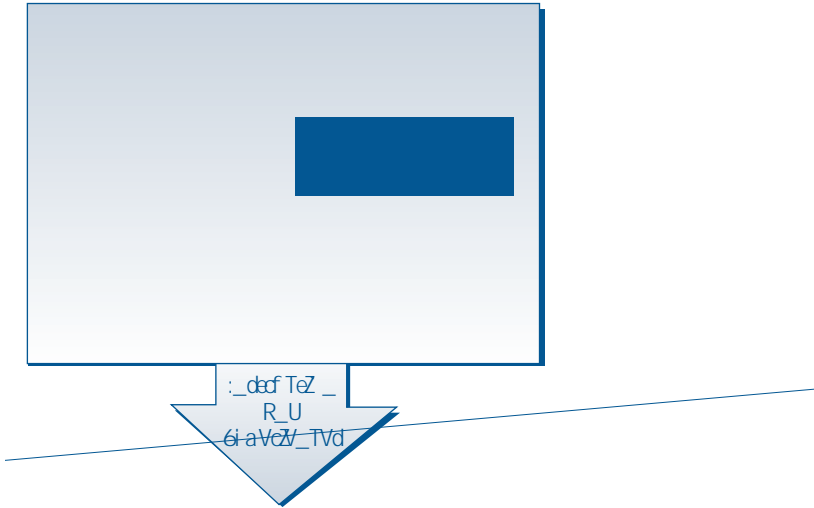


3

Contexts for Learning to Read

Young children acquire reading literacy through a variety of activities and experiences within different contexts. At fourth grade, children develop the skills, behaviors, and attitudes associated with reading literacy mainly at home and in school. There, various resources and activities foster reading literacy. Some of the experiences are very structured, particularly those that occur in classrooms as part of reading instruction. Others, less structured, occur as a natural and informal part of the child's daily activities. Both are critical in helping young children develop reading literacy. Moreover, each environment supports

the development of reading literacy, PIRLS 2006 will use questionnaires completed by the students tested, their parents or caregivers, their school principals, and their teachers



National and Community Contexts

Cultural, social, political, and economic factors all contribute to the backdrop of children's literacy development within a country and community. The success a country has in educating its children and producing a literate population depends greatly on the country's emphasis on the goal of literacy for all, the resources it has available, and the mechanisms it can assemble for providing effective programs and incentives that foster reading and improve achievement.

Emphasis on Literacy. The value that a country places on literacy and literacy activities affects the commitment of time and resources

necessary for a literature-rich environment. A country's decision to make literacy a priority is influenced in part by people's backgrounds and beliefs about the importance of literacy for success both within and outside of school (Bourdieu, 1986; Street, 2001). Even without extensive economic resources, countries can promote

languages spoken at home, and how language is used, are important factors in reading literacy development. Children whose knowledge of the language used in formal reading instruction is substantially below that expected of children of that age are likely to be at an initial disadvantage. In addition, use of different languages or dialects at home and at school may cause problems for young students learning to read.

Economic Resources As children mature, the support and guidance provided at home contributes to literacy development in many different ways. An important aspect of the home environment is the availability of reading material and educational resources. Research consistently shows a strong positive relationship between achievement and socioeconomic status, or indicators of socio-economic status such as parents' or caregivers' occupation or level of education. Research also shows that ready access to various types of printed material is strongly associated with literacy achievement (Purves & Elley, 1994). Homes that make such material available convey to children an expectation that learning to read is a desirable and worthwhile goal.

Social and Cultural Resources Society and culture are inherent influences on the perceived importance of reading for academic and personal success. Parents and other family members convey their beliefs and attitudes in the way they teach their children to read and to appreciate text. Parents and caregivers engaging in many literacy activities fosters children's positive attitudes towards reading. For most children, the home provides modeling and direct guidance in effective literacy practices. Young children who see adults and older children reading or using texts in different ways are learning to appreciate and use printed material. Beyond modeling, parents or other caregivers can directly support reading development by expressing positive opinions about reading and literacy.

Home-School Connection. Across all of the home factors associated with acquiring reading literacy, parents' or caregivers' involvement in children's schooling may be key to literacy development (Christenson, 1992). Research shows that students who discuss their school studies and what they are reading with their parents or

caregivers are higher achievers than those who do not (Mullis, Martin, González & Kennedy, 2003). Involved parents or caregivers can reinforce the value of learning to read, monitor children's completion of read

School Contexts

Although the home can be a rich environment for developing reading literacy, for most children school remains the main location for formal learning and educational activities. By their fourth year of formal schooling, most students have acquired basic reading skills and are beginning to read more complex material with greater independence. This is due in part to the changed curricular demands placed on students at this level. At this point, children are transitioning from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” (Chall, 1983). Students’ educational experiences may be especially significant at this point in their reading literacy development.

Many factors in school affect reading literacy acquisition, directly or indirectly. Some of the main school factors that contribute to the acquisition of reading literacy are discussed below.

School Policy and Curriculum.

students and collaborate in curricular and extracurricular activities that foster learning.

The extent and quality of school resources are also critical. These may include resources as basic as trained teachers or adequate classroom space, as well as less essential but beneficial resources like comfortable furniture and surroundings. The presence of a library or multi-media center may be particularly re;

In addition to homework, teachers have a number of ways to monitor student progress and achievement. Informal assessment during instruction helps the teacher to identify needs of particular individuals, or to evaluate the pace of the presentation of concepts and materials (Lipson & Wixon, 1997). Formal tests, both teacher-made and standardized assessments, typically are used to make important decisions about the students, such as grades or marks, promotion, or tracking. The types of question included in tests and quizzes can send strong signals to students about what is important. For example, teachers can ask about a variety of textual information, such as facts, ideas, character motivations, and comparisons with other materials or personal experiences. Teachers also can use a variety of test formats ranging from multiple-choice questions to essays.

