

Parent-child Reading is Fun

for Parents of Children Aged 6 to 9



Curriculum Development Institute
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PREFACE

Reading is the foundation for learning. Early childhood is a critical stage in the developmental process. The development of a good reading habit in the early years can enhance language learning and knowledge acquisition. During this important period, parents should seize the opportunity to develop their children's interest and competence in reading so as to help them prepare for life-long learning.



The Education Bureau has always been keen to promote a 'Reading to Learn' culture, and schools have been working hard on it. In this respect, teacher guidance and home-school co-operation are equally important. In fact, the development of a child is a concerted effort. The home is the first learning environment for young children and parents are their first teachers. It is the best place to begin the cultivation of reading habits.

By reading together with their children, parents provide the opportunity for children to enjoy themselves and learn at the same time. Communication is enhanced through fun and sharing of feelings. Family members thus learn and grow together.

A recent international study, 'The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006', highlighted three factors which affected students' reading literacy, including family reading activities, parental attitude towards reading and family educational resources. Based on the findings of the study, we have prepared this series of booklets to introduce parent-child reading and make suggestions on the related activities.

We hope this series of booklets can help parents nurture their children based on their developmental characteristics and encourage them to have active collaboration with schools to promote reading. This facilitates children to enjoy reading and gradually move from parent-child reading to independent reading. Eventually, children will develop the ability of 'reading to learn' in order to construct knowledge and broaden their horizons to make good preparation for life-long learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The different contexts of diversified reading activities help the acquisition of a large amount of words and phrases. Children can build and expand their own bank of vocabulary based on this, which in turn becomes a good foundation for reading. If children have 'learned to read', they are more likely to read independently. This leads on to the stage of 'Reading to Learn' in which children gradually develop into autonomous learners.

In 2001 and 2006, Hong Kong participated in 'The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study', or PIRLS for short. In PIRLS 2006, the 9 to 10 year-old Primary 4 students of Hong Kong ranked second in reading abilities among 45 participating countries and regions. The PIRLS findings showed that students' reading literacy was linked, to a very large extent, to the frequency and quality of family reading activities. In general, most primary schools have put an emphasis on school-based reading programmes. Students are provided with reading experiences to learn and apply effective strategies that are conducive to enhancing reading abilities. Parents should try their best to co-operate with schools in promoting reading and to create a favourable reading environment at home, which facilitate children to experience the pleasure of reading and have a love for it. This booklet aims at giving ideas on family reading activities and how they can be conducted, together with some tips for parents' reference.

Reading is fundamental to learning and if children are well equipped in this respect, they can become more adaptable in this modern world. So, let us work together to encourage children's dreams and creativity through reading.



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1. Why children need to read?

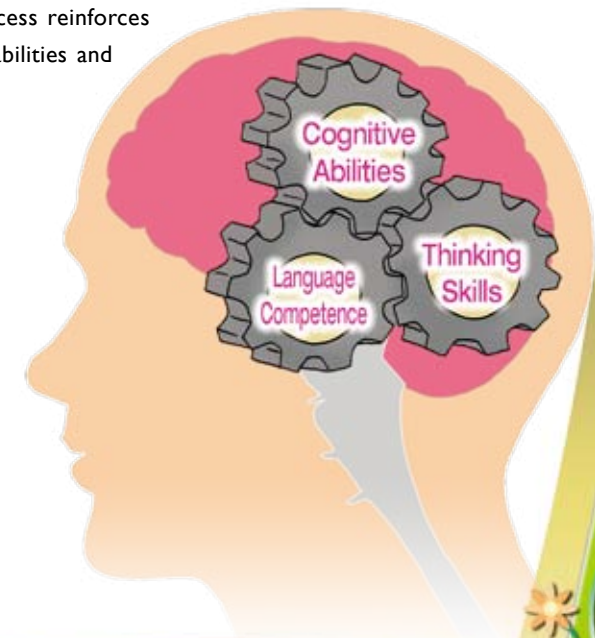
Children are active, curious and eager to learn. Reading books with healthy contents can help them acquire knowledge, develop thinking skills, develop positive values and attitudes. It is important to nurture good reading habits and positive attitudes towards reading in the early years.

Developing cognitive abilities

During the reading process, it is common to apply different skills such as understanding, induction, analysis, deduction and imagination, which facilitate the development of children's cognitive abilities. Thus children who read regularly have faster brain development and will be more mature in their thinking.

Enhancing language competence

Reading can help children acquire more vocabulary, knowledge as well as written language patterns. As children read, they need to interpret and deduce meanings from the words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and articles constantly. Such process reinforces and enhances their reading abilities and language competence.



Nurturing thinking skills

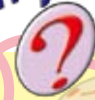
The process of reading itself involves the use of skills like deduction, induction, critical thinking and problem solving, which are very helpful in the development of children's thinking skills.

Developing positive values

Through classic stories and literary masterpieces, children learn from the wisdom of the past and cultivate positive values. For instance, tales of adventures and heroism and stories about how other children overcome adversity, can encourage children to face difficulties and failures bravely. Some traditional Chinese folktales encourage children to serve parents with filial piety and their siblings with friendliness and respect.



Myth



Is it really necessary for parents to take part in school reading activities?

According to the findings of PIRLS 2006, more frequent home-school co-operation led to better student's reading performance. If parents can serve as 'Story Pop' or 'Story Mom' in schools regularly, they can help promote reading by creating a favourable atmosphere. In addition to nurturing children's reading interest and habits, parents can convey the message that they have high regard for reading and great concern for children. As a result, parent-child relationship is enhanced.



7. What kinds of reading activities children need?

The home is the first place for building up children's reading habits and attitudes. Parents should try their best to spend time (at least once a week according to the findings of PIRLS 2006) with children on interesting and appropriate reading activities. These activities include telling stories, reading signboards or product labels, reading aloud, talking about books and reading materials, visiting bookshops and libraries, independent reading, and watching TV programmes and videos with sub-titles. Details of the reading activities are as follows:

Telling stories

For young children, parents may start telling stories to arouse their interest and help them get used to reading on their own. When telling a story, remember to have eye contact with children. It is also important to vary your tone, speed and voice accordingly. Appropriate use of facial expressions, actions and props can make story-telling more attractive.

Reading aloud

Parents may read books together with children. For example, take turns to read aloud a story or enact the roles of the story.



Talking about books after reading

Parents may discuss and share with children after reading. Talking about books not only make reading more fun, but also stimulate children's thinking and enhance their speaking and communication skills. For example:

- For younger children, ask them to re-tell the story briefly, name the main characters or tell where, when and how the story takes place.
- For older children, ask them higher-order questions, such as choosing their favourite characters and scenes, the characters they like to act, or suggesting different endings for the stories.
- Share and discuss the content of the story with children. For instance, after reading the famous Chinese tale of 'Szema Kwong Breaking the Giant Earthen Tank to Rescue His Friend', prompt them to think whether they agree with the character's decision or whether they have other alternatives in rescuing the victim.

During these activities, parents should not insist on their points of view. As long as children's views are reasonable, respect them and give them room for independent thinking.



Reading Internet materials and sharing

There are plenty of different reading materials for children on the Internet. Parents may read these materials together with their children and guide them to select those healthy and educational websites (see Appendix), to help develop good reading habits as well as proper attitudes in surfing the Internet. Parents should also establish rules for using the Internet with children, including things related to the time-table, websites and behaviour for surfing, etc.

Watching TV programmes with sub-titles

Watching TV programmes appropriately can also help develop reading skills. Parents should encourage children to read sub-titles for enriching vocabulary and enhancing sensitivity in written language. Healthy TV programmes, such as animations and shows for children, news reports and informative programmes can enrich their general knowledge. Reading materials related to the programmes after viewing is also a good extension activity. Hence, children should be allowed to watch TV but there should be a limit to the time spent.



The PIRLS 2006 found that students who spent 1 to 3 hours each day on watching TV programmes (including news reports) had the best reading performance in Hong Kong.



Visiting bookshops and libraries

Continuous exposure to different reading materials will arouse children's reading interest. The PIRLS 2006 findings showed that those Hong Kong students with the best performance in reading visited and borrowed books from libraries every week. Therefore, parents are advised to take children to bookshops or libraries at least once a week.

Forming reading groups

Parents of the same school or district can organise regular reading activities, such as reading parties or reading clubs for children. In this way, children not only read themselves, but also share their pleasure in reading.





How can children make good use of information from the Internet?

To go in line with the reading programmes in schools, parents can help children access the Internet at home, schools or other places (e.g. public libraries) so that they can browse educational websites to improve their reading literacy.

Although many children spend a lot of time on reading website materials, books cannot be totally replaced.



The PIRLS 2006 found that students who had the best reading performance used the computer at home once or twice a week but it was no more than an hour each time.

If children spend a lot of time on computer or video games, they will have less time for reading. Parents should ensure that children spend adequate time on leisure reading.

How do we help children develop confidence in reading?

If children are good at reading, parents should encourage them by praising them verbally or allowing them to buy their favourite books as incentives.

When children have confidence in reading, they will read more than their peers and are more ready to accept new challenges like reading books on new topics or those with more difficult contents and fewer pictures. Their reading skills can be further enhanced.



3. What should children read?

Parents should let children choose their own books for leisure reading and expose them to diversified reading experiences and text-types. Reading materials with healthy contents and correct language are all suitable for children.

Reading stories and fiction is undoubtedly beneficial for fostering competence in reading literary texts. At the same time, reading magazines for children, geographic journals, magazines on sports, music and art periodicals, science series, product manuals and catalogues help enhance children's ability in reading informative texts too. Reading both text-types is equally important and a balanced exposure should be provided.

The following are some reading materials suitable for children:

Fables, fiction, stories

'Fables' are short invented stories with lively contents to arouse reading interest. These stories help children understand moral lessons.

'Stories' and 'fiction' contain rich twists and turns in their plots. They reflect life experiences and develop children's imagination and thinking skills.

Biographies, travel books

'Biographies' record stories and deeds of famous people and can serve as good examples for young children.

'Travel books' widen children's knowledge and experiences of scenery, heritage, customs and cultures in places around the world.



Poetry, folk songs

Poetry and folk songs are refined and concisely written literary works characterized by rhymes and rhythms which are easy to remember. They facilitate children's literary appreciation when reading aloud.

Science series

Science writings attempt to explain basic scientific principles and concepts. These books provide simple and interesting experiments and challenging problems which stimulate children's curiosity as well as develop their interest and inquiry about science.

Newspapers

Newspapers are reading materials related to our daily lives. Newspapers of a high standard both in contents and language expose children to current affairs and international news as well as latest information of various kinds.

Newspapers which meet the above criteria are good choices for children.

Newspapers of the day are also available in school and public libraries.



Myths



Can children choose their own books?

Allowing choices in favourite reading materials not only can help nurture children's reading interest, but also facilitate parents to have a better understanding of their children's thoughts and likes.

If children show preference only for a particular type of book, parents should guide them to read a larger variety of reading materials to widen their horizons.

The PIRLS 2006 found that children enjoyed reading more and had outstanding performance in reading if they had their own choice in leisure books.





சாத்தியம்

Can children read comics and leisure magazines?

Comics and leisure magazines do, in general, stimulate children’s reading interest. They also provide certain social experiences and topics for conversation with parents and schoolmates. Children should not be discouraged from reading such materials, but parents need to be sensitive about them and make sure that the contents are healthy and the language is correct. Parent-child discussion should be held to convey the correct messages if necessary.



4. How can we create a good reading environment?

To help children develop good reading habits and attitudes, parents need to engage them regularly in family reading activities and create a desirable reading environment at home. Hence, it is essential to have adequate reading resources at home.

Creating a rich reading environment

Children should have books of their own (other than textbooks and supplementary exercises)

Children can buy the books they like, or receive them as gifts from parents. The number of these books they own need not be huge, but they can gradually build up their collections. Building up a book collection arouses children’s reading interest and helps them develop positive reading habits and attitudes.



The PIRLS 2006 found that the more books children had at home, the better were their reading abilities.

An adequate collection of books at home

Children are more prone to developing a reading interest and good reading habits if there is a rich collection of books at home and they constantly have access to a variety of books. If there are insufficient books at home, an alternative is to visit the library frequently.



Providing a favourable reading environment

A desk specifically for study

The PIRLS 2006 found that if a child had a desk of his or her own, his/her concentration on reading and learning would improve. The best way to create a reading environment is to provide every child with a desk specifically for reading and study. A simple desk will serve the purpose.



A quiet environment

Provide a quiet reading environment for children. Turn off the television or radio for just two hours each evening, or turn the volume down so that children can read and learn with better concentration.

Computers

Plenty of reading materials are available on the Internet. A home computer not only helps children learn the application, it also broadens their scope of reading and develops independent learning abilities.

5. How can we help children nurture a reading habit?

Setting good examples, creating a favourable environment and an atmosphere conducive to reading at home and encouraging children's positive reading attitudes are all effective ways for parents to help children develop good reading habits.

Role modelling

Parents are children's role models. If parents want children to have positive reading attitudes, good reading habits, a love for reading, they should set an example for them. They should read in their spare time, enjoy talking about books with others, and make reading part of their daily routines.



The PIRLS 2006 found that there was a positive correlation between parents' reading attitudes and children's reading abilities. The more time parents spent on reading at home, the better was the reading performance of these children.

Encouraging reading

Children of this age group are generally curious. Parents could first encourage them to read books they are particularly interested in and then go on to other reading materials.

To create more fun for reading, parents can engage children in different kinds of reading activities. For instance, they can take turns to read aloud and then read aloud together, encourage children to share views on the characters in the story, the plot and the ending as well as reflections after reading.



Creating space for reading

Children need to have enough space in order to develop good reading habits. Parents can help children draw up a schedule with a balanced time allocation for reading, doing homework, revision and participating in other activities to allow for a whole-person development.



Myths



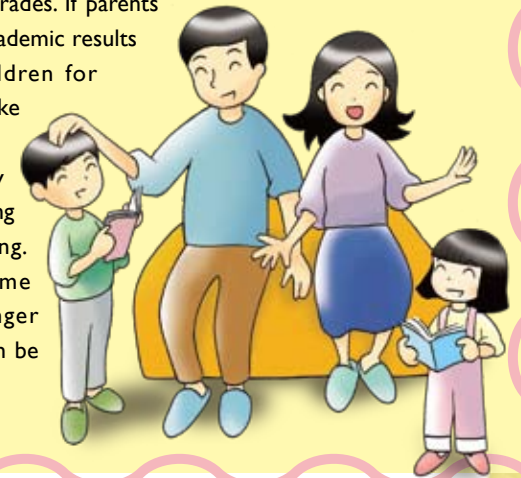
Should parents arrange a large number of extra-curricular activities and tutorials for children after school?

A suitable amount of extra-curricular activities can help children develop their multiple intelligences. However, it is counter-productive to impose too many on them as children may become resistant. The development of children's reading competence will also be affected as there is limited time for leisure reading.

If tutorial lessons are mere repetitions and drills of what was learned at school, they do no good to children's learning. On the contrary, children's learning will be improved if time spent on tutorial lessons is devoted to reading and sharing of thoughts and feelings.

Is academic performance the most important?

Academic learning is indeed important, but do not put too much importance on marks and grades. If parents place undue emphasis on academic results and put pressure on children for academic excellence or make them attend too many after-school remedial classes, they would run the risk of turning children away from learning. Children may even become resentful and can no longer enjoy learning. It would then be difficult to cultivate their life-long learning attitudes.



Appendix: Websites for parents

Award-Winning Chinese and English Books for Children and Young Adults (Book Lists), Education Bureau
<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/reading-to-learn/reading-and-learning-resources/award-books/index.html>



English Campus, Hong Kong Reading City
<https://www.hkedcity.net/english/en/>

Reading to Learn, Education Bureau
<https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/reading-to-learn/index.html>

Recommended Reading, Hong Kong Public Libraries
<https://www.hkpl.gov.hk/en/kids/recommended/reading.html>

Comments and enquiries

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The full text of this booklet is available at:
<http://www.edb.gov.hk/pere>