

## 2018 The Home Literacy Event: Why reading to children is so important.



### Back story

- PIRLS 2017: SA came in 50<sup>th</sup> out of 50 countries that took part in an international reading survey. 319 000 gr 4's, representing all 11 official languages were tested. [www.iea.nl/pirls](http://www.iea.nl/pirls). 80% of our grade 4's failed the test.

- The Link between Childhood Reading Skills and Adult Outcomes: Analysis of a Cohort of British Children: Claire Crawford<sup>2</sup> and Jonathan Cribb<sup>3</sup> © The Institute for Fiscal Studies, April 2015 ISBN: 978-1-909463-85-1

Executive summary :This briefing note builds on previous work by Crawford and Cribb (2013) to

investigate the link between children's reading skills at age 10 and their outcomes as adults using data from the British Cohort Study (a survey of individuals born in one week of April 1970). We find that reading skills are associated with significant increases in gross hourly wages and gross weekly earnings, particularly at older ages (ages 38 and 42). ..... Overall, this note provides suggestive evidence that improving reading skills in childhood may be one route through which earnings potential in adulthood could be increased...

## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO? Read them bedtime stories.

### 1. Routine and emotional well-being

1.1 A bedtime story is a great way to get closure on a busy day, by building a bridge from physical activity and screen time, to sleep time.

1.2 It forms part of routine that creates a sense of security and predictability.

1.3 It is an intimate session in which parent and child go on a fantasy journey

1.4 It is emotionally preparing the child for dreaming: "Stories shape our lives and in some cases help define a person." Prof Gregory Burns, Univ Emory, Atlanta.

1.5 Stories help with the development of morality. The baddies vs the good guys. Stories also develop a sense of empathy: To feel the misery or joy of others. NB: empathy is a right brain function.

1.6. Theory of mind: To put oneself in another's boots. Stories/books seem to have a stronger influence than screens: Christopher Bergland, Psychology Today, 2013-11-23. Interpreting the illustrations, especially facial expressions, is a skill that leads to theory of mind.

1.7 Children identify on more than one level with the protagonist (hero) of the story. "The neural changes that we found associated with physical sensation and movement systems, suggest that Christien Nesar BA(Log) Pret. Hons (French) UNISA. MA (Applied Linguistics) UJ  
[www.christiennesar.com](http://www.christiennesar.com)

reading a story/novel can transport you into the body of the protagonist.” The child becomes the protagonist – which explains why they often need to hear the same story so many times. It is an affirmation of self.

**1.8 Stories give time for processing the day’s events**

**1.9 It offers an opportunity to address fear and anxiety; remember to individualize the child’s emotional needs. Bibliotherapy: using books to heal.**

**1.10 The ‘Happily Ever After’ gives a serotonin boost. Feel-good hormones improve sleep.**

**1.11 Dramatizing subtly enforces the idea of story and fantasy, so they do not bring the dragons or witches to their own reality.**

**1.12 Open ended stories in which there are no real solutions to the main problem, are confusing for little ones.**

**1.13 Nightmarish tales, where bad is not conquered by good, are not recommended at all. Remember children up to the age of about 11, are very rigid about moral codes. Refer to Erikson’s Stages of Emotional Development.**

## **2. Language and vocabulary**

**2.1 A parent can read a child “brighter.” Remember Einsteins’s words: If you want brighter kids, read them stories.**

**2.2 Children who are read to have better language than those who are not read to. Ref: 10 year study at University of London. Also Univ of Cincinnati and Harvard.**

**2.3 Different genres: facts or fiction?**

**2.4 The child’s field of interest is important. Books should be child centred.**

**2.5 Genres can be alternated. For instance: Fun poetry, fairy tales, fables, factual books, hide and seek books, modern children’s stories, classics, etc. Parent must provide the selection, but the choice should be left to the child.**

**2.6 Always good to end with a goodnight kiss and a prayer or meditation.**

**2.7 More than one language in the home? OPOL: one parent, one language. Take turns. Mom in her own language, dad in his own (or grandmother/significant person)**

**2.8. Reading should be dialogic: Dialogue helps to expand vocabulary and keep the child involved. This dialogic reading has been proved to be one of the finest ways of expanding and enriching language. LANGUAGE is CAUGHT, not TAUGHT.**

## **3. Pre-literacy skills**

**Start as early as the child can sit on the lap. Begin with plastic or cardboard books. Tactile stimulation, like touching, biting and sucking the pages is important! Why so early?**

**3.1 Association between text (scribbles) and story.**

Christien Nesar BA(Log) Pret. Hons (French) UNISA. MA (Applied Linguistics) UJ

[www.christiennesar.com](http://www.christiennesar.com)

**3.2 Excitement and fun associated with stories will translate to formal reading skills**

**3.3 Midline crossing when turning page.**

**3.4 Eye movement: tracking from left to right.**

**4.5 Eye span: bigger books allow for wider eye span**

**4.6 Rhyme and rhythm of poems: lead to predictive skills**

**4.7 Analysis and synthesis of words: (... and along came a big dr-a-g-o-n..., or a big bad w-...)**

**4.8 Fun with sounds: alliterations, tongue twisters > auditory perceptual skills**

**4.9 Listening skills all round improve. Univ London study: Immigrant children who had regular literacy events at home, were better listeners than mother tongue English children who had no literacy events at home. Better overall academic achievement by 2016 from immigrant children: 10 year study, tracking children from age 5 to 15. (Daily Mail, 4 April 2016) Support from immigrant parents, including reading at home, cited as one of the top reasons.**

**4.10 Accidental word recognition. Independent reading happens spontaneously.**

**4.11 Once a child can read, parents can do **PAIRED READING**. Reading aloud with a child is one of the best therapies to increase speed and comprehension of reading. Paired reading can be combined with turn-taking. This an excellent way of acquiring reading skills in the FAL, too. A child needs to hear its own voice reading in the FAL. They tend to be embarrassed to read aloud in class. "I sound stupid," is the most common complaint.**

**4.12 Remember story CD's in the car, especially when the journey takes place near bedtime. Listening to a story is better than playing with a device.**

## **5. **Brain activation****

**(Read the work of John Hutton, prof of Pediatrics at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital; American Academy of Pediatrics)**

**5.1 Listening to a story calms the frontal lobes of the brain (the seat of impulsivity); the frontal lobes are activated by screen activities. Which is why researchers do not recommend screens at bedtime. In addition, screens activate dopamine secretion and stimulate alpha brainwaves while inhibiting the secretion of melatonin, all factors interfering with sleep.**

**5.2 Listening to a story activates the language area in the brain. Left hemisphere is needed for logic and language processing; right hemisphere needed for listening, memory, attention span, empathy and creativity. Broca's area is activated for language formulation; Wernicke's for language comprehension.**

**5.3 Studies by Hutton et al shows activation of the visual area without any visual stimulations. > indicates visualisation that takes place. (MRi scans with 3 year olds watching TV vs group listening to a story)**

**5.4 General brain connectivity improves during story reading: still evident the next morning (MRi studies, prof Berns, Emory)**

5.5 Processing that starts during story time, thus continues during the sleeping period.

5.6 Since the development of listening skills is essential for further learning, story telling without books is also a very good idea. Parents therefore don't need to be literate to be able to offer their children a home literacy event. Picture books without words are also a great source of stories.

## 6. **SLEEP!**

6.1 Bedtime stories may be the cheapest, most effective sleeping medication.

6.2 Sleep is essential for all bodily functions

6.3 Growth happens during sleep: sleep deprivation may lead to stunted growth.

6.4 Lack of sufficient sleep, or poor quality sleep, may lead to lack of concentration, fatigue, restlessness. False ADHD diagnosis may be made.

6.5 Lack of sleep may be at the root of diabetes, obesity and depression (The National Health Service, [www.nhs.org](http://www.nhs.org))

6.6 Lack of sleep may lead to poor processing and retention of facts: underachievement.



**Bedtime stories are essential for emotional well-being, for establishing a predictable routine, for a sense of security, for enrichment of language and vocabulary, for the development of pre-literacy skills, for brain activation and for sound sleeping patterns > which may lead to future academic and financial success.**

Suggestions for bedtime stories, as well as for reading in class. FAL or home language.

FAL:

1. Babalela
2. Die Goorgomgaai (The Gruffalo)
3. Jaco Jacobs: his entire oeuvre
4. Fanie Viljoen – Oe la la, Lulu.
5. Riana Scheepers et al: Nuwe kinderverseboek en Rympies vir Pikkies en Peuters.
6. Jaco Jacobs: Moenie hierdie boek eet nie. 365 rympies.
7. D J Opperman : Die Kleuterverseboek
8. LAPA : [www.lapa.co.za](http://www.lapa.co.za)
9. NB: [www.nb.co.za](http://www.nb.co.za)
10. Protea. Try to find: "Die land van die groot woordfabriek." (Classic!)
11. Best Books: they keep a good selection of all publishing houses.
12. Translations of Roald Dahl's books. (nb books)
13. Graffiti (Pretoria), PNA and EB have a good selection of children's books.

