

" An effective learning environment for the acquisition of literacy should be alive with activity which is felt to be deeply purposeful in all the ways of human meaning."

Don Holdaway, *Foundations of Literacy* (1979)

Shared Reading in the Montessori Classroom Benefits and Practicalities

What is Shared Reading?

Shared reading, pioneered in New Zealand by Don Holdaway, is a literature-based approach to reading instruction that is, in effect, the classroom equivalent of bedtime stories. Big books with enlarged text, though not essential to the approach, may be used so that the story can be shared with a large group of children as visibly and interactively as one might share a normal-sized book with one child. Like bedtime reading, the book is read and re-read as often as the story enchants the children. As the text becomes familiar, the children are encouraged to join in the reading with classmates and teacher. The familiar text can become the basis for many other learning opportunities, such as print concepts, sight words, rhyming and other skills lessons. [Extension activities](#), such as those available on this website, can be presented and added, along with the book, to the language shelves for independent use during work time.

DON HOLDAWAY

In the mid 1960's, teacher, writer, lecturer, reading clinician and consultant, Don Holdaway, encouraged teachers in New Zealand, and later elsewhere, to find ways to replicate the bedtime story in their classrooms. The lively sessions in which the children became co-readers with the teacher became known as shared readings.

"When an adult and a child or group of children spend unhurried and uninterrupted time viewing, reading and sharing a book together, the unspoken messages about reading and about books are as important, and perhaps longer lasting, than any part of the actual content."

Margaret Mooney, *Shared Reading: Making it Work for You and Your Children* (1994)

How do children benefit from the shared reading approach?

Shared reading exposes children to the experienced reading model of the teacher in an inviting and supportive climate which encourages their participation. Human contact is critical to literacy, and reading aloud *with* children *every day* is key.

What parallels can be made to Montessori principles?

As a natural approach to literacy, shared reading aligns with several Montessori principles:

- Shared reading begins with the **"whole"**.
The teacher's reading of the storybook exemplifies all of the characteristics of the experienced reader, allowing the children to enjoy and become familiar first with the "whole" of reading.
- **Repetition** is important to learning in the shared reading model.
The teacher reads and re-reads, varying the focus depending on the needs of the group. The book is placed on the shelf with extensions, allowing the children to re-visit the story often.
- Shared reading is **non-competitive** and **all inclusive**.
The children come together to read and work with the same book in a collaborative manner. They actively contribute to the reading with their classmates and with the teacher's guidance. The teacher involves all of the children by targeted questioning and interaction with the text. Children feel comfortable to engage at their level.
- Shared reading sessions **promote community**.
Children interact with the story, the teacher and each other in shared reading. Everyone has a voice. Children are encouraged to share ideas, prior knowledge and experience; and listen with consideration to the ideas and experiences of others. They share enjoyment, surprise and a host of other emotions as they become familiar with the story. They share opinions and solve problems together. It is peace 101! . . . and it doesn't stop with the group session. Older children, especially, carry that sense of community with them as they emulate the teacher's reading and assist others.
- Shared reading **integrates** the learning of concepts and skills in a **meaningful context**.
This is considered one of the top best practices for literacy. Using high quality children's literature opens a wide range of teaching possibilities. Teachers may incorporate a mini-lesson, highlight or model any of the following during shared reading sessions:

Concepts of print

- Print carries a message
- One to one correspondence between words read and printed text
- Conventions of print such as directionality (left to right, top to bottom), differences between letters and words, distinctions between upper and lower case, punctuation
- Common characteristics of books (author, title, front/back)

Strategies to access unfamiliar words

- Phonic knowledge
- Picture clues
- Re-reading a sentence

Expressiveness in reading

- Story language and patterns
- Vocabulary
- Voice

Comprehension

- Making and confirming predictions
- Cloze (fill-in-the blank) activities
- Sequencing pictures
- Re-telling/dramatizing
- Re-building story with key words or sentences

Words, words, words!

- Size - long & short
- Rhyming
- Word endings, word beginnings
- Compound
- Sight

Just as children's knowledge of phonics facilitates exploration and experimentation with print, so also Shared reading sessions may influence the acquisition of phonics, bringing greater meaning to lessons with the sandpaper letters and the moveable alphabet.

Is the group setting critical to shared reading success?

Components of shared reading can be utilized every time the teacher reads, whether to an individual student or the whole group. However, the shared reading approach finds its greatest success when it rides on the enthusiasm and interest of the group and when collaboration is involved.

In practical application in the Montessori classroom, both individual and group shared readings may occur. Group shared readings allow the teacher to provide a reading experience to more children each day, exemplifying the joys of reading in a focused, uninterrupted manner. The teacher may be more challenged to keep the flow of a shared reading to a single child uninterrupted during work time. However, such a reading can be fine tuned to the individual's interest and abilities, and is equally important. In short, children learn in different ways - a balanced approach works best.

Is the use of enlarged texts (big books) necessary for shared reading?

Big books can be valuable to some readings, especially if the group is rather large; however, you can have a successful and enjoyable shared reading without using enlarged texts. Margaret Mooney, in her article entitled, *Shared Reading: Making it work for you and your children*, describes big books as "only a vehicle for the approach of shared reading. They are neither essential every time . . . nor are they the approach itself." If you are searching on line for a big book edition of a favorite story, the following links may be helpful:

Childcraft.com - Use standards keyword: "share reading experiences" to search on-line for big books/small books. A larger selection is available in their catalog under "LITERACY- Shared Reading". Big books/small books are offered as single titles or in collections. Big book storage is sold as well. Request a catalog on line or call 1-800-631-5652.

www.scholastic.com

www.teacherbigbooks.com - Use this site as a navigator for shopping on Amazon.com They've pulled out all the big books available on Amazon and listed them with links by title and author.

e-bay is another possibility

How do you plan a successful shared reading for a multi-age group?

Most children respond positively to book reading and storytelling. However, when working with a multi-age group, especially preschoolers and kindergartners, book selection is critical as attention span and interest levels will vary. Here are some suggestions for success with 3's, 4's and 5's:

- Choose a book with everyone in mind. For example, *Goodnight Moon* is a familiar read for a young multi-age group; *Wild, Wild Sunflower Child Anna*, however, would be better appreciated by an early elementary audience.
- Give the first reading to the whole group (3's, 4's, 5's). Give subsequent, focused readings to older children (5's) only. This is not a hard and fast rule, but, generally, it works.
- Use [extensions](#) to bring focused lessons to individual students. The flexibility of the Montessori classroom allows the teacher to give targeted lessons to individuals when the lesson is not suitable for the whole group.
- Use high quality children's literature and focus on enjoyment first!

References and Resources:

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- Barron, Marlene (1990) *I Learn to Read and Write the Way I Learn to Talk: A Very First Book About Whole Language*. Katonah, New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc.
- Cullinan, Bernice E. (1992) *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read*. New York, New York: Scholastic Inc.
- Kenney, Pamela; Maine Montessori Institute (2005) *Shared Reading: Critical to a Balanced Reading Program*. NCME Montessori Reporter, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, pp. 15 -19.