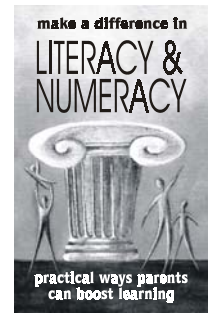


# Whatever happened to phonics?

## How schools teach reading and writing

For students in primary and junior grades



“If you think of reading as sharing, you can see how important the social aspect must be. Reading lets us access our collective experience, to harvest the skills and wisdom of all humanity. And reading brings joy - the sheer fun of stepping into other lives, other universes, of getting caught up in a world of imagination”  
Paul Kropp

Effective schools do not exist in isolation; they are an integral part of the communities they serve. Parental involvement is a key element in a school’s plan to make every child a successful reader. While the school has primary responsibility for formal reading instruction, children are more likely to succeed when their parents are actively involved in their education. (Ministry of Education, *Early Reading Strategy*, 2003)

Oral language is the basis of literacy and is a vital foundation for reading success.

- In every culture, children learn the language at home by listening, speaking, watching, and interacting with adults and children in their environment.
- When parents do not speak English at home, they are encouraged to share their family stories, created stories and traditional tales.
- Families should also read together in their own language.
- The Mississauga Public Library System has many books for sharing in a number of different languages.

### Strategies for the reluctant reader

- Read the story aloud as the child follows along.
- Be positive and praise children for the attempts they make.
- Read aloud from a variety of books (e.g.

- poetry, picture books, novels, journals, magazines, non-fiction) to model fluent reading and to increase their interest in books.
- Have the child choose reading materials in which he has an interest (e.g. cartoons, comics, non-fiction, newspapers).
- Model when reading aloud by pausing and predicting what will happen next or wondering out loud (why an event occurred or why a character acted in a particular way) at several points in a passage when it makes sense to do so.
- Encourage discussion and talk that will help clarify their thinking and understanding.
- Demonstrate what you do as a reader by talking about what you do as you read, why you do it and different ways of going about it.
- Read the title, look at the cover and the pictures in the text and talk about what the reader already knows or they suggest; predict what the story might be about; what words might be in the story; talk about what the people/places/animals in the story might be like.
- Children need to see important male figures reading (e.g. newspaper, magazines, manuals, books) on a regular basis.
- Don’t over-emphasize the mistakes. Move on.
- Reluctant readers or active children usually find it difficult to just sit and listen. Paper, crayons and pencils allow them to keep their hands busy while listening. When you

have finished reading the story, talk to your child about her pictures.

## Reading and writing

- Read with your child every day.
  - Visit the library regularly with your child.
  - Choose a variety of reading materials (fiction, non-fiction, magazines).
  - Take time to read and explain graphs, captions, headings, sub-headings and talk about why authors use them.
  - Start a book collection. Books may be purchased at garage sales, given as gifts, or through book clubs at school.
  - Expose children to poetry, chants, rhymes and songs. Tapes, CDs and videos may be borrowed from the library or purchased.
  - Guide your child when he is looking for information on the internet. See the handout for some excellent web sites for parents.
  - Monitor the amount of time your child spends on the computer, watching television and playing video games.
  - Be sure to have a regular daily reading time.
  - Reading is a social experience. Spend time talking, laughing and wondering about what you are reading together.
  - Play a variety of games that will give your child opportunities to develop phonological awareness. The handout has some suggestions for fun activities to do with your child.
  - Take advantage of those few minutes of time spent in line-ups or driving in the car and use them for playing games. What a great window of opportunity for learning!
- Provide opportunities for purposeful writing in your home. Message boards, e-mails, lists, cards, notes to family members and stories all help a child understand how and why writing is used in our everyday world.
  - Research indicates that phonics is *one* of three strategies for teaching children to read and write. It may be taught on its own, but must be practised at home and at school using books that are connected to a child's everyday life, are meaningful to a child, and which allow a child to use her imagination.
  - When reading, phonics helps a child ask, "Does it look right?" (sounding it out). Your child needs to also ask, "Does it sound right?" (Think about what word sounds right in the sentence grammatically; "run" and "go" both sound right because they are action words). Also ask "Does it make sense?". Remember that reading is all about meaning.
  - As a parent, you are your child's most important teacher. Think of reading as sharing and as an important family activity. Just as children learn to walk and talk at different times, they also develop reading skills at their own pace.

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