

A Note on Reading

May 2024 by Teresa Thayer Snyder

I am not much of a music person, and I am sorry for that. I admit I am fascinated by how music is composed and how rhythm, notation, tempo, and all the elements that are part of composition, including lyrics, fit together to create a universal language of sorts. It is one of the reasons I have begun calling reading a symphony. There are so many parts and so many elements that fit together to make someone a reader. To suggest that it is possible to learn to read without phonics is a lot like suggesting that one can create music without a scale. However, a scale is not much until it is elevated into combinations with other factors that make the difference between “Do-Re-Mi” and “Baby Shark” or Beethoven’s Fifth.

Reading is complex. It is so much more than individuated letter sounds. I was reminded that reading is a complex process firsthand with my four-year-old granddaughter yesterday. She was playing with trucks on my living room floor and she was verbalizing letter sounds. As a retired educator, my ear heard her working the “tr” sound. She turned to me and asked, “Grandma, what is the first letter of truck?” The old teacher in me immediately responded “What sound do you hear?” She said, “t”. I responded, “And what comes next, (mouthing the r sound) tr . . .” She looked me right in the eye and said, “Grandma, I don’t want to spell it, I just want to know the first letter.” Turns out she had a magnet letter in her hand (a T) and she wanted clarification that it was the correct magnet for her truck.

Liliana is an emergent reader. She is at a very important stage of putting sounds and letters together, much like a small musician plunks out the notes of a scale on a little piano. Her brain is absorbing connections. At the same time, we



often sit snuggled together to read familiar books . . . over and over. She is using memory to begin reading (and Lord help us if we skip a page because she knows!). She uses the pictures in her books to assist her memory.

She watches TV and uses the commercials to play with sounds and combinations. I was surprised when she saw a commercial that had the word “voom” in it and she suddenly said, “Hey, if that was a ‘z’ it would be zoom!” Zoom is a word in one of those favorite stories we have read . . . over and over. Her brain is making transfers. It is a discovery process. It is about connections.

This is all happening quite naturally. In short order, I am confident that Liliana will be independently reading—and comprehending—the stories she loves. When I say naturally, I do not mean it happens in a vacuum. She is a child surrounded by books and folks who read to her. She has ample supplies of paper and markers to write and draw with. We wouldn’t expect a child to become a pianist if they never had a chance to play with a piano.

Finland has a very complex language, and they do not begin formal reading instruction until age seven. They also have a 100% literacy rate (Literacy Rate by Country 2023 - Wisevoter). Perhaps instead of lamenting student performance and the need to go “back to basics” (which have never been abandoned in the first place), our children would be more likely to read if they were surrounded by books and folks who read to them and saw reading as the adventure it is. Perhaps, instead of drilling letter sounds, we could invite them to join us as readers. A child is more likely to become a musician if they love music. A child is more likely to become a reader if they love stories.

Blessings on the children and those who read with them!!

Read these episodes from the Literacy Gallery

[Maureen Slamer – Little Bee](#)

[Maureen Slamer – I Read the Words Right](#)

[Maureen Slamer – I Don't Know that Word](#)

[Maryann Whitfield – Luke and Mother Octopus: A Moment of Enlightenment](#)



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