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## **An educator's evaluation of quality reading resources for parents and teachers**

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

An educator's evaluation of quality  
reading resources for parents and teachers.

A Thesis Submitted to the  
university Honors Program  
In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree  
with university Honors  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

By

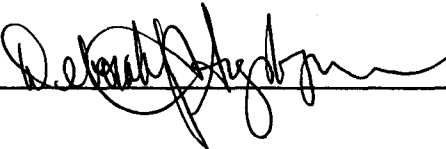
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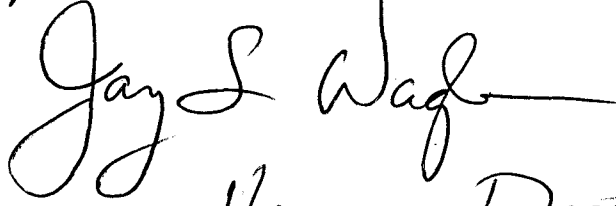
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There are many children in this country who are learning to read or need help with reading. Parents are unsure where to look for quality resources on the subject of reading. They are overwhelmed by advertisements on the television offering a "quick fix" to help their child learn or do better in reading. While some parents invest in these expensive programs, many others look to their child's teacher for the answer. The problem is that although teachers are very qualified at offering advice to parents, many do not know where to turn for quality reading resources. It would be of great benefit for teachers, as well as parents, to have a list of books to refer to when the need arises.

#### Description and Relevance of project

##### Purpose of project

This project is designed to assist teachers and parents in selecting reading resources. The purpose of the project is to evaluate reading resources and determine which are of the highest quality. A list of the recommended resources will then be compiled for use by teachers and parents. The various resources will help parents of children who are learning to read, need motivation in reading, or have problems with reading.

##### Author's Authority on subject

I feel that I am capable of evaluating and recommending reading resource books for several reasons. First, I am a senior

at Northern Illinois university majoring in Elementary Education. While at N.I.U. I have taken several reading methods classes that have aided in my understanding of reading and reading problems. This knowledge has also assisted me in choosing the benchmark resources (those against which my selections would be evaluated) for the project. I also turned to teachers for validation of my impressions on the resources.

Besides my educational background I am also a mother of four children and a staunch believer in the value of children and reading. I believe that it is not only a parents and teacher's right, but duty, to guide a child on the path to becoming a successful reader. This guide, for many adults, comes in the form of a resource book.

#### put line of Proceq~re

In order to develop such a resource, I planned and followed the following six steps:

1. Choose the benchmark resources for the project.
2. Develop an evaluation form.
3. Choose the respondents.
4. Conduct a search for the materials to be evaluated.
5. Ask respondents to evaluate the materials.
6. Interpret results and synthesize with the information in benchmarks.

#### categories of Materials

In order to evaluate the resource materials in an orderly fashion, I decided to place eight books in four different

categories. The first category was "teaching a child to read." The books that I located to fit under this category were Parents Are Teachers Too by Claudia Jones and Shortcuts to Beginning Reading by Marie L. Myers. This category was chosen because parents often want to assist their child in learning to read and these books may help.

The next category was "motivating a child to read." The books, Reading Is Not A spectator sport by Mary Helen Pelton and Developing Readers in the Middle Years by Elaine Millard were placed here. This category was chosen because many children need motivation to become successful readers.

"Helping a child to read better" was the third category. It is my belief that there are many children that need help with reading and parents, as well as teachers, need resources to turn to. The books placed under this category were, Beyond the ;ReadalQJldby Dorothy Grant Hennings and Any Child .r::an .-Bead Better-Develgping Your Child's Reading~kills OutlLt<lEL !;he Classroom by Harvey s. Wiener.

The last category was "helping children with reading problems." This category was aimed at assisting the many children who need special help with reading. The two books that were listed under this category were, Helping Children with Reading . and spelling by Rea Reason and Rene Boote and the Complete Reading Disabilities Handbook by Wilma H. Miller.

## The Selection of criteria

### Benchmark Resources

In order to evaluate the resource materials, I first had to decide on several benchmarks to obtain the criteria from. The first benchmark that I chose, The Reading Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease was given to me by my advisor, who thought that it might be relevant to my project. I read the book and realized that most of what I felt was essential to a reading resource was written about in this book. In this book Trelease offers practical advice to parents and teachers about reading and reading aloud to children. Trelease extolls the virtues of reading aloud to children from birth on up and holds the belief that reading aloud awakens a child's mind and helps to improve their language skills.

The next resource, Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading also believed that reading aloud is important. This resource was not a book but rather a report, compiled by a commission that evaluated more than 10,000 reading research projects. This report was written in an effort to improve the reading situation in America. One of the areas that this report emphasizes is the importance of reading aloud to a child. In it the authors state that, "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children." (Becoming a Nation, p.23)



~stablishing the criteri~

Both of these benchmarks illustrate the significance of reading aloud to children, and this is therefore a criterion of mine if the book is aimed at teaching a child to read.

Another criterion for any book about reading that would be recommended to include information on motivation. "Motivation is intrinsic and internal-a driving force within us." (Tompkins, 139) This is the feeling of Gail Tompkins in Literacy for the 21st century. If a child is unmotivated he or she often gives up, remaining passive and uninvolved. Teachers, as well as parents, must motivate children in reading if they want to help them to be successful. Becoming a Nation of Readers echoes these views, writing that, "Motivation is one of the keys to learning to read." (Becoming a Nation, 14)

The book's format is also an issue when selecting a resource for teachers and parents. It needs to be in an easy-to-read format. This means that almost any parent will be able to read and understand it, regardless of his or her educational background.

Along with an easy-to-read format, a recommended book needs to provide clear, reasonable advice on how to assist a child in reading. Whether the book is on learning to read or about a child with learning disabilities, parents and teachers need concrete solutions.

Advice that is given also needs to be for a wide range of children's abilities or problems. Parents and teachers generally

do not have only one problem that they need direction on and a book that offers advice on only one area will be of limited use. Even though initially some parents may look for information on a specific area, a book that offers more diversity would be of benefit in the long run.

Even if a book is able to give advice on a variety of problems, the author has to be able to back up his/her statements with research-based facts. Jim Trelease, for instance, gives many statistics to back up the statements that he makes. He also has an extensive list of notes to prove where he has gotten his facts. Books that give a lot of statements without being able to back them up will not be considered sound.

It is also important for a book to have a list of recommended books, or resources, to turn to. Essentials of Children's Literature by Carl M. Tomlinson, has a large list of recommended children's books that are categorized in different genres. This enables parents and teachers to be able to extend beyond that book if they wish to.

#### Respondents Chosen

In order to evaluate the quality of the resources that I found I enlisted the aid of five adults. Though I had my own criteria and ideas about the books, I felt that it would be of value to get a range of opinions concerning the resources. The participants were all women ranging in age from the mid 20's to the early 40's with varying levels of education.

The first person is the librarian for a children's library. She has a B.S. in education with some graduate work completed. I have gotten to know her over the years when I have taken my children into the library. She was chosen because she possesses both a love for books and a knowledge of literacy. She will be referred to as "librarian respondent." She believes that "children need to be encouraged to read for the love of reading itself."

The next two respondents are both elementary school teachers. The first one (teacher respondent #1) has a B.A. in elementary education. She wrote that, "a child will learn how to read by being exposed to good literature, phonics activities, and being read to and reading to someone." She was picked because she has been a teacher for only a few years and has new and fresh ideas about reading. The second teacher (teacher respondent #2) has a B.S. in elementary education with some graduate classes. She feels that, "Any way that we can make reading easier and fun, will help open so many doors for a child." She was chosen because she has taught school for over twenty years and has a lot of experience with children. She has also taught special education and has worked with children with reading problems. Respondent #2 is a parent of a 12 year old and is also an avid reader.

The last two respondents are both parents with high school diplomas. The first parent (parent respondent #1) wrote that if children "are strong readers they will do good in school." She

has two children, ages 7 and 9, and a 16 year old step-child. She was selected because she is also an avid reader and visits the library often. The second parent (parent respondent #2) also has three children. Their ages are 9,11, and 13. She believes that, "The earlier you introduce your child to books and reading comprehension, the better a child will do in school." This respondent was chosen because she is a big supporter of reading to children.

Even though the respondents have varying degrees of education and experience, they were all instructed to keep the child who has reading difficulties in mind when reviewing the resources.

#### Procedure

##### Search for Materials

After I chose my respondents, I had to gather the materials. I had an idea from reading the benchmarks what criteria I was looking for and kept this in mind while conducting my search. I decided to start with avenues that I thought any parent or teacher could easily have access to. I began with a search on the internet at *Amazon.com* since they have the largest supply of books. I typed in many different phrases, such as "helping children to read" but was unable to come up with very many books. Those that I did find that seemed of quality I was able to order at the local library through an inter-library loan.

Next, I asked the librarian at the local elementary school if there was a resource library for parents at the school. She

directed me to the section, and although there were books on different behavior problems, there was nothing on reading. This is a school that I feel would greatly benefit from a resource section on reading. This would make quality reading resources readily available for both parents and teachers.

I decided to try the bookstore, *Borders*, since this would be very accessible for parents and teachers. There were many educational books for sale in this bookstore, but I was only able to find one that seemed sound enough to be included in the study.

The last, and most successful search I did was at Founder's Library at Northern Illinois university. By using the computer and typing in key phrases I was able to locate areas in the library that I could search and find the books that I needed. The only negative aspect about using the library at N.I.U. is that it does not seem readily accessible to most parents or teachers. Even though anyone can use the library at N.I.U. the only ones able to check out resources are students and faculty.

#### Questions Chosen for Respondents

After the books were selected, I decided on the questions that I would ask the respondents. A complete list of the questions are included in appendix A. The first two questions addressed readability and the degree to which the book gave clear, reasonable advice. I felt that this criterion was essential in a sound resource book. I also wanted opinions from people of varying levels of education to determine if a variety of people could use the book.

The next three questions were aimed at determining if the book covered a wide range of children's abilities, if the information stated in the book was backed up by facts, and if there was a list of recommended children's books. The answers given, combined with questions answered by the respondents before they looked at the book, gave me a better perspective of the book and of the importance people place in different aspects of a book. A complete List of the questions asked of the respondents are included in Appendix B.

The sixth and seventh questions were left open-ended and dealt with the strong and weak areas of the book. These questions enabled me to get a clear view of the respondent's opinion of the book.

The last two questions were chosen so that I would be able to rank the books and compare the reasons the respondents gave if they would recommended the books.

#### Instructions Given to Respondents

In order to evaluate the resources, the respondents were each given a total of four books to look at. They were told to review each book and fill out the questionnaire. I explained to them that they did not have to read each book, but they did have to review it well enough to be able to answer each question.

I distributed the resources so that each book would be evaluated by respondents of different background (i.e. a teacher and a parent).

### selected Resources

The books were next placed into their categories and examined to determine if they met the criteria.

#### Teaching a Child to Read

Under the category of "teaching a child to read" the book Parents Are Teachers Too: Enriching Your Child's First six Years, by Claudia Jones was placed. This is a book that offers parents many ideas on how to teach a child to read. It includes such sections as reading readiness, introducing the alphabet, and learning to write. Jones not only advocates reading aloud to children, but also uses quotes from Jim Trelease to make her point. This, along with an extensive bibliography, helps to make this book sound.

There are many sections in this book, each including activities that are simple but educational. An example from the section on introducing the alphabet suggests writing each new letter in the sand or with fingerpaints. The book also gives a multitude of advice and motivational activities that is in an easy-to-read language.

Jones not only explains how to teach reading but also has sections on other areas such as math, sports, and nature. There are also lists of recommended adult and children's books. One of the books that is on her list is one that is a continuation of this one, called More Parents Are Teachers Too-Encouraging Your 6-to 12-Year old.

The other book in the category of teaching a child to read

is Shortcuts to Beginning Reading, a How-To Manual by Marie L. Myers. While the last book focused on aspects of reading in younger children, this one focuses on teaching reading and building reading fluency in children of many different ages.

This book is easily understood and well organized with a long table of contents, a glossary, and an index. Chapter 3, which comprises the majority of the book, centers around a series of methods used to build fluency and shows the rationale behind them. These methods offer advice on a wide range of situations. The large bibliography gives validity to the many facts that were offered in this book. There is also an adult and children's book section.

In the methods section of the book the author states the importance of reading aloud to a child and shows how it can facilitate the building of fluency. Several of the examples showed reading aloud used during a lesson with the teacher or parent reading a section of a book while the student/child followed along.

Along with methods for building fluency is a section on motivation, primarily of students who hate reading. In this motivational technique the adult is to buy an item, such as a small car and then, "Use the items as bait for having students read by either telling them about or showing them *one* of the items." (Myers,52) The item suggested to give to the child in the book is used purely as a reward and has no relevance to the book. Another idea given is used for reading sentence strips. "If the



student read correctly, he or she gets a toy immediately to put in his or her bag." (Myers,53)

### Motivating Readers

The next category also deals with the issue of motivation. Reading Is Not A Spectator sport by Mary Helen Pelton illustrates many different ways that a child can be motivated to read. This book begins with inspirational stories of people whose lives have been changed by reading.

Reading aloud to children is a recurrent theme of this book ... "when we read aloud to students, we share a very special moment in time. We slip away to distant lands and places. We meet characters we mutually love and hate. We laugh together, we cry together." (Pelton, 22) Pelton also uses quotes about reading aloud from two of the benchmarks used, namely The Read-Aloud Handbook and Becoming a Nation of Readers. she has references at the end of every chapter to give validity to the many statements she makes.

Besides motivating a child to read by reading aloud, Pelton offers parents and teachers a wide range of advice by giving many suggestions about such things from library use to designing the ideal literacy classroom. Ideas were also given from actual schools that involved such things as having a sleep-over in the school's library after reading the book HelJ2.,I'm a Prisoner in the Library by Eth Clifford.

The advice offered in this book is mainly directed towards teachers and the classroom, but will also be of use to parents.

It is presented in an understandable form. There is also a list of books, pamphlets, and television resources at the back of the book.

Developing Reader~ in the Middle Years by Elaine Millard is the second book in motivating a child. This book was compiled from research gathered and interviews given by Millard. The book is intended to discuss issues relating to reading and how teachers can help children.

Though the book claims to give advice to teachers on ways to motivate a child in reading, there was very little present. She writes that, "I think it is vital that teachers of older children have a full grasp of the issues underlying the reading debate and know about the most common methods used to instruct young readers so that they can trace their influence on the attitudes to reading that exist in their own classrooms and work to build on them or to remedy failures." (Millard, p.13) This type of confusing sentence was common throughout the book and made understanding the meaning very difficult. In addition, the print was small, making the book difficult to read.

The suggestions that were offered to teachers were often basic, "Teachers need to keep up to date with new children's fiction and update their classroom collections frequently." (Millard, p.69) Millard is able to back up many of her statements by citing various studies, but does not give a list of recommended books.

Helping Children to Read Better

In the third category the book was Beyond the Read Aloud by Dorothy Grant Hennings was placed. This book was written in response to The Readaloud Handbook in an effort to integrate reading aloud in the classroom into an "ongoing whole-language program in which children learn to reflect on literature by listening and responding to it." (Hennings, p.1)

To illustrate several teaching techniques, Hennings used three teacher composites, illuminating the practice of a kindergarten, fourth, and seventh grade teacher. By doing this the author was able to offer a wide range of advice. The kindergarten teacher's story, for example, showed a week long lesson plan covering a book. Reading aloud was done often by the teacher.

The week began with reading the story and concluded with comparing and contrasting the book with another one. The steps and the reasoning behind them are both in a language that is easy for a teacher or parent to understand. The strategies used will not only educate children but will also motivate them to become better readers because the activities are enjoyable. The chapters ended with a list of references that aided in making this a sound book. The only recommended books that were listed were the ones used during the lessons. This book was aimed at teachers, but gives advice that many parents can use at home.

The last book in this category is Any Child Can Read Better-~evelo~~9ur Child's Reading Skills outside the Classroom by Harvey S. Wiener. This book was designed to give advice to parents on assisting their child with reading skills that will "guarantee success in the classroom and beyond."

The book begins with several reasons why a parent should not purposefully set out to teach a preschooler to read. One of Wiener's reasons is that, "if you become more of your child's teacher, you risk being less of a parent, and you can strain the already delicate relations in a household." (Wiener, p.5) Wiener believes that the teaching of reading should be left up to the teachers at school.

Wiener also has a section on having a child write in his/her personal books. Wiener has the child putting a circle around a key thought or underlining an interesting word. To give validity to his feelings, Wiener quoted an article that was written in 1940 called *How to Mark a Book*.

Though this book was easy to read, many of the activities involved asking a child questions about a story he or she read. There was also no bibliography or other references provided to give validity to the author's statements.

#### Children with Reading Problems.

The last category deals with children with reading problems.

The first book, Helping Children with Reading and spelling: a special Needs Manual, was written by Rea Reason and Rene Boote. This well organized and easily understood book is intended for

teachers, but can be a good source for parents. The ideas written about in the book are intended mainly for the primary school student, but the authors indicate that the suggestions can be adapted for older students.

This book has many specific chapters from how to motivate and assess a student to teaching phonics to children of different reading levels. Many ideas for games are given that will assist the child with reading or speaking. Along with many of the games are reproducible pages for the parent/teacher. Reading aloud to children is also stressed.

The authors give examples of children with different problems and shows an initial plan of action with a continuing plan of action. There is also a large bibliography. Addresses of several organizations are given at the end of the book to assist the parent or teacher.

The last book that was reviewed was the complete Reading Disabilities Handbook by Wilma H. Miller. This well organized and easily read book has a large amount of information on ways to diagnose children with reading handicaps. The book is intended for use in the early and middle school grades. several of the areas covered are visual and auditory impairments and memory deficiencies. A wide range of problems are addressed.

This large book offers a number of pages that can be photocopied for use by teachers and parents. These activities are educational as well as motivational. The book also clearly explained specific strategies to use when teaching handicapped

children.

The appendix at the end of the book gives lists of computer software and other resources that would be helpful to parents and teachers. The statements that are given in the book are indeed backed up by facts.

After reviewing the books and the evaluations given by the respondents, I have come to some conclusions regarding which books should be given a recommendation.

#### Recommendations

##### Learning to Read

Parents Are Teachers by Claudia Jones met all of the criteria. I found it to not only be educational but an inspiration to me as a parent and future teacher. There was an abundance of information that was given in a logical matter. The respondents also agreed that this was a great book. "I think that any parent could pick it up and follow her ideas." wrote parent respondent #1. I highly recommend this book for parents as well as teachers. Recommendation: Highly recommended by both the respondents and myself.

The next book, Shortcuts to Beginning Reading by Marie L. Myers also meets the criteria needed. The methods used and the rationale given were very complimentary to each other. The only aspect of the book that I did not agree with was the part on "high external rewards." I felt that even though this "bribery" may work in the short term, it would do nothing towards turning a child who hates reading into a child who loves it. Teacher

respondent \*1 also agreed with my view about the reward system. I recommend this book primarily for teachers, but with a word of caution about the part of the book that deals with rewards. Recommendation: A moderate recommendation by both the respondents and myself.

Motivating Readers

Reading Is Not A spectator sport by Mary Helen Pelton met all the criteria. I enjoyed the inspirational stories of readers at the beginning of the book. I found a lot of advice that I will be able to use when I become a teacher, especially the idea of having a sleep over in the library after reading the book, Help, I'm a Prisoner in the Library. I definitely recommend this book for teachers. Parents could also enjoy reading this book, but may, however, find the language rather difficult to read. As parent respondent \*2 wrote about the language, "much of it was confusing to me as a parent." Recommendation: A high recommendation from teachers and myself but only a moderate one from parent respondents.

Developing Readers in the Middle Years by Elaine Millard was nothing more than a very long research paper. I found the language to be quite difficult to read at times. The beginning of the book offered inspiration and help to teachers, but delivered neither. As teacher respondent \*2 put it, *lilt* is hard to read-not interesting." Recommendation: Not recommended by any respondents or myself.

Helpin~hildren to Read Better

A very interesting book was ~eyond The Read Aloud by Dorothy Grant Hennings. This book gave very specific strategies for the classroom. I enjoyed the step-by-step process that Hennings took me thru in her examples. I felt that her approach would really aid children in constructing meaning in literature. This book met all of the criteria and is recommended for teachers as well as parents who have children involved in kindergarten, fourth grade, or junior high. Teacher respondent #1 also gave this book her approval, commenting that, "The author does touch on what strategies the teachers do use during the reading lessons." Recommendation: Highly recommended by both respondents and myself.

Though the book Any Child Can Read Bette~ by Harvey S. wiener was originally written in 1990, many of his ideas are outdated. If a preschooler of mine was ready to read I do not feel that I might, "strain the already delicate relations in a household." As a parent of four children, (three of which are in school) I am unsure where he gets the idea that households have "delicate relations." Teacher #1 also felt that the book was outdated.

I also do not like Wiener's suggestion that my child, or student, will be writing in the margins of his or her personal books. These books are meant for pleasure and if reading is turned into a labor-intensive activity, I feel that a love for reading will never be found. I was also surprised that Wiener



had to go back to 1940 to find material to quote for his book.

Recommendation: This book was not recommended by the respondents or myself.

Children with Reading Problems

Helping Children with Reading and Spelling. A special Needs Manual by Rea Reason and Rene Boote is highly recommended for teachers and parents alike. The activities and games shown are not only educational but fun for children. The reasoning behind the activities is also useful. As librarian respondent #1 wrote, "I thought the "Case Example," followed by a "plan of action" is an especially helpful way of illustrating different techniques to help children. combining spelling and handwriting methods is valuable to have in 1 manual." Recommendation: Highly recommended by both the respondents and myself.

The last book, Complete Reading Disabilities Handbook by Wilma H. Miller will also be recommended for parents and teachers. Besides meeting all the criteria the book gives a tremendous amount of advice to parents and teachers. The activities shown can easily be made or copied from the book and seem like they would be enjoyable for children. "I would recommend it to teachers. A parent might find the activities helpful. Many are easily home-made games." replied respondent teacher #2. Recommendation: Highly recommended by both the respondents and myself.

### Conclusions

In the end of my study, I discovered that using this method to evaluate resources is effective. The combination of parents and educators gave a unique perspective of the resources. Because of the thorough evaluation done I have a high degree of confidence in the reading resource books that I recommended.

I believe that every town, whether at a local school or junior library, needs to have a section of reading resources and other educational resources for parents and teachers. I intend on distributing my list of reading resources to the local elementary schools and junior library. Hopefully the list will not only be used, but also expanded by future librarians and/or teachers.



4. Is the information stated in this book backed up by facts (i.e. statistics, references)?

5. Does this book give a list of recommended children's books, and if so, are they grouped in a way that is easy for a parent/teacher to use?

6. What do you feel are the strong areas of this book?

7. What do you feel are the negative aspects of this book? <sup>3.</sup>

8. Would you recommend this book to another parent/teacher? If so, why?

9. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest) how would you rate this book?

Respondent Questionnaire  
Appendix B

Name:

1. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
2. What are your feelings about children and reading?

Pretend that you are buying a resource book to help you assist your child/student in reading. Please circle the number that best reflects your feelings to the following statements. (I-not very important to you 10-feel very strongly about it)

1. It is important for me to be able to understand the book with ease.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

2. It is important for the book to have clear suggestions on reading.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

3. It is important for there to be a list of recommended children's books in the resource book.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

4. It is important that the information stated in the book be backed up by facts.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Recommended Reading Resource List  
Appendix C

Overall Recommendation

Learning to Read

Parents Are Teachers, Too  
by Claudia Jones

Highly recommended for  
parents and teachers

Shortcuts to Beginning Reading  
by Marie L. Myers

Moderately recommended for  
teachers

Motivating Readers

Reading is Not.-A Spectator sport  
by Mary Helen Pelton

Highly recommended for  
teachers and moderately  
for parents

Developing Readers in the Middle Years  
by Elaine Millard

Not recommended for  
parents or teachers

Helping Children to Read Better

Beyond the Read Aloud  
by Dorothy Grant Hennings

Highly recommended for  
parents and teachers

Any~hi~d Can Read Better  
by Harvey S. wiener

Not recommended for  
teachers or parents

Children with Reading Problems

Helping Children with Reading  
and spelling  
by Rea Reason and Rene Boote

Highly recommended for  
parents and teachers

comple~~ Reading Disabilities Handbook  
by Wilma H. Miller

Highly recommended for  
parents and teachers

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