



RAISE YOUR CHILD TO
**READ &
WRITE**

FRANCES ADLAM

A guide for New Zealand
parents: from birth
to seven years

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Frances Adlam

PART 1 LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE

HELLO

I have written this book because I believe in the importance of children learning to read and write to their optimal ability. Reading and writing is the key to success at school, and success at school is the key to opening so many possibilities and choices for our children as they get older.

As you are reading this book I am confident that you, too, understand the need to support a child's reading and writing journey. Every child needs a loving adult to help them on their way. However, you could well have questions or be unsure about your child's journey. Are you:

- › eager to raise your child to be a confident reader and writer?
- › curious to know which activities will support the growth of your child's learning brain?
- › anxious about your child's reading level?
- › concerned that your son never writes or draws?
- › worried it has taken your toddler a long time to talk?
- › confused about whether you should just let your child play or encourage her to read?
- › bamboozled by how you are supposed to immerse your baby in the recommended 2000 words an hour when you are at work all day?

Raise Your Child to Read and Write will answer these questions, and more. This book brings together the latest science-based evidence

in how children learn to read and write and translates it into parent-friendly language, so that you can apply the key ideas at home. *Simple ideas that will make a huge difference to your child's learning.*

I'm Frances Adlam. I have been teaching students of all ages how to read and write for over thirty years. I was one of the fortunate few to directly train under Ted Wragg (voted one of the top 100 educators of all time). Professor Wragg's famous mantra: 'If a child is not learning, change the way you're teaching' has underpinned all my work in education.

As well as my qualifications in education, lecturing in teacher-training programmes, working as an advisor for the Ministry of Education, and writing over forty books for teachers, it is working as a literacy specialist and teaching students who struggle at reading and writing that has become my passion. Many of these students have dyslexia, ADHD or other learning differences, which makes the process for them extra tricky. I also take workshops for teachers around New Zealand on how children learn to read and write.

It was on such a tour of my 'Playful Literacy' workshop that the idea for this book was sparked. As teachers worked together, a thought kept recurring: *Wouldn't it be wonderful if parents also had this knowledge.* Technology, fast-paced living, parents working longer hours, scattered families, and an epidemic of stress and anxiety – these factors can sometimes derail us from what really helps grow a child's learning brain.

In this age of conflicting information-overload, parents need the scientific facts set out in clear language. And so this book was born.

In these chapters you will learn how talk and language acquisition in the first years of your little one's life is the foundation from which all learning grows. *Talking to your baby will fire up her brain pathways for language.* Talking to your baby will shape your child's brain infrastructure to hear the sounds in spoken words – a process which will impact the quality of your child's learning for the rest of her life.

You will learn how the process of learning to read is built upon a multitude of skills: story-telling, singing, role play, reading to children, listening to nursery rhymes, and so much more. The values, attitudes and passion you bring to your child's reading experiences will directly impact your child's success in reading through their school life.

Researchers can now predict the potential reading level of a child in primary school and college by the wealth of pre-reading experiences the child has been immersed in, in their early years.

This book will show how the ability to write evolves from years of hands-on activities, such as messy play, scribbling and drawing. Writing is both a physical activity and a thinking activity. Your child needs a strong core, strong muscles and excellent co-ordination to sit at a table and write with ease. All those words you immersed your child in through stories, songs and talk are now used to shape the thinking and structure of your child's written work. Nothing goes to waste.

Possibly the most significant factor this book highlights: *the importance of the love, time and interest you put into building your little one's reading and writing brain.*

This is not about adding more to your to-do list. Really. It is about simplifying life. How young children learn to read and write is one of the most scientifically researched areas in education. We know precisely what supports a child to learn to read and write, and what doesn't. *In your child's first years, interactive experiences in talking, reading and mark-making with a loving parent are the most significant determiners of your child's success in reading and writing.*

I encourage you to let go of the pressure and worries that often come with a child's learning. I encourage you to reclaim the joy

and adventure of learning, for you and your child. Take trips to the bookshop and library with him; curl up on the sofa and spend the afternoon reading; open the box of crayons and scribble, doodle and laugh with your child. These are the ways we ignite the fire inside your child to love reading and writing.

If you are hoping this book will help your child win a spelling prize at four years old, this book is not the one. But if, like me, you are interested in raising a child who is passionate about words, creating stories, reading books and much more, then this book is for you.

Nurturing your child's brain to read and write well is a process, not a race. The more enjoyable the process, the richer the learning.

I am passionate that every child has the right to learn to read and write well. Loving parents are crucial to this process. Reading this book will give you vital insights into why and how you can best help your child.

This book sits on the shoulders of educationalists, psychologists and scientists who have researched this area in depth. For those of you keen to further expand your knowledge in the research, there is a list of recommended resources at the back of the book.

Unplug. Breathe. Engage with your little one. And have some fun. Truly, it's the best thing you can do. Enjoy the journey,

Frances x

OVERVIEW

There are three key areas involved in young children learning to read and write:

- › talk and language acquisition
- › reading
- › mark-making and writing

You will learn how each of these three areas has its own developmental stages to work through, and that each area overlaps and impacts the other two.

To keep the book user-friendly for parents, the book is divided into sections, which each cover general facts about how children learn to read and write, toolkits of activities for specific ages and stages, and more specialised subject matters such as children who learn differently and children raised in bilingual families.

Points to remember:

1. Learning to read and write follows a developmental path, which starts at birth. Each child will travel along the path in their own way and at their own pace.
2. Your relationship is at the heart of raising a reading- and writing-smart child.
3. Parental involvement in promoting the value of reading and writing will directly impact your child's success in all areas of learning.
4. Fun, play and creativity are crucial to engage your child in learning to read and write. Engagement leads to practise; practise leads to progress and progress leads to fulfillment.

Terms used in this book:

1. The term 'loving parent' is used to represent the vast array of adults who dedicate their love and time to raising a child. This includes, but is not limited to, grandparents, step-parents, caregivers, nannies, aunts and uncles, older siblings.
2. In an attempt to acknowledge gender equality, the personal pronouns 'he' and 'she' are alternated from chapter to chapter and, quite often, within a chapter.
3. The term 'school-aged child' has been used for the five–seven–year–old age band. Again, this description is used for ease of reading, not for an indication of when or if a child should start school. The science behind the information for this age band is relevant for all children, whether attending school or being home-schooled.

The age guidelines in this book have been grouped according to five stages:

- › Young baby: birth–8 months
- › Infant: 8 months–15 months
- › Toddler: 15 months–3 years
- › Young child: 3–5 years
- › School-aged child: 5–7 years

This grouping of ages and stages is based on its usefulness in corresponding with the reading and writing development for young children. (There is, of course, fluidity in these between cultures, communities and educational systems.) All the guidelines in this book are just that – guidelines. Let them offer you a flexible framework, not a rigid benchmark.



*Every child is different; every journey is different.
But at the heart of learning to read and write is
always you, the parent.*

The crucial role of parents in growing a child who learns to read and write well

Learning to read and write is a journey made up of incremental steps that start at birth. At first glance, many of the components of this journey seem to have little to do with learning to read and write: messy play, being outdoors, role playing – how can these activities have any impact on your child's future reading and writing success at school? Yet they certainly do.

This book sets out to connect which experiences are crucial for raising a reading- and writing-smart child, and why. Many of these experiences will be familiar to you, although you may be surprised as to how and why they are so important for this learning journey.

Learning to read and write is crucial to your child's well-being in so many ways:

- › It directly impacts your child's success at school.
- › It empowers your child to have more choices in how he can express himself and communicate with others.
- › It opens up a world of possibilities, joy and options for your child.

By picking up this book, you might be already considering how you can get involved in your child's reading and writing development. The good news is there is no need for you to 'teach' anything. Teachers will teach the curriculum areas of reading and writing, but as we know, there is so much more to learning than a curriculum of subject areas.

Many of the ideas in this book will be familiar to you, with their strong roots in parental traditions: singing lullabies to your baby, playing peek-a-boo with infants, reading stories to young children.

The concerning shift, however, is that parents are singing, talking and reading less to their children than any time in history. At the same time, science is clearly showing us that these activities are fundamental for growing a smart reading- and writing-brain.

All success in learning is impacted by the attitudes, values and experiences around learning a child is immersed in at home. Once at school, a child may learn how to read and write from a teacher, but the passion for this, the belief in its importance, and the resilience to persevere in learning when it gets tricky, well, these elements are all learnt at home.

A child who associates reading with fun, snuggles and other fond memories built at home will more likely be an enthusiastic learner in this area at school.

Reading and writing must be embedded in the moment-to-moment, day-to-day life of your child, starting at home with you, her parent. There is no better use of your precious time than channelling it into face-to-face interactive, talk-immersed activities with your little one.

Children are not born readers, spellers or writers. Learning to read, write and spell does not magically happen at four or five years old, just because your child is at an age to start school. It proceeds along a continuum, and, you guessed it, this continuum starts at birth (most likely before).

Every sound your baby hears, every song your toddler sings, and every scribble your little one draws combine, with a myriad other experiences, to build your child's reading and writing brain.

Learning is not a one-size-fits-all process. Observing and identifying your child's learning preferences will guide you as to which experiences will help him grow his reading and writing brain. You could find that:

- › an active child may enjoy writing letters with sticks in the sand
- › an imaginative child may need opportunities for role play and drama
- › a restless child may not want to listen to a story in the morning, but at the end of a busy day is happy to snuggle up and read some books
- › a shy child may struggle with group role-play, but, with the support of a sensitive adult, can be gradually guided to join in

What we need is a toolkit that highlights the connections between:

- › key activities that will help a child grow a reading and writing brain;
- › knowledge of the developmental stages of growing such a brain;
- › up-to-date scientific evidence;
- › real-world application of the activities for busy parents.

This book is your toolkit.



COMMON MYTHS ABOUT READING AND WRITING

Untangling learning-to-read myths

In the past ten years, educational research has brought much clarity to what does, and doesn't, support a young child to learn to read and write well. Before we explore some essential tools to help your child with this process, let's untangle some common myths that can inadvertently derail the progress.

MYTH 1 **Children learn to read in the same way they learn to talk**

Talking is hard-wired into our DNA. Typically, a child immersed in a rich speaking environment will learn to talk by the time he reaches his first birthday. For many years, the educational world believed this 'immersion' theory could be transposed to develop a child's reading skills. We now know this isn't true. Learning to read is quite different from learning to talk. Humans have been talking for tens of thousands of years; in contrast we've only been reading for a few thousand years.

Reading is not hard-wired into our DNA. Reading will not just happen; it must be taught.

MYTH 2 **Surround young children in books and they will learn to read**

Most of us probably know a child who seemingly taught themselves to read, by being surrounded by a wonderful world of books and stories. This is the exception, not the rule. It is true that immersing young children in books is hugely beneficial for brain development, vocabulary enrichment and igniting a love of words, books and stories.

It is to be encouraged wholeheartedly. But, learning to read is a complex process. It requires the weaving together of a multitude of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

A young child needs to know their letters and sounds. She needs to know how to blend the sounds of letters together to read a word. She needs to have strategies to read an unfamiliar word. Most children need explicit instruction to learn to read. Most children do not learn to read by osmosis.

MYTH 3 **Children must be a certain age before they can learn to read**

Learning to read evolves along a continuum of developmental skills and knowledge. From birth, children are constantly building the brain pathways that will enable them to read and write well. Many young children transition to conventional reading (of first books) between five and seven years old because this is typically when learning to read becomes a strong focus within the schooling system. We must not let this age-based convention distract us from the reality of what is happening – children progress along the learning-to-read continuum, step by incremental step.

MYTH 4 **Learning to read is a school's responsibility**

Your child's school is responsible for teaching your child to read. However, there is unequivocal evidence that a parent's involvement

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