



**BabyRead Columns
In
The Journal
Seneca, SC
(Chronological Order)**

2019

**2019 Journal Column
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The secret power of children's picture books

“Granny is collapsing in laughter while she reads to a baby. Comfortable on a sofa with her grandson, Alex, Granny keeps cracking up as she tried to read ‘Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed.’ If this happens in your house, you are fortunate.

“Granny’s raspy burr sounds great, but the real genius of the scene is what’s happening to the baby. Tucked beside her, he is totally enthralled by the book in her hands. As he gets older, you can see his eyes tracking the illustrations, his eyes widening each time that she turns the page.



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“What’s happening to the baby is both obvious and a secret marvel. A grandmother is laughing as she reads a story and her grandson is drinking it all in — that’s obvious. The marvel is hidden inside the child’s developing brain. There, the sound of her voice, the warmth of her nearness, and crucially, the sight of the illustrations that stay still and allow him to gaze at will, all have the effect of engaging his deep cognitive networks.

“There is connection and synchronization among different domains of his brain: the cerebellum, the place at the base of the skull that is believed to support skill refinement; the default mode network, which is involved with internally directed processes such as introspection, creativity, and self-awareness; the visual

imagery network, which involves higher order visual and memory areas and is the brain’s means of seeing pictures in the mind’s eye; the semantic network, which is how the brain extracts the meaning of language; and the visual perception network, which supports the processing of visual stimulation.

“And it is all happening when it needs to happen, which is early. In the first year of life, an infant’s brain doubles in size. By a child’s 2nd birthday, synapses are forming for language and many other higher cognitive functions.”

This is why it is so important to read to your baby from birth every day! Read anything.

“The early experiences your baby is having, such as the wiring and firing of neurons they produce, will help create the architecture of your baby’s mind and help create the pathways for your baby’s future thought and imagination.” (All quotes are from *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 19, 2019.)

BABYREAD’S GOAL is to read with moms/caregivers and their children from birth to 2 years, when the brain grows the most, and to encourage them to read every day to their babies. We read (free) twice a month in public libraries and schools. We need volunteer readers. To help, contact director Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., at babyread@charter.net or (864) 944-7881 or go to our website: babyread.org. Help also by going to smile.amazon.com and put in BabyRead as your charity. After that, always go to smile.amazon.com, the regular Amazon website will come up, and 5 cents of every \$100 you spend will be donated to BabyRead.

The secret power of reading books aloud to babies: Part II

In my July column, I discussed how reading from birth activates many neurons and processes in your child's brain. See babyread.org.

"The early experiences your baby is having, such as reading to her/him ... will help create the architecture of your baby's mind and help create the pathways for your baby's future thought and imagination.



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"In the first year of life, an infant's brain doubles in size." (This can change depending on the child's environment, what his caretakers do or do not do, and genetics.) "By his/her second birthday, synapses are forming for language and other higher cognitive functions. And by the time your child is blowing out five candles on his/her birthday cake, today's infant will have passed through the stages of development involving language, emotional control, vision, hearing and habitual ways of responding."

Reading aloud to your infant can greatly positively affect her/his language development, including vocabulary, emotional control and habitual ways of responding.

"Small children's brains cannot process ... the giddy shock and awe of animation. Apps on most electronic devices or TV don't give them the

time to exercise their deeper cognitive faculties. Just as Goldilocks signs with relief when she takes a spoonful of porridge and finds that it is 'just right,' a small child can relax into the experience of being read a picture book. There is a bit of pleasurable challenge in making sense of what she's/he's hearing and seeing. There is time to reflect on the story and to see its reverberations in his/her own life — a transaction as simple as the flash making the connection between a real kitty or doggie and remembering the pictures of these in a story book.

"The collaborative engagement that a child brings to the experience of being read aloud to is so vital and productive that reading aloud stimulates optimal patterns of brain development," as the American Academy of Pediatrics said in 2014, strengthening the neural connections that enable him to process more difficult and complex stories as she/he gets older." (All quotes from Meghan Gurdon, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 19, 2019.)

Remember, all of this is going on in your baby's brain, not just when he/she gets to school.

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The secret power of reading books aloud to babies — part III

In my July and August columns, I discussed the secret power of reading books aloud to children.

For these columns, visit babyread.org, email me at babyread@charter.net or mail me at P.O. Box 8184, Seneca, SC 29678.



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This month I quote again from Meghan Gurdon, who just had published “The Enchanted Hour: The Miraculous Power of Reading Aloud in the Age of Distraction.”

“Much of the hidden power of reading aloud has to do with those curious eyes and that devouring gaze.

Looking at a book with an adult, a child increases his/her capacity for ‘joint attention,’ noticing what others see and following their gaze. This phenomenon has a remarkable tempering power in children. It encourages the development of executive function, an array of skills that includes the ability to remember details and to pay attention.”

Ms. Gurdon cites a colleague who says: “Children naturally learn to regulate their attention when they are focusing on a task they find interesting in a context that is nurturing, warm and responsive.”

This is not a TV or an electronic device. This calls for a human being.

“By contrast, fast-paced TV shows have been shown to impair executive function in young children after as little as nine minutes of viewing.

Also, children look to adults to see where we are looking, so if we are glued to our electronic devices (or otherwise occupied), that will draw their gaze, too, ... Babies are particularly perturbed by a mother’s/caregiver’s flat or emotionless expression when we stare down at text, stare away as we talk into our phones, or stare into a screen.

“Glancing down to catch a baby’s eye when reading a story, meeting a child’s inquiring gaze — these simple acts bring the child’s brain waves into greater synchronization with the adults. ... Reading books to children has a double effect: it removes the negative of screen time while adding a terrific positive in the form of skill- and brain- building efforts.”

So balance is needed between all your chores and responsibilities and when reading aloud to your baby or toddler. A lot is going on — for you and for your baby. One half hour of your reading every day to your baby or toddler can help do the magic of building his/her brain.

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Meet Stacey, Mikey and Debby, a BabyRead reader

Stacey is a busy mom of three boys, ranging in age from 11 to almost 3.

When the youngest, Mikey, was only 9 months old, she, Josiah (now 6) and Mikey were at a K-4 screening when she was attracted to the BabyRead table. Before long, they

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were meeting with Debby, a BabyRead volunteer reader, twice a month for reading sessions.

In those early days, a large portion of each session was occupied with finger plays and songs. However, before long, Mikey was showing a greater interest in books than in the activities. He started picking a book and handing it to Debby to read.

During the first year, Josiah often attended the sessions, too, and developed a love of reading. Each time they went home from the library, he would read the newest book to Mikey. Stacey feels BabyRead is partially responsible for the fact that Josiah is now reading two years above his grade level and, at the end of last school year, was recognized by an award for his reading.

However, the tables have turned — Mikey now “reads” to the entire family, demonstrating a great love of his library provided by both BabyRead and his grandparents.

Stacey and Debby both noticed when Mikey started showing less interest in the “babyish” books he

was being offered and a preference for books with more narrative. This led them to focus on and celebrate Mikey’s developmental milestones.

They feel the BabyRead Book Committee does an excellent job of selecting a wide variety of outstanding children’s books that promote early learning skills and foster a lifelong love of reading. BabyRead also provided the family with a South Carolina Literacy Activity Calendar, which they use to track how often they read, and to find fun, educational and enjoyable activities and crafts.

BabyRead has had a significant impact on both Stacey’s and her boys’ lives. Among the influences have been weekly trips to the library to check out books, and a nightly bedtime routine of reading to and with the boys. Stacey’s friendship with Debby, and Debby’s interest in her boys, have also enriched Stacey’s life.

Although both parents have busy working lives, their children are still their priority and BabyRead has helped them to focus a lot of positive energy on their intellectual development.

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Learning is everywhere

Learning is everywhere — the kitchen, the bedroom, in the supermarket and while you're doing the laundry, are in the bathroom and living room, in the car, on the bus and outside in the world!

Reading books to your baby and talking about the world around her,



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right from birth, will make your baby smarter and prepared for school and life. Put your baby on your lap and your arms around him/her as you read a book. This is critical bonding experience for mother/caregivers and child.

After all, you are not teaching your infant how to read, but you are

developing an ease and, hopefully, a love of reading and pre-literacy skills — like that in English you read from left to right and that the writing under the pictures describe the pictures.

While you are in the kitchen, let him share the smells of what you are cooking. Let her smell the spice you are putting in the sauce, tell her the names of the fruits and vegetables, point out shapes and colors to her and explain what you are doing.

With toddlers, make fun instruments from pots and pans or two saucepan lids for cymbals. Together, play a song. Can you play a loud and soft sound? What types of sounds are made if she bangs hard, or soft,

on the saucepan with a spoon? Give your baby names for everything you and she are doing in the kitchen.

Read to your baby in the kitchen. There are specific books that focus on food and eating, like “The Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle or his book “Pancakes! Pancakes!” While it certainly helps very young children to associate words with things when you read them a story about something you are doing and can show him the object, the most important thing is talking to your child about the world around him and reading to him, regularly, every day.

In the bedroom, or as you dress your baby, tell him about what you are doing as you're doing it. Tell her “The shirt goes over the head, one arm in, another arm in, and then cover the belly.” Let your toddler pick out his clothes or at least pick one item. Ask her to identify where different items of clothing belong on the body. Ask him to name his body parts — head, ears, nose, shoulder, feet.

— *Excerpted from learning-is-everywhere.com*

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Learning is everywhere

Learning is everywhere — the kitchen, the bedroom, in the grocery store, while you're doing the laundry, are in the bathroom and living room, in the car and on the bus and outside in the world!

In my October column, I talked about learning in the kitchen and



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made a few comments about the bedroom in the November column.

Reading and talking to your baby right from birth will make your baby smarter and ready for school and life. Put your baby on your lap and your arms around him/her as you read a book. This is critical — it is a bonding experience for mother/

caregivers and child. After all, you are not teaching your infant how to read, but you are developing an ease and, hopefully, a love of reading.

When reading to young children, you are developing pre-literacy skills — like which way the pages turn, that the writing under the pictures describe the pictures, that print goes from left to right in English and up and down on the page, phonemic awareness, that is, awareness of sounds and their differences (“silly” and “lily,” “dog” and “fog”) and knowledge of the alphabet.

In the kitchen, talk about what you are cooking — the ingredients, the spices. Give your child pots and pans to play with and their names.

Bedtime is a perfect opportunity to read your baby or toddler a story. Your child is tired, and reading aloud is a relaxing way of winding down, perhaps after a bath. You can just make up a story or there are many good bedtime story books, such as: “Goodnight Moon” by Margaret Brown and “Good Night My Love” by Sondra Magsamen. Use songs and music in your baby’s bedroom while dressing him, playing or while cleaning up toys. Sing songs — ones you know, nursery rhymes or make up the song.

In the bedroom talk about what you are doing as you do it: “The shirt goes over the head, one arm in, another arm in, and then cover the belly.” Let your toddler pick out his clothes or at least pick one item. Ask her to identify where different items of clothing belong on the body. Ask him to name his body parts — head, ears, nose, shoulders, hands, feet. (Excerpted from learning-is-everywhere.com.)

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