

Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

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C I 501

Teacher Inquiry



“What happens when the parent of a Title I student intervenes by reading with his or her child every night?”



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“As parents, the most important thing we can do is read to our children early and often.”
-First Lady Laura Bush

“Not every reader is a leader, but every leader is a reader.”
-Harry Truman

“I cannot live without books.”
-Thomas Jefferson

“Being a successful reader is the first building block to lifelong learning.”
-Governor Jeb Bush

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★ Choosing My Inquiry ★



I enrolled in the Teacher Inquiry class in order to fulfill Act 48 requirements. The class had been highly recommended to me by teachers and the Principal at Gray's Woods Elementary School, but I didn't have a clear idea of what the class was all about. I soon learned that most of the others enrolled in the class already had an idea of what they would like their project to be. I, however, had to brainstorm some ideas, or passions, to come up with an idea for my project. After careful consideration, I decided on one idea that revolved around my 2nd grade son.

Children's Literature was my passion when I was a Penn State undergraduate. It was no surprise, then, when I started reading some of my favorites to my son, Anthony, when I was still pregnant with him. Over the years, we read an innumerable number of books to him. It was also no surprise when he was "reading" to us at only 3 years old, having some of his favorites already memorized. Goodnight Moon, More, More, More Said the Baby and Moo, Bah, La La La were just a few of the books he entertained us with regularly. In 1st grade, Anthony was identified as needing extra support in reading. Therefore, he was placed into the Title I program at his school. Frankly, this "diagnosis" of Title I support came as quite a surprise to me after all these years of reading to him. I remember one of the first things we were told at a meeting for the parents of Title I students is that *the number one most important thing parents can do with their child is to read with him or her every night at home*. This fact came as no surprise to me. After all, I had been doing this for six years already! As we progressed through his 1st grade year, over the summer, and into his 2nd grade year, it became more and more clear to me how challenging it was to work into our busy schedule the TIME to sit down together and read. You see, Anthony was not an only child by any means. Rather, he was our *oldest* child at just six years old, with two younger sisters; two younger sisters which, by most accounts, are high maintenance. I was also extremely guilty of that American pastime of over scheduling *all* my kids. There was football, soccer, karate, dance (including tap, ballet, and hip-hop), baton & pom-pom, Kindermusik, preschool, library story times, trips to Chuck E. Cheese, "make your own pizza" play dates, church play and musical practices, Wednesday night family nights at church, Sunday night Rainbows & Pioneer Clubs, and the list goes on! It seemed bedtime was always a repetitive chorus of 'Hurry up!' My husband and I were always rushing our little ones through baths, changing into jammies, and teeth brushing.

Why is all of this relevant to a graduate level course offered at Penn State University? In deciding to use my son as my Inquiry Project "subject," I wondered what would happen to his reading progress if I committed myself to actually doing what I knew I should have been doing for a year and a half now. The outcome of this project could be important in many ways. I thought how valuable it would be to actually have some data to share with the parents of children in my future classroom. I would be able to *prove* to them the importance in reading with their

child every night by firsthand experience and evidence to support it. The information from my project could be shared with other teachers and therefore other parents as well. With all this in mind, my wondering, and subsequent Inquiry Project, was born...

“What happens when the parent of a Title I student intervenes by reading with his or her child every night?”

Naturally, I had more questions come up in my mind when I thought about this initial wondering...

“Is there increased progression in the child’s reading level?”

“Does the child’s fluency and comprehension improve?”

One of the first things I needed to consider in beginning to plan and implement my inquiry was what others think/know about this topic. I initially took to the internet to research this topic. After what seemed like days of revisiting this topic online, my results were interesting. I was able to find site after site claiming that reading aloud is the number one most important thing parents can do with their children. However I was unable to find sites with evidence to state what the results are based on what studies. Here’s some of what I found:

- “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.”

Becoming a Nation of Readers: the Report of the Commission on Reading

- “Student achievement is significantly bolstered by just 20 extra minutes of reading each day.”

www.bookitprogram.com/parents

- Mem Fox authored a book entitled Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever. In commenting about Fox’s book, an individual from Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read says, “I am concerned that people won’t take the book as seriously as they should because of the lack of references to studies that have confirmed the value of reading aloud to very young children. Because of the lack of all but anecdotal evidence about the benefits of reading aloud, some readers may not feel comfortable about the validity of what Fox espouses. I don’t question that what she says is valid. I think “Reading Magic” is an important book, one that those who care for young children should both read and follow. This belief is based on my own teaching and parenting experiences.”

www.rif.org

After my lengthy research, I suggest that even Mem Fox does not have the data, with exception of anecdotal evidence, to support her claims made in her book.

I was able to find extensive research about how poor our nation’s children are doing in the area of reading. The most predominant of those being ‘Our Nation’s Report Card.’ This states that among 4th grade readers, 69% scored below proficient, with 37% being below basic. Being released in Fall 2005, is a social education project and public television documentary series entitled, Children of the Code. The introductory article to the series has an emphasis on how difficult it is for the human brain to decipher the “code” that is necessary in learning how to read. “The series will connect the dots between the code-technology of our writing system and the radically unnatural challenge faced by the human brain in learning to read it.” The article summarizing the program makes many claims about the effects learning to read has on individuals. For example:

- “Statistically, more American children suffer long-term life harm from the process of learning to read than from parental abuse, accidents, and all other childhood diseases and disorders combined.”

- “Every public major concern has a much higher incidence of reading problems attached to it: from juvenile delinquency, to teen pregnancy, to failure to graduate from high school, to drug problems. You take anything that we say is a major concern, and there is a higher than expected incidence, by far, of individuals who have struggled with reading or had a frank learning disability.” - Dr. Paula Tallal, Chair of Neuroscience, Rutgers University ([Children of the Code interview](#))
- "There are actually states in the United States that build prisons based on how many people are illiterate." - Dr. Lesley Morrow, President, International Reading Association (9-8-03 Children of the Code interview)
- "First reading itself, and then the whole education process, becomes so imbued with, stuffed with, amplified, magnified by shame that children can develop an aversion to everything that is education." - Donald L. Nathanson, M.D., author of *Shame and Pride*, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Jefferson Medical College, Executive Director of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute ([Children of the Code interview](#))

With just the above statements about children and the struggle in learning to read, it is no wonder that a parent is so concerned when their child is having difficulties. It appears that this series will be taking the blame off of teachers and instead bringing light to the neurological aspects regarding the difficulty in learning to read. So much of this research made me think of Anthony and question the effects of struggling as a reader could be having on him. This made my project become an even more passionate one for me!

Implementing My Inquiry



The first thing I did was set up a schedule to follow. Scheduled in the first week were my meetings with Anthony's classroom teacher and Title I teacher. With their assistance, I was able to establish what each evening would look like when Anthony and I sat down together. From Monday through Saturday Anthony would read to me for at most 20 minutes. The books would be provided by his Title I teacher or from our at-home library. Either way, the books would be at his independent level. I would use a leveled data base to ensure the chosen books were at the appropriate level. Following his reading, I would read aloud to Anthony approximately 15 minutes. He would choose what books he wanted me to read to him. On Sundays, we would take the night off from reading. As a reward for working hard throughout the week, Anthony would have 30 minutes to do whatever he wanted with whomever he wanted (mom or dad) *without interruption* from his 3 year old and 5 year old sisters.

Within the first few weeks, I was able to recognize that Anthony's struggles with reading, and writing, were not your 'typical' Title I students' struggles. I started to recognize some specific errors that identified issues with visual processing. He was losing his place often, confusing articles, and almost always preserved the meaning while making errors related to vision. For example, the text says *I went to the pool to go swim for the day*. Anthony says *I went swimming at the pool today*. This all brought back to the forefront of my mind an evaluation done in Kindergarten where Anthony was diagnosed with a visual processing problem. But, throughout 1st and 2nd grade, that was dismissed and he was just "struggling."

By week 6, his classroom teacher called a meeting among her, the Title I teacher and I to discuss Anthony. I was anxious to share what I had noticed, along with this prior evaluation. I was excited to think that maybe we would be able to get some more answers and provide Anthony with the *correct* assistance. After all, I had been experimenting with place holders and colored backgrounds and discovering it made a difference. At the meeting, I requested an IST so we could come together as a team and make some decisions about where to proceed with Anthony. Since he wasn't even meeting first grade benchmarks half-way through the second grade, I thought it was more than appropriate. However, my information regarding his visual processing was disregarded and my request for an IST was denied. Instead, it was clearly stated that the problem was motivation and the teachers' concerns were more behavioral/emotional, not academic. It was also expressed that since my project began, Anthony was actually regressing in school, having regular instances of shutting down.

Pressing on with my project, I maintained reading each night with him. I wrote a letter to Anthony's principal making a parental request for an IST meeting. At the IST, we discussed both the academic and emotional concerns and talked about possible sources and solutions. The IST meeting was successful in that the members of the team all seemed open to examining further what they could do to help Anthony. As a result of the meeting, I immediately scheduled an evaluation with Dr. Marla Moon to either confirm or disregard the two-year old report diagnosing Anthony's visual processing problem. Upon completion, Dr. Moon's report

“revealed visual and visual perceptual problems.” She feels that these are interfering with his ability to be successful in school, especially in the areas of reading and writing. She ordered three more evaluations to be completed, since she had more questions arise in the course of the evaluation.

- 1) An educational psychological evaluation – Does Anthony have a learning disability?
- 2) An occupational therapy evaluation – Are occupational therapy problems interfering?
- 3) A central auditory processing evaluation – Does Anthony also have an auditory processing problem?

To date, the ed psy eval is scheduled to be completed in September. The OT has already been done and we are waiting for the results. The central auditory eval is in the process of being scheduled. (6 – 8 month wait at PSU’s speech and hearing clinic.)

There were several ways in which I collected and analyzed the data.

1. Surveys:

I developed both beginning and ending surveys for Anthony, his 2nd grade teacher, and his Title I teacher. To analyze the data, I was able to summarize and pull out the parts imperative to my project.

2. Anecdotal Records:

Kept along the way, I would jot down notes while Anthony and I were reading together. Including the results of meetings held with teachers and evaluation by Dr. Marla Moon. To analyze this data, I read over most of it several times, especially in preparation of writing the final paper.

3. Running Records:

Completed one week before beginning and again the week following my project. I also looked at running records from his entire 2nd grade year. I analyzed this data by plotting the results, or guided reading levels, on a chart and comparing Anthony’s performance to 2nd grade benchmarks.

★ Making Claims ★



As I began to pull my inquiry project together, the claims became clearer to me. At first, I felt like I had so much I wasn't sure what, if anything would stand out as identifiable claims. As I sat down and reviewed the evidence gathered, these jumped out at me:

1. The parent/child relationship will improve.
2. The child's confidence as a reader will improve.
3. The rate at which the child's progress occurs increases.
4. The parent will become more knowledgeable about the child's performance at school and therefore be able to act more effectively as the child's advocate.

Claim #1

"The Parent/Child Relationship will improve."

Evidence: Anecdotal Records, Observation

Within the first week of reading with Anthony every night his actions toward me started changing. We read just before his bedtime. So we were always in our jammies cuddled up on the couch together. I noticed he became extremely physically affectionate. He would just hang on me any time I was within a few feet of him. He began hugging me more and started choosing to do things - anything - with me. The picture below shows the two of us on the couch together, with Anthony reading.



Claim #2

“The child’s confidence as a reader will improve.”

Evidence: Beginning and Ending Surveys

Before beginning this project, Anthony had an awful attitude towards reading. Not only did he feel discouraged, but he shared with me in the beginning survey that reading is “evil,” “confusing,” that he gets “mixed up,” and it’s “hard.” He had little interest in reading for any other reason except that he had to. Since spending this time together reading, he has made a complete turn around! He asks repeatedly “When are we reading?” “How much time until we read?” from the time he gets home from school until it happens. He anxiously pulls out the books he’s checked out from the library as soon as I see him. He’s a different child now! Below are excerpts taken from the beginning and ending surveys. I asked Anthony the same 20 questions at the beginning of the inquiry and again at the end. This was the slide I used in my presentation at the Teacher Inquiry Conference in May.

Beginning Survey:	Ending Survey:
Do you like to read?	Do you like to read?
NO!	Well, sometimes.
Why?	Why?
Cause I always get mixed up. Sometimes my eyes switch place with the other word. Like if I'm doing word study. I look up to talk to the teacher and when I look back down, I don't know where I am.	Because there's lots of interesting things.
What do you like about reading?	What do you like about reading?
NOTHING! Well, I like the pictures.	Interesting facts.
What do you like to read?	What do you like to read?
Chapter books. It's always hard with picture books because I get mixed up with the words because I'm always looking at the pictures.	Chapter Books. Because they have more pages and it takes longer to get through the book.
Do you feel good about reading?	Do you feel good about reading?
Probably mostly worst.	Most of the time.

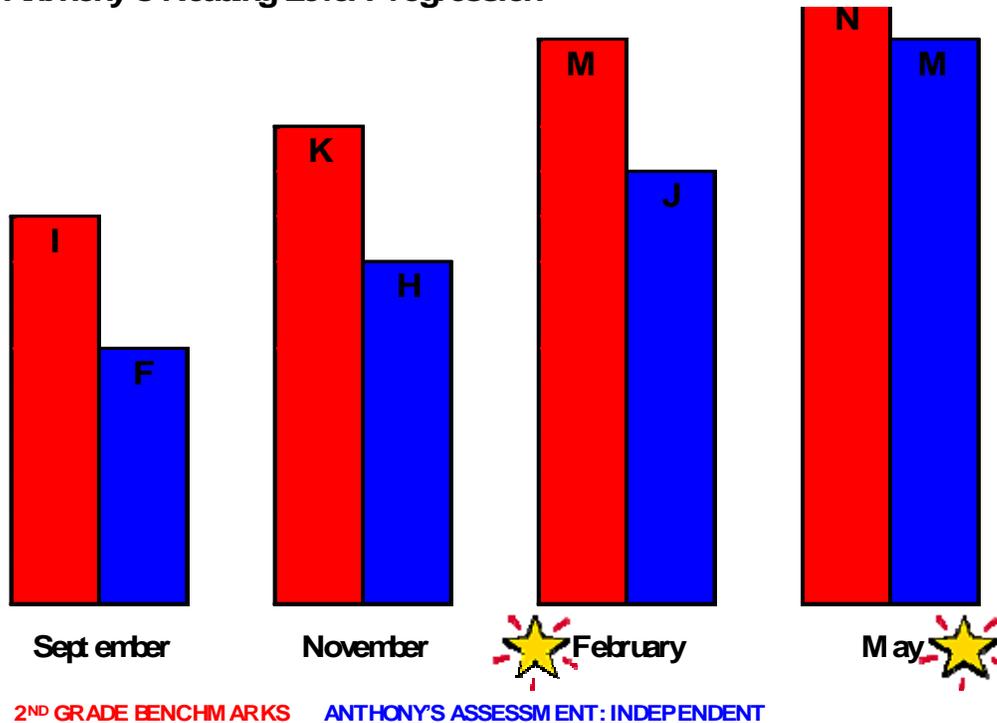
Claim #3

“The rate at which the child’s progress occurs increases.”

Evidence: Running Record Results before and after Intervention

From the beginning of the school year until my intervention, Anthony’s progress remained consistent. He started out two guided reading levels behind 2nd grade expectations. At each scheduled running record, one in November and one in February, he remained two guided reading levels behind. Once I got involved, and learned where Anthony was having difficulties, I was able to make some interventions to help him *succeed* in reading. The following chart shows how the gap is closing. Anthony is now only one level behind, and has the potential to reach Level N, and therefore be on track, by the end of the school year.

Anthony’s Reading Level Progression



Indicates start and end of project.

Claim #4

“The parent will become more knowledgeable about the child’s performance at school and therefore be able to act more effectively as the child’s advocate.”

Evidence: Surveys, Meetings, Anecdotal Records

Since Kindergarten, there have been questions about Anthony’s performance at school. When the struggle came out again in 2nd grade, I brought a prior evaluation to the attention of his teachers and questioned the need for more. His teachers shared with me that they both believed the source of the problem was MOTIVATION. Recognizing a pattern, and recalling that a visual processing problem was diagnosed, I wondered if the motivation was the byproduct of a larger problem. As the result of an IST request, we had a visual processing evaluation done by Dr. Marla Moon. Her examination “revealed visual and visual perceptual problems” All of these are interfering with his ability to be successful in school, especially in the areas of reading and writing. In addition, her findings suggested that “additional testing is appropriate.”

Had I not been doing this project of reading with Anthony every night, I would have continued to believe his needs were being met and would have missed even more time resolving this problem. Below are copies of the “scripts” written by Dr. Marla Moon for Anthony to have an Educational Psychological Evaluation, Occupational Therapy Evaluation, and a Central Auditory Processing Evaluation.

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PETER G. THEODOROUS, O.D.	PA LIC. #OEG-000709	DEA # _____
MICHAEL J. TALONE, O.D.	PA LIC. #OEG-000236	

NAME A. Anthony Marszalek DATE 4/30/05
ADDRESS _____ DOB _____
B Referral of EO psych. eval

REFILL _____ TIMES
SUBSTITUTION PERMISSIBLE _____ O.D.

IN ORDER FOR A BRAND NAME PRODUCT TO BE DISPENSED, THE PRESCRIBER MUST HANDWRITE "BRAND NECESSARY" OR "BRAND MEDICALLY NECESSARY" IN THE SPACE BELOW.

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NAME A. Anthony Marszalek DATE 4/30/05
ADDRESS _____ DOB _____
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MICHAEL J. TALONE, O.D.	PA LIC. #OEG-000236	

NAME A. Anthony Marszalek DATE 4/30/05
ADDRESS _____ DOB _____
B ref of central auditory process
eval

REFILL _____ TIMES
SUBSTITUTION PERMISSIBLE _____ O.D.

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★ Where Do I Go from Here? ★



I think this experience will remain one of the most valuable occurrences to both my personal and professional lives. In my personal life, I will always remember this inquiry project as the vehicle which enabled me to examine more closely why my son was struggling in school. Using the information gathered, I have been able to move forward so more answers can be found and Anthony can begin to be successful with the correct support. This experience will be visible in my professional life in a multitude of ways and for the lifetime of my career. It has given me the ability to look into a struggling learner's life and question why the child is struggling. I have learned how to examine several aspects of a student's academic performance, make proper assessments and be proactive accordingly. Additionally, I have the following wonderings for the future:

“How will this experience with identifying my own son's needs impact my ability to identify the needs of my future students?”

“What can I do to make sure I am as strong an advocate for the students in my classroom as their own parents would be?”

Overall, this experience has been priceless. I couldn't possibly measure the affect the outcome has had on my son or future students in my classroom. I believe this project will impact the success of Anthony as well as other students for years to come.

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CHILDREN OF THE CODE

A Social Education Project and Public Television Documentary Series

<http://www.bookitprogram.com/parents/>

National Reading Incentive Program sponsored by Pizza Hut

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RIF: Reading Is Fundamental, "Creating a Nation of Lifelong Readers"

Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever

Mem Fox

Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read

Bonnie B. Armbruster, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Fran Lehr

Jean Osborn, M. Ed., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Richard C. Anderson Center for the Study of Reading

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Andrea DeBruin-Parecki, U.S. Department of Education

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