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Encouraging Reading for Pleasure in Low- Income Families: A Case Study

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Introduction

Reading for pleasure in 8–18-year-olds is at an all-time low for low-income families. According to Picton and Clark (2023) the annual study conducted by the National Literacy Trust in 2023 indicates a rising trend in the percentage of underprivileged children without access to a single book. Increasing from 7.9% to 12.4% since 2020. It has also been found that young people who receive free school meals are less likely to read fiction when they are not in school (Clark, 2011). It is important that children are encouraged to read outside of school as it can positively impact their education; and according to Sullivan and Brown (2015), there is a deep connection between childhood reading and cognitive development, such as reading for pleasure, which can increase progress in vocabulary and even mathematics.

An excellent intervention to encourage reading for pleasure is paired reading. According to MacDonald (2010), paired reading has been acknowledged as a beneficial strategy for promoting reading in schools; it fosters relationships, boosts self-esteem, and motivates the pupils. Paired reading can be conducted at home, and the child's reading partner can be their parent. Engaging in paired reading at home can transform the experience for a child, making it feel less like a chore. It allows them to engage voluntarily, without the sense of obligation that comes with a scheduled school activity. The Socio-cultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) supports paired reading as it believes a child's learning and development is encouraged by social and cultural experiences. For instance, engaging in a paired reading activity with a parent would be considered a supportive and encouraging setting which can enhance the child's enjoyment of reading. Further Osborne et al. (2010) whose study involved children in foster care and their carers suggested that by engaging in paired reading children's literacy skills were greatly enhanced. To do this, the carers took part in a paired reading intervention with the foster children for a 16-week period and not only where the children's literacy skills improved but

also their motivation, and confidence. This supports the idea that paired reading in challenging circumstances can enhance literacy skills and encourage them to read for pleasure. If the children experience a boost in their motivation and confidence, they will feel good within themselves when they are reading.

Intervention

Reading for pleasure should be encouraged from a young age. According to Clark (2011) children's attitudes towards reading declines as they get older, and they are less likely to continue reading as they enjoy it less. A selective intervention such as paired reading or engaging in literacy activities at home would be able to tackle the problem of reading for pleasure that has been established in low-income families. A structured intervention will allow parents to support their children with developing their literacy skills. Reading for pleasure can be facilitated by parents establishing regular days and times to read with their child. Consistency in reading routines may help children view reading as an enjoyable activity rather than a chore. For instance, if a child is asked to read at random times by their parent, it may seem like a task, but having a set routine where a parent sits with the child to read on specific days and times can make reading more enjoyable for them. Children who experience their parents and others reading aloud tend to develop larger vocabularies, as a result these children demonstrate a better understanding of the world and can think more clearly (Foster, 2022).

There are a variety of literacy activities parents can encourage their children to do such as, playing sound games, playing word games, using playdough to create numbers or letters, drawing, and encouraging the child to explain their drawings. Parents participating in literacy related activities along with their children is known to enhance their enjoyment of reading (Foster, 2022). Some parents may struggle with time and routine, for example, the parent

returns from work, prepares dinner for their child or children, and assists with bedtime preparations. Literacy activities do not have to be time consuming, they can be incorporated into teatime, bath time and bedtime routines. For instance, reading with the child before they sleep, engaging in sound games or singing during bath time, asking the child questions about their day or interests during teatime, such as, “Who was your favourite character in the book and why” or “What has been your favourite book we have read so far?”. As the intervention is targeted at parents who are on a low income, they could sign up for a library card and loan books from the library, this will save the parents money whilst still being able to bond with their child and encourage their child to read. A risk factor of parents not intervening with encouraging their child to read for pleasure is that their literacy skills and test scores could be impacted further into education, for instance achieving grades to access to university or being able to intake and understand the information given to them by their lecturers. The protective factor of encouraging children to read for pleasure is a good and supportive relationship between the parent and the child and higher levels of engagement in the classroom.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is important for children to be encouraged to read from a young age as it will positively impact their education and understanding of literature. Parents can contribute to this by trying different techniques, for example, reading with the child and reading out loud to the child. Paired reading with a child can create a bond between the parent and child, it can also create a supportive environment for the child. Encouraging children to read will also allow them to start enjoying it and help them think more clearly, which will lead them to reading for pleasure.

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