

Introducing Reading....

As this week is book week I decided it was a great time to load you all up with lots of information about introducing and teaching reading to young children. Whilst I will give you my own personal opinion and provide you with other points of research, I really just want you to remember each child is an individual and will learn in their own time and at their own pace. The biggest issue I see with teaching reading is that parents see reading as a recognizable achievement, by that I mean, everyone understands when a parent says, but my child read Harry Potter at 4 years old, or my child can read their favorite story by themselves now. To other parents this may sound like an amazing feat, however, there are many more essential reading, pre-literacy strategies that will have a life long effect on your child's ability to read than just being able to say they can read early.

When I was a first time parent, I read a book by Mem Fox (author of Possum Magic etc) called 'Reading Magic, teaching young children to read'. Luckily I read it when my daughter was quite young as it had a profound effect on my introduction of reading to her and also my teaching strategies. In essence, among many other wonderful suggestions, she put forward the idea that if every young child, from the day they are born, was read at least 3 books a day, then there would be NO illiterate children in the country. This all sounds easy enough, 1 new book, 1 familiar book and 1 book that is read every day. This notion has been reaffirmed now for over 12 years as I have attended many training and literacy information sessions and has been followed by, "If you give nothing else to your child ever, just give them 10 minutes of your time daily and read with them".

Why does this work?

Well, in many very young children learning to "read", they are in fact missing many of the essentials that will establish long term reading skills. Reading is not any one single element. Children need to identify letters and sounds, decode these sounds, understand language, understand and comprehend written information and to be able to do this fluently so as not to miss key messages.

Reading to your children from an early age provides examples of spoken language, of questions, it provides an example being set by you that reading is fun and enjoyable. If children are to be effective readers they will need to understand what they are reading...I question those 4 and 5 year olds reading Harry Potter if the language is appropriate? They may have excellent skills of decoding the sounds and recognizing these in words but the language which is to be comprehended is well beyond the life experience of any child that age. So if they are not reading for information and enjoyment then what is the purpose?

Children will always have the ability to 'Rote' learn information that is, recall facts from memory, and reading by recognition of sight words can easily apply here. The question is though, is that actually reading or just memory recalling? Reading, like any other skills, mathematics, science etc, requires the reader to be able to understand the text and apply it to a new story. Only a great base of pre literacy skills will enable the child to be able to do this. Never underestimate the value of pre reading skills as these are what will make you child a good reader for life.

So, what does this all mean for you right now.....

- * Read to your child daily. 3 books a day, 1 they choose that is familiar but not read always, 1 that is read every day and becomes predictable and 1 that is new.
- * Ask questions as you read together, what do you see in the picture? What might happen next?
- * Find letters within words, what sound does this letter make? Find repetitive words in the text, make it a spotto game.
- * Let your children see you reading, the newspaper, a book, anything! Be a good example.
- * Give books as gifts, let children see books as a wonderful, special thing to both give and receive.
- * Visit the library, make this a special place just like the park that your family can visit.

KEEP IT FUN...like anything for children, when it is not fun they lose interest and the learning value is minimal. There are enough books out there to suit every interest so make sure it is your child's interest not yours when books are chosen.

In conclusion I will share with you how my child has progressed since I read Mem's book and you can then decide for yourself....

When Olivia commenced school at age 5yrs 10 months there were absolutely children in her class who could "read". I sent her to school without this skill for a reason. Her time prior to the school setting was spent on all the above suggestions, we immersed her in literacy but we never told her to read to us. Within 1 term at school, she had completed the first 4 reading levels. Benchmark for public schools is between level 6 and 8 for kindergarten and she ended the year on level 18. She was a fully independent reader by mid way through year 2 having completed all reading levels up to 30. Many of the children who had started with her who were already 'readers' slowed because of their lack in comprehension and because they did not possess the skills of how to read new language as it emerged in texts. She still enjoys reading and reads a variety of text from joke books to biographies to teen fiction (she is now 12!!!). Her skills prior to commencing school gave her the ability to quickly learn the actual skill of reading and her development in this area flourished as she has all the fall back skills necessary when she hit a new piece of text.

Each child is different, if they ask to learn how to read, provide them with things with which they can identify. Read the junk mail, recognize symbols and use the photos/illustrations to show the link of how this supports the written information. Find things in the environment to 'read', road signs, house numbers, anything. And remember, reading is not a race, the first to do it may not be the best reader by age 10 so there is a long life of reading ahead of your child, help nourish an enjoyment of this.

Finally, if you have ever questioned school readiness or how we are teaching children to read, I hope this explains all the work the children are involved in and how the program is designed for supporting all of these early literacy skills as well as so many more. And you thought they were just playing!

If you have any questions please come and see me. I have attached some further reading and examples for you as well.

Regards,
Amanda.....
Happy Book Week xxx

Website links to great articles.

<http://www.icanteachmychild.com/2012/02/10-steps-to-teaching-your-child-to-read/>

http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/100_IntroReading.pdf

<http://voices.yahoo.com/tips-introduce-reading-child-14136.html>

<http://voices.yahoo.com/ten-important-reasons-read-child-206237.html?cat=25>