How reading books fosters language development around the world

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Abstract

Research on literacy development is increasingly making clear the centrality of oral language to long-term literacy development, with longitudinal studies revealing the continuity between language ability in the preschool years and later reading. The language competencies that literacy builds upon begin to emerge as soon as children begin acquiring language; thus, the period between birth and age three also is important to later literacy. Book reading consistently has been found to have the power to create interactional contexts that nourish language development. Researchers, pediatricians, and librarians have taken notice of the potential for interventions designed to encourage parents to read with their children. This article reviews research on the connections between language and later reading, environmental factors associated with language learning, and interventions developed in varied countries for encouraging book use by parents of young children.
McDonald, A. Developmental and cognitive psychologists probe the mysteries of language development and unravel the complexities of the reading process. Their findings have made increasingly apparent that particular kinds of experiences can play a special role in advancing language growth. Book reading provides an ideal setting for fostering language while at the same time building strong affective bonds between parents and children. Book reading also provides recurrent occasions for parents to help their infants and toddlers learn to regulate their attention and responses to stimuli.