



# Success Stories

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## “Tess”

**M**y daughter, Tess, is a joyful eight-year old girl, with an unmatched zest for life. She happily embraces life, despite the multiple challenges that she confronts on a daily basis. Tess has epilepsy, frontal lobe dysfunction, and dyspraxia, as well as delays in language, fine motor, and gross motor skills. With assistance from a few support professionals, Tess currently functions successfully in a regular education second grade classroom. She is an excellent reader, writer and speller, and she is mastering all components of the second grade math curriculum.



When Tess was three years old, she entered the early childhood program at Prairie Children Preschool. Her classroom was comprised of five children with special needs and ten “community” (neurotypical) peers. At that point in her life, Tess had a very difficult time attending to stories read by the teacher during circle time. She would stand up, jump, spin, wander around, or roll on the floor. She loved having stories read to her at home, but it always took five or six readings of the same book to get her to sit still during the whole story. We needed to do something to make circle and story time at school more productive and successful for her.

To this day...Tess still loves to read and to participate in read aloud activities.

## The Book Reading Intervention

Together, Tess’s teacher and I came up with a plan. Tess’s teacher gave me a list of all the books that she would be reading to the children over the next few weeks. After securing copies of each of the books, I read them to my daughter several times at home, before the book was presented in the classroom. I used several strategies such as asking questions and prompting Tess to retell the story to get Tess more engaged and involved in the books we read together.

When the teacher read the book to the class, Tess already had been exposed to it many times before. She was eager to sit still and listen. Oftentimes, she would “read along” with her own copy of the book placed on her lap. She had learned to sit still, attend to a read-aloud session, follow the social norms of the classroom, and even participate in discussions about the book.

## What We Learned

This intervention generated a number of positive outcomes for Tess. The strategies we used taught Tess the importance of listening to stories, following classroom rules, and attending to her teacher. It also taught her that books are enjoyable. To this day, five years later, Tess still *loves* to read and to participate in read aloud activities. I believe that this intervention contributed tremendously to her current love of books, as well as to her ability to follow classroom rules.

We did experience some challenges in creating and implementing this intervention. Tess’s teacher and I discussed several different approaches before settling on the book reading intervention. Initially, I had recommended that one of the aides take my daughter to a quiet setting and read a preferred book to her. Tess’s teacher pointed out that this proposal would address the reading concern, but it would not teach Tess to attend or to be a part of the community.

Another challenge was the cost of securing all of the books. It would quickly become very expensive to buy all of the books that we could not find in libraries. Eventually, we figured out that Tess's teacher could borrow the books that we had selected from the other teachers in the center. And this helped tremendously to defray the costs of the intervention.

I believe that other parents and professionals can learn important lessons from this story. I learned the value of using interactive shared book reading strategies to improve Tess's literacy learning and her ability to pay attention in school. And, equally as important, Tess's teacher and I both learned that differences in perspective can be addressed through creative collaboration and problem-solving.

## Intervention Practices that Support Effective Book Reading with Young Children

The following have been shown to be effective early childhood practices for engaging children's interest and enhancing their language and literacy learning:

**Dialogic Reading:** The adult and child switch roles so that the child learns how to become the storyteller with the support of the adult who prompts the child by asking questions and carefully listening to the responses.

### **Interactive Shared Book Reading:**

The adult uses a variety of techniques to engage the child (or a group of children) in read aloud activities.

**Shared Book Reading:** The adult reads a story to a child (or a group of children) without requiring extensive involvement or interaction.

## If You Want to Learn More ...

What Works Clearinghouse.

[http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/early\\_ed/](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/early_ed/)

Center for Early Literacy Learning. (2008).

Children's active participation in reading and storytelling can enhance literacy learning. Retrieved March 28, 2008 from

[http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/cellpapers/cellnotes\\_v1\\_n2.pdf](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/cellpapers/cellnotes_v1_n2.pdf)

DEC Recommended Practices that support book reading with young children:

C19: Planning occurs prior to implementation and that planning considers the situation (home, classroom) to which the interventions will be applied.

F1: Family members and professionals jointly develop appropriate family-identified outcomes.

Sandall, S. Hemmeter, M. L., Smith, B. J., & McLean, M. E. (2005).

*DEC recommended practices: A comprehensive guide for practical application in early intervention/early childhood special education.* Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Buyse, V., Wesley, P. W., Snyder, P., & Winton, P. (2006). Evidence-based practice: What does it really mean for the early childhood field? *Young Exceptional Children*, 9(4), 2-11.



The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) promotes policies and advances evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities. DEC is the largest professional organization dedicated to individuals who work with or on behalf of young children with special needs and their families. For more information about DEC, visit [www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org)

## The DEC Success Story Initiative

The DEC Success Story initiative is designed to share the positive experiences and desired results of early intervention and early childhood special education programs for young children with disabilities (birth to 8) and their families. The stories submitted by families and professionals are based on actual events and reflect the authentic views and experiences of those depicted. DEC success stories are intended to show the relationship between evidence-based practice and positive outcomes for children and families. Each story also includes resources to provide additional information about the featured practice.

To submit your DEC success story, go to [www.dec-sped.org](http://www.dec-sped.org)

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Photo provided by Tess's family.

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