

# Listening to the Educator

## A Note from Lisa

Ellie Hondrou is an early childhood educator at The Nest, which is part of Alberton Primary School in Adelaide. It is a place of learning that integrates preschool and Foundation: three to six year olds learn together all day in playful, joyful, inquiry-based ways.

Ellie is the primary educator for one 'home group'. Most of the day, all home groups play together, with free access inside and outside. At one time each day, home groups meet for Writing Workshop (bookmaking) and Reading Workshop. During Reading Workshop, children spend most of their time actively engaged with texts. They choose their own reading materials and are taught strategies for choosing texts that are 'just right' for them. These strategies include thinking about their interests, whether a book is familiar or a new read and if the illustrations or cover grab their interest.

Gradually, children build their ability to read conventional print and this becomes another strategy in choosing their 'just right' texts.

These texts (mostly picture books and some familiar poems and rhymes on cards) are stored in each child's own magazine file, which they take to a place they want to read. In this story, we hear how Ellie reflected on a professional learning experience and how she was 'nudged' to think more deeply about how she was supporting children to build a strong identity as a reader.

### **"I am a reader!"**

**BY ELLIE HONDROU**

After participating in Matt Glover's EChO workshop, 'Understanding Emergent Readers', I left thinking more about the reading culture in my room. On the Monday back at school we had our usual Reading Time and I realised that there was still a lot of work to do for the children to see themselves as confident, capable, independent readers. I noticed several children would always come to me, asking if I could read their books to them. Or they would tell me, after five minutes, they had finished reading every book in their book box (4-5 books). I knew, in the back of my mind, that this was happening quite often; in fact, it had been happening all year, however I never really thought that deeply about it until Matt's workshop. The children could tell me what I wanted to hear: that they were readers because they could read the pictures, but they didn't really see themselves as readers.



*(Lisa's note: I often remind myself of my "Golden Rule" – if I want children to do something, then I need to do it in front of them. And think aloud about what I'm doing and why it's important. Probably lots of times. This is what Ellie did here – explicit, intentional teaching.)*

The next day I decided to do a particular reading mini lesson. I found a book that was unfamiliar to me and to the children and told them I was going to read a book to them. I quickly flicked through the pages and shut the book. The children were very quick to tell me that I didn't read the book, I just quickly turned the pages!

"That's not reading!" said one.

I responded, "Okay, let's read it again, but this time I will need your help. I've never read this book before, so instead of reading the words, we will read the pictures together." We started from the front and together we decided a title from what we could see illustrated on the cover. *(Lisa's note: This IS reading- the children are using the text clues to construct meaning.)* Page by page we read the pictures closely and the children created a story with a little help from me along the way.

I then told the children that during Reading Time today, I was going to conference with one child at a time and it was really important that we weren't interrupted. Listening to Matt Glover, I knew I needed to build a culture around conferencing; that working one on one with my children was far more valuable than anything else I could be doing.

Off the children went. Some reading alone, some reading with a buddy or in a small group. As I conferred with one of the young readers, I looked around the room, wondering if what we had just done worked. They were actually reading! All the children were engaged, slowly turning the pages, stopping at a page a really reading the pictures more carefully than they had before.

After conferencing with three children, I looked up at the clock and realised the whole group had been reading for nearly half an hour, with no interruptions, no one asking for their book to be read to them. Just one mini lesson had already helped my children have an image of themselves as readers: confident and capable

readers. I have now taught this mini lesson a couple more times with my group, to continue to build on their skills and confidence with reading and what a difference I have seen in just two weeks.

