



## Reading at Turner School; an article for Turner parents and carers by Jen Faul, Jo Padgham and Robyn Watson

*"Think about yourself as a reader. You probably choose what you want to read for a variety of purposes; have opportunities to read for long periods of time; respond mostly through reflection, conversation, and collaboration; and sometimes share your thinking and insights with others."* Debbie Miller 2013

Debbie Miller is a prominent expert on the teaching of reading and in that statement about adult reading behaviours; she has described what happens in our reading workshops with your children at Turner School. Reading and writing effectively are hugely important skills for life and in partnership with families, every day in all our classrooms our children with the expert help of teachers and assistants are working harder at becoming more proficient readers and writers. Our goal is to develop all students to be life-long active and thoughtful readers who read for pleasure and for information and can read all types of texts in multiple modes.

This article's main focus is on reading, however the connection between oral language, reading and writing is very strong and they all work to influence the other. Reading is a very complex 'thinking' process and to do it effectively we draw on many processes at once using a bank of strategies to both decode and understand an author's message.

At Turner School we value the role of parents and carers in supporting children's reading development and regularly run a day and evening two part workshop for parents, carers and volunteers that goes into the detail of the reading process, providing participants an opportunity to see children using various strategies to decode and understand the author's message and importantly, enables a consistent approach to the support that volunteers in Turner classrooms provide. At that workshop we provide participants with a workshop handbook developed by our team that explains the reading process and strategies to support reading plus we provide a resource called *What Makes Independent and Successful Readers? A Guide for Parents* by Oxford Literacy and Anne Bayetto. We have loaded this Oxford resource onto our school website [http://www.turners.act.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/328087/RRR\\_ParentsGuide.pdf](http://www.turners.act.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/328087/RRR_ParentsGuide.pdf)

### What do proficient readers do?

Research shows that active, thoughtful, proficient readers construct meaning by using the following strategies:

- Activate relevant prior knowledge, before, during and after reading
- Create visual and other sensory images from what they are reading during reading and after reading
- Draw inferences to form conclusions, make judgements and create interpretations
- Ask questions of themselves, the authors and the texts they read
- Determine the most important ideas in what they read; and
- Synthesise what they read.

When independent, successful readers read for understanding, they draw on a combination of the following processes that we call 'cueing systems':

- **Meaning/Semantic** (Readers make connections between themselves and an author's message. The degree to which this happens is influenced by what readers bring to the texts in terms of their background knowledge and understanding of vocabulary)
- **Structure/Syntactic** (Readers draw on their knowledge of what makes sense in terms of their knowledge of English grammar)
- **Visual/Grapho-phonetic** (Early readers learn there are conventions for print, reading left to right, they learn about the units of sounds in words and the letters that make those sounds e.g. b-at)

As you will appreciate, the level of difficulty of a text will influence the degree to which readers use these three cueing systems. Putting all this together really demonstrates just what a complex problem solving and thinking exercise reading is.

### Explicit teaching of reading skills and strategies

We explicitly teach children how to:

- Comprehend an author's message
- Understand the different strategies used for different types of texts and reading including digital
- Understand the structure of language and how it works
- Decode words
- Predict upcoming words using context; and
- Self-correct their reading.

Our teachers include key components in their comprehensive reading programs right from the preschool years through to the end of primary school. Those components are:

- Oral language
- Phonological awareness
- Phonics
- Vocabulary
- Fluency; and
- Comprehension.



Reading is a developmental process and children move through different stages from emergent readers right through to proficient readers. Some move quickly through these stages, others more slowly. We work with where each child is at on that developmental spectrum to move them to the next stage.

### Reading workshops

In our reading workshops our teachers plan intentionally for individual children's needs in each of the six components listed above. To be able to take every child's reading development further they regularly conference with children, assessing their levels of understanding (comprehension), vocabulary, fluency and phonic knowledge. They then plan for that child's next steps in vocabulary development, fluency work or phonics knowledge etc.

A typical reading workshop format begins with the teacher explicitly teaching an aspect of a component of reading or a reading strategy to the whole class. Then the teacher provides instructions on the range of reading work that she/her wants all children to commence. This is the time for children to practise their strategies and their reading. It may be they read independently, with a partner, in a small Book Club group or with a classroom volunteer. The teacher guides the practise based on each child's needs. More proficient readers continue their strategy development with higher order reading skills such as inferring and skimming for key ideas and they might be in a Book Club with a shared book that could be fiction or an information text and it might be on one of our e-readers called Kobos. During this time while the class is practising their reading, specific strategies and skills, the teacher is involved in reading conferences with individuals and small groups, moving about the class supporting children, quickly assessing skill level and providing targetted feedback to keep children learning and motivated. After a period of time (longer for older children, and shorter for younger children) the teacher brings the whole class back together for some reflection and sharing of what they have read and what they have learned. The reading workshop soon becomes a routine in the day and week and children grow in independence and reading proficiency. At Turner we have a number of additional specialist literacy teachers who work alongside class teachers to specifically support the development of children who have been identified as not progressing at the rate expected. These children are given additional in-class support during these reading workshops.

### How can parents and carers support reading development?

As outlined in the Oxford Guide referred to earlier in this article, there are routines and practices that parents and carers can do to support what happens at school:

**Talk with your child.** Speaking and listening provides your child with different ways to learn and think about the world.

Provide a positive role model. Chat about what you are reading in books, newspapers and magazines, or viewing on screens. Expanding your child's vocabulary and knowledge of the world will help them enormously with their reading.

**Read to your child every day.** This is not always possible but it may be that you point out words when you are travelling in the car, read something from the newspaper, magazine or book. Read a novel as a serial to your child/ren. Hearing what reading sounds like is so important, even when they are older. It is also a really lovely quiet bonding time.

**Listen to your child read.** All children of all ages like to receive positive feedback and listening to your child read is a great opportunity to congratulate him or her on what has been achieved. Our Turner Home Reading Log encourages a balance of reading **To**, **With** and **By**. During and after reading it is important to check your child's understanding and asking questions such as "Find the part where it says that..." or "What word on this line tells you that...?" or "On this page I can see a word you have learned. Can you find it?"

**Encourage your child to read from a wide range of sources.** Just like a balanced and healthy diet of food, children need a balanced and healthy diet of reading material. Even though they might just LOVE that one type of book, we know how they benefit from a range of healthy food...so have the same attitude with reading choices. Join the local community library, take out a family borrowing from our Turner library, take your child to a book shop and you both select a new book, ask grandparents to give a bookshop voucher for a birthday or Christmas. Swap books with family friends. Visit Book fairs.

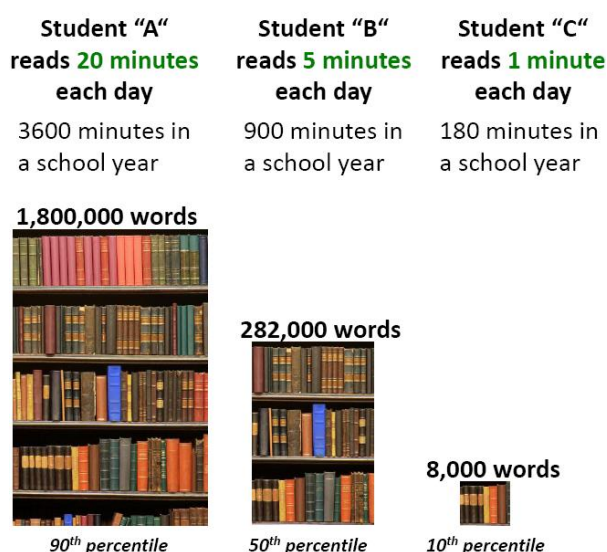
### What if English is not your family's first language?

We encourage you to seek out reading material in your family language as preserving the stories, language and culture of your family is most important. Did you know we have some children's books in a range of languages in our Turner library? Pop in and see Norma or Bridgette. We will gladly add to this second language collection too so please talk with us. Our English as an Additional Language or Dialect EALD teachers also provide extra support to help children develop their reading in English.

Please talk with one of us or your child's teacher if you would like further information about supporting your child with the reading. And please, if you have not participated in our two part reading workshop for parents, carers and volunteers, look out for the next one on offer and book in.

The following information on the number of books read by children and the effect that has is quite compelling.

### Why Can't I Skip My 20 Minutes of Reading Tonight?



By the end of 6<sup>th</sup> grade Student "A" will have read the equivalent of 60 whole school days. Student "B" will have read only 12 school days. Which student would you expect to have a better vocabulary? Which student would you expect to be more successful in school...and in life?

(Nagy & Herman, 1987)