Developing the Foundations of Literacy Through Play

Practice Guidelines

Denny Early Learning & Childcare Centre

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# **Introduction**

This short booklet has been developed as a result of completing a series of support and development workshops with Denny Early Learning & Childcare Centre on supporting the foundational skills of literacy through play. This booklet details the significance of the adult’s role in play and outlines key information for each foundational literacy skill. Most importantly, it includes the contributions from Denny Early Learning & Childcare Centre practitioners on what is currently working well in practice.

The key materials and references used to develop this booklet and the series of workshops, can be found at the end of this resource.

# **Role of the Adult**

As adults, we can take on many roles in play. We may come in and out each one several times throughout the day and how much involvement we have might lie on this continuum. Research on successful outcomes of Early Years provision – both in the short term and for later success in school and as adults – has pointed to some general guidelines.

The best outcomes for children’s learning occur where most of the activity within a child’s day is a mixture of:

* child-initiated play actively supported by adults and
* focused learning, with adults guiding the learning through playful, rich experiential activities.

Figure 1:The Adults Role in Play (The National Strategies: Early Years, 2009)

Overall, the research suggests it is important that we have a balance of child-initiated activities (which enhance curiosity and social relationships between children) and structured activities (which enhance concentration and thinking).

Remember this quote…

“what the child is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow.”

* Vygotsky (1978)

One key role the adult has is to **meet the child where they are at** developmentally. A theorist called ‘Vygotsky’ believed in **learning potential**. He believed that a child’s abilities are not fixed, but rather, with the right support from a peer or adult, a child will learn.

Research highlight the following conditions for effective play…

A Child must:

* feel secure
* follow own agenda
* enjoy self
* develop & learn

Context must be:

* safe
* interactive
* inviting
* Sustaining

(Sayeed & Guerin, 2000, p7)

It will not be a surprise to you that the literature emphasises the need for a child to feel safe, comfortable, curious and stimulated in order to learn. Remember the essential aspects which drive early learning are **wellbeing; communication; and promoting curiosity, inquiry and creativity.**

As EYOs you spend a lot of your day ensuring children are feeling secure. Remember, children are not born with the skills to calm themselves down (self - regulate) so you have to do this with them (co - regulate).

# **The Role of the Adult: Five to Thrive**

* Remember that within the Five to Thrive approach, as well as the five activities of RESPOND; CUDDLE; RELAX; PLAY; and TALK; we have the three processes or ‘tasks’ which are seen across the five blocks.
* Remember that these three processes are **attachment needs** and is what we need from other people in general for our brains to grow.

**Mindful Awareness**

When we are mindfully aware of the child we are **attuned** to their needs. We have good knowledge of the child and will find ways to let them know that we are **keeping them in mind.** In being attuned and keeping them in mind, we are giving them a sense of **belonging, a sense of safety** and **showing them that they matter.**

Consider the following:

* What do we do in the nursery to co-learn and co-regulate with children through play?
* What works well? What are the challenges?
* What things do we say and do that lets a child know that we are keeping them in mind?

**Co – Learning**

This simply means when two or more people learn or attempt to learn together. When we support babies and children to learn we provide stimulation for their brain to grow. For effective co-learning we need to be mindful of the child’s stage of development and find appropriate ways to scaffold, support and challenge their learning.

**Co – Regulation**

When we co-regulate with someone, we are finding ways to settle their nervous system (in other words, **calm or soothe them**). When someone is not in the place to self – regulate then they need someone to co-regulate with them. This helps to maintain optimal brain function **(we can think better when we are calm!).** Babies are not born with this skill, so they need adults to help them. Children and young people are less able to self-regulate as they have immature nervous systems.

# **Phonological Awareness**

Consider this game…

First person…I went out for dinner and had something beginning with ‘T’, Tacos

Next person...I went out for dinner and had something beginning with ‘T’, Tacos and something beginning with ‘T’, Tomatoes

Person after adds another item and so on

Use Maracas to beat out syllables of the food/drink items.

What skills would you need to play this game?

You may have considered some of the following…

* **Social Listening & Aural attention:** These are fundamental and in itself is developmental in nature. To play the game you need to pay attention to whoever is speaking, you need good eye contact, ability to take turns and not interrupt – these are all social listening and aural attention skills.
* **Discrimination of sounds:** Refers to the ability to hear the difference between a range of sounds e.g. between speech sounds and non-speech sounds. It helps children to focus on what was happening in front of them and not be distracted from outside noise.
* **Auditory memory:** Really important for phonological awareness. Refers to the ability for the child to be able to hold information in their memory so that they can start to work with and process that information. For this game, the child needs the ability to remember the previous food items that were said, hold this in their head and use it to give an answer.
* **Rhyme awareness and detection:** Ability to hear if two words rhyme or sound the same at the end. By the time children are able to speak and listen at a level typical for the average 3-year-old, they are usually aware of rhyme.
* **Syllable Detection:** The ability for children to be able to break words into syllables. To play this game children need to know the ‘beats’ in each word. This game involves beating each syllable out with a musical instrument.
* **Phoneme discrimination:** Ability to hear individual sounds within a word e.g. ‘Tacos’ has different sounds and can be broken into /t/ /a/ etc.
* **Alliteration detection**: Being able to isolate a first sound at the beginning of a word. It also covers, being able to recognise that two or more words begin with the same sound (More advanced – being able to produce words beginning with the same sound).
* Generally, before children can recognise individual sounds in a word (phonemes) they need to recognise the individual beats within a word (Syllable). E.g. basket = bas-ket for syllable detection and ‘b’, ‘a’, ‘s’ etc for individual sounds.
* **IMPORTANT NOTE**: The aim is not for you to remember all of these but to have an awareness that there are a number of different skills children need in order to develop phonological awareness. These skills lie on a continuum, but it is important to remember that not all development is linear, and some children will go back to refine some of the earlier skills as they develop some of the later skills.

Consider the following:

* What other activities take place at Denny Early Learning & Childcare Centre to support the skills outlined above?
* Thinking of the children you work with, which of the above skills can you observe, and which ones are they working on?
* Chapters 1, 3 & 6 in the ‘Foundations of Literacy’ book by Sue Palmer &
* Ros Bayley offers lots of play activities to support phonological awareness. Care should be taken to ensure that activities are developmentally appropriate for the children you are working with.
* This link is a useful resource to understand the skills underlying phonological awareness.

<https://highlandliteracy.com/where-to-begin/>

# **Supporting Phonological Awareness at Denny ELCC**

* Opportunities for Rhyme and rhythm
* Stories in rhyme read to the children
* Language rich environment
* Musical activities – steady beat – awareness of syllables that words can consist of more than one sound
* Ring games – encourage body movements moving from left to right
* Youth Music Initiative
* Monthly song / rhyme booklet sent home
* Oral storytelling including puppets, small world and loose parts
* Using opportunities arising spontaneously ‘planning in the moment’ to sing rhyme clapping out sounds.
* Lending library and library visits
* Talking Tubs
* Mapping stories with musical and pictorial representation to further challenge children

# **Supporting Oral Language at Denny ELCC**

How do we support language development during play?

**Denny Practitioners discussed the following:**

* Explore what is happening in the local community
* Give children enough time to take in and absorb their new learning experience.
* Positive language, praise and encouragement.
* Chat groups/group time/singing.
* Group Bears & Song Books – encourage language at home.
* Talking Tubs – Group Activities.
* Role Play Area
* To be child – led
* Asking open ended questions “I wonder vs what”
* Promote Curiosity
* Use of Makaton & Visuals
* Use of puppets
* Encourage imaginative play
* Playing with Language and exploring this freely
* Providing resources that enhance/encourage their communication skills and curiosity e.g. “Look what I have”
* To give children opportunities to self – regulate.
* To watch, wait and listen.
* To develop positive relationships.
* To create a safe environment.
* To have positive body language.
* To be mindful of developmental needs.
* To listen and speak at a child’s level

# **Reflection Points to Support Language**

* Do we observe, wait and listen before we intervene?
* Are we mindful of our questioning styles? E.g. ‘I wonder’ vs ‘what’.
* Do we model language through imaginative play?
* Are we providing motivation & feedback?
* Are we challenging children’s curiosity?
* Do we extend and expand on language used?
* Where is the child at in their stage of language development?
* Am I adapting my communication style appropriately to meet the needs of the child?
* Do I need to use less/more language?
* Do I need to support what I am saying with use of visuals/gestures?
* Am I doing a balance of taking their lead (child-initiated activities) and initiating activities myself?
* Has this child had experience of this activity before?

# **Fine Motor Skills**

Consider the activity of making something out of Playdoh. What skills do children use/and develop through this activity?

You may have considered some skills which involves the brain, hands or body. These are the key building blocks for fine motor skill development.

#

Figure 2: Building Blocks for Fine Motor Skills (Adapted from https://highlandliteracy.com/)

**The Brain**

When using fine motor skills (for example playing playdoh) these skills are used by the brain:

Through each experience, your brain may store learning for the next time. **All these skills are crucial to the development of literacy** e.g. when learning to write the first letter of your name you use all of these skills which are developed through play.

**The Hands**

These are the fine motor skills used by the hands when playing playdoh

* Children may have a dominate (doing hand) and a helping hand.
* The ability to manipulate the playdoh and have a good grasp. To have precision and good control.
* Use of thumb and two first finger more than ring finger and little fingers. (busy fingers vs sleepy fingers).
* These skills are important for literacy development.

**What other play activities support development of these skills?**

**The Body**

The Body is another crucial building block for fine motor skills.

Considering the playdoh activity, these are the key ‘body skills’ involved.

* Requires the ability to maintain a good steady posture to support the hands.
* Use of tummy and shoulder muscles.
* Use of whole arm movements.
* Requires ‘staying power’ (stamina/endurance)

# **Summary of Fine Motor Skills**

* Fine motor skills are the small movements used for control and precision during activities.
* There are 34 muscles in each hand to move the fingers and thumb, so it is important that children have lots of opportunity for different activities to strengthen these muscles.
* Our brain, hands and body are the building blocks to fine motor skills.
* Remember – It is important to engage children in different levels of motor development in preparation for writing (e.g. gross motor as well as fine motor activities).
* All these skills support the development of literacy
* All these skills are experienced through play

# **Supporting Fine Motor Skills in Denny ELCC**

* Opportunities to play with malleable materials such as clay play dough and gloop
* Threading activities
* Cutting out with scissors
* Development of ‘body skills’ as building block to enhance fine motor skills
* A variety of mark making resources available chalk pencils crayons paint sand and twigs
* Posting and sorting games
* Outdoor learning environment forest walks – mud kitchen, planting seeds exploring with twigs and natural materials
* Serving snack and lunch and using cutlery
* Play on pedals
* Baking experiences

# **Concepts of Print**

* Children have to learn that print is significant.
* They have to recognise that print is different from pictures, that words and letters are different from numbers.
* They also have to know what reading and writing is for, and how people do it – for instance in English print goes from left to right and from top to bottom.
* Finally, they must be familiar with the letters of the alphabet, and how these are used to represent words.

**Helping children to recognise the nature and function of print is an important element in laying the foundations of literacy.**

# **Reflection Points for Concepts of Print**

* To help children expand their awareness of print we need to observe and understand how they interact with print. **Do we know what they are aware of? What do they not yet understand?**
* **Are we taking advantage of every opportunity to demonstrate how and why adults read?** As well as reading books, are we sharing and modelling reading a range of texts?
* **Do we encourage reading and writing within role play?** Ensuring that they have the appropriate materials for literacy e.g. magazines, brochures, posters, etc.
* Do we **help children to see their own words written down?** E.g. help scribe on their drawings and paintings and letting them dictate messages and captions for displays and their learning books etc.

# **Supporting Concepts of Print in Denny ELCC**

* Exposure to variety of environmental print
* Books across the nursery
* Storytelling regularly throughout the day
* Role model by adults – signing in marking register making lists, writing observations, the shopping list, menus and the planning folders.
* Children encouraged to write comments in their folder, ideas for planning, and on the signing in sheets.
* Reading and writing in role play
* Scribe on drawings and other art work models
* Modelling of adults reading and writing in a range of situations – office, reception and playroom

# **Resources/References**

Articles/Documents

Building the Ambition:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00458455.pdf>

Getting it Right for Play:

<http://www.playscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/Power-of-Play.pdf>

Learning, Playing and Interacting: Good Practice in the Early Years Foundations Stage:

<https://www.keap.org.uk/documents/LearningPlayingInteracting.pdf>

Scotland Play Strategy:

<http://www.gov.scot/resource/0043/00437132.pdf>

ICAN Talk Series – Document on Speech and Language Needs:

<http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/sites/talkingpoint.org.uk/files/I_CAN_Talk_7_-_Speech_Language_and_Communication_Needs_and_the_Early_Years-3.pdf>

Books

ABC and beyond. Building emergent literacy in Early Childhood Settings by Elaine Weitzman and Janice Greenberg.

Foundations of Literacy by Sue Palmer & Ros Bayley

Play, Learning and the Early Childhood Curriculum by Elizabeth Wood

The Whole-Brain Child by Daniel Siegel & Tina Payne Bryson

Weblinks

<https://highlandliteracy.com/emerging-literacy/>

<http://www.theteddybearnursery.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Five-to-Thrive-parents-guide.pdf>

<https://fivetothrive.org.uk/resources/>

[http://mamaot.com/developmental-progression-of-handwriting-skills/#prewriting](https://highlandliteracy.com/)