

Can reading adventure packs (RAPs) complement and enrich the literacy program in your classroom?

Barbara Fisher

Senior lecturer, Faculty of Education, Avondale College NSW

Introduction

Children's personal experience, confidence and success (or otherwise) with books and reading, particularly at the initial stages, is directly related to their attitude towards reading (Wang, 2000).

The packs are intended to provide an enriching literacy experience for the children

Many of these attitudes are developed prior to school commencement and often are closely linked to early literacy experiences in the home. Economic conditions of the household may determine children's exposure and access to quality reading materials in the home. Some low-income families find it extremely difficult to resource their children's early literacy needs. While it appears that most families are aware of the importance of the home literacy environment and the need for reading resources, too many are without books or lack an adult who is willing to read to children.

With the realisation that family members can contribute positively to early literacy development, there has been a plethora of programs and initiatives in recent years designed to support and encourage family participation in children's literacy education. Surprisingly, most current programs assume (often incorrectly) that parents/carers have sufficient available finances to resource the literacy needs of their children.

RAPs' origins

Margaret Gill is an experienced 'early years teacher' in Victoria. She has long been aware of the difficult economic conditions and financial constraints that impact many of the families in her school district. Hence she constantly tries to narrow the gap between the home literacy levels and early literacy needs of the children in her classroom. While visiting three New York schools in the USA, she saw an innovative early literacy reading program in action. It was a co-operative home-school venture. The excitement and enthusiasm exhibited by the children using this literacy program impressed her, and she was eager to adapt and trial a similar program in her own classroom. On returning to Australia, Margaret,

with assistance from the writer, developed and trialled Reading Adventure Packs (RAPs), a literacy program that utilised packs of stimulus material (Fisher, Gill, & Greive, 2005). The program was an attempt to support and improve children's attitudes to reading and involve members of the family in the children's reading by supplying reading resource materials.

The RAP program involves the collection and organisation of literacy resources by the teacher into several themed backpacks. Students borrow the resources and take them home on a rotational basis. The resources in the packs (listed below) are intended to provide an enriching literacy experience for the children and contribute to their development of positive attitudes toward reading. In addition to focusing on resources facilitation, family participation and literacy enrichment, the program's other main purpose is to complement a teacher's existing literacy program in the classroom, rather than compete with it.

Typical weekly sequence

On Monday morning the names of all the children in the class are placed in a hat and five names are drawn out. A record of these is kept together with the corresponding name of the RAP taken home by each child. The randomly selected children are the first group to enjoy the literacy activities at home for four school days, thus giving the entire family access to all the activities available in each backpack.

At home the children may choose to read and complete all, or as many of the activities as they desire. The family/children select the activities and the time frame for their completion. Teachers are not required to check on how much or how little has been completed. An exercise book is provided to encourage the children to record something they learnt, discovered or enjoyed during the week from their particular literacy RAP. Children are able to read each other's stories or comments when it is their turn to have the RAP. Prior to returning the RAP to school on Friday morning, parents/carers are expected to check the inventory to ensure that

