

Let's Celebrate Reading

By Dr. Al Roberts

When people think of March festivities, they may envision green-themed parties for St. Patrick's Day or look forward to basketball madness. I like to remember that March is also National Reading Awareness Month.

Read Across America, sponsored by the National Education Association, kicked off the month with events in all 50 states and numerous locations abroad. The observance began in 1998 to honor the legacy of Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel) whose birthday falls on March 2. The annual remembrance encourages people to enjoy the fun of reading.

Also in March, the National Head Start Association sponsors National Read-Aloud Month to challenge parents and caregivers to read books aloud to children at home. National Head Start notes that "When children listen to books read aloud, they learn about people, places, and how things work. They learn about emotions and feelings and how to use words to share their ideas."

One of my favorite books for reading to children is *The Velveteen Rabbit*, by Margery Williams. It was originally published in 1922 and has become a classic. It tells about a stuffed toy rabbit and how it became real through being loved. Many equally wonderful tales await children's ears. If you need help finding one, stop by your local public library and ask for assistance.

Several other organizations also focus on the benefits of reading aloud to children. For example, a group called Read Aloud 15 Minutes, emphasizes that reading to a child for just fifteen minutes a day can have life-long benefits. Fifteen minutes may not seem like much, but, if practiced consistently during a child's first five years, it adds up to more than 450 hours. Those extra hours of literacy skills building can bestow a measurable benefit in future learning success.

And the benefits of reading don't end with childhood. In fact, they're just beginning. The crucial role that strong reading skills play in academic achievement among older students is also well-documented. In fact, some researchers have estimated that college students can expect to read between 600–750 pages a semester per course.

To help foster life-long growth in literacy achievement, Southside Virginia Community College is embarking on a new Quality Enhancement Plan: iRead, iLead, iSucceed. The QEP embraces a commitment to literacy that focuses on analytical reading comprehension and is designed to promote student achievement and academic success. Through faculty development and training in the promotion of analytical literacy skills, we hope to create students with stronger literacy skills. One of the anticipated outcomes of this new initiative is that students will demonstrate an increased level of engagement in literacy activities through supported reading and writing opportunities both at the academic level and personal level.

Reading. It's something we celebrate all year long.

Dr. Al Roberts is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the city of Emporia. He can be reached via email at al.roberts@southside.edu.