

The following is a keynote address (transcript) presented to 480 participants at the annual Read-Aloud Delaware Conference on Saturday, March 13, 2004. Sally Anderson, Executive Director of Mother Goose Programs, was the speaker.

What Can We Learn Using Just One Picture Book?

We who work in the field of early childhood education know that *young children* are constantly absorbing and processing information.

We know that children who are read to and talked to have an advantage over those who aren't.

We also know that that *through* experiences with books and stories children develop early literacy skills and that this development is critically linked to success in learning to read.

This morning I'm going to focus on three main ideas:

1. Picture books provide powerful learning experiences for children.
2. Conversations between adults and young children are a natural part of the reading experience.
3. A picture book can be the focus of curriculum development—the focus of intentional interactions with young children.

I know that most of you read every day with your children—perhaps several times a day. I know or at least I hope that you read the same book to children many, many times so that they understand the story, the setting, and the characters and how relate to their own lives.

What's the best way to talk about books and reading? By reading, talking about and thinking about extending activities—using a book of course. Scholastic Publishers were kind to donate 500 copies of *Bunny Cakes* by Rosemary Wells so that each of you has a book. I know you will enjoy *Bunny Cakes*—we all love Rosemary Wells' amusing Ruby and Max.

So, let's see what we can do with just one picture book.

Set the context for reading: Have a conversation about some aspect or aspects of the book to help children understand the story, characters, vocabulary and/or

Cover
Endpapers
Title page
Author
Illustrator

I want each of you to look at the illustrations as I read the book. Think of a child in your care and listen and look just like that child might when you're reading to him or her.

[At this point, Anderson read the book aloud to participants.]

Since this was our first time reading *Bunny Cakes* together I read the book straight through so that we all had a better chance of paying attention to the storyline, the book's narrative.

This is very important when reading to children. The listener needs to be involved in the action, the characters' motivations, the mysteries and surprises of the book.

So let's see how we can use this book for fun, to encourage children's curiosity and promote learning.

All the explorations and conversations I suggest will help "help children come to school ready to be successful" (that's language directly from your State Department of Education) and meet the Delaware Early Learning Foundations for School Success.

Title page : **Language and literacy through conversation and explorations.**

Math explorations: I use the word *exploration* because I want to remind you that children need many opportunities to work (play) with a given material and that children enjoy doing the same exploration many times.

Numbers and Operations

Count the cakes, candles, red hot marshmallow squirters

The concepts of more or less, one-to-one correspondence, compare number of objects

Book connections: *Seven Blind Mice*, *Ten Minutes Till Bedtime*

Endpapers: **Math, science, Language and Literacy**

Tool hunt

Sort according to: size, use, material (Learning foundations)

Compare and sort

Describe

Simple investigation

Observe, predict, discuss materials

Book connections, tools: *Albert's Alphabet* and....and perhaps move into some building projects with recycled materials?

Sorting: *Hannah's Collections*, *Bein' with you this way*

So, we've read *Bunny Cakes* several times, discussed the cover, endpapers and title page, made connections to children's own experiences, engaged with children in complex conversations, introduced new materials, vocabulary and skills, allowed children plenty of time to explore and made connections to other books—from one book children have had fun, learning experiences for.....maybe two or three months?

And then there's always:

Cooking together. How many of you cook with children? Do you tell children that you're exploring math and science together when you're cooking? You're talking about change over time, same and different (ingredients), measuring, counting, using our senses, etc. etc.

[At this point Anderson talked about scientific tools such as hand lenses and their importance while working with children.]

Cooking: Language, literacy, science and math

Explore ingredients with hand lens, use senses to feel, touch, taste, same and different
Measure

Noticing change over time

Make predictions: what will happen?

Do experiments: balance

Book connections: *Just a Little Bit, You'll Soon Grow Into Them Titch, Now I'm Big*

Getting Along: Emotional and Social Development

Max and Ruby (brother and sister)

Patience: endure delays without become upset

Express feelings, understand how our actions affect others, attempt to solve a problem in a positive way

Cleversticks, Jamaica and Brianna, Lottie's New Beach Towel among others

Communicating: *Max Found Two Sticks*: With this book, we're making musical instruments, practicing rhythms and finding ways to communicate without speaking

Signs in our classroom and neighborhood: Shapes, writing,

Mapmaking: Going for a Walk *Jonathan and His Mommy, Mei-Mei Loves the Morning, Down the Road*

Community Helpers

Problem Solving

Books: other books by Rosemary Wells

Vocabulary:

deem: "She deemed it the most delicious food she had ever eaten."

Escalator: *Corduroy*

Well, there's a curriculum for one year, especially if you make new connections to your Learning Foundations for School Success, along with other books and other explorations you're already doing with children.

Summary

So, what have we experienced, been reminded of, and learned?

We've been reading, looking at and talking about one book in many different ways. We know we're going to read this same book many, many times. We're not just using the book at library time but we've thought about how to integrate the book into several (all?) learning domains and interest areas in our own work with children.

We've seen how reading and talking together develop language and literacy skills and depending on the conversations and the extending activities, how they develop science, math and social studies skills and concepts.

We know that learning in one domain affects learning in other domains. There's no such thing as "Just doing math." Won't you also be talking together? Discussing new vocabulary? Playacting? Writing? Sorting? Counting? Having fun?

Won't you be learning new skills, re-enforcing other skills and making connections to other books and activities?

Picture book reading is powerful. It enriches the learning experience, enlivens discussions, and provides opportunities for skill development, content knowledge *and* helps children make connections to themselves and to the greater world—even when they can't read themselves. It encourages them to WANT to read.

Book reading is not just a minor part of a literate environment but rather a main condition for developing the knowledge necessary for eventual success in reading.

...And conversations and books?

Broad and deep language development is the product of frequent exposure to varied and complex language. None of us can endlessly imitate speech. We run out of ideas or just plain get sick of it.

But if books are added....we can talk about new and different experiences, experiences we've all shared through stories.

And we have new and rich vocabulary to express our ideas.

Books and conversation *do* make a difference in the lives of young children. When parents and educators have the knowledge and tools they need to promote early language and literacy development far-reaching changes are possible.

These include healthy cognitive and emotional development in children, beneficial bonding and communication with parents and caregivers, and a strong foundation for a life of learning.

I hope this morning has helped you think about :

*how you use picture books and read aloud experiences with the children in your care,
how essential it is to have ongoing, open-ended conversations with children
how a picture book can be the central focus of your curriculum.*

THESE three things, combined with careful observation and documentation of the children in your care and regular communication with families about their children's activities provide children with the Early Learning Foundations they need—not just for school success.

You are the people who are building the foundations that are critical for children's reading and academic success.

Reading does indeed transform, change, and revolutionize our thinking, talking and behavior.

The work you do transforms, changes and revolutionizes the lives of young children.

Thank you.