ForeWord Reviews
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Helping Your Children with Reading and Writing at Home
Mary A. Colbert
William P. Colbert
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Authors Mary and William Colbert, educators and specialists in the field of teaching reading and writing, encourage parents to make reading and writing with their children an enjoyable and valued part of family life. They affirm that this will not only contribute greatly to the future success of their children, but it will also create cherished memories and make for a stronger family. The authors present evidence that when parents share reading and writing activities with their children, communication improves and mutual understanding deepens, opening doors to a lifetime of satisfying relationships.

One barrier to such activities can be a parent's belief that such activities are best left to "experts." The authors soundly disprove this idea with stories of adults who recall much-loved multi-generational reading and writing activities in the home. The authors include questionnaires to help parents compare their thinking on the subject with that of professionals in the field. Parents who tend to downplay their teaching abilities may be pleasantly surprised at how many of their beliefs about the learning process are in agreement with those of the authors and other experts.

The Colberts insist that reading aloud to small children is one of the most effective things parents can do to inspire a love of reading. Careful listening to children by teachers, curriculum workers, and especially parents, can identify their interests and the next point where learning should begin for each child. The authors demonstrate how families can share a wide range of reading materials, from newspapers to the classics, and how discussions of shared reading can improve communication and create foundations for thinking, listening, and respect that will ease various life-stage issues that arise in every family.

Making the point that reading and writing are essential for an educated, informed, and productive citizenry, the authors suggest strategies for the integration of family interests and activities with the schools. They assert that such investments for the future "would cost far less than a war and far less than the ultimate costs of the new prison-expansion programs being initiated in many communities," and that "the ultimate result would surely considerably reduce the need for wars and prisons."

Although the book is written in a somewhat didactic style that will appeal more to professional educators than to average parents, it does possess a buoyant, light-hearted optimism about parents' abilities to affect learning outcomes for their children. The Colberts offer the assurance that parents who strive to engage their children in reading and writing at home "will gain much more than they ever give to the enterprise."

Kristine Morris