

Developing Reading Programs

Notes from NCCS 2017 Conference

Lillian Restaino-Baumann Ph.D
Secretary, Christ Child Society of Boca Raton
Professor, Retired, School of Education
Fordham University

In a visionary move, National Christ Child Society has taken as an important element of the programs for the children we serve, THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING PROGRAMS TO HELP THE CHILDREN AS THEY TRY TO MASTER READING SKILLS.

This mission demonstrates that NCCS understands that the children we serve are in constant danger of falling behind in reading and that our chapters are in the right place at the right time to make a difference. Because my career has centered upon research and program development in the mastery of reading skills with similar populations of readers in jeopardy, I must admit that I could not be more delighted with this campaign.

Our chapters have always been free to design their own programs, which insures that they can provide activities that are most comfortable for the members and for the children they serve. However, there is basic information about reading skills that would help all of us to make our reading programs more effective whatever form we choose.

I am taking advantage of the introduction by NCCS of the Literacy Mission at this conference to share with you the information that I consider essential for our programs to indeed "make a difference". I am limiting my discussion to ways to help the children we serve master READING COMPREHENSION. Phonics and vocabulary development are covered quite thoroughly in school instruction and are typically mastered by young children; unfortunately, much less instructional attention is directed to the far more complicated skills demanded for reading comprehension. I am further limiting my discussion to STORIES and NARRATIVES, that is, FICTION. Story skills differ radically from the skills needed for INFORMATION TEXT and SUBJECT MATTER, that is, NON-FICTION. Readers need a completely different set of skills for understanding non-fiction. Perhaps I can cover those at another time.

Because many of you are new to reading to a group of children, in TOPIC THREE of these notes, I am presenting very detailed examples to support your reading group at the beginning of your journey with them.

HOWEVER...AS YOU BECOME FAMILIAR WITH YOUR GROUP, I URGE YOU TO FIND YOUR OWN WAY WITH THESE EXAMPLES ...TO USE THEM AS SOURCE MATERIALS RATHER THAN SPECIFIED DIRECTIONS...I URGE YOU TO WORK WITH THESE EXAMPLES IN WAYS THAT YOU THINK YOUR GROUP WILL FIND MOST COMFORTABLE. ALWAYS REMEMBER...YOUR ROLE IS AS A READING BUDDY...NOT A TEACHER!

AND LET ME ASSURE YOU THAT JUST BEING THERE WITH THEM AS READING BUDDIES, JUST TALKING ABOUT THE BOOKS YOU READ TOGETHER WILL PROVIDE A SITUATION THAT ENHANCES THEIR READING INTERESTS AND SKILLS!

TOPIC ONE:

WHAT EVERY READER NEEDS TO DO TO GET THE MEANING FROM THE PRINTED PAGES OF A STORY

TOPIC TWO:

THE SKILLS YOUNG CHILDREN NEED TO MASTER BEFORE THEY CAN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON IN STORIES

TOPIC THREE:

WAYS TO INTEGRATE THE SKILLS IN TOPIC TWO INTO YOUR CURRENT PROGRAMS ...INFORMALLY and CASUALLY and HAPPILY

TOPIC ONE: WHAT EVERY READER NEEDS TO DO TO GET THE MEANING OF THE PRINTED PAGES OF A STORY

- ✓ Getting the meaning of a story requires the READER to BUILD a PARTNERSHIP with the AUTHOR
- ✓ AUTHORS expect the READER to know how stories are put together, that is, how authors put story parts together...what we call the STORY STRUCTURE
- ✓ AUTHORS build images and ideas of what they want to say, and put these images and ideas into words and sentences and paragraphs and episodes
- ✓ the READER can only BUILD the meaning of an AUTHOR'S story if the READER integrates the READER'S own personal images and ideas with the AUTHOR'S words, sentences, paragraphs and episodes

A perfect description of this process is quoted from Colm Toibin, author of the best seller BROOKLYN. In a New York Times interview, Toibin was asked why he avoids describing his main characters, to which he replied:

“If you describe them physically, you actually remove them from the reader. By not describing them, you begin to make their perception so intimately involved with the reader’s perception that it allows the reader to enter into their spirit and become them. It’s the first person intimate rather than first person singular.”

TOPIC TWO: THE SKILLS *YOUNG CHILDREN* NEED TO MASTER BEFORE THEY CAN BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON IN STORIES

Becoming a SUCCESSFUL READER means that the person has learned how to build the PARTNERSHIP with AUTHORS that we call UNDERSTANDING the story.

Young Children begin the difficult journey to becoming a SUCCESSFUL READER by mastering the following skills:

- ✓ they ORGANIZE and REMEMBER and PUT INTO WORDS the experiences they have with people, objects and actions...building a background of experiences to relate to the ideas and images and words they meet in stories they read
- ✓ they BUILD relationships between the experiences and words in their heads and the printed words in stories
- ✓ they become familiar with the ways in which books are organized...covers, pages, pictures, printed words, stories
- ✓ they become familiar with the DIFFERENT PARTS OF STORIES, namely, the CHARACTERS, THE STEP BY STEP ACTIONS OF THE CHARACTERS, THE ENDING...they are familiar with THE STORY STRUCTURE...
- ✓ they learn that they have to WORK to get the ideas from the story
- ✓ they learn how to use the information in the words and sentences to FIGURE OUT what is going on in the story

TOPIC THREE: WAYS TO INTEGRATE THE SKILLS IN TOPIC TWO INTO YOUR CURRENT PROGRAMS INFORMALLY and CASUALLY and HAPPILY

STEP ONE: DEFINING YOUR ROLE:

In my book, I repeat again and again that the operative word in the relationship between the grandparent and the child in the literacy experiences I present is ...JOY...and I fully expect that the same word is operative for our Christ Child members in their literacy experiences with the children they serve.

I am asking you to consider CHANGING YOUR PERSPECTIVE.

Unless you are very specifically assigned a tutoring position by the teacher with whom you are working YOU ARE NOT TAKING THE ROLE OF TEACHER. As you may have noticed, I have stolen the term defined by the Baltimore CCS Chapter...you are READING BUDDIES. You are sharing a book with the child, with you in the role of a guide through the story.

What do I mean by that? As a guide, you are very specifically SHOWING the children how YOU figure out what is going on in the story. You are doing what we call MODELING what the children can do in order to get the meaning of the story. How does this differ from teaching?

YOUR QUESTIONS ARE CONSTRUCTED TO FIND OUT "WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT parts of this story?" They are NOT CONSTRUCTED TO FIND OUT "WHAT HAVE YOU MASTERED CORRECTLY ABOUT parts of this story?"

The teacher MUST evaluate what the children KNOW.... but that is NOT your goal...you are there to SHOW the children WHAT YOU KNOW about figuring out stories and you are SHOWING them how what you know will help them in reading stories.

In my book, I also repeat again and again that you are free to pick and choose any skill I present that you feel comfortable in covering with the child, because there is no curriculum that the adult MUST cover.

However, I really consider the definition of your role as GUIDE/BUDDY/ROLE MODEL rather than EVALUATOR/TEACHER to be NON-NEGOTIABLE. When the children see you come into the classroom...you have to communicate a different feeling than that which the teacher does. For you, JOY IN READING is your goal ...for the teacher the goal must be MASTERING READING SKILLS.

STEP TWO: DESCRIBING WHAT YOU DO TO FIGURE OUT WHAT IS HAPPENING IN A STORY

You all have had vast experiences in reading stories...my concern here is what happens AFTER YOU READ THE STORY TOGETHER. Step One defines how you proceed in Step Two. This will probably be the most difficult step in your program... because you have to EXAMINE the thinking that you DO when you read. You cannot share what you do with the children if you cannot put words to what you do to figure out the parts of the story...so you really need to think it through.

Sophisticated readers always tell me "Oh, it's all automatic...". No, it is not...as a successful reader, you have used very complex processes for so many years that you can do them without directing attention to them...but you wouldn't understand what you read if you didn't go through them.

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY ACCURATE in putting what YOU DO into words...your goal is to show children that they have to WORK to get the meaning of all the parts of the author's story, not to give them an expert opinion on the processes.

STEP THREE: WAYS TO HELP YOUNG CHILDREN BECOME SUCCESSFUL READERS

1) WHAT TO DO AS YOU READ THE FIRST FEW STORIES WITH YOUR GROUP: FIGURING OUT THE DIFFERENT PARTS OF STORIES

- a. Prepare some INTRODUCTORY IDEAS about the story...it is important to get the children to bring up ideas in their experience that will help them to understand what the author is telling them.

REMEMBER: start with WHAT YOU THINK. ..." This story is about a little girl who lives on a farm...have you ever seen a farm? My aunt and uncle had a farm...and they grew vegetables, and had a cow and chickens.... etc."

- b. As you read the story, have a CONVERSATION about the story. SHARE your ideas. Tell them what YOU THINK about the CHARACTERS, THE EVENTS and THE ENDING. Encourage them to tell you what THEY THINK.....

You are not asking the children questions to determine how accurately they LEARNED the story...You are letting them in on what you consider the important parts of the story...THE CHARACTERS, THE EVENTS, THE ENDING.

..." YOU KNOW WHAT I THINK? I think that even though her sisters were so mean to her, Cinderella was really lucky because she had a wonderful Fairy Godmother...WHAT DO YOU THINK?"

Some children will repeat your words...THAT IS ACCEPTABLE...what you want is for them to learn how to TALK ABOUT THE PARTS OF THE STORY....

- c. Use the conversation to direct attention to the CHARACTERS, THE SEQUENCE OF THE EVENTS and the ENDING. These are parts of EVERY STORY...and it will become part of their story experience so that they will CARRY THIS INFORMATION OVER TO THE NEXT STORY THEY READ.

CHARACTERS: "My favorite PERSON was the Fairy Godmother...because she made a coach out of a pumpkin! Which one did you like the best?" (Do not insist upon a "why? If they can't come up with it.... YOU provide a possibility...REMEMBER YOU ARE MODELING RESPONSES HERE...not looking for accuracy!!)

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS: "I was sad when the sisters wouldn't let Cinderella go to the Ball with them...but then her Fairy Godmother appeared!! Do you remember what happened after that?" ...again, if no response ...YOU TELL THE SEQUENCE!! MODELING RESPONSES HERE!!!

THE ENDING: "I was so happy when the Prince found Cinderella and she could leave her terrible sisters forever." Did you think that was a good ending for the story?"

2) WHAT TO DO AS YOU MOVE ON IN READING STORY: SHOWING HOW YOU WORKED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THE STORY IS ALL ABOUT...

Begin to let the children in on how you WORKED at figuring out what is happening in the story... talk about more complicated elements of the story...always present YOUR IDEAS FIRST...then ask them for theirs.... if they repeat yours...build on it...

(I think the sisters were really mean because the story tells us all the things they made Cinderella do in the house, and then we find out that they didn't want Cinderella to come to the Ball with them.....what do you think? can you remember anything the sisters did that makes you call them mean? But I think that maybe the mother was the worst one because she never tried to help Cinderella.... what do you think?)

(I think the Prince really wanted to find Cinderella because the story tells us that he went all over the kingdom to have ladies try the shoe on to find her ...what do you think?)

3) WHAT TO DO AS YOU READ MANY STORIES TOGETHER: SHOWING HOW TO USE THE INFORMATION LEARNED FROM ALL THESE STORIES THAT WILL HELP THE CHILDREN TO FIGURE OUT NEW STORIES

- a. Authors put stories together in pretty much the same way...they have main characters and side characters; they then describe experiences that these characters go through and the problems they have; then they bring everything together at the ending of the story.

If young children are encouraged to talk and think about the story, they start to EXPECT to find these things in the new stories they read.

Even young readers can develop these expectations...EXPECTATIONS are very important skills because they can make children successful readers. They help children to understand new stories ...we call the expectation behaviors PREDICTION SKILLS.

Successful readers of any age not only figure out and remember how authors put stories together ...they USE this information to help them understand the new stories they read. GETTING SOME IDEA ABOUT WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN BEFORE THEY READ MAKES READING A LOT EASIER. IT GIVES READERS A KIND OF OUTLINE TO BRING TO THE STORY...THAT MEANS READERS ARE ARMED WITH AN IDEA OF THE CHARACTERS, THE EVENTS AND THE ENDING!!!

Your conversations can help them to develop by MODELING PREDICTON SKILLS!

- b. Now that you are really Reading Buddies, the next time you INTRODUCE THE CHILDREN TO A NEW BOOK, also introduce a new activity: PREDICTING WHAT THE BOOK IS GOING TO BE ALL ABOUT.

REMEMBER... FIRST, YOU SHOW THEM EXACTLY HOW YOU GO ABOUT PREDICTING WHAT THE STORY IS ALL ABOUT.

- c. DISCUSS THE TITLE and the PICTURES: ...Tell them...(there is a King and Queen and a baby...and ladies with wands, and some with wings...and all looking at the baby.)

(They look like fairies to me. Maybe they are the King and Queen's friends. I think that maybe they are there at a party for the new baby.)

(Oh... now the lady in this picture looks like an angry friend. The Queen looks really scared.)

If you think children in the group can work with you...
...ask THE QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU THINK THE PICTURE TELLS US
MIGHT HAPPEN IN THE STORY WE ARE GOING TO READ?

4) BULLET POINTS:

- a. Examine your own thought processes as you read. How do you come up with the author's ideas? The actions? The scenery? The characters? When you share this information, it doesn't have to be based on "sound research" it has to be your way of sharing what YOU do with the children... to convince them that you REALLY WORK when you read your books...YOUR GOAL IS TO SHOW THEM THAT THEY HAVE TO WORK TO GET WHAT THE AUTHOR IS TELLING THEM!! Your presence in their classroom is a joy for them...CAPITALIZE ON THAT!
- b. When you talk about the story with them tell them what YOU THINK about some CHARACTERS, about the EVENTS that go on, about THE ENDING.

HELP them to tell you what THEY THINK. This is one time that it is okay to PUT WORDS IN THEIR MOUTH.... accuracy is NOT your goal. Getting them to TALK about the elements of the story is what you are going for.

- c. When you read with young children, make it a CONVERSATION between you and the children. YOU ARE NOT ASKING QUESTIONS YOU ARE NOT ASKING THE CHILDREN TO SHOW WHAT THEY HAVE MASTERED...YOU ARE ASKING THEM **WHAT THEY THINK**....NO TESTING HERE...JUST READING BUDDIES SHARING IDEAS.
- d. Young children love to hear or read the same story many times...they learn new things about the story each time.... this gives them the opportunity to show off their mastery of all the elements of the story. Watch a non-reading young child "read" a very familiar book to another child...what a great opportunity to watch the very process of learning to read.

- e. When you read another story, REMIND the children of the things you and they thought about the last story they read. SUCCESSFUL COMPREHENDERS OF ANY AGE PUT INTO THEIR OWN WORDS HOW THEY THINK THROUGH ALL THE STORIES THEY READ...then they do what they did before for the next story. That's how they develop their skills in building meaning for the author's words. Using knowledge gained from one story in building the meaning of the next story is the POWERFUL SKILL OF PREDICTION.

THE OPERATIVE WORD IS **ENJOYMENT!!** YOU ARE NOT TUTORING HERE...YOU ARE SHARING A STORY. IT IS THE MOST VALUABLE SITUATION IN WHICH TO TRANSFER SKILLS...BUT THAT TRANSFER CAN NOT OVERWHELM THE ENJOYMENT!!!
LEARNING TO LOVE READING IS YOUR PRIMARY GOAL!

A WONDERFUL SOURCE ...and a FREE ONE...
HOW TO RAISE A READER by Pamela Paul and Maria Russon
An ebook from the New York Times Guides Series
Download a copy from:
<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/books/how-to-raise-a-reader>