

So Many Books...So Little Time...

Oh, the places you'll go. There is fun to be done...Dr. Seuss

According to the American Library Association, studies point to a relationship between reading together and the emotional development of young children. Just a simple picture book can help strengthen the bond between adult and child. This is what literacy means to me. Instill the love of books in young children and the seed is planted for lifelong learning. If our focus is only on teaching them to read and write, we may be losing sight of the bigger picture. Unless children are at risk, for whatever reason, most will learn to read and write when their brains are ready.

Much time and energy is going into structured literacy programming in early childhood settings. We know that play is children's work and that is how they learn. Are we rushing childhood? Children need time to nourish their brains, to think-question-wonder-to process their world. Shouldn't childhood be a journey and not a race? Today we will explore how music & movement can be used to naturally support, enhance and strengthen literacy and much more throughout your day, including transitions and end of the day blues.

To be a successful child is not always easy nowadays. Be smarter-faster seems to be the message. As an educator and a grandmother, my idea of a successful child is one who knows emotional well being and has good social skills. Being the master of the alphabet, the wiz with numbers, the best one on the team of 3 year olds, the smartest kid on the block; yet not feeling good about oneself and not being able to relate to ones friends does not a happy childhood make. Where's the advantage?

Mem Fox tells us "that learning to read and learning to love reading owe a great deal (much more than we ever dreamed) to the nature of the human relationships that occur around and through books". So read, read, read to your little ones everyday. You'll be providing an environment in which children will learn to love sounds, rhythms and captivating illustrations.

Send articles, tips and booklists home to families. Invite them in for a seasonal pot-luck. Bring out the big comfy pillows, spread out, relax, inviting everyone to join in a reading fest. Sing songs, do partner activities, tell a story, enjoy some time together. How often do families get to do that these days? Provide a handout. It will go a long way and may help start a new, or enhance an old, tradition at home.

In our hurry-up dot com world we are sitting children as young as 12 months in front of computers. Babies are given toy cell phones. We need to nurture children's natural love of books- music- nature. They desperately need their child hood and often, we are taking it away sooner and sooner. What is important for healthy development has not changed. Love them, hug them-hold them close. Keep them safe, sing and read to them-babies too. Dance with them, do open-ended art, write down their stories, tape record their songs, make eye contact with each child everyday. Take time to listen-time to just be.

What you do is the most important work I know of. Your time spent with the children can have an enormous impact on their lives. They learn about safety, love and trust from you. Thank you for what you do.

Music & Movement can be your best friend. Remember my motto...
When all else fails, share a book, sing a-song & dance a-long. It really works!
No expertise needed.

Story Time and Book Discussions

When children appear ready, involve them in book discussions. The goal is to get children thinking...how, what when, why and comparing situations in the story to their own lives. This will help them develop thinking and listening skills, critical in total development and learning. Yet both important areas are being under utilized, if at all. A few suggestions for lead in questions that could apply to any story.

1. Do you think ___ has/have ever_____ before?
2. The ___ were (i.e. afraid) of many things in the story. Would you be scared of any of these things?
3. What do/does the ___ think is going to happen to them when they___? What really happens?
4. What helps the ___not to feel____?What helps you feel ___when you are___?
5. Can you think of some rhyming or action words that were used in the story?
6. What kind of adventures do you like?

...For more ideas see *The More We Get Together...*

Studies show by actively listening to & making music, children acquire many early literacy concepts & skills, including phonemic awareness, syllables, rhyme, parts of speech, grammar, vocabulary & spelling.

Rhythmic & energetically integrate right & left hemispheres of the brain to bring balance.

Literally Speaking

- Children with a strong sense of the beat are more likely to read well.
- Music stimulates all the senses, helping children learn to recognize patterns and sequence.
- Early music exposure helps children learn by promoting language, creativity, coordination, social interaction, self-esteem and memory.
- Singing games support children's need to socialize and play, instead of "pre-academic " skills.
- Music helps "wire" the brain, supporting a higher level of thinking.

What We Can Do to Instill Love of Books and Reading

- Begin reading as soon as baby is born, if not sooner.
- Reread favorite books again and again.
- Repeat strings of sound-bah-bah-bah and add to them.
- Take a daily walk, and name objects in the environment.
- Talk about daily, routine activities.
- Make the time to listen with sincere interest.
- Draw attention to print in everyday settings.
- Introduce new words and Read poetry.
- Occasionally point to words and pictures as you read.
- Provide a variety of materials for scribbling and drawing.
- Write down children's stories.
- Help children dictate and decorate letters.
- Provide opportunities to experiment with reading and writing when children appear ready.
- Read out loud everyday.