

**Pacific Preschool Council  
Challenges Teachers to Celebrate the  
United Nations Decade for Literacy**

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Although it is not the task of preschool teachers to teach children to read, they can play an important part in laying foundations so that children will read successfully and with enjoyment as they move on to primary school.

Two things are important in preparing young children to be successful readers. The first is developing their lively interest in all the printed words they see around them so that they eventually come to realise for themselves that words mean something. In a rich environment of print children are challenged to figure out for themselves the meanings words are conveying in particular situations. The context of these words may be the supermarket, the street, the church, the family bathroom and kitchen or advertisements in magazines, pamphlets, books and newspapers. It should also be the environment teachers create in the preschool building.

At the third Pacific Preschool Conference, held in Vanuatu in 1990 a challenge was issued to participants to encourage their colleagues to undertake two specific activities to celebrate the Decade for Literacy.

The first suggestion is to exchange illustrated letters with children in kindergarten in other parts of the community and the region. The letters should be composed by the children with some help from the teacher who prints them clearly and neatly in large print. The children then prepare drawings or paintings to accompany the letter. Letters received can be read to the children and then displayed so that they add to the print environment of the classroom.

The second important way in which teachers can prepare children to be successful readers is by enthusiastically and creatively introducing them to stories and books. As a result, children learn to enjoy books and this is a key to later success in learning to read. So the second challenge to preschool teachers in the region is to find at least five stories they have never read or told before, to share with their children. It is suggested that teachers find stories of a variety of types which are listed as follows:

- 1 A story related to the children's every day life and experience so that they can identify with the characters' actions and feelings;
- 2 A story about the natural environment - something about growing plants or animals that will add to the children's sense of wonder as well as to their general knowledge;
- 3 A mysterious and magical story expressed in beautiful language to stimulate the children's imagination;
- 4 A story to make children laugh, and
- 5 A traditional story - a myth or legend.

Primary and secondary school teachers throughout the region may wish to take up and develop the letter writing suggestion in a way that is appropriate for older students. Teachers at all levels also need to be continually challenged to search out new and interesting materials for their students to read, whether they be stories or scientific articles. A desire to celebrate the literacy decade may inspire many of us to respond to the challenges issued by the Pacific Preschool Council.