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Reflections on Jim Trelease's *The Read-Aloud Handbook* and Mem Fox's *Reading Magic*.

This month I cuddled up with Jim Trelease's *The Read-Aloud Handbook* and Mem Fox's *Reading Magic*. I highly recommend both. They are a wealth of information for us both as teachers and parents on the vital importance of reading aloud to students and our children. What can we do increase our child's attention span, concentration, vocabulary, cognitive activity, and academic performance? Read-aloud to them. Now, this is something we've all known for quite a while. What was new to me though, is how well researched and documented the positive effects of reading aloud are, and how far-reaching the benefits for children are.

Now, one question kept coming into my mind again and again as I read these books. I have three children, Wyatt (age 6), Luke (4), and Wynn (3). Wyatt has been read to 2-3 hours a day since he was an infant (more on why later). Both *The Read-Aloud Handbook* and *Reading Magic* are chock full of stories of children who'd been read to aloud since birth who spontaneously start reading before they enter Kindergarten. I believe these stories. I've seen it happen. I keep expecting it to happen with Wyatt. I am still waiting.

Wyatt adores being read to. Truly, he'll sit for hours. We recently moved to New Mexico and school ended for him. With no school or other activities planned, the kids, mainly Wyatt, were going stir-crazy. (And their mommy wasn't doing so hot either because of this.) So I went to the library and checked out the first Harry Potter book, thinking, "We'll give it a try." We read all four within a week and a half. We just finished "The Hobbit" after a couple of days. The point being, he *loves* to be read to and has the vocabulary of a reader. He knows his alphabet and some sight words, but I keep expecting him to pick up a book and just starting reading. Nothing doing. Any Language Experience Approach activity I've ever tried with him has been met with stout withdrawal. When I suggest perhaps he could read me a word or two, he withdraws into a frowning shell.

Wyatt is an extremely physical and active kid. Now, I know everybody say's that, but even my friends just shake their heads at his activity level. I've always been profoundly grateful that he's as still as a mouse and peaceful when being read to. Why have I read to him 2-3 hours a day since infancy? Yes, I knew it would promote cognitive development and bonding between the two of us. Yes, I knew children who are read to perform better academically. Yes, I do myself love to read and enjoyed the experience. But, above all, I was TIRED! It was the only thing I could do to get him to be still and both of us happy.

So, why hasn't he spontaneously started reading? I don't know. According to the books and research, he just isn't ready yet and the worst thing I could do is try to push him and turn reading into something pressure-filled and anxiety-producing for him.

I share this story with you as teachers and parents kids like Wyatt who will learn to read in *their* time instead of *ours*, and to give us strength not to push them and turn reading something distasteful. But to continue to read to them, read to them books and stories that capture and interest them. Wyatt and me? We'll just keep reading, too. Anybody have a copy of *Lord of the Rings* I can borrow?

There is one area of Jim Trelease's book I would like to take issue with and explore further. This will be included in the September newsletter.