

READ IT AGAIN....AND AGAIN....AND AGAIN

written by Lorraine Wilson

‘Read it again,’ three year old Bailey says. ‘Read it again.’ His Mum has barely finished the words on the last page. She obediently turns back to the front cover and begins her fourth reading of ‘Rosie’s Walk’ by Pat Hutchins. The fourth reading in the last ten minutes, that is. Bailey’s Mum says that some days he wants ‘Rosie’s Walk’ to be read aloud, forty times. This little book has proved a favourite with all my grand nephews and nieces. They have all in their own time said ‘Read it again.’ And what a clever book it is with the villain ever present but never once mentioned in the text.

Just last week one of my nieces rang and said ‘Do you have time to listen Aunt?’ Of course I had time to listen. I then heard her read aloud the first page of ‘Playtime’ one of my own James and Jessie books. (These are a series of board books written to be read aloud to preschool children.) Then over the phone came the voice of Amy, 2 years nine months reading the next page, and so they progressed reading the whole book together. Now of course Amy is not actually reading the print. ‘Playtime’ is a dialogue story with a two infants engaging in a conversation as they play hide and seek. Amy has heard the story so many times, at her request, that she can now say one of the voices as the book is read aloud.

What do we learn from these episodes that has relevance for early literacy programs? Firstly we learn that reading begins at birth. These infants have been read aloud to since they were brought home from hospital. They have been immersed in the language of literature every day of their lives. (They have been immersed not only in the language of literature but in all sorts of print. When sitting in their car seats while being driven in the car, their parents have talked with them about particular advertising signs, the road traffic signs, and of course, their street signs.) Secondly we learn about the power of good books. There is something right about a book that children want read again and again and again. With each reading the child engages further; clarifies his meanings, expands his interpretations and broadens his world knowledge. With each new reading and immersion into the story, the child builds meaning and becomes more familiar with the language and so gradually joins in the reading of the book. At first it may just be a chant or refrain the child verbalises, but soon he can read aloud the whole book with his parent and even read it by himself, of course taking the cue from each picture as to what text to say.

Thirdly we learn about the value of revisiting texts. Reading a text for a second or third time enables any reader to develop further their insights and interpretations of that text. With children who are learning to read of course this also applies. However with children in the beginning stages of literacy, revisiting text makes possible the discovery of connections between the spoken and written words.

Young learners come to know where key words occur eg 'Fee Fi Fo Fum...' Young learners spot words which start like their names.

So those young readers who have heard favourite books read again and again gradually come to read these books for themselves. As mentioned earlier, initially these children use picture cues to trigger the text, but gradually it is familiar elements of the printed text which prompt the oral reading. Importantly the books these children are reading are books they love and so they have learned to value books and reading. These children have been able to apply choice in requesting their favourites be re-read; they have some control over that which is read to them.

Currently in Victorian classrooms, there has been a return to the use of levelled readers in the teaching of early literacy.

When I see some of these levelled readers I ask myself, 'Would any child willingly read this book a second time? Would any little five year old say 'Read it again.'

I wonder too what message a young learner gets about reading when given books to read which are about nothing; books written to teach reading; books written to practise sentence patterns or words; books where meaning is not the first priority. Such books never invite the reader to come back again and hence opportunities to make connections between the spoken and written word are denied.

To promote life long readers, texts used in early literacy programs must be authentic; they must teach young learners that there is value in learning to read. Importantly, classroom texts must prompt readers to say, 'Read it again.....and again.....and again.'

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