

Reading Instruction: Early or Late?

By Maggie Dail, M.A., CND

In 1972, Dr. Raymond S. Moore co-authored an article in *Harper's Weekly* entitled, "The Dangers of Early Schooling." Dr. Moore and his wife, Dorothy, wrote, *Better Late Than Early* in 1975. *School Can Wait* was published in 1979 – authored by Dr. Moore and four other people. Dr. Moore explains one of his big concerns regarding early reading instruction in *Homegrown Kids* in 1981:

Leading eye researchers – ophthalmologists and optometrists – insist that prolonged looking at books, near objects, or even confinement in a room without enough opportunity for distant vision often cause "myopia," abnormal nearsightedness. Young children are normally far-sighted, but being forced to adjust at too young an age to near objects over a period of months and years actually causes the immature eyeball to be wrenched out of shape. Anxiety is believed also to contribute to this abnormality." (p. 192)

Physical therapist and founder of The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential in Philadelphia, Glenn Doman and other contributors, have produced a series* of books:

How to Teach Your Baby to Read (1963 and redone in 2006)

How to Teach Your Baby Math

How to Give Your Baby Encyclopedic Knowledge

How to Multiply Your Baby's Intelligence

How to Teach Your Baby to Be Physically Superb

How to Teach Your Baby to Swim

How Smart is Your Baby?

What to Do About Your Brain-Injured Child?

* Books available: www.specialhelps.com

If one can judge a book by its title, they represent very different philosophies of education. Are they really diametrically opposed in their way of teaching children to read? Taking a closer look will reveal otherwise.

For one thing, Moore introduces that section "Taking Time with the Senses" from which the above quote with this on page 191: "We advise that you not rush your child into formal learning before he is ready." He goes on to talk about the development of the different senses. Doman and the neurodevelopmental approach certainly do not advocate early "formal learning" as in a school setting. Further, they do think about the child's development when presenting information. Below find instructions for how to prepare the material your baby will read. Doman was well aware of the development of the eye. He did not advocate teaching babies to read with regular print, but appropriate sized print. Neurodevelopmentalists discourage extensive "screen time" and encourage extensive outside play.

Frequency, Duration, and Intensity

Hallmarks of the neurodevelopmental approach remain frequency, duration and intensity. We use short, frequent and intense (focused) activities to target the brain in specific ways to encourage development. Doman's rule for teaching babies: always stop before they tire. "Lessons" for our youngest "students" will last only seconds. In *Teach Your Baby to Read*, Doman says,

The truth is that a child begins to learn just after birth. By the time he is six years of age and begins his schooling he has already absorbed a fantastic amount of information, fact for fact, perhaps more than he will learn the rest of his life. (P. 17)

Further, Doman gives a developmental sequence and brief history in teaching reading:

1. Birth to One- vital; "should have almost unlimited opportunity for movement, for physical exploration and for experience." P 36
2. One to Five- crucial, "we should be satisfying his staggering thirst for raw material, which he wants to soak up in all possible forms but particularly in terms of language..." p 36
3. Five to Eight- very important, "should be enjoying the material which would normally be presented to him when he is between eight and fourteen." p 42
4. Study of literature on the topic of young children reading produced:
 - a. "The history of teaching little children was not new and indeed stretches back for centuries..."
 - b. Often people, generations apart, do the same things although for different reasons and different philosophies...
 - c. Those who had decided to teach young children had all used systems, which, although they varied somewhat in technique, had many common factors...
 - d. Most importantly, in all of the cases we were able to find where small children were taught to read in the home, everyone had succeeded, no matter what the method." P 55, 56

In *How to Teach Your Baby to Read*, Doman debunks a number of myths:

1. "Children who read too early will have learning problems." Personal experience and reading of authors (and team at the Institutes) does not include any such children. P. 88
2. "Children who read too early will be nasty little geniuses." Is it learning problems or genius? Can't have it both ways. Neither is true. P. 89
3. "The child who reads too early will cause problems in first grade." This is partially true...he will cause problems for the teacher...but isn't it the teacher's job to teach each student as an individual...not a mass production. P. 89-91
4. "The child who learns to read too early will be bored in first grade." Yes, but first grade days are too long for almost every other 5-year-old. "To assume that the child who knows the most will be the child that is the most bored is to assume that the child who knows the least will be the most interested and therefore the least bored." p 90-92
5. "The child who learns to read too early will miss phonetics. If he misses phonetics he will not miss it. You might well ask yourself, "Did I teach my child to hear by the *phonics* method or the *hear listen* method or did I just expose him to spoken language?" p. 93-94

6. "The child who reads too early will have reading problems. Children who *can* read don't have reading problems. Those who *can't* read have the problems." P. 94
7. "The child who reads too early will be deprived of his precious childhood. The two-year-old wants to spend time with family...he wants attention. Usually the chores of life for the adult keep us from giving the child the attention he wants. Any time we spend with him teaching him to read is a joy to him. P. 95-97
8. "The child who reads too early will suffer from *too much pressure*." If learning to read equals pressure this is true. The authors do not advocate pressuring a child, only working when both are ready. P. 97, 98

Teaching Reading Basics – How to Teach Your Baby to Read

1. At what age to begin---the earlier the better
2. Things to bring to the process -- positive attitude and approach; appropriate size and well-organized material.
3. The best time to teach--when both mother and child are "happy and in good form." P. 106-107
4. The best duration --very short; at first a few seconds long three times a day. P. 107
5. "Always stop before you child wants to stop." P. 107
6. The manner of teaching -- very quickly
7. Child's enthusiasm is based on the following: "The speed at which materials are shown. The amount of new material. The joyous manner of mother." P. 108-109
8. Introducing New Material - John Ciardi in *Saturday Review*(5/11/63) said, "that a child should be fed new knowledge 'at the rate determined by her own happy hunger.'" P. 109
9. Consistency - organize your material so that once you start you can be consistent.-- best when done daily. P. 111-112
10. Material Preparation- (materials based on the child's visual apparatus) use stiff poster board in 4" by 24" and a wide red felt tip marker; each word must be 3" tall in all lower case unless it is a proper noun; print in bold (at least 1/2 " wide strokes); on back write the word so that you can read it. Print begins large and gradually reduces to normal print size as the child's visual pathway develops. P. 112-115
11. "Teach your Baby to Read Kit" may be purchased from:
The Better Baby Press, 8801 Stenton Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19118
<http://www.gentlerevolution.com/index2.html>
12. "Summary of The Basics of Good Teaching"
 - a. Begin as young as possible
 - b. Be joyous at all times
 - c. Respect your child
 - d. Teach only when you and your child are happy
 - e. Stop before your child wants to stop
 - f. Show materials quickly
 - g. Introduce new materials often
 - h. Do you program consistently
 - i. Prepare you materials carefully and stay ahead
 - j. Remember the Fail-Safe Law" p. 117
13. Examples of books that follow requirements
 - a. *Enough, Inigo, Enough*
 - b. *Inigo McKenzie, The Contrary Man*
 - c. *You Can't Stay a Baby Forever*
 - d. *Nose is Not Toes p. 152*

14. Remember the following rules in choosing books:
 - a. "Create or choose books that will be interesting to your child.
 - b. Introduce all new vocabulary as single words before beginning the book.
 - c. Make the text large and clear.
 - d. Make sure your child has to turn the page to see the illustration that follows the text."
P. 153
15. Then sit down with your child and read the book to him. If he spontaneously wants to read parts that is fine. Read naturally and with enthusiasm. P. 153-154
16. "Read the book two to three times daily for several days. Each book will have its own life. Some books are ready for the shelf in a few days, others are demanded daily for weeks." P 154
17. At this point the books are placed on his shelf. He can read them himself as often as he likes.
P. 154

- **Don't take my word for it, read the book your self.** www.specialhelps.com

While many of our clients are older children with struggles, many of our techniques come from the basic principles taught in *How to Teach Your Child to Read*. For a chapter book for children who struggle to read and an illustration of how we help our clients order today: *Getting to First Base – Chris Struggles to Read*.
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