

Babies Reading - and Loving It!

While a debate continues to rage among educationalists about the best time to teach children to read, tiny babies are proving time and again that they not only can read, but love to do so. Felicity Wong is a case in point. A YouTube video shows her reading more than a dozen words just two days after her first birthday. As her father writes and erases the words on a magnetic doodle pad, the tiny girl gestures to indicate the meaning of each word in turn, even pronouncing a couple of them out loud. Felicity is now two and a half. Recent videos show her reading her Thomas the Tank Engine book by herself at two years and four months and her Cinderella book at two years and five months - both of them from cover to cover. When Felicity's father, KL, offers to read a book for her, the response he gets is invariably an impassioned one, "No! I want to read it myself." Notes mother Elaine, "Felicity has developed a great love for reading. She actually prefers books to her toys!" In terms of the lessons themselves, KL says, "The biggest myth about teaching babies to read is that it is necessary to force them in some way. In fact, babies love to read, and the lessons are a great source of bonding between parents and children." KL and Elaine believe their daughter's affinity for books is a natural consequence of early and consistent exposure to the written word. Using flash cards, Felicity's parents began introducing her to a variety of words from the age of 4 months. The cards enable young babies to easily learn to recognize words, but of course, they do not teach the words' meanings. In the beginning, Felicity was very focused on the cards. But as time went by, her attention began being drawn to other things - especially as she became increasingly mobile. Because KL and Elaine only gave Felicity lessons when she was receptive, and always stopped before she wanted to, these lessons were soon becoming shorter and less frequent. Then, when Felicity was 9 months old, KL and Elaine began showing her multi-sensory DVDs that taught the meanings of words along with the words themselves. The dedicated parents also began producing sets of words as books and even computer programs, accompanied by photos taken by and of themselves. As well as enjoying the DVDs, Felicity loved the books and software so much that it was not unusual for her to ask to see five sets of words in a row. At 11 months old, Felicity began demonstrating knowledge of the meanings of words - and even reading some words out loud. Eager to share this news and encourage other parents to teach their babies to read, KL and Elaine filmed Felicity reading on two occasions at the age of 12 months. A common objection raised against babies reading is that they are parroting words without meaning. Yet, in these two videos of Felicity, we see a baby clearly demonstrating knowledge of the meanings of many words. In the first video, Felicity pronounces 2 words out loud and gestures to indicate the meanings of 12 others. In the second video, she reads aloud 11 words (including 2 in Chinese) and gestures the meanings of 5 words. As the videos of Felicity at two years and four months, and two years and five months show, it was just a short step from here to being able to read her favorite books all on her own. KL and Elaine feel they have given their daughter the gift of a lifelong love of reading. And while they continue to be amazed by Felicity's progress, they also believe that every parent can achieve something similar with their own child - provided they begin teaching him or her early enough.

About the Author

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