

November 2008 Newsletter

Dear Parents and Friends of Cowgate,

As I write the autumnal sun is shining bright in my window and I am filled with thoughts of celebration, in abundance, and blessings. In this newsletter I will welcome our new children and their families. I will, as promised, summarise our in-service day (added at the end of the newsletter to enable you to choose whether to read it or not at this time). It is important for those who work with young children to remember to nourish themselves in order to do the best job they can in their work with children, and nourished we are. I will also write of our inspirational visit from Professor Tina Bruce who shared and celebrated the wonders of her experience, encouraging us to look, listen, learn and celebrate our work with children and all the surprises that await us. Before I begin I would like to express my, somewhat naïve, thoughts on the 'credit crunch' which we are hearing so much about. Our true riches are playing in the garden...on doing some research for my PhD I came across this quote from Froebel, which distinguishes our constant belief in the spirit of childhood.

“Children are like tiny flowers; they are varied and need care, but each is beautiful alone and glorious when seen in the community of peers.”

Welcome

We are very grateful to the parents of Lucy, Matthew, Sam, Alfie, Honor, Rosie for choosing Cowgate. Please remember to mark all your child's' clothes and lunch boxes (if appropriate). We are thankful for the opportunity to share with you this wonderful journey. As you are aware our philosophy supports holistic development, we are keen to work very closely you, please do share with us how we can travel this journey of discovery together.

Thank you

Thank you to all the parents who have supported us this month. You know who you are and what you have done. Please know and trust that we truly appreciate your efforts.

Donna was absolutely delighted with the response for household goods which will be boxed up for the people who were previously homeless and now have a home to call their own. She asked me to thank you personally for your kindness and generosity.

I made a unicorn by Community Playthings

We were invited to contribute to the latest publication from Community Playthings. (Please peruse the copy on the reception). Some staff provided observations for this publication on Open-ended play with blocks and simple materials. This opening quote not only supports our beliefs about open-ended materials, but the booklet supports our overall philosophy. You may remember, in recent times, Lian and I had a wonderful visit to Community Play.

“Open-ended play is intrinsic to childhood; children have an impetus to explore and create. When free to experiment with the simplest materials, they find ways to express and develop their thoughts in imaginative play.”

The booklet provides information on:

Play

Open-ended play

Active learning

Imagination

Material

Time

Nature

Construction and small-world

Large construction

Dens

Hollow blocks

Community Playthings website is:

www.communityplaythings.co.uk

Sponsorship for Kadi

It is that time of year again when we need to raise £144 in order to continue sponsoring Kadi our sponsored child in Niger. The donation box is situated on reception; please do give a little something if you can. If you are unable to support Kadi at this time, please do not feel concerned, we will definitely be supporting Kadi in 2009. We have our ways 😊

The Scottish Parliament

After a visit from a MSP we received a motion in parliament on 27th October. It read...

“S£M-2747 Gavin Brown: Cowgate under 5’s Centre – That the Parliament congratulates the Cowgate under 5’s Centre on reaching the final of the Nursery of the Year awards, organised by Nursery World; notes that the centre is Scotland’s only representative out of three nurseries that have reached the final in that category; congratulates all the staff and children on this achievement; further notes the centre’s performance in the most recent HM Inspectorate of Education report, which identified the outstanding quality of staff interaction throughout the centre, the excellent progress of children in all aspects of their learning and the exceptional leadership of the head of centre and deputies, and wishes the Cowgate under 5’s Centre every success in the Nursery of the Year awards to be held in London on 21 November 2008.

Supported by: Bill Kidd, Shirley-Anne Somerville, John Lamont, Mary Scanion, Murdo Fraser, Margaret Mitchell, Ken Macintosh, Stuart McMillan, Robin Harper and Jamie McGrigor”

Lovely don’t you think?

Inspiring Emotional Harmony

The consultation period for this policy has been completed. I believe it is almost ready to be shared. I

would like to thank Julie and Donna for all their hard work. Thank you for seeing the best in everyone and settling for nothing less. We look forward to receiving the gift of all your hard work. Thank you for your creativeness which has inspired individual passion in all of us.

Music in the Garden

The children truly love the musical instruments in the garden. It now feels complete...the garden is the entire basis for all art and learning. Please take a moment to look at the images of the children playing as you enter the centre.







In Service Day - Essentials of Literacy 0-7 Tina Bruce and Jenny Spratt.

Tina Bruce facilitated our learning on the day. The following is a summary of the areas covered (adapted from the literature).

In the main the staff have reported that the knowledge shared on the day was 'reaffirming'. However, there were new things to reflect on and consider too. Certainly the day captured the excitement of children's journey into literacy, literature and new knowledge and understanding. The essentials of literacy are about educating children in the deepest sense.

Summary of Observation

Introduction

The importance of observation was highlighted throughout. Observation is key to supporting and understanding the way children make their unique journeys into literacy. Observation informs the planning for individual children and the way adults engage with the group as a whole. The way adults relate to children, and the enabling environment they create indoors and outdoors are both essential to developing communication, language and literacy.

A rich environment needs constant adjustment, in response to what is observed, but there are also essentials which should always be the
Conclusion

Observing the uniqueness of each child's journey from birth to 7 years enables us to:

- *Build on the child's individual interests and needs*
- *Work in partnership with parents as a team*
- *Employ and track children's progress*
- *Inform our planning both for individual children and for children as a whole*
- *See that children are unique individuals*
- *See how interconnected the different areas of development and learning are.*

In this section Tina focussed on how and what adults need to offer to create enabling environments for rich communication, language and literacy.

Baby Songs

There is nothing more fascinating than studying children and how they develop and learn. This involves exploring:

- *Brain development*
- *How we can help children to connect, communicate and engage with the people they spend time with*
- *How we can encourage children's participation in the social and cultural elements of life through baby songs and finger rhymes*

In Summary

The parent or key person encourages the use of hands in song. This lays the way for finger rhymes.

- *The importance of baby's relationship with warm affectionate parents, siblings and key people*

- *How can we be helpful to children in developing communication and language from the moment a baby is born because the baby has a need to learn by picking up ideas from a community of people they love*
- *How babies use imitation and mirroring to coordinate the integrated strands of movements, looking and listening*
- *How early we see babies showing an intention to communicate with us, and an ability to engage in proto-conversations, because this is how they begin to learn what other people know and do*
- *How music and dance are there from the beginning, and how they support the essentials of later literacy, such as rhythm, rhyme, intonation and alliteration.*

Finger Rhymes

Tina highlighted it is important to work with and not against nature:

- *Parents and key people are of central importance*
- *By the time a baby is sitting, a great deal has been going on with the baby's developing vision, proprioception (feeling where their body is*

located with reference to the floor) and balance (the midline) so that they operate together

- *The hands continue to play an important part in the developing learning*

In Summary

We looked at the important beginnings of multi-sensory learning on the journey into communication, language and literacy:

- *How the hands help adults and children to make meaning together through emotive gestures right from the start*
- *Finger rhymes encourage parents and key persons to enjoy early literacy experiences with their children*
- *The songs using the hands develop the midline, tracking and focus, and co-ordination of hand and eye in physical development crucial for later literacy*
- *They help children with fine motor skills and gross motor skills so that each helps the other along in ways which support the development of writing*
- *Finger rhymes are examples of early and engaging opportunities for the development of*

symbol making and symbol use by children just beginning to represent as they learn to walk, talk and pretend.

Mark-Making and Writing

Reading and writing are not separate processes. They feed into and off each other. They depend upon each other and they help each other along.

We heard how essential it is to have the body co-ordinating in ways which help the physical mechanics of reading and writing. The phonology (sounds and tune of the language) connects with hearing. The sounds link with the movements of the hands and the whole body. Children begin to work out that sounds can be written down as they mark-make, using pencils, paint and so on. They learn that to do this they need to use symbols which everyone can understand.

Key Messages About Children Beginning to Write

- *Writing draws on language, thoughts, feelings and relationships, but it is more distanced and remote than talking with people.*

- *Children need to know what writing is about, and what it is for, surrounded by people who enjoy and take writing as a serious pleasure.*
- *Having something you want to say in writing (composing) is different from the mechanics of writing and forming letters (transcribing).*
- *Early finger rhymes help the physical aspects of writing to develop. They enhance biological development.*
- *Larger movements with the shoulders and the whole body are also important.*
- *Handwriting is not writing. Handwriting is how the letters are formed. Until children are spontaneously producing the open semicircle in their drawings and mark-making, it is not appropriate to formally teach them lower case letter formation. But they often enjoy building words and loose alphabets.*
- *Children should not be pressurized into writing before motor cortex is sufficiently mature, but they should experience enabling environments, with positive relationships respected as the unique people they are. Practitioners who are working with other people's children need to acquire and update the subject knowledge involved in the mechanics of writing and the creativity, information and pleasure it brings.*

Action Songs

Why sing action songs with young children?

Sometimes the things we do with children, as part of our everyday practice, become such a habit that we no longer give them much attention. Students, in their training, learn a selection of songs, often by observing and taking part in group times led by experienced practitioners.

This section of the course focussed on the importance of action songs which use the upper body or the upper and lower body co-ordinating together.

We were encouraged to consider...

Why has the tradition last for over a hundred years?

Who started it?

Is it a valuable tradition in this day and age?

Friedrich Froebel, pioneered action songs as well as finger rhymes. His influence, though not many people realise this, remains in the action songs we sing daily with the children.

In Summary

Action songs are powerful ways of supporting the development of the essentials of literacy.

- *They challenge children in co-ordination.*
- *Action songs support the integration of sound, sight and movement*
- *They give a gentle introduction towards singing games*
- *They help children with phonological awareness, through alliteration, rhyme and rhythm.*

During the day we also covered, Action songs (moving around), Nursery Rhymes and Poetry Cards. We were encouraged to complete an action plan.

I do hope you agree that we were truly nourished during this course. I have already observed staff 'tweaking' their practice. I would highly recommend that if you have found what is written above useful you purchase the book. As the research for the book led to the information shared on the training day. Additionally, as you know, I love research. I would happily provide further research on this topic in a

future newsletter. Please let me know specific area of concern and we will research it.