

READ TO ME NEWSLETTER

Read to Me Program
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RTM UPDATE

2003 Programs

READ TO ME has been busily engaged with new programs, collaborations, and initiatives. During February and March we ran successful programs for parents at P911 High School and the Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center. The mothers and fathers at Lincoln Square were parents of 3- and 4-year-olds. Celebratory visits by author Tolya Thompson, Loud Lips Lucy (P911) and illustrator Melanie Hope Greenberg, Down in the Subway (L.S.N.C.) were fabulous. Thanks again to Gregory Robinson's Run for Literacy grant for the P911-Teen Parent program.

In June Susan ran a program at the Arbor Inn, a transitional residence in Brooklyn for mothers with children under 6. We added an additional bookmaking session with Cheryl Taylor of Studio in a School. Cheryl led creative and satisfying painting exercises. Moms were able to make two books for their little ones. Paulette Bogan, the author/illustrator, shared her humorous and beautifully illustrated book Goodnight Lulu, and proved herself the fastest artist on that day in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

Susan, Kristen and author-illustrator-friend Pat Cummings offered a special memorial session on RTM for the teen moms at P932 connected to the awful tragedy of the accidental deaths of two teen moms and one baby.

Collaboration

Our collaboration with Studio in a School and the Center for Intergenerational Reading, funded by the Altman Foundation, is called the Art in Reading. The project's mission is to positively enhance the art and literacy experiences that young children have in the classroom and at home. This past spring AIR trained eight early childhood teachers from four different Head Start and day care centers. In spring 2004 AIR will expand with additional teachers and three new sites.

Training Programs: Past & Future

A staff development training was held in May for 10 social workers from the LYFE Program. Pat Cummings, our guest author-illustrator, was hilarious again when she described the creative process. Thanks also to Rachel Payne, ECRIC Children's Librarian extraordinaire.

RTM is planning a second Professional Training Program for the fall. Participants will be invited to apply from different agencies working with young families. Thanks to the Altman Foundation for sponsoring this important development for the READ TO ME Program.

New Initiatives

We are currently in the pre-production phase of the video project *Ages and Stages* and are preparing for the ACS Fatherhood Literacy Initiative, a program for young dads, in collaboration with other agencies and four Head Start Centers.

Staff News

Kristen's baby Lucina was born April 18, 2003! She's currently reading Sandra Boynton's Moo Ba La La La.

Susan wrote Chapter 9 in Family Literacy: From Theory to Practice, published in the spring 2003 by the International Reading Association. Check website for more details.

RTM LEADERS SHARE THEIR STORIES

READ TO ME is spreading. New RTMs are developing in several states beyond New York. Initiating any kind of program is not an easy task. We commend all of you who have creatively and imaginatively found ways to get more books into the hands of young mothers and their babies. We dedicate this portion of our newsletter to the personal anecdotes of two READ TO ME Leaders. Thanks for giving us your invaluable insights into the adaptability and usefulness of READ TO ME.

Cambridge, MA./In March of 2002 I facilitated my first series of RTM workshops. I conducted these workshops at a high school in Cambridge MA that has a teen parenting program. Teen mothers are able to continue their high school education while their babies are cared for at the day care facility which is on site. The child care program is staffed with professional teachers and social workers and provides child care classes for the mothers. Several high school students who are interested in becoming teachers or social workers work as interns at the day care facility and receive high school credit.

My RTM sessions were held at the end of the school day at the child care center which is physically attached to the high school. Both mothers and interns attended although the attendance was quite erratic. Often the mothers had other obligations that caused their absence and consequently each RTM session had a different mix of participants. It was therefore necessary for each session to be complete in itself. Susan Straub alerted me about the possibility of erratic attendance before I began the sessions. She stressed the importance of having each session be discreet and able to stand on its own. This was an invaluable piece of advice. But despite this challenge, I found the experience very challenging and personally rewarding. I tried to follow the RTM structure fairly closely as it is outlined in Susan's video. I was anxious because it was the first time I was presenting the series and did not feel comfortable deviating from the established structure. I think the series went well but there were some areas that I felt could have gone more smoothly.

During the first session, my students were very quiet and did not participate as much as I had hoped. I would ask questions about their Polaroid pictures but there was little to no response. That part of the session went much faster than I expected since the discussions were so limited. The sessions were scheduled to be between 45 minutes to an hour and I had about twenty minutes left. Luckily Susan had suggested that I bring some

of the wordless books with me just in case something like that occurred. Again, Susan's experience was key. I also found that the book making session of the series was a big hit. Knowing that this session would be time consuming, we scheduled it to be an hour and a half. But, even with that extended time, the students felt that there was not enough time. The time just flew by. The materials were left with them so that students could complete making their books during their own time. One of the reasons that the book making session was not as productive as it could have been was that many of the mothers brought their babies with them. This caused the mothers to get distracted and lose focus.

I had the good fortune of being asked to return this past spring to conduct the RTM sessions again at the same school. Some of the participants would be the same but many would be new. I made some minor but important changes. At the beginning of the first session, before the Polaroid photos are taken, I show the first few minutes of Susan's video. After the video, I asked the students what they thought about the video. The first time I did this, very little discussion ensued. This time, before I showed the video, I asked the students to choose one statement in the video that they related to. I even gave them some paper so that they could jot it down. This helped them to focus and really listen to the comments made in the video. This time when we discussed the video, the discussion was lively and contagious.

I also made a minor change in regard to the Polaroid photo taking portion of the first session. After we took the first round of photos I gave out very colorful 3"x3" post it notes. I asked the students to write a caption on the post it and stick it under the photo. I told the students that the caption could be a quote that their baby or in the case of the interns, any baby might notice about the photo. What is something that a baby might notice about this photo? We then went around the room and read the captions. Then we did another round of photos. This time I told them to ham it up and make a face, an expression of feeling. It could be a silly face, a serious face, one of surprise, anything. Again, they were instructed to take a post it note and write a caption. We also photographed the students in dramatic poses and in small groups of students. Again, they wrote captions. This activity broke the ice and involved all of the students. The writing portion gave students the necessary time to reflect and think of something to say. Putting their thoughts in writing also helped to anchor the discussion. The discussion was lively and helped to get the students to interact with each other and get to know each other. It was also just fun. And, the hour flew by.

I also decided to hold two book making sessions and to make each one an hour and a half. We also arranged for child care during these sessions so that no babies were present since the babies distracted both mothers and interns last year. The book making sessions were well attended and the students were very pleased and proud of their books. Many of the students said that they couldn't believe how good their book came out and that they had never done any art before. It was so wonderful for their self esteem. Again, the time just seemed to fly by.

I hope that my students benefited from the RTM sessions. I know that I felt so good about bringing the wonderful world of books to these teenagers and a new generation of

readers. I am very excited to be a part of Susan's team and to contribute in a small way to the important work that she is doing.

Susan Barahal, Cambridge, MA

Indianapolis, IN/ I was first introduced to the Read to Me program on a long car ride last summer. My husband and I were headed to a wedding and I had grabbed Oprah's O Magazine to help the time pass. I read the article about Read to Me and announced to my husband, then and there, that I was going to become involved with the program.

After teaching for five years and obtaining a Master's Degree in Reading, I knew first hand the need for a program like this. Now a stay at home mom, I was looking for a way to remain involved with education, but on my own terms. It turns out, Read to Me has been a perfect fit for both my schedule and my skills. I was certain I wanted to start a group in my community of the East Side of Indianapolis.

After some investigation, I connected with the Dean of our district's alternative school (a school for students who have difficulties in a normal academic environment). She saw a need with her students, and the pilot program of Read to Me Indy began in January 2003. The first group was small (only four moms, one dad, and seven children) with sporadic attendance, but it was a great start, holding true to all the fundamental elements of the program.

My goal in starting the program was to keep it small in scope. After all, the reason I chose to be a stay at home mom was to spend time with my family. I have found that the Read to Me program certainly "fits the bill". I am able to choose the amount of time I devote to the program without sacrificing the quality or importance of its message. It continues to amaze me how much benefit can be found in the simple act of reading!

Jennifer Hancock, Indianapolis, IN



Lucina and Kristen

Reading to a baby requires the ability to read his/her signals. One must be able to tune into the baby's facial expressions, gestures, sounds, movements etc. Lucina clearly is not in the mood to read. Maybe later.

THE ATTENDANCE ISSUE: Coping with low/changing attendance

READ TO ME leaders need to prepare for an expected number of participants (typically 10-15), and deal with whoever shows up (often 1-3.) We cope inventively, but also experience feelings of loss. We need to feel those feelings, of course, but also re-imagine that whoever comes gets our best.

One 1-family workshop was a scheduled trip to the local library. The staff member of the homeless shelter and I accompanied a 20-year-old her 20-month-old son Angel to the branch library. I felt annoyed and even a little apologetic when we arrived since I led the librarian to expect between 6-10 people. However, everything was cool: the mom was an avid reader and clearly had been reading to him. He held his book the right way up and was gentle when turning the paper pages. He sat knowingly, expectantly at one of the ordinary grown-up library tables, anticipating some pleasure in reading. As he spotted his favorite objects he named them 'ball,' 'car,' 'doggie.' Mom said the words back to him, and together they pointed and named, and sought evidence on other pages and in the library room of more balls, cars or doggies. He borrowed several board books and a few picture books. Mom found several new books by specifically requested authors to borrow with her updated library card.

I felt personally disappointed not to enjoy the librarian's demonstration with rhymes and actions. We all have active fun. However, this mother and child had the full attention of three keen adults, and blossomed. At the next READ TO ME workshop, another mother with a 6 week baby regretted not going on the library trip, and our *experienced* mother offered to take her there. She had already finished reading her books, needed to return them and borrow more. Isn't this the goal?

A 2nd workshop with only one family was to be a group read. I brought multiple copies of Corduroy by Don Freeman. One mother and her 20-month daughter Niasia were READ TO ME 'regulars.' (In previous workshops, the little girl was often cranky. Her mother is pregnant with a second child, and the little girl intuits difficulties ahead.) I invited the mother to *read* the artwork: tell us the story as you and your daughter see it unfold in the pictures. Both mother and daughter were fascinated, and pointed to things they observed and talked about them. The daughter helped guide the mother's observations by touching certain things in the pictures. She also kept choosing another volume of Corduroy, asserting her toddler-power of personal choice. Since all the books were the same, there was never any issue, and the mom (and I) found the antics somewhat amusing.

We then read the words Mr. Freeman actually wrote, enjoying the enriched story through the written text. We all three marveled at how close we were to guessing the storyline,

and how wonderfully well the actual story enhanced the pictures. (For additional pleasure for both, Mom substituted her own daughter's name Niasia for Lisa.)

All of this took more than half an hour, more time than the mother expected her child could handle. The rest of the session was spent choosing extra gift books. There was no doubt that I would give them a copy of Corduroy. They earned it!

In this case my feelings of missing the others was replaced with a genuine sense of having learned something vitally important in this special session which could help other new family readers. There is art in reading, especially in picture books for children, and in their stories; and even more in the remarkable closeness shared between parent and child.

Susan Straub
Director & Creator
READ TO ME

AGES AND STAGES VIDEO

Ages and Stages is currently in its pre-production phase. We are still searching for funds to begin production. Here is a brief description.

Sometimes it is difficult to imagine what reading to a baby looks like. From my years of experience with READ TO ME participant mothers and babies, I perceive a need to offer more information about how real babies at different ages and stages actually use books. Some newborn-to-3 month old infants track the pages with their eyes and ears, and even seem to respond to the rhythm of the text. Older babies mouth books. Still more advanced babies grab for the books and cheerfully hold and drop them. Babies nearing one year are more interested in locomotion than sitting still, but will allow readers to pass books back and forth, or play little games using books as props. I have re-imagined all of these activities as pre-reading.

Unaccustomed new parent-readers often find it difficult to allow the baby to explore books in these ways. Some argue that the baby isn't old enough to read yet, won't listen or sit still, or wrecks the books. They may wait until the child is in pre-school before reading to him. Because we know the 0-3 time is valuably rich with opportunities to lay the groundwork for all future school success and perhaps a lifetime of reading, something needs to help these parents think more positively about emergent reading.

I envision a series of brief (2-3 minutes) vignettes showing real babies at different ages and stages doing what they really do with books. This pro-baby and light-hearted videotape would not be just an idealized view of a parent reading to a quiet compliant baby but a more complex yet realistic portrayal of babies and the ways they use books. Eventually the videotape might be specially packaged with a selection of appropriate books.

SPECIAL THANKS

The enormous generosity of our supporters enables us to keep sharing the joy of books with young mothers and their babies.

THANK YOU!

SUPPORTERS

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AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATORS

Pat Cummings, Ananse and the Lizard: A West African Tale (Henry Holt, 2002)

Paulette Bogan, Goodnight, Lulu (Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2003)

Melanie Hope Greenberg, Down in the Subway (Star Bright Books, 1998)

Lori Carlson, Sol a Sol (Henry Holt, 1998)

Tolya Thompson, Worrywart Wes/Loud Lips Lucy (Savor Publishing, 2002)

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