of reading interventions by Trivette and Dunst clearly provide evidence about the types of experiences that help young children develop early literacy skills. The key to successful practice is involving children as active participants in the reading session. Parents can use active reading techniques with their children as can teachers in a childcare or preschool classroom. The literacy experiences do not have to take much time. In fact, keeping the activities short will make it easier for young children. Take a look at two early literacy learning opportunities that you might want to try.

## Bedtime Story Telling

Bedtime is 3-year-old Juan's favorite time for story telling, and he likes it best when his father, whom he calls by the Spanish endearment "Papi," tells the story. While sometimes the stories are about people in the family that Juan has never known, Juan's favorite stories are silly tales about his mother, father, or big sister. Like most children, Juan likes to hear the same story over and over. He will often ask Papi to tell the story about the time his sister became an Easter egg. With Juan's help, Papi turns that brief event into a full-length story.

Papi starts by asking Juan what he remembers about the story. Juan giggles and says María got covered with all the different colors. Papi laughs too and says, "Let's start at the beginning of the story. Do you remember the first thing that we had to do that day?" Juan replies, "We went to the store to get some dye." His father asks him who went to the store and which store they went to. When Juan answers these questions, his father asks him what happened next, and Juan proceeds to talk about coming home, cooking the eggs, and mixing up the dye. Throughout this narration, Papi asks him questions to get more information or elaborates on the things Juan is saying.

As they progress through the story and reach the exciting finish, Papi asks Juan what happens, but Juan insists, "No! You tell the funny part, Papi!"

So his father finishes the story. He reminds Juan that he and his sister were sitting at a table out in the yard with all the egg dye and eggs sitting on top. Accidentally, Juan's mother let their dog Pedro out of the house. Pedro bounded over to see the children. He went under the table and stood up, knocking over María and the table and spilling the eggs and dye all over her. Juan breaks out laughing. His dad asks him why he is laughing and Juan says that when María stood up she had many colors on her. They both laugh, and Juan says, "María looked like a giant Easter egg!"

## Supporting Reading with a Child with Disabilities

Preschool and childcare teachers can help young children develop early literacy skills by letting them be active participants in the reading session. These reading experiences can be effective with a small group of children including a child with a disability.

Lisa, a child care teacher, reads stories to small groups of children three or four times a day. Just now she sees three children standing in the book nook. She approaches them and asks if they would like to read a story. Ryan, Felicia, and Chyo all respond by saying, "Yes." Lisa asks the children to decide which book they would like to read. After they select one, everyone begins to find a place to settle into. Lisa knows that Ryan has some visual problems, so she guides him to a spot where he'll be able to sit and see the book most easily

The children select a book about trains, a new book they've never heard read before. Lisa shows them the front cover, reads the title *Trains, Trains, and More Trains*, and asks the children what they know about trains. Felicia says, "Trains are loud and hurt my ears." Ryan says, "Trains carry cars on them," and laughs. Lisa follows Ryan's lead and asks him what is so funny. He responds, "Cars can drive on roads." Lisa explains that this is true, "but when a lot of cars ride on a train, you can get lots of them from one place to another quicker." Chyo says that she wants to ride on a train and the other two children chime in, "Me too!"

Lisa begins to read the story, which is about a little girl,

Danielle. All Danielle has to do is make a wish and she gets to ride on different kinds of trains—a freight train that hauls coal, cars, and food; a passenger train for people living in a city and for people taking long trips; and even an old-timey train. As Lisa reads the story, she asks questions, like the following, that promote the children's engagement with the story:

"Here's a picture of Danielle. Tell me something you notice about Danielle."

"This is the word *train*. What letter does the word *train* start with?"

"Can each of you show me another "t" on this page?"

"Why do you think Danielle wants to go visit the old-timey train in this picture?"

"What's a difference between the old-timey train and the passenger train that takes

people to work every day?"

"What makes the trains go down the tracks?"

Lisa is very careful that each child has the time he or she needs to respond to these types of questions. She follows up their answers by providing more information and asking additional questions. Each child is allowed to answer questions and interact with the printed material in ways that are appropriate for his or her skill level.

After about 10 minutes, Chyo and Ryan become restless, so Lisa finishes up the story and the children move on to another activity. She knows that she will be reading with them again later in the day.