'This is not a book. It's a magic key which will unlock a love of stories and reading within your child.' Rebecca Sparrow, author of *Find Your Tribe*

raising readers

How to nurture a child's love of books

MEGAN DALEY

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: RAISING A READER – THE EARLY YEARS
From babies to two years old
The importance of song
From three to five years old
Establishing reading routines
Incidental reading
Playful reading

CHAPTER 2: READING AND SCHOOL – WHEN IT ALL COMES TOGETHER
The mechanics of reading – where to begin?
Phonics and sight words
Reading comprehension
Readers versus library books
Digital technologies supporting beginning readers
Encouraging writing and illustration

CHAPTER 3: THE SCHOOL LIBRARY
The school library and the teacher librarian
What is the purpose of a school library?
The school library as a social hangout
Selecting quality books
Self-selection
The library makerspace
Literary awards

Children's Book Council of Australia Book Week

CHAPTER 4: SPACES FOR READING
Book-themed bedrooms
The reading classroom
Inviting library spaces

CHAPTER 5: THE RIGOUR OF READING
Extending your child's reading
From reader to writer

CHAPTER 6: READING CHALLENGES
Reading differences and difficulties
The gender debate
Keeping tweens reading
Supporting the move into YA reading

CHAPTER 7: THE SOCIAL LIFE OF YOUNG READERS
Competitions for readers
Author visits
Literary and book-related events
Book clubs
Book launches

CHAPTER 8: A BALANCED LITERARY DIET – A FEAST OF GENRES
Humour
Mystery
Historical fiction
Realistic fiction
Fantasy
Science fiction

Dystopian fiction
Myths, legends and fairytales
The classics
Non-fiction
Biographies and autobiographies
Plays and film scripts
Short stories
Poetry
Verse novels
Comics and graphic novels

CHAPTER 9: MULTIMODAL AND DIGITAL READING

Turn them into experts first!
Coding – the 'new literacy'
Ebooks
Apps
Audio books
Online storybook readings
Gaming
Digital literature
Critical literacy skills

CHAPTER 10: READING THE VISUALS

Picture books
Visual literacy
Picture books as visual literacy teaching tools
Wordless picture books as visual literacy teaching tools
Illustrated chapter books as visual literacy teaching tools

CHAPTER 11: READING FOR THE FUTURE – SUSTAINABILITY AND NATURE

Reading supporting sustainability

CHAPTER 12: READING MINDFULLY
Reading as flow

CHAPTER 13: ACKNOWLEDGING AND REFLECTING DIVERSITY
Indigenous voices
#ownvoices
Refugees and displaced children

CHAPTER 14: READING THE DARK

CHAPTER 15: HOW-TO GUIDES
How to be an excellent book gifter
How to play with sight words
How to host a book party
How to create a library makerspace
How to create a Book Week costume
How to run a readers' competition
How to start a book club
How to host an author or illustrator visit

ENDNOTES
CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

I have loved books my whole life. I was fortunate to be raised in a home that valued words and literature, and my parents read to me throughout my childhood and beyond. I vividly remember my father reading to me in my early teens; though, perhaps, he was reading to my younger brothers and I was just part of the action. Regardless, I was hooked by the sound of words being recited by someone I loved and admired. My mother, who was also a teacher librarian, filled our house with quality books. She introduced me to some of my all-time favourites, including *Dicey's Song* (Cynthia Voigt), *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly* (Robin Klein) and John Marsden's iconic *So Much to Tell You* – which blew my teenage angsty brain!

When I had my first child it came as something of a shock that others around me were not reading to their babies. And in my role at the time as national vice-president of the Children's Book Council of Australia, I was asked several times over by the media or parents about the 'right age' to start reading to children. The answer seemed obvious to me – from birth, of course! I would tell people that books were an essential newborn accessory. But I also had to be mindful that not everyone had my upbringing or training or knowledge of childhood literacy. On a personal level, fostering a love of reading in my children seemed to be the easiest part of parenting. I find being a parent a very hard job at times and every stage of child-rearing seems to be filled with guilt. I do,

however, feel confident that I will be able to look back and say, 'But I read to them and gave them the joy of books' and know that I did my best.

I have been a teacher librarian for over fifteen years and a primary school teacher for twenty. As a parent and educator, I know how beneficial it is for children to enter the education system bubbling with excitement about words, images and ideas. Flashcards or early online reading programs won't instil this joy in your little one, but gorgeous books will. Immersing your child in language in all forms – stories and songs and nursery rhymes – is one of the best ways you can give them a head start and help them to reach their academic potential. We educators are always so grateful to the families who read to their children and support the education process in this way. It is possible to encourage the joy of recreational reading and still meet the demands of the school curriculum and data requirements, but families are crucial in helping us achieve this.

Raising Readers is a guide for parents and a resource for educators. Like all good non-fiction books (my teacher librarian hat is on now), you can dip into this book as needed or you can read it from start to finish. I will walk you through each stage of a child's literacy development – from birth to adolescence – and offer advice, connect you with the right books at the right times, share pieces of wisdom from my literary friends, as well as some tips and tricks to ensure your family's or classroom's reading journeys are as memorable and as engaging as they can be.

Throughout the book I refer to school libraries and library staff as if they exist in every school. I do this because they

darned well should and the research supports this. I don't believe good school libraries and quality teacher librarians and library staff are a thing of the past, but if you are in a school without a library or teacher librarian, I hope that this book offers you guidance. We all have an invaluable part to play in ensuring the young people in our lives fall in love with books. It is a gift they will cherish forever.

CHAPTER ONE

RAISING A READER – THE EARLY YEARS

FROM BABIES TO TWO YEARS OLD

Babies will start to show interest in books much earlier than you might think. Shortly after birth, infants respond to sound, often turning towards it, and start focusing their vision. After three to four months of listening and looking at the world, many infants will begin to reach for objects.[1] As they gain control over their movements, babies will explore books in the same way they do a rattle or toy. They will chew them, turn them over and stare at them. They will be intrigued by bright, contrasting colours, and soothed by a calm voice reading a story or singing a song. For babies, hearing the rhythm of words and the expression in voices builds a rich and diverse network of language in their developing brains.

I read a large number of novels when I had newborns as I found myself sitting in chairs rocking or feeding the baby for many hours

a day. I became adept at cradling my e-reader in one hand in exactly the right position – at this stage paper books didn't seem safe as I needed to use two hands and no one wants to drop a brick of a novel on their newborn! I mostly read my books aloud and while I'm sure the content was wildly inappropriate, I figured that my babies didn't understand the words. I did know, however, that they were hearing language that was far more complex and diverse than if I was just having a casual chat with them – though, of course, casual chats are also extremely important![2] Some parents may feel silly reading to their baby or wonder what the point is, but the key here is exposure. The more you read aloud to your child, the more words they'll be exposed to and the more solid their foundation for future literacy skills will be.

From around six months old, babies who have been read to regularly will begin to identify a book as more than just a colourful object – the book will signal that 'it's time for a story'. This is especially the case when parents or caregivers respond by reading the book whenever the baby hands one to them.[3] Babies may develop a liking for a particular book and frequently pick it up to be read, or become animated and excited when a favourite book is re-read.

Very early on, a baby develops literacy skills using all their senses, including touch. The sense of touch enables babies to attach meaning to objects, from cups and shoes to the pet dog and, of course, books. They explore the mechanics of how books work by turning pages and touching the covers and illustrations. Lift-the-flap and touch-and-feel titles are wonderful for babies and toddlers because they encourage physical engagement with books. Touch and physical contact are finely integrated in language development,[4] from the parent or carer cuddling the child when reading, to the child exploring the physical nature of a book, and

then later, as early readers, when they trace words with their finger as they read text or manipulate digital texts on a tablet device. That's why it's important to have plenty of books around your house within easy access of your child – so that they have ample opportunities to hold, explore and play with books.

From around ten months old, babies may comprehend their first word, and by twelve months many will say their first word. Acquiring and comprehending words is a slow process until around eighteen months when many children become rapid word learners.[5]

Toddlers are little sponges, soaking up everything there is to learn. They adore words, nursery rhymes, songs and books. Of course, toddlers are also destructive little bunnies! Because they are still learning how a book works and because they use *all* their senses to 'read', chewing and ripping may occur! But do not let the possible destruction stop you from reading to them. This is the time to get your kids hooked on books.

For younger toddlers I think board books are a great option for unsupervised book time as they are relatively indestructible. However, the text in board books is often minimal, so they should not make up your entire collection for this age group. It's important to also introduce beautiful picture books rich in both language and artwork. Exposing little ones to gorgeous illustrations, exquisite writing and the joy of story is the best way to help them fall in love with books.

The social nature of reading comes into play around this time, as toddlers become aware of their peers and are able to engage in literacy opportunities in unstructured learning environments.[6] Toddlers in childcare or playgroups may use books in the same way they will use toys – one may show another how it works, there will be tussles over favourites and, *eventually*, there will be sharing and

exchanging of books. When toddlers share a book they are supporting each other in their learning,[7] – for example, one child might name the animals in the illustrations and the other might make the sounds. In an early education centre, toddlers will often be observed reaching for a book that was previously shared by an educator. They may 're-read' the book for themselves and this independent and unstructured reading time is as meaningful as the group reading session; in fact, it is one of the earliest forms of literate behaviour.

Reading with babies and toddlers

Here are some tips to help make reading with your baby or toddler a fun experience for you both, the operative word being FUN!

- Choose a time when your baby is content and alert.
- Cuddle up with your child. Reading is the perfect time for physical bonding.
- Choose books with fabulous pictures and minimal but engaging text.
- Keep reading sessions short, snappy and regular. Don't feel like you have to finish the book. You might only get through a few pages at a time.
- Babies and toddlers love looking at pictures of themselves and their loved ones, so consider making a photo book – a lovely keepsake as well as a literacy tool.
- Feel free to bounce or tickle or rock your baby as you read – anything that makes reading fun. The same applies to toddlers. Allow them to wriggle and spin as you read. They are (mostly) not going to sit still for the length of a book.
- Moderate your voice and use expression to make the story come alive. Add in animal noises or other sound effects.
- Allow children to chew, touch and smell their books to get

the sensory thing happening. Not ideal in an early education environment but totally okay at home!

- Be prepared to lose a book or two. When there are toddlers in the house, have a selection of books within their reach so they can instigate reading sessions, but keep your precious ones higher up for one-on-one reading time. That said, forget pop-up books for the time being. They'll be shredded in a nanosecond.
- Encourage interaction with the book. Ask questions like: 'Can you point to the horse?'; 'Where is that silly monkey hiding? Can you see him?'
- Show and encourage page turning.
- Be prepared to read books over and over again (endlessly!). It might drive you bonkers but babies and toddlers love repetition – it's how they learn.
- This tip doesn't involve a book per se, but songs and nursery rhymes are incredibly useful literacy tools, so sing to your child whenever you get the chance. It doesn't matter if you can't carry a tune in a bucket – your kids will love it!

THE IMPORTANCE OF SONG

Like reading, it is never too early to sing to a baby. Parents and caregivers will have experienced how effectively singing a song can calm a baby or entrance a toddler. Song is tightly intertwined with language development and, like books, no child should be without song in their life. Research has found that music is a powerful tool in language acquisition and that the processing of music and language occur in the same areas of the brain and share the same neural pathways.[8] I have been fortunate to work with some talented music educators, including Dr James Cuskelly, Carla Trott and Jennifer Teh. Jennifer Teh's music classes for babies and

toddlers were an important part of our weekly routine for some time, and I have asked her to share her thoughts on the role of song in language development.

Jennifer Teh

Singing is an intrinsic part of raising children. When a baby cries, it feels right to hum a lullaby. We sing action songs and nursery rhymes with our toddlers and young children. Song is a unique way of connecting and communicating, and it carries with it benefits for both the singer and the listener.

Many wonderful things happen when a child is sung to. Songs can be used for storytelling, cultural exchange, to calm, to excite and to incite discussion. For the singer, the act of singing increases cardiovascular function, lowers blood pressure, releases endorphins and lowers stress levels, with consequent increase in immune function. Singing to babies is particularly powerful. All positive mother–baby interaction leads to the release of beta endorphins for both, promoting feelings of wellbeing and increased relaxation, and this is especially true when a baby is being held and sung to.

There is a direct correlation between singing and the development of language. The folk songs of every culture carry with them the signature inflections of the 'mother tongue' language, and help to wire the child's ear, voice and brain to engage with this language. If you are worried that you don't sing well enough, relax! For your child, your voice is the safest and most familiar sound, and is far better than any recorded music. Just as children learn language in interactive environments by being engaged in live conversation, they will gain the most benefit from being sung to directly by their caregivers.

You can begin singing to your child before they are even born – amniotic fluid is a great conductor of sound. Babies begin to respond to sound in the womb from around eighteen weeks gestation, and the ability to recognise voices and even songs develops quite significantly by the end of pregnancy. All through my pregnancy with my son Joshua, my husband Jamie sang one song to my belly, over and over again. When Josh was born, Jamie held him and sang that song, and immediately Josh stopped crying and stared quietly at him (and our midwife started to cry instead). As an infant Josh would still settle immediately whenever Jamie sang 'You Are My Sunshine'.

Sometimes it is hard to know WHAT to sing to your child, but there are many fabulous books designed to be sung to children of all ages – from

illustrated nursery rhymes, to sung stories like *The Wonky Donkey* by Craig Smith. Other books haven't necessarily been created with the purpose of being sung but seem to naturally lend themselves to it, for example, books written in rhyming verse. But you can sing to your child about everything and anything, so fill your day with music.

BOOKS FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS

All book recommendation lists in *Raising Readers* do not include well-known or classic books. I have instead selected less obvious choices and my personal favourites. Consider each list as a springboard for you to seek out other books that might be a good fit for your young reader.

Whoever You Are by Mem Fox, illustrated by Leslie Staub (Scholastic Australia, 2015)

Dreamers by Ezekiel Kwaymullina, illustrated by Sally Morgan (Fremantle Press, 2014)

At the Beach I See by Kamsani Bin Salleh (Magabala Books, 2017)

What the Sky Knows by Nike Bourke, illustrated by Stella Danalis (University of Queensland Press, 2005)

For All Creatures by Glenda Millard, illustrated by Rebecca Cool (Walker Books Australia, 2011)

Puffling by Margaret Wild, illustrated by Julie Vivas (Scholastic Australia, 2008)

Kissed by the Moon by Alison Lester (Penguin Books Australia, 2013)

Goodnight, Me by Andrew Daddo, illustrated by Emma Quay (Hachette Australia, 2005)

Birthday Baby by Davina Bell and Jane Godwin, illustrated by Freya Blackwood (Allen & Unwin, 2018)

Baby Band by Dianne Jackson Hill, illustrated by Giuseppe Poli (New Frontier Publishing, 2017)

Yoga Babies by Fearne Cotton, illustrated by Sheena Dempsey (New Frontier Publishing, 2018)

FROM THREE TO FIVE YEARS OLD

It is tempting as children enter the preschool phase to turn shared reading time into a 'meaningful learning experience' in the belief that a child needs to be 'prepared' to enter the school system. Media representations of parenting are often fear-based, with parents left feeling their child will be disadvantaged if they are not signed up to the latest flashcard system or early online reading program. Intensive early intervention may produce a child who enters the school system seemingly 'reading' at a higher level, but as their peers learn to read at their own pace and 'catch up', those children with the *experience* of books, rather than those who have learnt sounds and words by rote, are often the ones with higher all-round reading comprehension and engagement with books. By all means, sing alphabet songs with your preschooler, practise recognising letters and sounds in words, and encourage them to write their name, but I urge parents and caregivers to keep it playful and be led by your child's interest and enthusiasm. Reading books is still the single most important activity you can do with your child in developing their literacy.

Young children respond with enthusiasm when books are presented in multiple forms or modalities. For example, bring a book to life with props such as puppets, weave in songs, ask children to act out scenes from a story, or get them involved in a hands-on way with felt books. Engaging all of your child's senses in book-based experiences is crucial in maintaining their attention and creating a sense of playfulness.

Technology gives us further opportunities to re-imagine contemporary reading practices. Preschoolers experience story in a different, yet interactive way when they engage with digital texts on touch-based devices. I will never forget when my then three-year-old swiped the paper page of *The Very Cranky Bear* in total frustration, trying to make the bear move. I was horrified yet fascinated that she hoped for 'more' from the paper book. I don't believe the print book will be replaced anytime soon, but it is a fact that print and digital stories share space on the bookshelf.

Children in this age group also often enjoy creating handmade books. Asking your child to tell you the 'story' of their picture and writing this down on the page helps young children make connections between images and words. They will also delight in using their little books to retell their story to a loved adult. This retelling of a story over and over is important in developing the idea of how a narrative works as well as the knowledge that words always stay the same on the page – that the letters d-o-g will always spell 'dog'. It is an absolute lightbulb moment when a child realises that text, those squiggles on a page, hold meaning, and writing and telling stories together is the perfect way to help your child make this discovery for themselves.

Reading with three- to five-year-olds

Although children in this age group generally have longer attention spans, they are still easily distracted by food, an adored older sibling or any bright shiny object! So keep book time fun to keep young readers interested. Here are a few tactics I have used with my own young children and in early education centres.

- Turn off the TV and put away the iPad. It can be hard to focus on a book when there are colourful, bright images constantly flashing by!
- Kids love humour so put on funny voices or make sound

effects to keep them engaged. Used sparingly, audio books can be a perfect addition for children around this age. They will love the variety in voices and start to understand how tone, pitch and pace can alter the feel of a story.

- Be interactive. Talk about what's happening in the story; ask your child to guess what's going to happen next; point out interesting details in the illustrations.
- Act out or add actions to parts of the story, or ask your child to do so. If you're not confident in this, try using props such as toys or puppets. Some books even come with finger puppets included as part of a pack.
- Talk about the parts of a book and physically point to the cover, pages, text, images and the spine.
- Follow the text with your finger so your child can see the way words flow from left to right.
- Be prepared to re-read favourite books over and over again. I promise they will one day move on to another book – although my now seven-year-old still makes me occasionally re-read her favourite dinosaur book from when she was two, and I suspect she will be requesting this book into her teen years!
- Tell your kids how much you love reading with them. The emotional bond children form with books, through a loved adult enjoying the process with them and articulating this enjoyment, should not be underestimated.

ESTABLISHING READING ROUTINES

Establishing a reading routine from a young age helps children to develop strong lifelong reading habits. A child's love of books begins with loved adults taking the time out from a busy schedule to read with them. It's a wonderful bonding exercise. Cuddling up

and reading with a child allows them to form powerful associations between books and moments of happiness, love and closeness.

But life can be stressful and it can be difficult to keep reading at the top of the priority list when there are work crises to deal with, children to wrangle, bills to pay, and so on. Every family has their own set of challenging circumstances. Making reading part of the daily routine helps to ensure that it happens because it becomes automatic, like brushing your teeth or turning on the dishwasher. But it also means that you're consistently carving out moments for yourself to relax and relish dedicated time with your child.

BOOKS FOR THREE- TO FIVE-YEAR OLDS

I don't believe you ever grow out of picture books. Though my children are no longer preschoolers, I will be keeping the books on this list forever. We have created special memories by reading these books together and so they have become treasured possessions.

The Last Peach by Gus Gordon (Penguin Books Australia, 2018)

Tom Tom by Rosemary Sullivan, illustrated by Dee Huxley (HarperCollins, 2010)

Monster Party by the children of the Rawa Community School, with Jane Godwin and Alison Lester (Magabala Books, 2018)

My Dog Bigsy by Alison Lester (Penguin Books Australia, 2015)

Cheeky Monkey by Andrew Daddo, illustrated by Emma Quay (ABC Books, 2010)

It's Bedtime, William by Deborah Niland (Penguin Books Australia, 2012)

The Game of Finger Worms by Hervé Tullet (Phaidon Press Ltd, 2011)

Watch This! A Book About Making Shapes by Jane Godwin, Beci Orpin and Hilary Walker (Scribble, 2018)

I'm a Hungry Dinosaur by Janeen Brian and Ann James (Penguin Books Australia, 2015)

I Do Not Like Books Anymore! by Daisy Hirst (Walker Books, 2018)

Rock Pool Secrets by Narelle Oliver (Walker Books Australia, 2017)

Do Not Lick This Book by Idan Ben-Barak and Julian Frost (Allen & Unwin, 2017)

All the Ways to be Smart by Davina Bell, illustrated by Allison Colpoys (Scribble, 2018)

The Cleo Stories series by Libby Gleeson, illustrated by Freya Blackwood (Murdoch Books, 2014)

This is a Ball (and others in series) by Beck Stanton and Matt Stanton (ABC Books, 2015)

Bedtime reading is often the easiest routine to put in place as it is already a time of calmness, closeness and winding down from a busy day (more on this soon). However, there may be other opportunities throughout your day where reading routines can be established. There's no right or wrong time. Do whatever will work best for you and your family.

Going to the free 'Rhyme Time' or 'Babies and Books' sessions at your local library is a great way to incorporate fun literacy activities into your schedule. As I've mentioned, songs and nursery rhymes are wonderful tools for a child's language development. But 'Rhyme Time' or 'Babies and Books' sessions have the added benefit of filling your little one with the joyful feelings that come from being in a social setting.

Visiting the local library to sign my newborn up for a library card was one of the first outings I had with both my children. For many years, my friends and I were in a weekly routine of meeting at the public library for nursery rhyme, music and storytelling sessions with our young babies. Our goal was to expose our children to the sights and sounds of language, but it also became a time for us to discuss, debate and recommend baby books (and some adult ones for ourselves!), leave with armfuls of library loans, and connect with like-minded parents over the trials and

tribulations of raising small children.

Bedtime reading

In our house, my husband, Dan, was the chief bedtime book reader for many years until his death. At one point the Daddy bedtime books routine was a complicated and strict ritual involving two books, a thumb wrestle, two squashy hugs and something else I don't remember. It was lovely hearing Dan and our girls laugh over funny stories or argue about re-reading a book for the fifth night in a row. I am so pleased my children had these early years with a father who read to them, and I suspect this will be a treasured memory they carry into adulthood.

Bedtime reading is definitely a routine worth aiming for. Sometimes, when I am exhausted by solo parenting or when the end of school term is nigh and I'm surrounded by small cranky people, it is so tempting to skip the bedtime books. But when I reflect on the benefits of a bedtime reading routine in my own life, it's clear to me why I make the effort nearly every night to do it.

- Bedtime books make me *stop*. I am on full throttle. All the time. I sleep very little and I never sit still, but reading bedtime books makes me hit the pause button. Almost instantly I feel my frenetic energy dissipate.
- I have to be present and mindful to read. I can't be on my phone, I can't be washing or working. I have to read the words and engage with the story. I am entirely present with my children and the book we are reading together. For more on mindful reading see chapter 12.
- No matter how chaotic and *loud* and plain horrid the evening has been, bedtime reading is a change of focus and completely resets the mood in the house.
- It (almost) always happens. The routine makes me feel like everything will be okay, like I've *got* this parenting thing.

Mostly.

- Books spark conversations. Every afternoon I ask my girls, 'What did you do today?' and *every* day I get nothing. But later that night we might read a book about friends or feelings, and they suddenly start talking about their day at school or an issue with a friend. When my daughters see their lives reflected in the pages of book, talk happens.
- Going to sleep with dreams of fairies, dinosaurs or adventures is far better than dreams of being yelled at to floss your teeth properly. It's the last thing you do at night with your children, so make it wonderful.

Despite my lifelong love of books, some nights it is just too much, and I tell my children to read alone or I put on an audio story or streamed reading service like Story Box Library – perfectly acceptable alternatives and no guilt needed! However, I can see the benefits, for *myself* as well as my girls, so I try really hard, take a deep breath and squash into a single bed with them, hoping the youngest doesn't sink her teeth into her sister to make her move over. And then we read.

Even if it is only for fifteen minutes, that time spent reading is precious. Being physically close, squished up together, and escaping into an imaginary world through books reduces my stress and anxiety like nothing else I know. Whether you are a single parent, have multiple children or you work long hours, bedtime reading may be the one time in the day when you are completely present with your family. I never regret those fifteen minutes (which often turn into thirty). It's like exercise – you always feel better once you start, or so I'm told.

Challenges to bedtime reading

Time poor: Work on enlisting the help of other loved adults in

your child's life, such as neighbours, grandparents or older siblings. For example, if your child has long-distance grandparents, perhaps they could share a book together over the phone or handheld tablet.

Reluctant readers: The thought of an argument just before sleeping time may be enough to prevent a parent from attempting bedtime books with their reluctant reader. The thing to remember is that for a reluctant reader, one-on-one book time with a loved adult can ignite the spark for a love of reading or at least a love of story. My advice here is simple – persist, persist, persist. Even when you feel like you are getting nowhere it is worth it, I promise. Choosing books that have a connection with a particular person is a good strategy here. Maybe Nonna always reads *My Nanna is a Ninja* (Damon Young and Peter Carnavas) so it becomes 'her' book, or you might have a football-loving family member for whom *Why I Love Footy* (Michael Wagner and Tom Jellett) is exclusively reserved.

Choosing the book: Dear glory, the battles we have in our house! We take it in turns, myself included, and we switch it up. Some weeks we will read picture books. Then we might spend a week on puzzle books and then we might have two weeks of reading a longer chapter book. Some people would suggest that the child should choose the bedtime books; but I, with my educator hat on, would argue that bedtime reading is the perfect time to introduce a new genre, explore a book at a higher literacy level, or share one of your own beloved novels from childhood. Taking it in turns means that everyone has choice, but there is also balance, compromise and a variety of reading material.

If you are passionate about literacy and can see the benefits offered by regular bedtime (or other time) books, consider becoming involved with The Pyjama Foundation, which currently operates throughout Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Bronwyn Sheehan founded the organisation in 2004 because she wanted *more* for children living in foster care: more hope, more opportunities and more books in their lives. The Pyjama Foundation trains volunteers called Pyjama Angels, who are matched with a child in care. They spend an hour a week with that one child reading books, playing educational games and helping with homework. The work of The Pyjama Foundation is so important in offering a more positive outlook for children in care. For more information see **www.thepyjamafoundation.com**.

INCIDENTAL READING

Fitness experts talk about the importance of incidental exercise, so surely a teacher librarian can talk about incidental reading?! Incidental reading is all about snatching pockets of time in a busy day to quickly escape into a book with your child. It could be while you're waiting for the bath to fill or while you're killing time before a doctor's appointment. The key to incidental reading is to surround yourself with books so that they can be easily and regularly dipped into.

Place collections of books in baskets or boxes throughout your home, chuck a few board books in the nappy bag, and stash a few in the car. Around the time she was five, my daughter, whom I'll call PudStar (as I do online), decorated an empty shoebox and filled it with board books for her younger sister, ChickPea (another pseudonym from my blog). She asked me to write 'Car Library' on it. We used that box until it fell apart and have had many more 'Mobile Library' boxes since.

I often keep borrowed library books on the back seat, mostly so they don't get lost at home (which happens regularly, despite me

being a librarian!). But having books in the car has also been a lifesaver for me. It doesn't always happen, but sometimes I can go on a 30-minute car trip with my girls not whingeing, fighting or constantly asking, 'Are we there yet?' It is such a simple thing to do and can work wonders.

It's incredibly easy to model reading as a necessary part of everyday life when you are out and about. Read road signs and menus aloud, or hand your child a catalogue in the supermarket and ask them to read or name the pictures of the items, and then have them add up two or three of them for some numeracy practice.

Five easy 'coffee shop packs' for incidental reading

I'm more than guilty of the 'here kids, have my phone while I drink my coffee' trick. No one wants to be the parent with the screaming children disturbing the entire café! But I also always carry books in my bag. For 'on the go' reading, I like to choose books that can be easily dipped in and out of, like a joke book or poetry anthology or fact book. I also keep 'coffee shop packs' – small bags or zippered folders with a book, pencil, paper and props – in the car. I like to have a number of different packs on rotation so that they retain their novelty value and my kids will stay interested in them. Here are my top five suggestions for easy 'coffee shop packs'.

1. Mini editions of children's books. These are often sold in school book club catalogues or around Christmas time as gift sets with soft toy characters. When she was young and compliant, my eldest child, PudStar, would neatly line up her five mini Olivia the Pig (Ian Falconer) books, decide which one to 'read', then settle down to look at the pictures and tell the stories to herself or her mini Olivia the Pig finger puppet. Her ability to independently

immerse herself in this imaginary world was due, in part, to my mum having read these books endlessly to her. PudStar deeply absorbed the stories, which then informed her play.

2. Doodle books, colouring books and activity books. Doodle books are fab. They show a picture idea and the child is encouraged to continue drawing from it. For example, there might be an outline of a TV screen and the child can draw a scene within it. Just remember to include colouring pencils in the pack. Books of mazes, word games or quizzes are also great for older children.

3. A few nice picture books that are 'new' to the child. These might be library books or ones you rotate from home, but the important thing is that they are a bit of a novelty for the child.

4. 'Spot the difference' or other 'finding' books. These provide hours of entertainment as kids try to find small hidden things. I've set up the idea that my daughters have to find Wally all by themselves (mainly as I cannot stand these sorts of books).

5. Story stones. These are smooth pebbles with stickers or small paintings of characters, settings and objects, which can be used to tell stories. There are plenty of ideas online for making these yourself or, if craft glue is your kryptonite, you can also buy pre-made ones. At some stage I must have found it quite therapeutic to make these (cut, glue, repeat) as I had about twenty little drawstring bags of different sets of story stones, as well as some with sight words.

PLAYFUL READING

My favourite memories of my own childhood are of playing with

my huge circle of family friends. Playing was just what we did – it was an organic part of our lives. Our parents never agonised over our choices of games or thought about creating 'meaningful learning experiences'. In those days, everyone seemed to accept that free play was a natural and essential part of childhood.

But of course we *were* learning through our play, as we constructed cubbyhouses and imaginary worlds; experimented with floating and sinking (the caterpillar didn't float – sorry, caterpillar); negotiated with our peers over what games to play next and who was 'it'; practised our numbers while baking and selling mud pies, and empathised with one another as bones were snapped on netless trampolines of the 1980s.

But these days, between technology, work, school and extracurricular activities, and the feeling that we must 'entertain and educate' our children at all times, free play seems to have fallen by the wayside. I cannot stress enough how play and literacy development go hand-in-hand. A game of 'shop' may require children to write and read shopping lists or food labels. A game of 'school' will often involve the 'teacher' asking the 'student' to write their own name or listen to a 'modelled book reading'. It is well documented in early literacy development research that parents and educators need to value play as an important and valid part in literacy development as children engage with and respond to stories, create their own stories, and learn about themselves and their world.[9]

Emma Schafer is a kindergarten teacher and advocate for literacy development through play-based learning experiences. Her learning spaces always have books dispersed throughout as well as a book corner or nook which offers children a place to escape the busyness of the classroom, a way to settle into their day, or a space to be immersed in story and imaginary worlds. Emma shares her

thoughts below on playful reading in the kindergarten setting.

Emma Schafer

Play is an all-important, and sadly sometimes overlooked, aspect of child development. Play allows children to master social, emotional and academic skills while interacting with peers and the world around them. The mastery of social skills through play develops resilience, problem-solving, empathy and kindness. Through play, children learn to work alongside and with each other, negotiate roles and problem solve conflicts. They practise their decision-making skills, act out and work through scenarios and interact with a diverse range of peers and adults in a safe environment.

Quality literature and picture books play a pivotal role in play-based learning and language acquisition. Children most often role-play situations that they know and understand. Most preschools, kindergartens and prep rooms will have a home corner where you will see children playing various family games. Children take on the roles that they are most familiar with, act them out and make up variations on these games – often informed by the books we have been reading. In doing so, children are developing an understanding of how different roles in the world work, how different families operate, and are challenged by other children when something doesn't go as planned. Role-play in the early years is a way for children to 'try out' the lives of others, such as being a parent and looking after the crying babies (you wouldn't believe how unsettled the 'babies' in my classroom are).

Picture books give young children the visuals for the words on the page. They form an important part of our daily routine and are embedded into our program to support, inform and extend children's play. We read a wide range of books based on the children's interests and every year we find that different groups of children take different things out of the same books.

As a kindergarten teacher I have the luxury of following the children's interests and designing areas in the classroom to further support these interests. I also have books in outdoor spaces where much play occurs – yes, these books will not last as long, but they are an important component in our play spaces. We often add things to our home corner or change it up completely based on the children's interests, which very often stem from a book we have read. I place high value on books and I model this through the way I respect and engage with books. We read every day and children frequently bring in their favourite book

from home. These books are carefully placed on the whiteboard each morning, ready to be shared, discussed and enjoyed together. I find that there is often a trend with books that come in from home, demonstrating that children make connections with books we read at kindergarten and similar books they have at home. We may get a run on animal books or books about school or even books by the same author.

Recently we read a Hairy Maclary book in class and the children loved the predictability of the text with the rhyming dog names and were able to playfully join in the reading experience. This one book resulted in an influx of Hairy Maclary books from home to share with the class. A group of children were enjoying pretending to be dogs and role-playing with their peers. This play was completely organic, and in our classroom we encourage the children to ask their educators for extra props if they required. This led to quite a detailed discussion about what they needed for their 'doggie' play. We ended up making a variety of tails, which have been ever so popular, and this imaginative play continued for a couple of weeks. It encouraged children to use verbal and non-verbal language, take turns, share both resources and the different roles they had created within their game, and let us not forget the gross motor skills these children developed when crawling around the classroom!

I almost always use books as the starting point for new topics of interest. A recent unit of work on fairytales involved a huge number of books. Each fairytale was read to the children and they re-enacted the stories incidentally in their play and explicitly through intentional teaching. The language opportunities, storytelling and retelling that flowed from this unit was a delight to witness. We always have a 'small world' area set up in our classroom where children are able to take a set of imaginative play objects and play with them whenever it suits their rhythm. This area is resourced with puppets, objects and props, and during our fairytale unit our small world space became larger than life! Houses were constructed for the Three Little Pigs and puppets were sourced or made to play Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother.

Some of the children asked if they could act out some of the stories with an audience, so we created a stage and seating; there were even tickets to the show. This simple example of a common unit or area of interest for kindergarten-age children demonstrates the power of books as a starting point for play, acquisition of literacy skills and engagement in the arts.

In a technology-filled and busy world with so many structured

activities aimed at engaging young children and their parents, there is something refreshing and comforting about seeing young children playing organically, in their own time, following their own rhythm. Add books into the mix, and the power of the written word and beauty of the illustrations will take children's play to an even richer and more valuable place.

CHAPTER TWO

READING AND SCHOOL – WHEN IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

THE MECHANICS OF READING – WHERE TO BEGIN?

If I have noticed one thing from watching my children learn to read it's that reading will happen in its own time, so long as there are no identified literacy issues (see chapter 6 for more information). As a teacher I already knew this was the case, but when I became a parent, panic set in, as it does, and I spent much time crafting letter recognition and sight word games instead of just enjoying books with my girls. Maybe the sight word games helped, but I think what turned my children into 'readers' was surrounding them with beautiful words and images in picture books, and plenty of music.

My husband, Dan, and I also modelled a love of reading. I remember PudStar's brilliant prep teacher telling me that Pud had a great vocabularly around books – she talked about authors and

illustrators all the time, and she knew what genres she liked and didn't like. Do not be discouraged if I have just described your home and yet you still have a child who is not 'a reader'. You can have the same recipe and the same family and yet one child will avidly read while the other two seem to do anything to avoid it; a few examples of this existed in my own childhood home! It is not an exact science, but I urge you to not decide too early that you have a 'non-reader'. Their time may just come – my youngest brother is now a voracious reader despite completely avoiding books as a child. Keep the structures in place, the modelled reading at a high level and the books strewn on every available surface, ready and waiting.

PHONICS AND SIGHT WORDS

I'm sure a few of us have experienced this scenario: child goes to first ever day of school pumped. Child comes home from first ever day of school sweaty, deflated and cranky, moaning, 'But I didn't learn how to read!'

Learning to read and becoming an independent reader is a process of incremental skill building. The first few years of primary school can seem to be a never-ending slog through sight words and frantic morning searches for those flimsy little school readers that teachers hand out daily with the reverence of a first edition Harry Potter. Those home readers often look like they have been through a washing machine or perhaps *need* to go through a washing machine, to remove the unidentifiable sticky residue on the cover. They appear lightweight in content and not particularly inspiring; yet teachers put great value on them, and on reading practice, so diligent parents play sight word games and churn through readers night after night.

There is a method in all of this and passionate teachers work

tirelessly with their students in the teaching of this thing called phonics. Phonics is the teaching of letter–sound relationships. It is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between the *sounds* of letters/letter combinations and the *look* of printed letters/letter combinations. The individual sound of a letter or letters ('th', 'igh', 'ough') is called a 'phoneme', and the letters that represent those sounds are called 'graphemes'.

When teaching phonics, teachers may use any number of programs and there are debates over which one is the most effective. Basically, most programs use a combination of explicit and sequential teaching of skills, and incidental teaching through the reading of books and environmental texts. Whatever the method, the desire of the teacher is the same: to build up strong neural pathways in children regarding the sound and sight of letters and letter combinations.

Alongside this alphabetic knowledge, sight words are introduced. Sight words are those words that cannot be decoded using the sight/sound approach. Lists of these words come home in the early years of school and give children the opportunity to build up a bank of high-frequency words and an understanding that not all words can be decoded (although there are various schools of thought on this and it is an ongoing educational debate).

Without knowledge of the alphabet, the letters and the sounds, as well as the blends that those sounds make, reading is impossible. Remembering words by sight will only get a young reader so far – soon enough they will need some strategies to decode unknown words. This is why sight words and phonics instruction are taught together.

Phonics lessons occur in all levels of primary school education but are at their most focused in the early years of primary school, with trained early childhood teachers being the experts in phonics

instruction. As children move through to the middle years of primary school we talk more of spelling instruction, morphological elements like Greek and Latin roots and structural analysis of words.

Phonics is just one of many strategies used to teach reading and it should be handled with care and used sparingly. It is very easy to assume that teaching a child to read is merely a matter of practice, persistence and focus on accuracy, but these things are just part of the mix. The very best teachers plan for the reading needs and interests of their students, constantly monitor their progress and adjust teaching methods to support and extend as needed.

For suggestions on how to engage in collaborative play with sight words at home or in your early education setting, see 'How to play with sight words'. The emphasis should be on learning through collaborative play and shared discovery – a mix of incidental and planned activities is ideal.

READING COMPREHENSION

I am a passionate advocate of young people reading for pleasure. Reading is a chance for some downtime, and being motivated to read and being enthusiastic about reading has also been shown to have an important influence on the development of students' comprehension.[1] As young children decode words and sentences, they learn to construct meaning from a text by developing skills, making inferences, verifying understandings and making repairs to their reading.[2] Talking about books is one of the earliest ways in which parents and educators can engage a child in reading and encourage their comprehension of what has been read. Reading with young children should not always be a formal learning experience; however, it is great to get into the habit of creating dialogue around literature by asking questions and having

informal discussions about the content, context or connections you have or can make with a book.

I've had excellent book conversations with toddlers and they relish the opportunity to chat with a trusted adult about a story they have enjoyed. With slightly older children who are just starting their 'learning to read' journey, it is really important to continue these book conversations. When your child starts to decipher words in a text, we adults can get so caught up in the excitement of this that we momentarily forget that comprehension is an essential element in the 'learning to read' process. I see plenty of very young children who are capable of reading the words but if you ask them a few questions about the content of the book, they are at a loss; their deep understanding of a book is not at the same skill level as their ability to decode words. Comprehension is central to reading development.

The following questions or conversation starters can be used with toddlers right through to independent readers. Modify as needed and add your own questions into the mix. Asking a question or two without making it a chore gives you an insight into your child's level of comprehension and encourages them to be critical readers of text.

The idea is not to work through this list of questions after each book is read – that is so not fun. If your child is in the mood, just casually ask one or two questions. To make this activity playful, I have written questions on paddle-pop sticks and put them in a bottle and turned it into a lucky dip game. Another suggestion is to make paper chatterboxes where your young reader can pick the question. Get creative and make up board games, or cardboard dice with questions written on them. There are no rules and you know your own children. The following questions will get the dice rolling (so to speak).

Reading comprehension question ideas

- Can you find the author's name on the cover?
- Can you find the illustrator's name?
- What do you think of the illustrations in the book? Are they painted? Drawn? Is it a collage? Photographs? Are they black and white or coloured? How is colour used?
- Which is your favourite illustration? Why? Can you describe the illustration?
- What do you think might happen next in the story?
- If you were the author of the story would you have finished it the same way?
- What did you like or dislike about this book?
- What do you think the author was trying to say to us? What helped you figure out the message?
- What part of the story was the most exciting or interesting?
- Which character was your favourite? Why?
- Did any of the characters remind you of anyone you know?
- Can you think of any other books that are similar to this one?
- Look at the cover. Did it give you clues about the story?
- Point to the parts of the book when I call them out: spine, front cover, back cover, blurb, title.
- How did this book make you feel? Was it a happy book? Thoughtful? A bit scary? An adventure?
- What would be a good food to eat while reading this book?
- What is the setting of this story?
- Can you ask *me* a question about the book we just read?
- Can you retell the story?
- Who is telling the story?
- Can you think of a friend who might also like this book? Why do you think they would like it?

Another strategy to increase discussion about books and the way they work is to search out books that are about books. I have two favourites – *Parsley Rabbit's Book about Books* (Frances Watts and David Legge) and *Lucy's Book* (Natalie Jane Prior and Cheryl Orsini). Full disclosure: I am the image of the librarian in *Lucy's Book*. Even after ten years I am still very fond of *Parsley Rabbit* and regularly use it in library lessons. Written for an early childhood audience, Parsley Rabbit walks us through a book that is all about books and along the way he points out the title, endpapers, spine, the way the words move from left to right on a page, and the many more parts and workings of a book. Utterly brilliant. *Lucy's Book* introduces young readers from early childhood to middle primary to the concept of libraries but also the idea that a book can be loved by many and is a resource to be shared. Even if I were not pictured in this book (complete with pink hair and some of my favourite clothes!), this would be the best book I have found that captures the essence of libraries and love for a special book.

READERS VERSUS LIBRARY BOOKS

I often have parents visit my school library early in the year to find books that their child will be able to read by themselves. I relish the opportunity to launch into my spiel about the difference between 'learn to read' books (teacher-chosen levelled readers) and recreational books (self-selected library books). Term One of the first year of school is completely overwhelming for students, staff and parents, and each year I think that I would dearly love to sit 'new to the school system' parents down with a cup of tea and possibly some Persian love cake spiced with saffron, rose, cardamom and lemon (I digress), and talk them through the differences between classroom readers and recreational reads. Instead, while I have you here, make yourself a tea, grab a slice of

cake and settle in.

Once phonics instruction is underway and parents are having endless 'fun, fun, fun for everyone' with sight word games, the next level of reading instruction is added to the homework folder – the home reader. Readers are short texts, specifically designed for the purpose of teaching reading.

To the capable adult reader they may appear dull and uninteresting, but to the child learning to read they are just about the most wonderful thing in the world. Classroom readers are designed as teaching tools, with high-frequency sight words, simple sentences, predictable storylines, pictures which help to decode the text and a levelled system where books increase in difficulty as reading mastery is achieved. It is widely accepted that the early years of reading instruction are crucial in developing proficient readers, and classroom readers form part of the 'learn to read toolkit', alongside a suite of other strategies and ongoing monitoring of student progress.[3]

By week two of term the library lessons start, and library bags full of big picture books are dragged home like treasure sacks. The sheer volume of texts coming through your house in those early primary schools years can be *overwhelming*. Even I, a teacher librarian, find the number of library books formidable at times.

Books borrowed from libraries are self-selected, recreational reads and help young people develop an emotional attachment to reading and develop lifelong reading habits. Picture books and early chapter books are complex interplays between words and text, and require young people to think deeply, imagine, wonder and interpret. They contain sophisticated language that requires discussion and increases your child's vocabulary. They are also full of images that add to and extend the text.

Young people need both classroom readers and recreational

reads – each supports the other and each has a distinct purpose. Classroom readers are great for using as part of your child's homework routine, where a parent or caregiver can support the reader in feeling a sense of accomplishment as they decode words and make meaning from a text. They are used in the classroom context to teach specific skills, to model writing styles, and to test reading ability. Teachers will have a goal in mind for each child: lower level readers help to develop confidence and fluency, while higher level readers extend and challenge – both are of critical importance in helping children become independent readers. Quality early childhood teachers are to be trusted; they are experts in what each students needs in a school or home reader. So don't change your child's reader level without first discussing your concerns with the teacher.

Books that your child has chosen from the library are for sharing with a loved adult and are usually a read-aloud experience until your child is reading independently. Even then, reading aloud is something which I encourage well into the upper primary years and beyond.

Focusing on developing a sense of joy around reading, rather than on what level your child is reading and where their peers are at, is so very important. Over-focusing on home readers and turning them into a battle can turn a love of reading into an intense dislike, as perfectly captured in the gorgeous picture book *I Do Not Like Books Anymore!* (Daisy Hirst). Unless there are diagnosed literacy issues, all children will learn to read at some point, but the journey often determines the strength of the outcome and those children who associate books with joy will always come out on top.

Award-winning children's author Pamela Rushby can write the most insanely beautiful prose, but often I find her name on a very 'constrained' levelled reader. I asked her about why and how she

writes in these vastly different ways.

Pamela Rushby

I've been writing for both trade and educational publishers for more than twenty years and in that time I've had over 200 educational books published. Which sounds impressive until you remember that some of these books are only about eight pages long, and might contain only twenty (or fewer) words. These, believe it or not, are the hardest ones of all to write.

Trade books are the ones you'll find in bookshops, as well as public and school libraries. They're recreational reading: books you choose and love to read. Educational books are largely found in classrooms.

If you looked at a number of trade books and educational books lined up on a shelf, you might not be able to see much of a difference between them. They're all attractive to children, they're entertaining, they're colourful, they're well edited, they're well illustrated. But there is a difference. Educational books are carefully designed, by educational experts, to give children in classrooms practice in reading, to introduce them to new ideas and concepts, to develop reading skills, to build confidence, and to put children's learning into a broad context.

For a writer, choosing to write for the educational market is a whole different ballgame to choosing to write for trade.

A friend of mine once said that a writer's brain is like a lava lamp. At the bottom there's a whole gooey, pulsating mass of thoughts and ideas. Every once in a while, one idea might go *bloop!* and rise to the top. You'll think about it for a while, it'll change shape, perhaps get bigger, another idea might join onto it. Then it'll sink to the bottom again. But one day, that idea will rise to the top and won't go away, and you'll think, *Aha! There's a story!*

That's the way it works when I write for the trade market. I start out with an idea I've had. It's been blooping around in the lava lamp for quite a while, growing and developing. When it's ready to go, I'll know, because it just won't go away. And soon I'll be writing that story, because I desperately want to write it. (And fingers crossed a publisher will, eventually, want it too.)

When I write for the educational market I'm almost always writing commissioned material. A publisher has decided to produce a new series of books and invited writers to contribute to the series. The publisher will have an absolutely clear idea of what the series is intending to achieve, and the writer

will receive a brief that outlines the publisher's needs and expectations. Let me give you an example.

A brief I received for some beginner reading books asked me to write a story about 'weather and its effect on people'. I had 120 to 150 words to do this. I needed to include certain high-frequency words at least eight times in the text. I also needed to include a phonic element and/or a vocabulary element from a given list. Oh, and it would be nice, the brief concluded, if I could manage to be funny, too.

Quite a challenge.

After a lot of thought and juggling of ideas and words (and a certain amount of whingeing, whining and despair), it was possible. I did it.

The trick is to approach a brief as if it's a puzzle to be solved. It may take some time, but, like a cryptic crossword, it can be done. It's a totally different way of writing from coming up with your own idea and developing your own story exactly as you want it to be.

One of the misconceptions people have about educational books is that they're boring. Well, in the past some certainly were. You may have memories of some of them. (*See Spot run. Run, Spot, run*.) But writers now see it as a challenge to make the books fun as well as meeting their educational aims. The one I'm working on features Spacegirl, a superhero who saves the universe by lassoing planets. I'm restricted to a very limited vocabulary and word count, (similar to the See Spot Run books), but I'm having fun with it – and I hope the kids will enjoy them too.

Usually editors from the publishing house will provide suggested topics to write about, although I've found editors to be very open to any suggestions I make too. And boring? Never! In the past few years I've written about the scariest theme park ride in the world; why cows' burps are increasing the levels of greenhouse gases in New Zealand; aquanauts living under the sea for extended periods; and high fashion for dogs – all have been total fun to research and write about.

When your beloved child comes home from school and presents you with the evening's homework reading, you can be assured that they are going to gain from that reading. Because to produce the 50 or so words in that little book, a lot of people – educational experts, designers, editors, illustrators, and writers – have put in a lot of time and effort to deliver a meaningful learning experience.

BOOKS FOR BEGINNING READERS

The 'story' books below are good to read alongside school readers as they contain high-frequency words and pictures that act as hints for the text.

That's Not My series by Fiona Watt, illustrated by Rachel Wells (Usborne)

I Went Walking by Sue Williams, illustrated by Julie Vivas (Turtleback Books, 1992)

Dog In, Cat Out by Gillian Rubinstein, illustrated by Ann James (Omnibus Books, 1991)

One Woolly Wombat by Kerry Argent (Scholastic Australia, 2012)

Spot series by Eric Hill (Penguin Books)

Crocodile Beat (First Readers edition) by Gail Jorgensen, illustrated by Patricia Mullins (Scholastic Australia, 2015)

Deadly Reads for Deadly Readers (four-book pack) by Nola Turner-Jensen, illustrated by Dub Leffler and Maggie Prewett (Magabala Books, 2012)

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES SUPPORTING BEGINNING READERS

There is a complex relationship between paper and digital books, and the way educators use digital technology to teach literacy concepts is continually being researched and debated.[4] There is no doubt that technology-infused experiences of literacy are reshaping learning environments and the contemporary reading practices of children. The rate at which digital change is occurring requires us to be flexible in our thinking but mindful of how quickly we move to the next 'bright shiny digital thing' offered to us and our children or students.

BOOKS FOR EMERGING READERS

Some books for little readers who are just starting their independent reading journey and can read a text with little or no assistance.

Did You Take the B From My _ook by Matt Stanton and Beck Stanton (and others in series) (Harper Collins, 2016)

Treehouse series by Andy Griffiths, illustrated by Terry Denton (Pan Macmillan Australia)

Billie B Brown series and Hey Jack series by Sally Rippin (Hardie Grant Egmont)

Aussie Nibbles series (various authors) (Puffin Books)

Solo series (various authors) (Scholastic Australia)

Ginger Green, Playdate Queen series by Kim Kane, illustrated by Jon Davis (Hardie Grant Egmont)

Toocool series by Phil Kettle, illustrated by Craig Smith (Scholastic Education)

Sporty Kids series by Felice Arena, illustrated by Tom Jellett (Penguin Books Australia)

Mates: Great Australian Yarns series (various authors) (Scholastic Australia)

Flying High (Scholastic Australia, 2015), *Going Bush with Grandpa* (Omnibus Books, 2014), *The Memory Shed* (Scholastic Australia, 2015) and *One Rule for Jack* (Omnibus Books, 2014) by Sally Morgan and Ezekiel Kwaymullina, illustrated by Craig Smith

The ease that young children have navigating hyperlinks, scrolling, enlarging and shrinking text and selecting elements is remarkable, and the engagement and delight they exhibit when making sense of digital texts through touch is reason enough to embrace technology as part of literacy learning. The use of touch-screen technology takes us back to the very early book experiences of babies, where touch is all-important in accessing and making meaning from a text. Technology affords the opportunity for the child to have some control over the reading experience as they play around with different but interconnected genres of text such as captions, images and embedded sound.

There are a number of digital literacy programs designed specifically for children. All need to be critically assessed before

they are used, based on the needs and interests of the individual child. Many of these programs market themselves as superior to a paper-based literacy education approach. In reality, the research indicates that technology is at its best when woven through existing evidence-based, high quality literacy programs that employ a range of teaching and learning tools, both print and digital.[5] Digital reading programs or apps focusing on early word recognition or early reading of texts enable students to control their learning pace and to feel a sense of responsibility and autonomy in the process. In a busy classroom or home environment, independent computer work can provide individuals or small groups the time to complete work without direct adult instruction, and they are rewarded with immediate feedback. The immediacy of results can be highly motivating for students and frees the teacher to focus more directly on other areas of need in the classroom.

Literacy lessons in early years classrooms will have groups of students working in multiple ways: with a print text perhaps led by the teacher; using audio devices to listen to a fluid reading of a text to help them pronounce and understand words they are unable to read independently; on tablets completing word recognition or levelled reading programs and outside writing sentences on the wall with chalk. No single teaching strategy is better than another in terms of benefit but the use of multiple strategies ensures that learning styles, needs and paces are well catered for. Digital technologies are part of the modern day suite of teaching and learning strategies available to parents and educators.

Technology gives teachers the opportunity to have multiple reading strategies existing in the one learning space which means they are able to tailor learning to the needs of the individual.

ENCOURAGING WRITING AND ILLUSTRATION

As young children learn to read words, they also learn to make pencil marks on paper creating words and images. Reading, writing and illustrating are intrinsically linked. When a child begins to create meaningful text and recognisable images to communicate with others, it is a time of wonder and excitement, and a concrete example that they are comprehending and *creating* texts.

I distinctly remember author/illustrator and dear friend Narelle Oliver looking at PudStar's curly, whirly, twirly, upside-down and back-to-front handwriting and saying to me, 'Grab that handwriting, Megan! Keep it! You will never get that once she starts school and learns "proper handwriting". Graphic artists would kill to be able to properly re-create a child's natural handwriting.' Being someone who can't stand bits of 'mess' I did *not* follow Narelle's wise advice and keep samples of PudStar's 'fancy handwriting', as she used to call it. Narelle was right and these days PudStar is all about 'proper handwriting' with no swirls on the end – so boring, really. Narelle sadly passed away and is dearly missed by many, but I often think about her when I tuck away some of my younger daughter's 'fancy handwriting'.

It was the same with PudStar's artwork. As soon as she started formal education and learnt about the 'proper' way to draw, all the gorgeous twirly bird pictures she used to create with Narelle Oliver and the insightful sketches of family members stopped. I knew it was just a stage and that her confidence in her creativity and her ideas would return as she learnt new art techniques, but it also felt like the beginning of the end.

My mum, also a teacher librarian and former high school art teacher, has great conversations with all her grandchildren about their artworks. A while ago, PudStar was totally frustrated that she could not draw something exactly as she saw it. Mum was very patient in encouraging her to not think of her drawings as

photographs – that drawings are not about making perfect images because we have cameras for that. She talked about art as being a different way of looking at something and capturing its essence. We have a beautiful picture book about Monet and my mother showed PudStar how Monet captured the movement and sparkle of water and flowers with dabs of paint. I often think about this conversation and retell it to my children and students when we are illustrating stories.

Having a supply of art and writing materials and unlined paper is key in encouraging spontaneous bursts of creative writing and drawing in little people. Both my girls have always had unlined journals next to their beds and a lead pencil or two (never a Sharpie pen – I learnt that the hard way). I never comment on what they write or draw unless asked. Blank paper is perfect for children of all ages as it encourages them to think outside those terribly restrictive red and blue lines. When there is no pressure to write or draw, children will often do their best and most creative work.

Encouraging children to draw, write, make, create and tinker is the perfect way to help them to develop their own unique style and embrace their 'art mistakes', which are not mistakes at all. Writing and illustration should be supported alongside reading as a means of encouraging a holistic approach to nuturing a literate child who is self-motivated to both consume and create words and images.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AND THE TEACHER LIBRARIAN

Many parents and educators are aware that school libraries are facing challenges of budget and staffing cuts. This trend has been on the rise for some time, but I'm not one to worry too much about trends. I think I rather like to buck them. I am also a firm believer that if you hold onto something for long enough it will come back in style, usually with a few tweaks that make it even better; in short, I reckon libraries are back in vogue. In the 1980s my mother bucked all fashion trends, and I remember being utterly mortified at her turning up to my rowing practice in zebra print jeans and Madonna sunglasses, long before these items were a thing. It is said that we turn into our mothers, and I have most certainly followed in her footsteps, both in becoming a teacher librarian and horrifying my children with my fashion choices.

I remain quietly confident that the 'trend' of looking at school libraries as an outdated resource is turning, especially where

technology, Fab Labs and makerspaces are incorporated.[1] Well-resourced school libraries and quality teacher librarians are worth their weight in gold, and the positive impact they can have on an entire school community is well documented anecdotally and in research. Well-resourced school libraries, with exemplary teacher librarians and library support staff, develop and sustain a vibrant reading culture, promote innovative use of digital technologies and are a participatory hub within schools.

Stepping off my soapbox for a moment, what are the practicalities involved in ensuring the school in your community has a well-resourced library with passionate library staff who work to meet the curriculum and recreational needs of their patrons?

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SCHOOL LIBRARY?

School libraries exist as learning environments providing physical, digital and online spaces to enable access to high quality, diverse collections of resources, activities and services. These appropriately and ethically encourage and support the learning of all who engage with the space. Libraries are community resource centres and operate to contribute to the betterment of their customers, arming patrons with the information they require, and as a social space that can be used for cultural and educational events. School libraries vary in size, funding and staffing but all are focused on supporting student learning and creating lifelong learners and readers. School curriculums are resourced through the teacher librarian, who seeks to extend and support the individual curriculum, goals and ethos of their school environment. School libraries are wonderful places which are the beating heart of many school communities and a refuge for those who need time away from a busy school environment.

What should your school library look like?

A school library does not need an expensive fit-out or architecturally designed space. The very first school library I was put in charge of was a one-room demountable building in the middle of a dusty carpark at the back end of the primary school. Despite the distant location, it was such a hive of activity that we had to hand out numbered cards to monitor the number of students allowed inside at any one time. Those 'today you can visit the library at lunchtime' cards were as valuable as Golden Tickets to Willy Wonka's chocolate factory.

If you are a parent, carer or staff member, the following things are what I believe you should *expect* from your school library. It should:

- Be welcoming and inviting – the door and the entrance should invite the community inside.
- Be visible throughout the school. Being visible is not just about building placement, but also about excellent signage and presence both online (school website and social media) and in real life – for example, is your teacher librarian seen at all the major events at school?
- Have library staff who smile and are helpful because libraries are a service to the community. If your library staff are only ever behind a closed office door, you should consider removing that door or moving their work station to the front counter.
- Like a fast-food joint, your school library should be upselling at all times: 'Would you like a magazine with your loans this week?'
- Have a sense of order about them. I am all for chaos and my washing pile on the couch is a testament to this. Libraries, however, should be easy to navigate with resources that are ordered, searchable and findable. The Dewey decimal system

exists for a reason and good library staff love a Dewey number on a book spine label.

- Have staff who continually weed and cull their collection with care. The classics will always remain under the careful eye of a good librarian or technician, but it is terribly difficult for young readers to find quality books when they are wedged between mouldy, dusty, horrid, ripped texts. Damaged or outdated books should be upcycled into artwork or lovingly recycled. Even if your library budget is dire, there is no need to hang on to 25 copies of a book that has not been borrowed since 1972.
- Have old and new technologies on display, such as QR codes for students to zap with their devices and stunning picture books treasured as works of art. Print and digital books can happily co-exist.
- Be comfortable, and have dedicated spaces for reading and for collaboration. Some students need downtime and solitude in a busy school day and libraries should provide this. They also need collaborative working spaces for sharing of ideas and creating together.
- Have some noise! I have had so many little kindy children over the years look up at me and say, 'You are TOO loud to be a library lady', but it doesn't take them long to realise that I am not the 'shhhhhhhhhh' style of librarian. Sure, libraries can be calm and quiet at times, but they can also be full of laughter, discussion and debate. If libraries have to be quiet, then I need a new job, as does my teaching partner because she is *way* louder than me.
- Be a fine example of a modern learning environment with 24/7 access to parts of the collection available to students through databases, ebooks and a functioning website, and possibly social media streams.

How do you know if you've struck a good teacher librarian?

Let's start at the beginning with what a teacher librarian actually is? I could just reproduce my job description, but real-life examples are far more engaging, so I'm going to use award-winning and well-known Australian teacher librarian Jenny Stubbs.

I first met Jenny when I was starting out as a teacher librarian. Jenny runs the vibrant Ipswich Teacher Librarian Network which, at her request, now has many local council librarians as members, adding greatly to the information pool. All teacher librarians across Australia are in networks because we are gatherers and sharers of information. One of the jobs of a librarian is to find and access information within a library, but the information gathering goes far beyond the walls of the physical building. Good librarians have curious and enquiring minds and collaborate with their colleagues and the community. Jenny is the master of surrounding herself with like-minded professionals and creatives who passionately believe in the power of story to change lives and the utter importance of literacy.

For over 28 years, the Ipswich Teacher Librarian Network has published a new book each year based on the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards, an enormous undertaking for a group of teacher librarians who work voluntarily on the project. This book is used in schools throughout Australia and overseas to promote Book Week and to provide resources to teachers and teacher librarians which support joyous and educationally sound exploration of some of the best books in the country.

Jenny Stubbs is the founder of the StoryArts Festival Ipswich, a biennial festival which has become one of the most highly regarded children's literature festivals in Australia. She advocates and builds effective library and literary programs that contribute to the

development of young readers. Jenny and her team of dedicated volunteers organise and fund the festival largely through sales of the Ipswich Teacher Librarian Network book, and the festival has enabled tens of thousands of children to experience books and be inspired creatively through a series of free author events.

Jenny embraces any new technology that improves access to information and to story. For example, she introduced the first online chats in Australia between authors and children, which grew into an online literature festival that now caters for thousands of young people each year. She is a role model for lifelong learning.

As you can see, being a teacher librarian involves far more than returning books to shelves.

It must be acknowledged that not all school libraries are managed by teacher librarians, but by teachers, library technicians or other support staff. While a qualified teacher librarian remains the ultimate goal, we should never dismiss the work of others in the library. All dedicated staff can make a valuable contribution.

THE SCHOOL LIBRARY AS A SOCIAL HANGOUT

I can't tell you how many times I've had parents concerned that their child is at the library. Every. Single. Lunchtime. Alone, 'just' reading, usually down the back at the non-fiction shelves where it's nice and quiet. Sometimes I would like to join them. I don't know if other library staff do this, but I do gently 'shoo' some of these students from the library to go and run in the sun with their peers because a life lived in moderation is a good one. There are students I allow to come to the library only three days a week so that they have a healthy mix of exercise of the mind, body and social network. There are parents and carers who worry their child reads too much, and there are parents and carers who would give their right arm to have a child who reads.

A library is a beautiful place to work and play in and there are many reasons students seek them out.

- To escape the noise of the school playground, although as many of my students will tell you, I am the loudest librarian in the world, so don't come to my library for silence. I recently had a Year Six girl say to me, 'Mrs Daley, can we talk about books another time? I'm actually trying to read.' It's dreadful being shushed by your own students.
- Life is busy and schools are *really* busy. A lunchtime spent in the library can be much-needed downtime in a chaotic day.
- Like-minded peers and adults tend to reside in the library at lunchtime and friendships are often formed here.
- From the comfort of the school library, the mind can travel to China, the moon, the future, the past – very reassuring for little people who may be having problems in the actual world.

If you do have a child or student who is overly attached to the library, I'd recommend you talk to their teacher about some 'time out' from the library and how they can help make the playground more inviting for your child. It's also a good idea to make yourself known to your school library staff. Over the years, I've become really friendly with some of the parents of 'my library kids', mainly because the parents are also readers and lovers of libraries and so are part of my tribe.

If your school library has a makerspace zone or something similar, by golly, get your reader involved! The sharing of ideas, discussion, debate, problem-solving and working with others that occurs in these spaces are essential social and life skills to develop.

SELECTING QUALITY BOOKS

Australia has an incredibly diverse, vibrant and fabulous children's literary community that produces some of the best children's books in the world. But some people find that when they're presented with an entire wall of books in a store or a library it can be hard to choose and it all becomes a little overwhelming. I choose a children's book in a similar way to how I choose wine; my eye is drawn to the label and its design, then I am won over by how many shiny gold award stickers adorn it, then I consider the price point. For choosing children's books which will be loved, here are my tips.

Literary awards do matter. They point us in the right direction. Awards lists always spark conversation and controversy but these lists are a 'who's who' of children's and young adult books.

Phone a friend. Seriously, go find yourself a book expert at your local school library, public library or bookstore. We bookish types relish opportunities to talk with young readers and recommend books that will keep them reading. Many independent bookstores have children's and YA book specialists on their teams. Public and school library staff are there to help you and if you come across an unhelpful librarian, please feel free to stomp up and down and complain because I strongly believe that we are in customer service and that readers are our customers. Much to the horror of my tween (actually everything I do horrifies her), if I spot a parent looking confused in a bookstore I usually sidle over to them and help out.

Judge a book by its cover. I do it. All. The. Time. If a book is well designed and the cover grabs you, it generally means that care and thought has gone into not just the cover but also the content. A great cover sums up an entire book in one image.

Price point. This could be controversial but on the whole I would prefer to purchase one exceptional hardcover children's book than four or five 'bargain bin' books. Bargain books tend to not remain treasured books and they are often mass-produced items that need a good edit, a better illustrator or a much better author. There are, of course, exceptions to this, like the time I found hardcover versions of Blue Willow china-inspired *Little Blue* (Gaye Chapman) reduced to a mere two dollars. After I wept inside that such a stunning book could possibly be reduced to so little, I purchased all 31 copies to use as party favours – way better than a lolly bag (said no child ever). If you cannot afford books or would prefer to try before you buy, then give your library card a workout.

Hover around groups of children. Not in a way that will cause concern, but stand near children in bookshops and libraries and watch what they are borrowing and listen to what books they are talking about. After all, young people are the very best guides to the books that will be enjoyed.

SELF-SELECTION

One of my work goals is that my primary school students will become efficient in self-selection of recreational material by high school. Teacher librarians seek to arm children with strategies for searching out books for themselves and quality library programming ensures that self-selection strategies are explicitly and incidentally taught from a young age.

In the early years, teaching self-selection strategies may take the form of browsing with children through forward-facing picture book boxes and talking about what appeals to them based on the cover. I model this, often through role-playing when choosing a book for myself: 'Oh, here is a book with a cat on the cover, I'll get

that one! Oh, hang on ... I really don't like cats at all, I'm a dog person. This one has a lemon tree on the front and the colours remind me of being outside in my garden – this one I *will* borrow because I love gardening.' I have one-on-one conversations with students whenever I can and regularly insist that each kindy or prep child walks past their teacher or myself on the way out and tells us why they have chosen a particular book. We make a game of this 'march past' and the children hold up their book and loudly tell us why they think it looks like a 'good fit' for them.

There are also patterns when selecting books with young children. If a child has really enjoyed *The Very Cranky Bear* (Nick Bland), this is an opportunity to point out other Nick Bland books and see if children can see the similarities in illustrative style. Likewise, if a child continually borrows books on a particular subject, perhaps dinosaurs, introduce them to non-fiction texts, or expand their horizons and offer them some books on jungle animals – some children feel safe sticking with 'what they know' in books and have difficulty knowing what to move on to.

Throughout the primary school years, teachers, parents and students should have ongoing conversations about why and how we choose books for independent recreational reading. Empowering students to choose their own books sets them up for being lifelong readers and shifts ownership of reading from the adult to the child.

Questions that help with self-selection

- Does the subject matter appeal to you?
- Why do you want to read this book?
- Read the first page – do you understand most of the words?
- Is this book going to challenge you and are you interested enough to accept that challenge?
- Have you read anything else by this author and did you enjoy

it?

- Tell me the last book you really enjoyed? Can you find something similar?

Strategies that help with self-selection

- Write down the authors you like and search out their titles.
- Check new book displays in libraries and bookstores.
- Scour the shelves at home and find things other family members have enjoyed.
- Talk with your peers about the books they like to read.
- Ask your friendly school or local librarian for some recommendations.
- Take your time browsing the library shelves and you might notice a gem that you have not seen before.

THE LIBRARY MAKERSPACE

This chapter would not and could not exist without Jackie Child AKA #bestteachingpartnerever. Jackie landed in my world and my library about eight years ago – my little teacher librarian life has never been the same, nor would I want it to be. I hired Jackie because I thought we were peas in a pod. Turns out we are polar opposites in just about everything except our passion for primary school education, and for children's literature, and our ability to talk our boss into letting us run with half-crazed ideas.

The half-crazed idea Jackie raised was to introduce some spanners, drills, and sewing equipment into the library. She'd seen this 'cool thing' at a conference where libraries in America were inviting the community to work collaboratively on projects that often involved engineering principles and skills; she believed it was a natural fit with school libraries where information is sourced, digitally and physically, and shared among peers. Jackie Child was

a rally car driver, engine re-builder and a keen creator of ice-skating outfits *before* she was a teacher librarian, so I did wonder if she was trying to bring her own love of a good tool set into *my* pristine library. Turned out Jackie was onto something and her name has become synonymous with the makerspace movement in Australia.

What is the makerspace movement?

This might sound like a buzzword but the concepts underpinning the makerspace movement are timeless and have been part of the makeup of libraries since their inception.[2] The idea of making, tinkering, engineering and creating is not a new one. Using these elements within a community space forms the conceptual framework for the term 'makerspace'. A makerspace mindset values questioning and inquiry, re-inventing and exploring new ways of doing, and focuses on participating in learning – making and re-purposing, rather than consuming.

Under the umbrella term of 'makerspace', there exists several incarnations of the idea, with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) considered to be the first to formalise the concept in America. It is generally believed that the makerspace concept evolved from the hackerspaces in Germany as early as the 1950s.[3] One of the incarnations is Fab Labs, which are places of fabrication where physical items are produced. A hackerspace is focused on computers and technology and co-working spaces are shared working environments with shared tools and resources.[4]

Makerspaces are the perfect partnership for libraries – where information is stored, accessed, shared, explored, pondered and debated. Library patrons can follow their interests and passions, applying knowledge from all areas of their life; personal and educational knowledge, experiences and skills. Informal makerspace activities are probably already occurring in your school

or local library; formalising the process is merely a response to what students and customers now expect from modern library spaces and extending our outreach to new library patrons.

Libraries provide equal access to information, resources and technologies and this is particularly obvious in public libraries, where patrons access the internet and computers, assisted in this process by library staff. Increasingly, libraries are housing and providing equal access to hardware such as robots, 3D printers and scanners. It follows that librarians embrace the ideas underpinning the makerspace movement and facilitate community interest in new and emerging technologies and spaces of making and creating.

In our school library, books have been the starting point for nearly all of our makerspace projects. Books with characters that think outside the square (such as the Violet Mackerel series by Anna Branford and Sarah Davis, *Different Like Coco* by Elizabeth Matthews, the Engibear series by Andrew King and Benjamin Johnston, and *Rosie Revere, Engineer* by Andrea Beaty and David Roberts) or books that present opportunities to create new characters or ideas, with technology or physical equipment. For example, when reading *A Very Unusual Pursuit* by Catherine Jinks, we invented our own Bogles, and when reading *Something Wonderful* by Raewyn Caisley and Karen Blair we created our own wonderful machines to solve a problem at home. Student borrowing of books and their engagement in reading has also increased since the introduction of a makerspace zone in the library. As students tinker and create, we observe incidental language learning and the building of literacy across multiple domains. The library has become a space for all, not just for students who identify as readers. When students enter our library space, they are surrounded by books to tempt all persuasions and more often than not they walk out with one or two books under their arm. Recently, students playing the *America the Wild* game on our Xbox Kinect

First published 2019 by University of Queensland Press
PO Box 6042, St Lucia, Queensland 4067 Australia

uqp.com.au
uqp@uqp.uq.edu.au

Cover design and illustration by Jo Hunt
Author photograph by Simone C Photography
Typeset in 11/16pt Legacy Serif by Jo Hunt

The University of Queensland Press is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

The University of Queensland Press is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.

ISBN 9780702262579 (pbk)
ISBN 9780702263613 (pdf)
ISBN 9780702263620 (epub)
ISBN 9780702263637 (kindle)