

Parents, teachers stop reading aloud too early and kids are missing out, researcher says

ABC Radio Perth – Reading to Kids Ending Too Early Study
By [Emma Wynne](#)

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Research involving almost 1,000 West Australian schoolchildren has revealed that parents, and teachers, may be giving up reading aloud to them too early.

Dr Margaret Merga from Murdoch University interviewed 997 children in years four and six for her study.

She said 60 per cent of them reported they were not read to at home.

"Many parents stopped reading aloud when their kids could read by themselves," Dr Merga told [ABC Radio Perth](#).

"Over 50 per cent of year four students and 70 per cent of year sixes weren't being read to by anyone at home.

"Some of them weren't being read to at all at school either.

"But the accountability for them to be able to read aloud in class and do testing of oral reading seemed to be increasing and was of real concern to these children."



PHOTO: [A child reads alone, but is it of benefit to her ongoing learning?](#) (Supplied: Josh Applegate/Unsplash)

Reading aloud helps with pronunciation skills

Dr Merga acknowledged it may seem logical to let children read by themselves once they had learned the basics.

But being read to, and also reading aloud themselves, helped children gain confidence or have unfamiliar words explained to them, according to Dr Merga.

In her interviews with the children Dr Merga found that they could see the benefits of reading aloud with their parents without being prompted.

"They would say things like: 'I looked around and I knew that I was better than the other children in my year group because I read with mum or with dad and we had that opportunity for me to try out words and listen to how words are said'," she explained.

"For children it can be quite embarrassing to mispronounce words, particularly if they find themselves standing up in front of the class."

Dogs listen without judgment



[A nationwide program that sees children read aloud to dogs helps build their confidence and improve their literacy.](#)

Reading creates time with parents

The children also reported simply enjoying the time spent reading with their parents.

"This was a bit of a sad moment in some of the interviews," Dr Merga said.

"Some of the children were fine with it [no oral reading at home]; they said, 'That's fine, they were slowing me down anyway'.

"But quite a few children said that they actually really regretted it.

"And these weren't necessarily children who were struggling with reading, some of them were really competent and years ahead in their reading.

["A lot of the children talked about that time, about having their parents' attention. Even if they had to share it with siblings, it was still really close attention."](#)

"They were sitting down together, the parents were off the phone, they didn't have the TV or anything else on and they could really enjoy that experience."

Dr Merga acknowledged that many parents were juggling busy schedules, but she said her research highlighted the importance of finding time to continue reading aloud.

GIF: [Literacy isn't something that magically finishes once kids learn how to read.](#)

Expectations about reading 'expire'

Dr Merga said no reading aloud once children had learnt the basics could also inadvertently send the wrong message about the importance of literacy.

"In 2012 I spoke to a quirky teenager who said to me: 'I used to be really into reading and I was so good at it and I won a prize, but then mum and dad stopped expecting me to do it and school stopped sending books home so I knew it wasn't important anymore.'

"I sat there trying to hold my face together.

"It came out in later research, this real feeling that children get that there is an expiry date on it.

"Both at schools and home, we are accidentally giving this message that literacy is something that is magically finished once they learn how to read."