

Teach Your Child to Read

By Judy Sumner

There are many parents who are dissatisfied with the quality of the education which their children are receiving in public schools, but they hesitate to begin home teaching because they worry that they are lacking the necessary knowledge. Such fears are groundless. Extensive comparisons of the achievement of students taught by different methods show that home teaching is often superior to the type of activity-based style of education that is, unfortunately, so common in classrooms today.

Although my own professional background is in nursing (RN, BScN, MScN) rather than education, I have successfully taught my own children to read, write, spell and do arithmetic. In addition, I have taught reading and spelling to several neighbourhood children aged eight to ten years. My experience may be helpful to other parents with young children.

Education research has shown that there are tried and true methods that will help parents who wish to save their children from a lifetime of illiteracy. Learning to read and write is the most fundamental aspect of education, since progress in all other subjects depends on these skills.

If possible, it is best to begin teaching children to read before they start grade one. It is more difficult to teach reading successfully after habits such as guessing at words and/or recognizing words as wholes rather than as sequences of letters are entrenched by the misguided educational practices of most public schools. An excellent guide to teaching beginning readers is "Recipe for Reading" by Nina Traub. Other good introductions are found in: "Alpha-Phonics", "Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons", "Professor Phonics Gives Sound Advice", and "Sing, Spell, Read and Write".

Teaching methods outlined in these books are based on scientific evidence that the best way to teach children to read is to begin by teaching them the names of the letters of the alphabet, the sounds they represent and the way that groups of letters can be combined to produce additional sounds. This knowledge must be complemented by extensive practice in reading simple prose. Good phonics-based readers include: "Recipe for Reading Storybooks", "Primary Phonics Storybooks", and "Open Court Reading and Writing". It is also important to read and enjoy interesting stories with children so that they will wish to learn to read for themselves. Useful guides to helping children pay attention to details of stories are: "Test Lessons in Primary Reading" and "Standard Test Lessons in Reading".

Children who have reached grade four or higher but have not learned to read fluently are more difficult to teach than younger children. Such children may have a fairly extensive "sight" vocabulary (they may recognize a number of words by their overall shape, even though they do not know the sounds of the letters and cannot sound out an unfamiliar word) and they may have learned to guess at, or skip over, unknown words. A way of rescuing such children is to teach them the phonograms (letters and letter combinations such as "igh", "oi" and "au") and then teach them to sound out nonsense syllables such as "das", "frize", "fute", "nist", etc. It does not seem possible to teach children to sound out words which they can already recognize by sight. A good guide for teaching the older illiterate student is "Spellbound: Phonic Reading and Spelling". A phonics-based guide to teaching spelling in the elementary grades is: "McDougal Littell Spelling", which instructs students in the rules of English spelling and provides words at the appropriate grade level to demonstrate these spelling patterns.

Finally, for parents who wish to have an objective assessment of their child's spelling ability, I recommend the "Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale".