



September 2008 Newsletter

Welcome dear parents and friends of Cowgate,

I am delighted to write to you today, the sun is shining through the trees, the little red berries are awakening...autumn will be a welcoming time...

This newsletter brings warm greetings to our new children and families, information on these years' classes, health and safety information, garden development

Warm greetings

It is so wonderful to welcome our new children and families to Cowgate. It is a beautiful thing to see a child absorbed in his play; in fact, it is hard to think of a purer, more spiritual activity. Play brings joy, contentment, and we [the staff team] are warmed observing the children at play.

At Cowgate, our philosophy for settling children is that we will allow your child to settle at their own pace. Clearly, the bedrock of their security from day to day is the knowledge that we who care for them are always at hand, ready to help them, to talk with them, to give them what they need, and simply to "be there" for them. We promise you we will be sensitive to each child's needs – all our children will require different supports, some will meander

– blissfully, through magnificent irrelevance, others will require sensitive adults to support them through the settling-in process, trust us... we will be there.

Classes

Something for you...

“Mediation for Mums”

May I draw your attention to the poster on the entrance door? Please note your interest on the form on reception.

An extract from the poster reads...

*“Medication stimulates the happiness centres in the brain, leaving you feeling deeply energised, less stressed and more resources to cope with everyday pressures and strains.”
Sounds too good to miss...*

Something for the children

We are putting together Betty’s music list...please note your interest on the list at reception and...

Sparkle Arts Classes will “bring out your little one’s inner sparkle” although we all know our children sparkle already...☺ This class offers “A creative mix of dance, movement, music and role-play, designed to stimulate both body and mind amongst pre-school children.

Buggy Store

A little reminder that all buggies need to be put into the buggy store. Situated in the garden. Little feet (and sometimes bigger feet) can trip up on the wheels.

Thank you for your assistance with this.

Garden Development

The musical equipment is ordered; the wobbly bridge is too; Dave is waiting on the wood arriving to build the planters and then Lorraine and I will go and buy the plants... wonderful, wonderful fun to be had.

Parks Survey

A request from the Eco-Schools team

“The Parks Team want to know what you think about your local park or greenspace in Edinburgh. Is it a wildlife haven or a waste ground? Do you love it or loathe it? Is it litter-strewn or is it litter free? To have your say go to www.edinburgh.gov/Parksurvey. It would be great to include the views of children. This on-line survey will be accessible throughout the next year, so please re-visit it whenever there is something you would like to comment on”.

*For any queries contact lindsay.grant@edinburgh.gov.uk
(0131 469 5257)*

Well a little newsletter this month...I will leave you with the words of Froebel

“a child who plays thoroughly and perseveringly, until physical fatigue forbids, will be a determined adult, capable of self-sacrifice both for his own welfare and that of others.”

Children as agents of their own learning

As you know we are working on honing our skills in how we listen to the children in the centre and how we support children in leading their own learning. I thought this month you may be interested in a little snippet of theory about High Scope. As usual read on if you would like to read more about this approach otherwise...

Take care until next month.

The warmest of wishes,

Lynn and the Cowgate Team

A little bit of theory...

Bringing the High Scope Approach to your Early Years Practice

Brief introduction to High Scope...

The High/Scope approach follows five basic principles that underpin the whole approach. At its core is that active learning is essential for the development of all children and adults is deep seated within the approach. It is learning that happens when children interact with objects, people and events around them and build new understanding from them. No one can have or experience things for one another; only individuals can have and learn from experiences for themselves.

The physical environment

A High Scope setting will initially look very similar to any good quality early years and this 'extract' will go through the unique differences in how it is set up and used both adults and children.

Active learning

Active learning is defined as learning in which the child, by acting on objects and interacting with people, ideas and events, constructs new understanding. (Hohmann and Weikart 2002:17)

In a High/Scope setting we support children on their voyage of active learning by providing five basic ingredients:

Materials – a plentiful variety of interesting materials, bought or found for children to play with. This might include:

- *Everyday objects* – pots, pans, hammers, nails, sheets, boxes, paper
- *Natural materials* – stones, shells, leaves, twigs, pebbles etc
- *Tools* – brushes, mops, scissors, staplers, paper clips, hoses, watering cans
- *Messy items* – water, soap, play dough, clay, paint
- *Large, heavy items* – big blocks, planks of wood, boxes, crates, bikes
- *Smaller items* – lego, buttons, toy cars, pasta, beads and small figures

Manipulation – offering opportunities to and allowing children to explore and work with the materials in their own way.

Choice – giving children the choice to select their own materials and how they use them. If children are to follow their desire for learning they must be allowed the freedom to choose activities and materials to support that learning.

Language – from the child. Children talk about what they are doing or have done, reflect on their learning, integrate new knowledge and build knowledge with others.

Support – from the adults. Adults support and extend children's efforts by talking with them about what they are doing, asking why High/Scope calls 'real questions'

(one's they don't already know the answer to), joining in with their play and supporting them to solve problems.

By using these five ingredients as often as possible with children in their play experiences we support their voyage of discovery and learning and have fun together along the way too.

For adults to understand active learning and its importance in how children learn, it is best to experience for themselves. Here is an example of how it is often presented to adults in training sessions.

In a taster session for adults on active learning a High / Scope trainer / facilitator could present the participants with some apples (both red and green), as familiar objects to most people. Everyone would choose an apple and for about five minutes explore it using all five senses – touch, hearing, sight, smell and taste. Plates, knives and some kitchen towel would already be on hand for participants to use as and if they wished. Everyone would have a piece of paper and a pen and would be asked to record everything they discover about an apple. While they are exploring the fruit the facilitator would acknowledge what individuals are saying and comment or offer new words, he or she would also be there to support them to work through any problems they may encounter along the way. After exploring the apples, participants and facilitator would record onto a flip chart every thing or word that had been discovered, for example, juicy, crunchy, spotty, have pips, round, smooth, wet inside, tasty, smell, clean, can roll. Participants would then be offered some plastic apples and

would go through the list and cross off all the things not found out by just exploring the plastic fruit. The facilitator would then use a picture of an apple and the word 'apple' and go through the whole process twice more. At this point all the words from the exploration exercise have usually been crossed out! This is often when the realisation of what people have experienced hits them.

It is important to use something familiar as adults often think they know everything about an object; therefore the power of active learning, what they have found out through exploration, is much more evident and clear to them.

By allowing the adults to explore the fruit in any way they wanted they discovered so much more than from the plastic fruit, picture or word. All of us, but especially children, learn by having real experiences. They won't learn about an apple or a rabbit, for example, by looking at a picture, but the picture will be meaningful if children have had first-hand experience of the fruit or rabbit. By experiencing an apple and building up knowledge of the fruit children can use this knowledge and understanding to inform them about other new objects and experiences they have.

For example, we have all witnessed the learning that a young baby goes through when he discovers his own feet or hands, the frowns on his face as the foot or hand comes into focus, the way he immediately plays with the fingers or toes, feeling the skin and then guiding it into his mouth for further exploration. The baby has to do this without

help; we cannot teach the sensations and learning that is going on for the individual. He is experiencing active learning for himself. Doing so instinctively. What the baby learns from his own fingers he can use to understand his parents' hands, his toys and his food. This way of learning is natural and instinctive. Continuing throughout our lives; this is the core of the High / Scope approach.

The ingredients of active learning flow throughout the exercise:

***Materials** – there were enough apples, plates, knives, paper and pens for everyone to have their own.*

***Manipulation** – participants were free to explore the fruit as they wished.*

***Choice** – participants were free to choose which apple they wanted (red or green) or if they wanted one at all. They had choice in what they did with it, what they recorded on the paper and how they described their finding out.*

***Language** – adults freely chatted while exploring the fruit, sharing words and checking things out with each other and the trainer during the exploration time.*

***Support** – the facilitator was there to support by supplying the apples and equipment and then during their exploration could support problem solving.*

From experience of High / Scope this exercise has been presented many times to parents, students and colleagues from various disciplines using a variety of objects including

sherbet lemons, daffodils and even a tepee. On every occasion there is a light bulb moment, when understanding of how we learn is realised and suddenly seems so obvious. If some participants still seem to be a little unsure of the power of active learning, other examples can be presented verbally to make it more real for individuals, for example asking them to think back to when they learned to drive and try to remember how many times they stalled the car before they got the balance of clutch control and acceleration. No matter how many times the instructor explains or even tells you what to do, until you are in the driving seat and are using the pedals yourself you cannot truly understand and learn how to drive. To learn to drive you have to have all the ingredients of active learning present:

Materials – the car

Manipulation – you have to manipulate the controls to make the car go

Choice – whether you learn to drive or not

Language – there will be lots of chat between you and the instructor

Support – the instructor is there to support your learning

Using an example that feels more real or personal to participants often helps re-enforce the understanding of the process for young children.

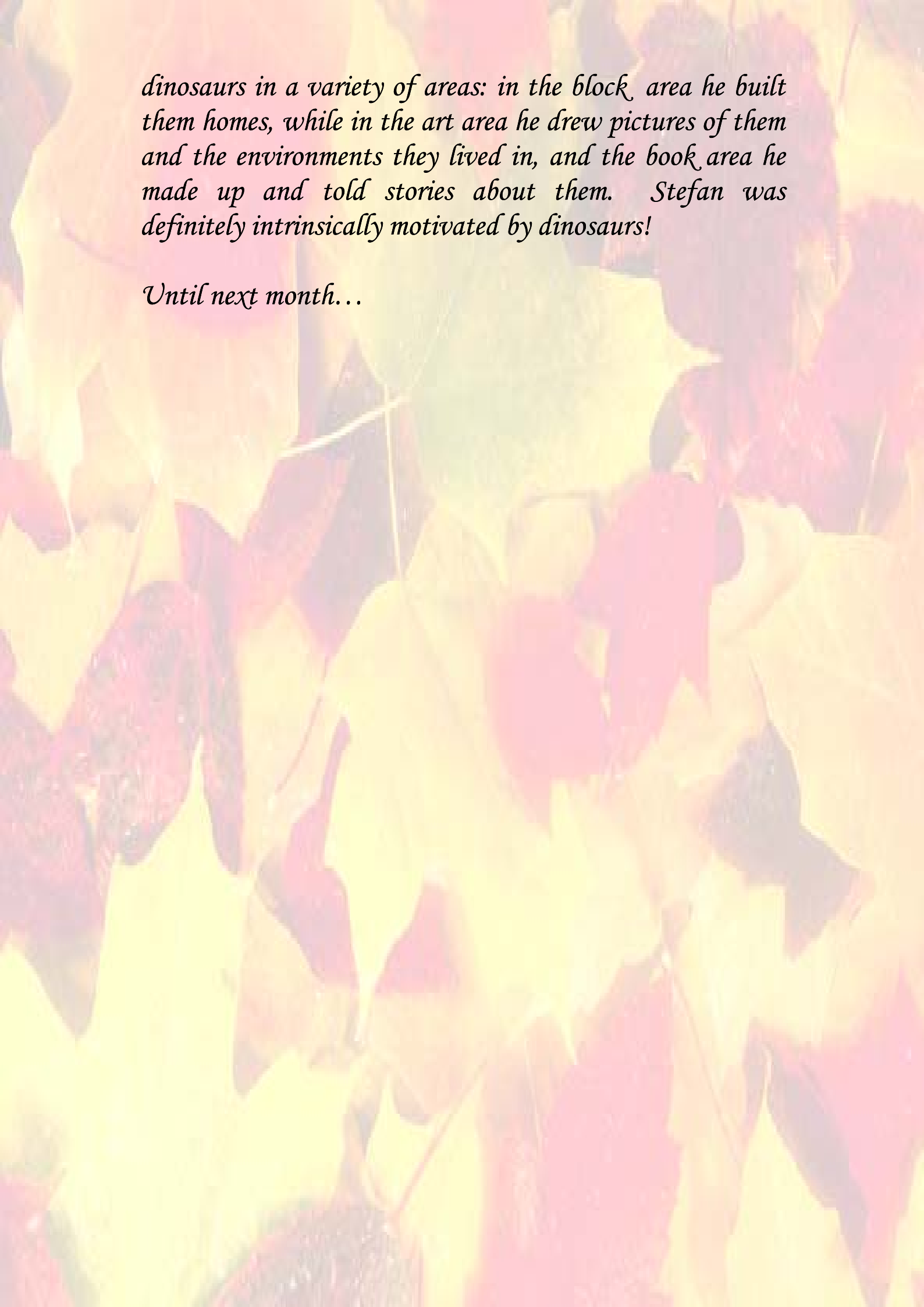
For children the power of active learning comes from personal initiative. Children act on their innate desire to explore. Think back to the young baby exploring his hands and feet, nobody told him to explore them, he just did. As

the baby grows, he asks and searches for answers to questions: 'Why do I have to put my hat on?' 'What happens if I ...?' He asks questions about people, materials, events in the world around him and ideas that arouse curiosity, the endless (or so it seems at the time) "Why?" "What for?" "When?" "How?" He solves problems that stand in the way of his goals and he generates strategies to try. The child who cannot reach something in a cupboard may pull a chair towards it and climb up to reach, or the child who cannot open the garden gate may climb over the fence or look for a hole he or she could crawl through. Are these children being naughty or defying home rules or are they using their initiative to solve problems they've encountered?

Children who are active learners become engaged in their play because they have chosen to do so. In a High / Scope setting practitioners will always consider the five factors of intrinsic motivation:

- *Control*
- *Interest*
- *Enjoyment*
- *Feelings of competence*
- *Probability of success*

Children will become engaged in what they are doing if it is something they are interested in, it is enjoyable to them, they have control over the situation, there is a probability of success and they feel competent in doing it. For example, Stefan, aged three had a great interest in



dinosaurs in a variety of areas: in the block area he built them homes, while in the art area he drew pictures of them and the environments they lived in, and the book area he made up and told stories about them. Stefan was definitely intrinsically motivated by dinosaurs!

Until next month...