

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Island Parenting: Reading Is Fundamental Part 2

Opinion / **Published On June 01, 2016 10:23 PM /**

Mutryce Williams **June 01, 2016**



We used to be a region that boasted a high literacy rate. (Let me clarify. Although there may be a majority of children who can identify or 'call words', this is not the same as reading or being literate. A marked component in literacy is being able to comprehend what is being read.) Parents used to place great emphasis on the importance of getting a sound education and this meant encouraging their children to 'dig' their noses deep in books. A good book was the 'holy grail' for many families because this meant a ticket to success for their offspring.

I remember a mentor telling me that his love of books came from seeing the sacrifices that his parents made so that he could have textbooks. He told me that books were a rare and expensive commodity, especially textbooks. He mentioned that in those days

many a sacrifice was made to acquire books. He said that his parents toiled and 'hurt their heads' over how they were going to get him those books, so that he could make something of himself.

He said, "In witnessing all of this I had no choice but to develop an immense love and respect for the written word, knowledge and all that books had to offer. Anyone who had a book that I hadn't read or was interested in reading automatically became my best friend. Books were the trading cards back then."

He continued, "Somewhere we have lost a sense of what books and learning have done for us. Somehow we have forgotten that they were the tools which elevated us. Somehow we have forgotten that they were the bread that nourished and sustained us and most importantly somehow as parents we have forgotten that these same books more than anything else have been our tickets to success, yet we fail to pass on this love for reading or books to our young. We are failing them. I don't want to go off on a tangent but there are just too many distractions. An integral part of a child's upbringing is instilling that love for knowledge, that love of reading."

He continued, "Do these children really need all of those fancy 'appliances' or whatever they are calling those things. They don't, and as parents we know this, but for some reason our children being able to boast that he or she has the latest, I don't even know the names. You may have to help me. This is more important than their being able to say, 'look at this, this is my library, my parents cared enough to build it for me'. Mind you, I am not talking about a separate room or physical structure rather I am speaking about a collection of cherished books that this child has acquired over the years. Books that this child has lost his or herself into, books that helped build character, books that assisted in imparting knowledge and books that were selected with love by a parent who cared enough to give his or her child one of the most valuable gift that can be give that gift of reading. This is a gift that will set this child up for success. Again, I am not speaking of tangible riches because he who has a wealth of knowledge acquired through reading may be considered rich as well. I really can't help but wonder what has or what is happening to us now."

A reflection of this conversation prompted me to do a second issue of reading is fundamental for this column, as I really do want to drive home the fact that reading really is fundamental. Read on.

Feed Me a Story!

What difference can reading aloud to a child for 30 minutes per day make. Source: U.S. Department of Education, America Reads Challenge

If daily reading begins in infancy, by the time the child is 5 years old, he or she has been fed roughly 900 hours of brain food!

Reduce that experience to just 30 minutes a week and the child's hungry mind loses 770 hours of nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and stories.

A kindergarten student who has not been read to could enter school with less than 60 hours of literacy nutrition. No teacher, no matter how talented, can make up for those lost hours of mental nourishment.

Hours of reading books by age 5

30 minutes daily 900 hours

30 minutes weekly 130 hours

Less than 30 minutes weekly 60 hours

Reading is important for Brain Development Source: The Huffington Post Reading Room

“Recent research into human brain development is proving that parents truly are their children’s first teachers. What parents do, or don’t do, has a lasting impact on their child’s reading skill and literacy. For example, there is considerable evidence of a relationship between reading regularly to a child and that child’s later reading achievement (National Research Council, 1998).

“But many parents are not yet making the most of simple, vital opportunities to stimulate full and healthy child development in the early years, and by extension, good reading readiness. As US Education Secretary Richard W. Riley has said, “If every child were read to daily from infancy, it would revolutionize education in this country!”

What a Difference Reading Makes! By Scholastics Global Literacy Campaign

- Fifteen-year-old students whose parents often read books with them during their first year of primary school show markedly higher scores in PISA 2009 than students whose parents read with them infrequently or not at all. (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA))
- The performance advantage among students whose parents read to them in their early school years is evident regardless of the family's socio-economic background. (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA))
- Students who read magazines and newspapers regularly for enjoyment also tend to be better readers than those who do not. (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA))
- Children who grow up in homes where books are plentiful go further in school than those who don't. Children with low-education families can do as well as children with high-education families if they have access to books at home. (Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations 2010)
- When children are provided with 10 to 20 self-selected children's books at the end of the regular school year, as many as 50 percent not only maintain their skills, but actually make reading gains. (Bridging the Summer Reading Gap, by Anne McGill-Franzen and Richard Allington)
- Children living in poverty, on the whole, have a greater summer learning loss than do children from affluent families, and those students living in poverty who did have gains over the summer, had smaller gains than their peers whose families had higher incomes. (McGill-Franzen and Allington)

- Ensuring that books are available to any child at any time of the year will be a good first step in enhancing the reading achievement of low-income students and an absolutely necessary step in closing the reading achievement gap. (Ameliorating summer reading setback among economically disadvantaged elementary students, Richard Allington, April 2007)
- Students who read widely and frequently are higher achievers than students who read rarely and narrowly. (Scholastic: Classroom Libraries Work!)
- Children learn an average of 4,000 to 12,000 new words each year as a result of book reading. (Scholastic: Classroom Libraries Work!)
- Research has found a relation between the amount of time that children read for fun on their own and reading achievement. (Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts)
- Children in classrooms without literature collections read 50% less than children in classrooms with such collections. (International Reading Association) • Studies have proven that increased family engagement in educational programs is linked with increases in child reading achievement and other academic successes (such as high school graduation rates.) (Pre-K Now)

Reading Tips from the PBS program “Between the Lions”:

- Read to your child every day. If you can't, ask someone else to be your child's designated reader.
- Try to find a regular time and a quiet, comfortable place for reading together.
- Encourage your children to ask questions about the characters, pictures and words.
- Talk about the story with your child. Did he or she like it? Why?
- Older children enjoy reading aloud too. They can read their favorite parts or you can take turns reading chapter books.

Reading Quotes

“Reading is the single most important skill necessary for a happy, productive and successful life. A child that is an excellent reader is a confident child, has a high level of self-esteem and is able to easily make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn.” National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

“Books also can encourage children to ‘follow their dreams and achieve their potential,’ Yes, it seems incredible for a book to launch a life, but it happens every day as hungry, inquisitive young minds reach out and grab hold of the new people, places and ideas that books bring them.” RIF's website

“The best advice I ever got was that knowledge is power and to keep reading.” David Bailey

“There are many ways to enlarge your child’s world. Books are one of them.” Jackie Kennedy

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.” Joseph Addison

“Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home.” Anna Quindlen, *How Reading Changed My Life*

“I cannot remember the books I've read any more than the meals I have eaten; even so, they have made me.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“My alma mater was books, a good library.... I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity.” Malcolm X

“Reading is a discount ticket to everywhere.” Mary Scmich

© Viconsortium 2026