

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2011

Dear parents and friends of Cowgate,

A very warm welcome. This newsletter brings thanks to you from all the staff; Kadi; Hazel is taking on the responsibility of organising and running the children's library; wonderful news; the additional information this month is on literacy – many parents ask about literacy development, 'when interconnected knowledge and understanding work in close harmony with tried and tested practice wisdom, then practitioners and parents work well together. The result is that children flourish in their development and learning.' (Bruce, 2008).

Warm welcome

A very warm welcome to all our new children and their families. In addition, we warmly welcome all our new students. We hope you all enjoy your journeys with us.

Thank you

We (Karen, Lian and me) would like to thank all the parents for their kindness towards staff this season. Thanks for your gifts, of course, but more than that, the very kind, meaningful words

you expressed. Thank you for your understanding of their caring commitment towards their profession.

Kadi

Thank you for your kind donations towards Kadi's sponsorship. You raised £57.87 towards the £144 annual payment.

Library

Hazel is taking over responsibility of the children's library. Would anyone have any spare time to support her? As well as the children's library in the Croilean, Hazel has agreed to take over the children's lending library. Any support / advice would be very welcome.

Wonderful News

We are one of the winning entries in the biodiversity competition. We have been invited to an Awards Ceremony on Friday 21st January in the John Hope Gateway at the Botanic.

The Christmas Tree Festival

The children really enjoyed the Christmas Tree Festival at St George's West Church. www.standrewandstgeorges.org.uk.

As you know so many of our Christmas plans were cancelled due to the (delightful) snow then when Jane (Ruby Brown's Gran) came up with the splendid idea of us visiting the tree festival we were very grateful. It turned out to be such a marvellous trip we hope to enter our own tree next year.

Pets

Thank you to all the families for caring taking our pets home for the holidays.

Warm wishes from Lynn and the Cowgate and a very HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

Date to remember...

January 10th – in-service day

Essentials of Literacy from 0-7

In most cultures of the world, literacy (being able to read and write, either in print or Braille or using the computer technological aids) is important and considered necessary for full participation in society, and in order for each person living in that society to make a contribution.

Opening up the world of knowledge and understanding, and finding there is a lifelong satisfaction in communicating with and without words, and in reading and writings, also equips children for survival in fast-developing global world economy where the future is uncertain and unknown.

It involves:

- *good communication (sensitive using words/signs, body language, saying things without words)*
- *rich language (being articulate and being a sensitive listener)*
- *becoming a bookworm who avidly reads for pleasure, and information*
- *writing mainly for pleasure (greetings to family and friends) and other reasons too.*

When should children be taught to read and write?

There are various views in different parts of the world about the age at which children should be formally taught to read and write. There are good reasons for this, which we shall explore. In most countries, children are between 6 and 7 years old, because that is a good time biologically, and typically they then learn within about three months.

Do children (provided they are given a good environment) learn to read and write naturally?

One view is that children will learn to read and write naturally, but only if they are in an environment which encourages this:

- with people around them reading and writing
- being read to
- engaging with literature and informational print as an important part of everyday life.

Should children learn to read as early as possible?

Another point of view is that children need to be inducted to having the key world of literature and knowledge, and to be independent readers as early as possible. Until they can read fluently they are thought to find chunks of text confusing and therefore to be unable fully to appreciate literature or non-fiction texts. The emphasis is on being able to read and write without help (rather than Vygotsky's 1978 notion of practitioners needing to aim at the ripening buds, so that children do not have to perform early, but are supported by adults in their understanding and their competence develops steadily).

Is it important for practitioners to know about the biological, social and cultural development of children, and the subject knowledge of what is involved in literacy, so that they learn how to put the two together in order to help children read and write?

The view... is that biologically-driven processes are a vital part of learning to read and write. Without a body and a brain, there is no question of it being possible! But we cannot just leave things to nature. Neuroscientist Colin Blakemore (2001) argues that 'nurture shapes nature.' This means that there are important processes functioning in the brain, and in the growing and maturing body. If we work with those, we can help children to develop their learning with maximum impact. Our biological selves are shaped and nurtured by people, relationships and culture. This is particularly so where reading and writing are concerned. We are not leaving things to nature. Instead, we are working with nature.

We need to understand what is involved in the subject knowledge of literacy. What are the essentials of texts and how they work? What are the mechanics of reading and writing? Some of the most important things about developing literacy are not always obvious. The way the brain works to co-ordinate

vision, hearing and movement is crucial. So is the way the child develops as a symbol maker and symbol user. Talking, understanding what others say, and engaging in conversations are part of this process.

Key moments in the journey towards literacy: walking, talking and pretending

The excitement and celebration of the first steps in walking

When a baby becomes a toddler, and takes his or her first steps, family and friends become electric with excitement. And so they should be. Co-ordination of the body's movements is one of the greatest landmarks towards literacy.

First words

The first time a child very obviously uses a word is of enormous importance in a family. For children who have a hearing impairment, a communication disorder or learning difficulty this may be a first use of sign language, such as British Sign Language, or Makaton. Words or signs are symbols. They stand for something else, and are imbued with meaning. The words 'Mum' or 'Dad' are not actual the people. They stand for the person, who may or may not be present.

When a child begins to use words and phrases, symbolic thinking has opened up for that child, who can think about the past, present and future, and describe and comment on events and people, expressing thoughts, feelings and developing ideas.

Pretend play scenarios

Some researchers argue that language and other kinds of symbolic behaviours are separate systems. Others argue there are different kinds of symbolic behaviour...the important thing is to value both the early beginnings and the later developments of symbolic behaviour, such as pretend play, drawings and paintings, models and sculptures, dance choreography, musical composition and dramatic play scenarios. The pioneering Italian educator, Malaguzzi (1998), describes these as 'the hundred languages of the child'. We open up a rich world for children when we help them to be symbol users and makers of their own symbols. But we need to remember the warning in relation to the use of the brain: 'Use it, or lose it.'

In order for young children to (later) be able to read and write independently, these are ESSENTIALS OF LITERACY

Relating to others

- *Literacy has its beginnings in social relationships, movement and the senses, communication and language.*
- *People need to talk with and listen to babies and young children.*
- *Eye contact with babies is important and so is looking away when the baby has had enough interacting for the moment.*
- *Silences and pauses are important. Adults tend to fill silences, when they might be important to leave as moments of reflection and connection.*
- *Mirroring, turn-taking and imitation are important in developing non-verbal and verbal conversations.*

The importance of movement

- *As babies crawl, their eyes must move in co-ordinated ways in which later track,*
- *Children need to be able to co-ordinate movements, both large (gross motor) and small (fine motor). The way the eyes, hands, and fingers move together is vital. Arms and shoulders are an important aspect of this. Because of the*

way the physical body develops, the first parts of the spine to become well co-ordinated are the head and hands. Then the legs become co-ordinated, and walking begins. The arms and legs start to work together.

Becoming a symbol maker and a symbol user

- *Symbols stand for other things and people, both present and absent.*
- *Personal symbols hold meaning for the child because they are made by the child.*
- *Text themselves (the written words) have no meaning. They represent the meanings that are rooted in personal symbols and personal experiences.*
- *We need to help children develop the essentials of communicating without words. (There is a whole literature, for example, on picture books, see Baddeley and Eddershaw, 1994; Styles and Bearne, 2003; Whitehead, 2007; 46-7, 99-100)*
- *We need to help children make and use their own personal symbols, relating to their culture and the wider world.*
- *Music, dance, all the art forms and an appreciation of literature make a huge contribution to the way children*

develop their understanding and become competent in reading. They give meaningful experiences of rhythm, sequence and narrative, tone and intonation, pauses, rhyme and alliteration.

- *Order (syntax), sequence and narrative help children to make meaning of texts in stories and poems, to compose their own (fiction and non-fiction) and to understand sentences, beginnings and endings.*

The importance of play

Children's spontaneous free-flow play (Bruce, 1991) gives opportunities to use connecting language to experiment with narrative, characters, revisit songs and rhymes and stories, to make alternatives, to use familiar rhymes, rhythms and alliteration and to collaborate with others and work as a team to bring about a satisfying play scenario. This works rather in the way of jazz, drama or dance improvisation.

The importance of conversations with children

- *Repeating back, clarifying, expanding on what children say, helps language to develop.*
- *Spoken language and the kind of listening that understands what is said, acts on what is said, and responds and*

initiates, questions and problem-solves, ensures shared sustained conversations

- *Use and understand language or signing for our own thoughts, ideas, feelings and relationships.*
- *Use and understand language or signing to talk with and respond to other people in all sorts of different situations.*
- *Children need to be able to understand what is involved in communication without words or sign language. They will not grasp the importance of a question mark if they have not captured the tone and tune of the voice when a question is asked. The sounds and subtle messages of non-verbal communications, to do with pauses, the music of anger, lovingly, affectionately muttered sounds, surprise, fear, protective shouts, a sudden look, meeting someone's gaze, or avoiding eye contact, pulling someone to look and share a focus, pointing...*
- *Looking and listening...are important co-ordinations in the brain. Later when children read and write, the look of the sentences, words and letters will need to co-ordinate with the sound of them in sophisticated ways, which have become internalised processes in tracking, decoding print and encoding the written symbols.*

The importance of sounds and listening to them, especially the sounds of languages

- *The sounds in the words must be distinguished from one another. The sounds are later mapped onto the letters on the page, and meaning must be there.*
- *Children need to have developed and learnt spoken or signed language. Many children throughout the world speak two or three languages. Some are lucky enough to speak three languages with entirely different roots and structures (for example, Italian, English and Urdu). This means it is relatively easy to learn any language with ease. Monolinguals have become cut off from the music, phonology (sounds in the language) and forms of all but their own language, and find this more difficult.*

Rhythm, rhyme, intonation, alliteration

- *Phonological awareness (the ability to distinguish between similar and different sounds in the language) is crucial to later reading and writing. It is helped when children can hear the differences between phonemes, syllables, initial sounds and rhyming chunks.*

- *Rhythm (music, dance and song) helps children with syllabification, blending and segmentation.*
- *Tone, intonation and pauses in the language help children to understand punctuation.*
- *Rhyme helps children to hear the patterns and distinguish between those that sound similar and different, and to see patterns which help them to decode and encode words as they read and write.*
- *Alliteration helps children to hear the repetition of the smallest units of sound (phonemes) and to see the smallest units of sound in print (Graphemes) at the beginning of words.*

Time-honoured traditions

- *Baby songs, action songs sitting on the spot, and later moving from the spot, nursery rhymes, both traditional and modern, and carefully introduced poetry cards help children put all this together.*
- *Action songs help co-ordination of sound, vision and body movements. They can be on the spot with upper body movements. They can be moving about using co-ordinated arm and leg movements. All this is important for later*

reading and writing co-ordination of the senses (including hearing and vision) and the physical body.

- *Nursery rhymes and stories help a sense of narrative, storyline and characters, and create events and contexts and new worlds, alternative worlds, imaginative worlds. They help children to engage in 'connecting language' (and, but, then, before, after, soon) (Ragnarsdottir, 2006). They encourage oral and aural reading and writing.*
- *Poetry cards give children opportunities to engage with small manageable chunks of text, to learn about the alphabetic principle and to explore how sounds map onto graphemes (letters or clusters of letters in a word).*

High well-being

- *Ensure the child has a high well-being, and is confident enough to problem-solve their way into reading and writing, to have a go, predict, confirm and self-correct. Both beginners and independent readers need to do this. This is very different from guessing.*
- *Introduce the essentials of literacy at the pace that is comfortable for each child.*

- *Support and extend the child's literacy learning in the right way for him or her, at the right time, with the child's full and willing engagement.*
- *Set children on the path to becoming lifelong readers and writers for pleasure, information and understanding from the start, enjoying music, song, dance and sharing books, rhymes and poetry.*

The essentials of literacy make it possible for children to:

- *read or write with print or Braille*
- *open up worlds of literature*
- *open up worlds of knowledge and information*
- *open up worlds to inhabit through creative writing*
- *connect with the thoughts, feelings and relationships of others*
- *connect with their culture and that of others.*

Diversity and inclusion

For very good reasons not all children will speak in words, read or write (owing to have complex needs or learning difficulties), but they need to be able to communicate, with or without language or signs. They may enjoy books, drama, music and

dance experiences that are found in stories and poems. They may enjoy information books and experiences of nature and everyday life that go with this. This journey into literacy is complex, and cannot be normalised or standardised. One size does not fit all. Although human beings are social beings, they are not herds to be driven.

How to avoid undermining the essentials of literacy

- *Encourage crawling on the floor.*
- *Encourage the use of face-to-face pushchairs, which give adult and child a shared focus (looking at the same things together), and talking about what you both see, hear, smell.*
- *Discourage the use of mobile phones on outings and instead, engage in talking with (not at) babies, toddlers and young children.*
- *The over-use of dummies constrains language development. They can, however, help children with consistently blocked tubes to clear them and be less nasal, hear and sleep better and to be more relaxed and open to learning.*
- *Do not rush children into formal instruction in reading and writing.*

(Bruce and Spratt, 2008, Sage publishing)

