

Jeannie Skinner is National Library Adviser for the Far North Region. There are 80 schools in her region and in a 12 month period she travels some 24,000 kilometres visiting and working with them. Jeannie is a passionate, learned, and articulate advocate for school libraries. In the Spring 2003 issue of Booknotes, Jeannie wrote an excellent article and she has kindly given us permission to reproduce the portions relevant to our school.

“A sanctuary, a mine of treasure, a house of maps to secret lives in secret worlds...”  
Welcome to the school library.

I think I can assume that a Booknotes audience will understand the vital importance and rich rewards of being an enthusiastic and fluent reader. Wonderful authors have put it so much more eloquently than I can” Aidan Chambers in his depiction of a book as a time-space machine, and Joy Cowley with her passionate description of the empowering and healing benefits of language. Paul Jennings outlines the sort of literature children need, and why, in a couple of sentences; “Children need prose that will provoke tears or laughter, or curiosity or wonder, or fright or dreams, or rage or peace. They need books that will move the mind and stir the soul.”

Reading develops imagination, empathy and insight, but, further, reading ability is a crucial skill for coping with the modern world. Rather than acquiring a certain body of knowledge, we must become expert at the skills of finding, evaluating, and using information to answer our questions. Information literacy – knowing how to learn – is more than a strategy for school students, it is a basic survival skill for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the ability to read – easily and competently – is an essential component of this skill.

“The reality is that the kind of sophisticated reading skills demanded by high-level academic or professional work – the ability to understand multiple plots or complex issues, a sensitivity to tone, the expertise to know immediately what is crucial to a text and what can be skimmed – can be acquired only through years of avid reading.”  
Mary Leonhardt.

Elliot Eisner acknowledges the complex of advantages through reading when he writes:

“... Books are the doorways into other worlds, and in these worlds the child has authority. He has choices.... He can enjoy and control his world. Books offer children more than entertainment and escape. They give children a means of coping with life. They empower children who feel helpless. In a wounding world, books give children the means of self healing.” Joy Cowley.

“Among the various aims we consider important in education, two are especially so. We would like our children to be well informed – that is, to understand ideas that are important, useful, beautiful, and powerful. We also want them to have the appetite and ability to think analytically and critically, to be able to speculate and imagine, to see connections among ideas and to be able to use what they know to enhance their own lives and to contribute to their culture.” In the words of a bumper sticker slogan – KIDS WHO READ SUCCEED!

But how do we encourage children into reading? What are some of the motivating factors which lead children into books? Paul Jennings describes an elderly lady approaching him to sign a book, saying “My grandson John hates books and reading. Write something in the front that will make him read your book.” Paul sighs and writes “Dear John, When you have finished reading this book, Grandma will give you \$50.”

Unfortunately, bribery’s out. Reading must be fun for children, and the rewards intrinsic. Stephen Krashen, in his book “The Power of reading: insights from the research,” identifies three simple factors which encourage children to read more:

- Children read more when they see adults reading. Modelling has a dramatic effect (a good reason for teachers themselves to read for pleasure during sustained silent reading times in schools).
- Children read more when they are read to. Reading aloud to children from the time they are born until they start school (and well beyond) has profound, far reaching effects. Two passionate and articulate advocates for the importance of reading aloud to children are authors Jim Trelease (<http://www.trelease-on-reading.com>) and Mem Fox (<http://www.memfox.net>)
- Children read more when they have access to books. This sounds incredibly obvious, but if you’re talking about leading horses to water, you must make sure the water is there!

This last factor – access, - is where school libraries have a very special role. For most NZ children their school library is the most accessible source of books, designed with their needs in mind.

Many thanks to Jeannie for this article.

We welcome you to encourage your children to use the Campbells Bay School library, we hope you will continue to read aloud to your children until they absolutely refuse to let you and we hope you will enjoy being fabulous reading role models.