

Read it again

LORRAINE WILSON

presents the case for texts that children ask to be read and re-read, to be part of classroom early literacy programs.

... and again

Fee-
Fi-
Fo-
FUM!

... and again



'Read it again,' says three-year-old Bailey. '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* read 40 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.

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 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 the book aloud with his parent and even read it by himself.

Thirdly, we learn about the value of revisiting texts. Reading a text for a second or third time enables any reader to further develop their insights and

interpretations of that text. This also applies to children who are learning to read. 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, for example, 'Fee Fi Fo Fum!' Young learners spot words that 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. Initially, these children use picture cues to trigger the text, but gradually it is familiar elements of the printed text that 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 what 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 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 lifelong 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.'

In the beginning stages of literacy, revisiting text makes possible the discovery of connections between the spoken and written words.



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