

## **CHATTING IT UP AT HOME: AN EASY WAY TO AFFIRM CHILDREN AS READERS**

by Rita Moore, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon

As a parent of three, I often felt a little disengaged as my kids learned to read. Later, as a reading teacher, I remembered how much I had wanted to be involved in my children’s developing reading proficiency. I was determined to build some bridges between home literacy and school literacy. What I figured out how to do calls for no fancy materials, required reading or required reading time, or scripted instructions. The best way to support children’s reading is to read with them and talk about what you read together—have “reading conversations” that parents and kids use to understand and appreciate what they read. In the classroom we sometimes spin these conversations as informally “retelling” or “summarizing”—it’s one of the most research proven ways of aiding comprehension and vocabulary development but more important, teachers know it works. Now it’s time to share that secret with parents.

Thinking about what the writer means and each reader brings his or her own interpretation of a story, an article, or even a textbook reading is key to helping readers understand their potential as readers. Integral to this process of supporting reading development is talking about any kind of experiences the reader can use to connect to the printed page. Once that connection is made, then learners draw on those experiences and begin to problem solve their development as readers. Parents and children connect in special ways because unlike the classroom teacher, they have many years of shared experiences to bring to the reading conversation.

As a reading teacher, I encourage parents to talk at home about what children read at school. This can be accomplished in five minutes or less but the impact on readers is immediate. While it’s helpful for teachers to provide parents with access to what students are reading, it’s not required. Parents talk with their children about vocabulary from shared readings as well as retellings that children want to talk about. Parents assume an active, empowered role in the reading process and in a safe, non-threatening way take part in the teaching of reading—modeling the same ways of understanding print that is being affirmed in the classroom. When parents understand that that children learn as much or more from talk about reading and

miscues in reading, then reading conversations at home become a natural part of home culture. One parent said after trying the strategy of home reading conversations: “We put words on the ‘fridge now that we want to talk about instead looking them up in the dictionary. Conversations like these have changed attitudes toward reading at our house.”

Teachers often provide in depth information to share with parents during face-to-face conferences or meetings about student progress. My colleague Vicki, a literacy coach and long-time classroom teacher, often shares her way of thinking about teaching reading to parents. When children struggle with a word, they often substitute another word, skip the unfamiliar word, or make up a place holder word. It’s similar to what writers do with first drafts. Vicki shows parents miscues that her students are working on and shares samples of their retellings (summaries) that they have shared with other students. She explains that her students talk about their miscues and retellings in groups and share their thinking about why they miscued or explore their interpretations of readings.

This kind of evidence of who their children are as readers (from early grades to intermediate) resonates with parents because the conversations begun in class can now continue at home. That information coupled with the critical dialogue the teacher has participated in with the student gives insight into a child’s progress we have lacked in the past. After talking with Vicki and other parents about how children make mistakes, correct them, and often relate one reading experience to another, one father said, “Yes, now that you have shown me and explained this to me, I have seen her do that at home, too. Now we can talk about it during reading time at home.”

As a reading teacher of over 20 years, I strongly encourage parents to take advantage of one of the most powerful ways of helping children become confident, effective readers...take a few minutes in the car, at meal time, or whenever you find the opportunity to have a “reading conversation” with your child. Share your thinking about miscues and their versions of retellings. It’s fun and sends the message that what they do as readers is important.