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**Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

Taking Literacy Outside the Classroom

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The ability to read well is considered by many to be a precursor for success throughout life. A student will often face great challenges across academic subjects if they are a struggling reader. Because this is such a crucial skill, it is important to consider all methods available to help develop literacy. While there are many conventional strategies for teaching literacy, there are also unconventional strategies that many parents and teachers do not think of when helping a child learn to read.

Conventional strategies in assisting students to become readers include reading **to** students, **with** students, and **by** students. Using these methods, students gain many skills. By reading **to** a student, we are helping them to develop comprehension and listening skills. They also gain skills in recognizing contextual clues and witnessing adult modeling of the very behaviors teachers would like to reinforce. By reading **with** students, we are helping them to develop a connection to us which can help speed the process of reading fluency. This is accomplished through strategies like choral or echoic reading whereby children hear an adult read then re-read what was said, auditory memory skills, fluency, and comprehension skills from mentors asking questions during story reading time. Reading **by** the children themselves can be an excellent strategy for integrating creativity through imaginary story telling, story writing, 'hearing' the way a word or sentence sounds, and for studying particular story genres.

Unconventional strategies seem to be more of a challenge, but may actually be simpler to implement. With families being as busy as they are today, many may decide that spending a large amount of time on these conventional strategies is simply too much to do. Feeling overwhelmed, many parents may decide to do nothing. Luckily there are fun, imaginative ways to develop literacy skills regardless of time or place.

There are unconventional ways to teach reading comprehension skills. While comprehension is often viewed as the ultimate goal of reading, we typically spend very little instruction time focusing on it. Instead parents and educators become consumed with the process of teaching decoding skills. What are some creative ways to build a child's comprehension, regardless of location? While watching television shows ask children one of the 5 Ws (who, what, when, where, why). During a commercial break ask your son or daughter what they think is going to happen next or who they like the most in a particular show. While listening to books on tape in your family vehicle further discussions of program content can also occur. Books on tape are an excellent avenue for children to be able to benefit from hearing fluent, expressive readers as well.

Phonetic skills can be developed outside the classroom too. Do you remember playing the Alphabet / I Spy Game while driving (I see something that begins with the letter A)? This could include variations of the game by using rhyming words, ending sounds, or alliteration as part of your game.

Sight words often help children develop reading proficiency earlier than a strictly phonics based approach. By reading advertisement billboards and bumper stickers children can learn to recognize many words by sight. Critical thinking skills can be taught as well by helping our children to identify truth and fiction in advertising.

Lastly, never underestimate the educational value of treasures from your purse, wallet, or glove compartment box. Old brochures, receipts, or deposit slips can be used to help children practice their reading and writing skills.

With a bit of creativity we can continually develop literacy skills in our children. These skills can be taught using both conventional and unconventional methods. *Oh, the Places You'll Go* when you think beyond convention and take literacy outside the classroom.

*Special thanks are given to Dr. Seuss for his literary achievements and the use of the title of one of his marvelous stories for the purpose of this article.