



LISA BURMAN

NURTURING the GROWTH of EMERGENT READERS

Even before children are reading conventional print - that is, before they are decoding - they ARE reading. They already use many reading strategies to create meaning from texts, but too often these are not regarded as 'real reading'. I don't find terms such as 'pretend reading' and 'pre-reading' at all helpful. They don't resonate with my belief that every child has the potential to be a reader and that they do not come to us when they start Kindy/Childcare/Preschool/School empty of knowledge and understandings.

When we recognise and value reading the pictures and environmental print as READING, we can notice, assess, plan for and be intentional in our teaching of emergent readers without being limited to only teaching the alphabet or sight words. For sure, these areas are part of reading, but only a small part of being a reader. We can choose to focus on different priorities for young readers and in doing so, I believe, better create the conditions where they will develop the desire to BE a reader. This positive emotional connection to reading, to picture books and other texts, will mean children will return again and again to successful reading experiences. These repeated experiences will help develop their reading strategies, concepts about print *and* disposition to read.

Before they can decode words, children *already* show they:

- Continually work at constructing meaning, using a wide range of comprehension strategies when listening to, viewing and reading texts like environmental signs and picture books.
- "Try on" the role of proficient/adult reader by 'role-play' reading, particularly with familiar texts and texts they create in their play.
- Constantly learn new words and language patterns (vocabulary and grammar).
- Read familiar texts with high levels of comprehension, fluency and expression.
- Value reading (particularly picture books) as a social exchange and develop a positive emotional connection with the experience of reading.
- Use many text features (such as illustrations, diagrams, page numbers, page order...) to problem solve and construct meaning.
- Infer from illustrations, for example, a character's feelings or the weather conditions, that are not explicitly stated in words.
- Form their reading identities - what they like and don't like, favourite books, authors and if they see themselves as a reader (or not).
- Respond to texts in multiple ways, by talking, playing, drawing, constructing...

**Learning to read starts at birth,
not at four or five years of age when children begin school.**



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“Decoding the words is the flashy face of reading.

It’s the grand façade, the sparkly outer layer, the fondant frosting.

Because decoding words is the part of reading we can see and hear instantly and on demand, parents and educators often view the ability to decode early as a sign that their young child or student will be better than fine.”

Kathy Collins & Matt Glover “I AM Reading” (2015)

Our Learning Priorities for Emergent Readers:

- Nurture a strong disposition to read.
- Develop personal connection to texts (with a strong emphasis on, but not limited to, picture books).
- Build a positive identity as a reader.
- Develop strong oral language, both receptive and expressive, building vocabulary and syntax use.
- Develop their phonological awareness.
- Develop strong symbolic functioning through pretend,/imaginative play and meaningful mark-making.
- Build understandings of the concepts about print.

By prioritising and intentionally planning for ways children will **build strong connections to picture books**, we in turn provide opportunities to develop their reader identity, disposition to read, oral language, concepts about print and symbolic functioning (when children read illustrations and draw and engage with other mark-making when making books).

It is essential that children have many opportunities to **hold the books in their own hands**, to choose texts to read and be read to. We want children to be read aloud to multiple times a day AND also have the opportunity to BE the reader: choosing books, reading the pictures, reading familiar texts and talking about books with others.

Instil the concept that readers choose their books (reading material) on purpose. We want to avoid creating a random “any book will do” culture of reading. Become more intentional about showing children how and why you choose a text to read:

- Read the cover, flick through the pages, read the blurb.
- Have I seen this book before?
- Have I got this book at home or has the teacher read it to us?
- Am I interested in the topic?
- Does the cover look interesting?
- Has it been recommended by someone?



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Reading Strategies you might observe Emergent Readers using include...

Comprehension Strategies:

- Visualising - e.g.: *jumping up and down when the rabbit character does this (shows s/he has created a mind picture of the still illustration moving.)*
- Predicting - e.g.: *What do you think this book will be about? What do you think will happen next? What makes you think that?*
- Asking Questions - e.g. *Where has the caterpillar gone? What are those things on the moose?* Please note: this doesn't refer to answering questions, but the child asking questions during reading.
- Inferring - e.g.: *The bear is grumpy because they're making too much noise and he wants to go to sleep; infers the baby is hungry when illustration shows baby crying, based on text clues and background knowledge.*
- Summarising - e.g.: *This is a funny story because the flea makes the bear really itchy; This book is all about snakes.*
- Making connections: e.g. *I went to the beach too!; That's the Grumpy Bear again (when reading The Very Itchy Bear, connecting to another text); My baby sister cries too.*

Monitoring Strategies:

- Backing up and re-reading when doesn't understand the text s/he is creating from illustrations.
- Turning back pages when one is skipped, particularly with familiar texts.



Checking Strategies:

- Matching the words spoken with the text clues in the illustrations (The words and illustrations need to work together to make sense.)

Problem-Solving Strategies:

- Reading text clues in illustrations and other graphics to figure out what is happening. (e.g.: when reading the illustrations... "Oh, the flea is in the bear's pants! That's where he's gone.")
- Reading text clues to create meaningful oral text or inner script.



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Our 6 Favourite Pedagogical Practices for Emergent Readers

1. Read Alouds and Sustained Conversations

- Multiple read alouds in a day - small group, individual, varied text types.
- Talking about texts with others - small group, 1:1, exploring ideas from texts.

2. Read to Self and Others – Independent Reading Time

- Children holding books in their own hands so their reading experience is as the READER, not only as the 'listener'.
- Children choose their own reading materials. Talking about book choice, reading purpose and ideas in the texts.

3. Symbolic Play

- Small world play
- Story Tables
- Pretend Play (e.g. Home Play, Blocks, Pet Hospital, Office, Restaurant...)
- Loose Parts Play
- Construction

4. Shared Reading

- Small group reading of Big Books and short poems/ rhymes on charts.
- All eyes on the same enlarged text, teacher points to words, demonstrating concepts about print in meaningful context.
- Children read along with the adult reader, who gradually lowers his/her voice as the text becomes more and more familiar.
- Re-reading of familiar Shared Reading texts is essential.

5. Songs, rhymes, finger plays & circle games.

- Opportunities during the day to sing songs, join in with finger plays and rhymes.
- Circle games in small and larger groups.

6. Bookmaking and other mark-making.

- Opportunities to create their own texts, in their play and other creative pursuits.
- Pedagogy of Bookmaking reinforces so much learning about reading, as children create texts as writers.

