

Chapter 1

Can You Really Teach Infants to Read?

(Our Story)

If I ask you to stop and imagine a parent teaching a tiny child to read, what comes to mind? Does it look like any of these?

- A strict authoritarian parent places an infant in a booster chair at a desk piled high with phonics textbooks and, hovering nearby with a ruler in hand, barks out instructions explaining how each sound is made and how we aren't quitting today until you can read *mother, father, dearest, please can I have some more.*
- A well-intentioned parent pleads through clenched teeth with a stubborn toddler to please just look at the word on the flashcard already while the toddler screams, "NO NO NO NO, DON'T WANT TO!!!" The parent then coerces the child to focus attention on the card just long enough to be rewarded with a jelly bean before running off again.
- A parent places a child in front of a magic educational video promising instantaneous results with little or no parental involvement. This parent figures: "Why not try a digital baby sitter that just might give my child a jump start on life? It isn't that expensive really...if they get a good scholarship because of it, we'll come out ahead."
- Or a three-year-old who can read but who has become a walking encyclopedia with zero personality. This kid can recite Pi to a hundred digits, read Shakespeare, and knows the whole periodic table of elements but never smiles or has any fun.

What if it didn't look like any of those but looked more like this scenario?

A mother sings the ABC's and a few other songs to her child while making breakfast. It keeps the child entertained long enough for food to arrive without tears and the kid claps

along happily. Later, they play with alphabet blocks making words, saying letter sounds, and, of course, building towers and knocking them over. Before nap time, Mommy reads several story books running her fingers under each word as she reads. The child loves looking at the pictures and finding words that he can read. After nap time, Mommy needs to go to the grocery store. From the car seat in the back comes an excited cry of “Stop, stop, red, red.” At the store, the mom shows her child what she is getting. The child points to the word *spaghetti* on the box and says “Get-ee, get-ee,” bouncing up and down happily. After they get home and eat dinner, Daddy takes a few minutes to show his son something special on his computer. The child is getting tired and cranky but perks up at the thought of time with Daddy and getting to see fun things on Daddy’s special machine. The family reads together before bed and, after the child points to the last page and declares, “The end,” it is time to go to sleep.

Granted this last example seems rather idyllic, but what if it were in fact closer to reality than the others? What if, through simple but meaningful interaction with your child, you could give him or her the gift of reading from an incredibly early age?

What if your child could...

- learn to talk and read at the same time,
- never remember a time when he couldn’t read,
- never be frustrated learning how to read,
- have his world opened up early (be able to process and take in many different stimuli at an early age),
- have enhanced parent-child relationship,
- build a solid foundation for lifelong learning, and
- have increased independence, self-motivation, and self-confidence.

While we certainly believe that all of these things are possible (and have witnessed them firsthand), what if the only benefit from teaching early reading was quality time with your child? One of the first and foremost promoters of early childhood literacy, Glenn Doman, considered it enough

of a legacy if all he did was to bring parents and children closer together. It is said of Glenn:

Once, many years ago, someone who did not agree with Glenn's ideas about early learning said of him, "All Glenn Doman is doing is driving mothers and babies closer together."

Well, it is not all that Glenn did in his long and highly productive life, but he often said, "Put that on my tombstone, make that my epitaph: He drove mothers and babies closer together, and I will rest well."¹

For our family, we decided that this was reason enough to give this approach a chance, and we have reaped a close bond with our children and numerous other benefits, some of which I am sure are still completely undiscovered at our children's young ages.

Our story begins

Shortly after we were married, my husband and I were both taking phonetic language courses. These courses teach how to recognize and reproduce the sounds in languages, theoretically any language. We had hopes that these courses would later help us learn the daunting language of Mandarin, and it is indeed assisting us in that tremendous undertaking. But it was during these classes that we both learned we were expecting our first child and heard about the idea of teaching babies to read.

The idea of teaching our baby to read intrigued us, and we began looking into this completely foreign concept. Morning sickness and fatigue from the pregnancy gave me plenty of time to research many things regarding child-rearing, and I soon learned a great deal about the fascinating world of infant education. After reading and researching, I began nesting projects to prepare for the new baby. I made sure we had the usual things like clothes and diapers for the

1 "Remember Glenn." <https://iahp.org/remember-glenn>

baby and also digital flashcards to teach our baby written language one day.

Our goal was not to teach our baby to read by a certain age but to spend quality time with our child and provide intellectual stimulation. At that point, we hoped for great results and an early reader but figured if it didn't work, we had nothing to lose and only quality time to gain.

So we welcomed our first son into the world with great joy. His first year of life was filled with many great (but busy) times as we moved several times including halfway around the world to a new culture. When we had time we worked on written language with our son with digital flashcards, songs, games, books, toys, and even words on videos.

It didn't add up to that much time, a few minutes here, a few minutes there, and we often thought that if only, we had more time to invest in this process we would see better results. However, one day before he was even nine months old he surprised us by reading a word on a television screen. I often read the words at the end of this video to him, but that day he read one himself, completely unprompted. Was this real? Could our baby actually be reading before his first birthday? We weren't expecting this. Yet he consistently demonstrated the ability to read that word and soon picked up several others. Before his first birthday he could read a handful of words and knew several letters and their sounds.

Today, our oldest son can read college level literature; he finished *Beowulf* before his fifth birthday. Our second son, on the other hand, is much more gifted in motor skills than verbal skills, but, well before he turned three, took off and quickly began reading sentences. At three and a half he could read many easy readers designed for elementary-school students, and even the much more challenging classic works of *Winnie-the-Pooh* and *Thomas the Tank Engine*. Our third son, who is just over a year old, can verbally read or hand sign many words already.

When we first heard about the concept of teaching early childhood literacy, we had no idea how much we all

would learn, and we look forward to seeing where this grand adventure will take all of our kids in education and life.

Can you see early reading as a possibility for the future of your family?

What could it do for your child's education?

How could it impact your child's life?

And what do you have to lose?