



SOUTH EAST IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE  
*Working together, empowering all, improving outcomes*

# Supporting Early Literacy Learning and Development in the Early Years



Early Years in Fife



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The importance of developing communication skills is central to our lives. Children start developing as communicators from before they are born. The way children move, relate to others, play, and explore all have an impact on the language and literacy skills they develop

*'We need to understand what is involved in the subject knowledge of literacy. What are the essentials of texts and how do they work? What are the mechanics of reading and writing? Some of the most important things in developing literacy are not always that obvious. The way the brain works to co-ordinate vision, hearing and movement is crucial here, and so is the way each child develops as a symbol maker and symbol user. Talking, understanding what each other says, and engaging in conversation are also part of the process.'* (Bruce and Spratt, 2011)

## Introduction

This Communication and Literacy guidance focuses on the progression of children's learning and offers practical suggestions on how we can help.

We find out about each child's learning through observation. We respond to what we see, and so the more we understand about *'the pattern of development of young children from pre-birth to growing into a young child,'* the more effective we are at supporting learning.

Every child is an individual and finds their own pathway through their learning. Our role is to recognise and understand what we are seeing through observations.

We need to make sure that our interactions, experiences, and spaces offer a broad range of exciting possibilities for children to deepen their knowledge and build their skills.

Parents and carers can help us to see the whole child. Each child carries with them learning from their family and communities. When we know our children and families well, we can make links between what we observe, and the life experiences the children bring to their play. The more parents and carers share their knowledge of their child's skills and interests, the more meaningful our responses will be. Parents and carers are our partners in this.

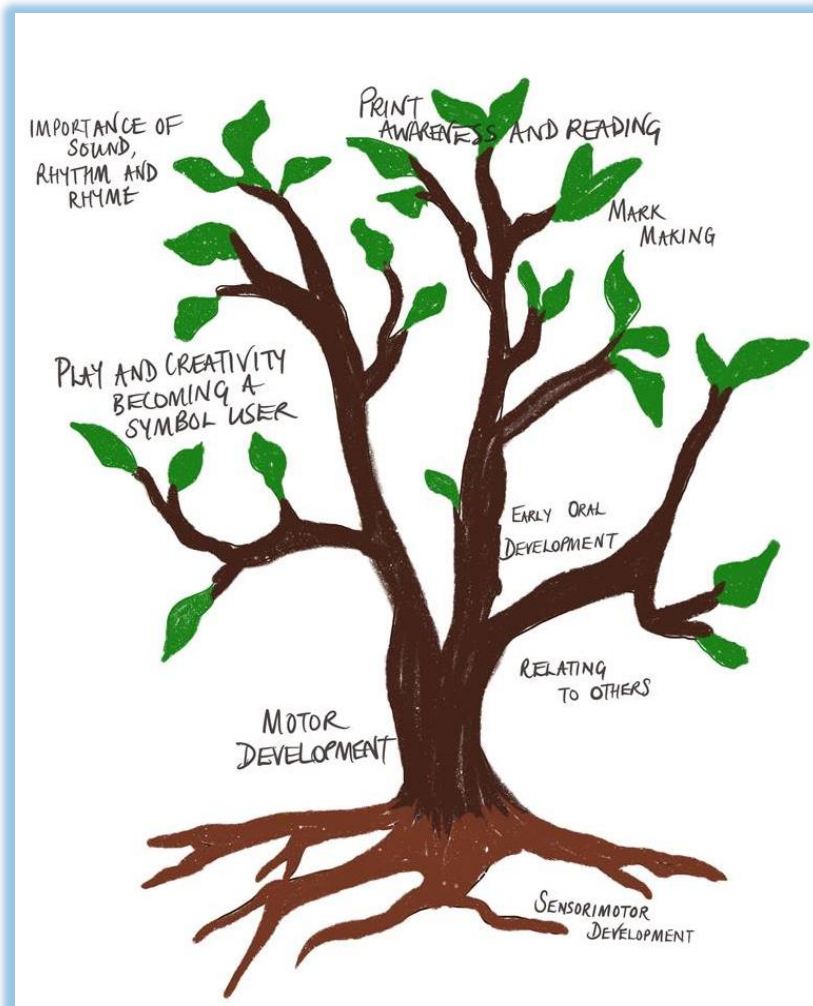
This is especially true for children who are learning through English as an Additional Language. These developing bilingual children are already communicating and learning in their home language in ways we do not always see in our settings. We want our children to become strong communicators in all the languages important to them.

*'The importance of communication and language development for all aspects of children's lives cannot be overstated. Communication underlies our ability to manage behaviour and emotions by expressing what we need or using language to regulate how we feel. Language is also much more than words. It is understanding and using patterns and cues for*

*interaction, sequencing thoughts and ideas, and making stories that help us understand what is happening and what is next.'*

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg24

## The Literacy Tree



Children need to develop and learn in all sorts of areas before they will be able to understand and apply the literacy skills of reading and writing that sit at the top of the tree.

The roots of children's learning start when they are incredibly young, exploring through movement and senses. The importance of relationships is central for our children, along with developing oral language as they make sense of the world around them.

Through interactions and play children develop their symbolic understanding, refine their motor skills, and start to have fun with language.

This guidance takes each of the elements on the tree and provides an overview of the progression of learning.

*"The crucial role we play in supporting children's development and learning and in recognising the impact our practice can have, cannot be underestimated. To do this effectively we need to have some understanding of the pattern of development of young children from pre-birth to growing into a young child. It is important to know how children develop and learn from the beginning, how they are developing at any point in time, and how they might develop and learn in the future."*

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg18

## Curriculum for Excellence

The key elements of our literacy curriculum are

- Listening and Talking
- Reading
- Writing

The Curriculum for Excellence offers direction on the learning experiences we offer our children.

- Finding out new things and asking questions
- Learning unfamiliar words
- Exploring words, letters, and sounds
- Enjoying choosing stories, exploring characters and events, and sharing thoughts
- Retelling and role-playing stories
- Using varied materials for mark-making to communicate

All these elements are covered in the various sections of this guidance. How we put these in place depends on the uniqueness of our setting. This is the process of developing our literacy curriculum.



# Overarching themes for literacy learning from birth through the early years of childhood

**Literacy develops throughout a child's life from pre-birth and underpins all communication and interaction**

Literacy can be attached to everyday learning experiences and opportunities

Warm nurturing relationships help open up communication and connect literacy to the child's life

Literacy experiences should weave, build and grow children's interests, vocabulary and knowledge

Literacy learning should encourage children to see themselves as readers and writers, through purposeful experiences which build on the way that children use literacy



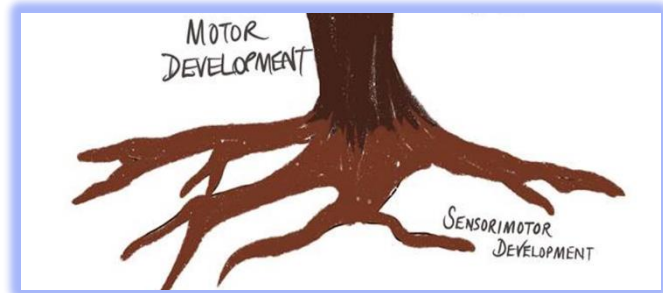
*Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg72*

## Chapter 2 - Sensorimotor and Motor Development

Children's sensory and motor development is fundamental to what and how they learn. They are the roots and base of the literacy tree.

**Sensory skills** are responsible for receiving information from the environment and from the body.

**Motor skills** are the responses from our brain once it has received information from our senses.



*"The development of movement and coordination for a child is linked to communication and cognitive development."*

*"For instance, a child with a developing vestibular system will find it almost impossible to sit still for any length of time or possess the fine motor skills and coordination required for writing before they are ready. This is why observations of children's actions are crucial to inform our practice and ensure it is developmentally appropriate."*

*"As adults, if we are able, we often take for granted the ability to get to where we want, pick up what we need, avoid hazards, and move co-operatively with others in games or traffic. But these skills take a long time, and a lot of practice to develop. It is very important that we plan for the development of all the gross and fine motor skills."*

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg24

Sensory and motor skills are the foundations for learning. The movements we make as babies, toddlers and children help us to prepare our bodies and our brains to learn, to focus on a task, to follow instructions and have the skills to access more formal learning. Sensory and motor development is a gradual process. A baby begins to experience new awareness through his/her senses: sight, touch, taste, smell, hearing, sense of balance and head position.

Our sensory and motor skills develop from pre-birth. In the early years, children learn to move, and learn through movement.

Most children develop strong muscular control and sense of balance through engaging in play that allows for exploration and movement. This will also help the child to have strong core muscles, shoulder strength and good postural control.



*“We need to explore the multisensory world of the child as a crucial part of learning. We are constantly looking at the importance of sound, sight, feel and touch, smells, and tastes and, very important, the movement and feedback from movements made. Penny Greenland, (2010) emphasises the importance of movement as the “felt sense of life”. It is active involvement and exploration through movement play that enables a child to become a more mature, efficient organiser of sensory information – providing the foundations for all future learning.” (Bruce and Spratt, 2011)*



*“Being able to crawl is important for future learning because it ‘supports’ a strong sense of the centre of the body whilst in motion” (Greenland, 2010), and it is the first time that children will experience balancing and travelling at the same time. (Bruce and Spratt, 2011)*

Children use their bodies to find out about the world around them from the moment they are born. As they grow, they develop their skills and control in both large and small movements.

The developmental and learning milestones below capture some moments in the development of motor skills

From babies to young children	3 – 6 months	Pushes head, neck, and chest off floor with arms while lying on stomach	Watches movement of own hands, plays with own hands
	6 – 12 months	Beginning to take steps with support	Pokes a small item with index finger
	12 – 18 months	Learning to balance and beginning to walk alone	Starting to show hand preference. Picks up anything small from the floor using pincer grip
	18 – 24 months	Can jump with both feet	Turns handles
	Around 2 years	Goes up and down steps – 2 feet per step	Stacks toys up and knocks them down
	Around 3 years	Goes up steps one at a time	Undresses with assistance and can use a spoon or other utensil independently

Around 4 years	Lives to run and climb and can hop on one foot	Dress and undress independently except for buttons, laces, zips
Around 5 years	Skips, hops, and jumps competently	Uses simple tools and utensils independently and can-do buttons and zips
5 years plus	Confident in physical skills and enjoys finding physical challenges to overcome.	

These are broad-brush overviews of roughly where you might expect a child to be in terms of their development as they grow. They are not prescriptive. Children are individuals with their own sociocultural context, and they find their own pathway through their learning.

### What Can We Do to Help Children Develop These Skills?

Children need interactions, experiences and spaces that encourage them to explore and experiment, and they need people who support them to challenge themselves and try things. Knowing our families well will help us to understand differing expectations about, for example, cleanliness, independence or making a mess which may impact on how comfortably individual children engage in specific experiences.



### Motor Development for The Under Threes - Things to consider



How well do your interactions, experiences and spaces reflect the diversity of Scottish society? Can every child and every family find themselves reflected in your provision?

- How often are your babies given the opportunity to have tummy time, and are you building up the length of time for these experiences? Is a responsive adult available for babies when having tummy time?
- As a team, how regularly do you discuss your children as individuals and plan provision for the development of the babies/children's core strength over time? Do your observations demonstrate this?
- How confident are practitioners in their knowledge and understanding of the stages of physical development? How often do the practitioners engage in professional discussions about this?



- How appropriate is the size of the resources available to your babies/ children as their grasp strengthens and dexterity develops?
- Are there differing weights in your resources? Do these reflect developing muscle strength?
- To what extent does your range of resources encourage progression of development? How do you know?
- Babies/children all move in many ways, including commando crawling and bum shuffling. Is there sufficient space for this? Do you have to 'lose' something to create this space? If you do what is this and for how long?
- How motivated are your babies/children to cruise? How often do you evaluate spaces, experiences, and interactions to ensure that your provision is offering babies/children both challenge and support?
- How often do babies/children have the opportunity for safe bare feet?
- How often do you get down to the child's level and experience what babies/children see in their line of vision? How do you feel when at this level? How effectively are you evaluating your provision from their point of view?
- Can babies/children see themselves in mirrors?
- How effective are the pulling and pushing opportunities available to babies/children? How regularly do practitioners reflect on why these experiences are important for babies/children?
- To what extent do staff understand the importance of supporting independent crossing the mid-line, perhaps through passing games or releasing objects?
- How many different terrains are available to crawl or to walk over? What are they? Do they offer different experiences?
- How motivated are your babies/children to try out opportunities to practise balancing? How well do your experiences and spaces support and challenge babies/children to build their skills through varying terrains/heights?
- Do your prams enable the babies/children to face staff? The next time you purchase prams can you have a conversation and consider this?
- How effectively do all practitioners encourage self-feeding? How often do the babies/children have opportunity to move seats to have a different conversation and view?
- How much of every day do babies/children spend outdoors? How well does each practitioner understand the benefits of this?
- How motivated are your babies/children by the loose parts available? How do you ensure that these are changed/replaced when required?
- How often are treasure baskets and sensory experiences available? Have you evaluated the resources and the impact these experiences have on babies/children individually?

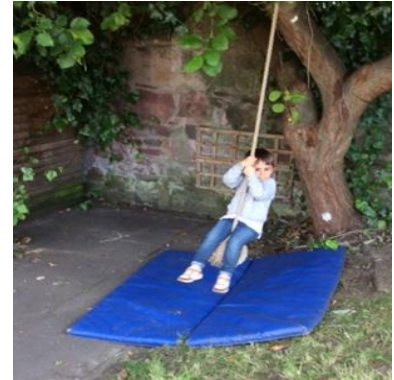
## The Proprioceptive Sense

The proprioceptive sense tells us about our body position. It is stimulated every time we move. Each time we use our muscles or stretch and bend our joints. Receptors for this sense are all over our body, deep within our joints and muscles.

### What Can We Do to Help Children Develop These Skills?

Lifting heavy objects, balancing, and jumping are all experiences that will help children develop a healthy proprioceptive system. Encourage children to:

- sit or stand while swinging
- run or dance and change direction
- start and stop their movement as part of a game.
- have fun with stilts, steppingstones, balance boards, wooden planks, balance bikes and scooters, etc.



## Upper Body Strength and Stability

Some children may not have had enough experience to develop their core muscles and shoulder strength. It is important that in the early years setting we give them plenty of opportunities to develop these skills.

### What Can We Do to Help Children Develop Shoulder Strength and Stability?

- play games lying on their tummy to develop shoulder strength and stability – try reading, mark-making, working on puzzles, playing with toys, etc.
- crawl - through a tunnel or crawling as part of a game or a song
- weave in and out of obstacles [try challenging children to travel in and out of the obstacles in a variety of ways, e.g., skipping, jumping, and hopping]
- create their own obstacle courses with loose parts



## Bilateral Integration

Bilateral Integration is the ability to use both sides of the body at the same time in an organised way. Children learn to do this in stages.

- Stage 1 Children use both sides to do the same thing. Given two objects, they may bang them together or roll with both hands e.g.: using a rolling pin... (symmetrical activities)



Stage 2 Then children learn that they can keep one hand still while the other moves. They learn to use alternating movements such as when walking, cycling, playing a drum one hand at the time.



Stage 3 After a while, they can achieve a higher level of skill, using both hands at the same time but each hand doing something different. Such as, holding a book, with one hand and turning pages with the other.



### Motor Planning and Body Awareness

Motor Planning and Body Awareness are important for children to understand the boundaries of their body and its movements within space. We need to have good motor planning to do everyday tasks such as putting on shoes and socks, holding a pencil, brushing teeth etc. With repetition these tasks become automatic. This means our planning for these tasks is quick and efficient and our movements more precise.

Children need opportunities to use their bodies in diverse ways. This will help them to practise motor planning as they have to problem-solve constantly. Where do I put my foot to balance? Where do I put my hand to hold on? It is important that we observe and support children who need to build confidence, offering small steps to help them to challenge themselves. We need to ensure our learning environment offers physical experiences and activities that explore movements of the body from one position in space to another and in relation to space around them, especially outside.



What can we do to help children develop these skills?

Sing a variety of action songs that name different body parts.

*“Actions songs...*

- *help children to be co-ordinated in their upper and lower bodies, so that, quite literally, they are whole people*
- *encourage children to create their own action songs*
  - *give children the essentials for later literacy.”*

*(Bruce and Spratt, 2011)*

Action songs in any language offer an opportunity to learn through senses and actions and acquire new vocabulary. This may be particularly beneficial for a child working in more than one language, or a child with additional support needs. As practitioners we can extend this experience by learning how to say body parts in languages familiar to our children. Bear in mind that not all children enjoy big adult led groups and these games can be played individually or with a small group of friends.

- “Popping bubbles” first with the hands, then change children to use other body parts such as, elbow, knees, head, etc.
- Move around the space and while listening to music challenge children to lead their movement with one body part.
- Use the language children need as we talk to them, e.g. in / on / under / above, to develop their understanding as well as their skills.
- Sequencing activities where things need to be completed in a certain order, such as an obstacle course, where children must change their body posture and way of moving.
- “The floor is lava” game. Encourage children to work out what to do to get from one area to another without touching the floor.
- Take the opportunity to help children be aware of what comes next in everyday activities, such as washing their hands or getting the paper and putting it on the easel.
- Play games that involve imitation, such as “Follow the leader, “Simon Says” etc, to help children with their body awareness and to plan actions based on watching and copying others – you could ask all your families for examples action songs and imitation games they know from around the world



- Provide lots of opportunities for sensory play e.g., sand and water, rough and tumble, texture games. Begin with large movements, progress later to fine movements.



### Eye-Hand Coordination

This is the ability to control hand movement guided by vision.

What Can We Do to Help Children Develop This Skill?

- Provide games using beanbags, where children must aim for a target such as a basket or a bucket - large at first, then as skill improves, smaller.
- Suspended ball games. Provide a small ball inside an old stocking and suspend it from a tree branch or a frame, then children take turns to hit it with a tennis racket or a wooden spoon.
- Construction experiences with blocks
- Threading
- Consider progression in learning, for example rolling a ball - bouncing a ball - then throwing a ball, considering the size of the ball and the distance this is thrown at.



## The Physical Development That Supports Emergent Writers

Babies and young children start making marks as they explore the world around them. For example, an early exploration involves food in the highchair. Meaning comes later.

How children make marks and the kind of marks they make depend on which muscles they use. Which muscles they use depends on their stage of development. Most children follow the same developmental stages. The physical stage links with the kind of marks children make.



### The Shoulder Pivot Stage

Young children start by learning to control their big muscles. These are their upper body muscles; those in their neck, chest and back. At this stage these are the muscles with most strength.

The Palmer Grip – the tool is held in the palm of the hand with the fingers wrapped round the pen to keep it in place.



In this photo we can see that:

- The movement comes from the shoulder
- The child has a straight elbow and a stiff wrist
- The movements and marks are big – usually long and straight or large and circular
- The child is using a palmer grip

### What Do Children Need at This Stage?

- Big spaces to make big movements
- Vertical spaces as sitting at a table can restrict these big movements
- Opportunities other than mark-making to develop these large muscles

### Shoulder Pivot Stage and The Development of Balance



- As children make these big movements, they are developing their ability to remain balanced as the centre of their balance changes.
- Along with this, children are developing their awareness of the movement of and the position of their body in space. This is called proprioception.



- As children develop their proprioception it means they can move more effectively in the space they have without crashing into things and falling over.

### The Elbow Pivot Stage

- The shoulder acts as a support. It is more still.
- The elbow pivot is working now.
- Children have an increased range of movement.
- Children continue to develop their balance.
- Children usually use the palmer grip.
- Again, the movements are large and lots of space is needed. Children are developing the circular push-pull movement.



### What Do Children Need at This Stage?

- Things that encourage children to use their large movements, including the elbow
- Lots of space
- Large mixing
- Sensory experiences that encourage children to explore circular movement



### The Wrist Pivot Stage

- By now the child's large muscles are strong.
- Their balance and proprioception have developed.
- Their movements are more fluid.
- They often tuck their elbows close to their body.
- They can now make smaller movements.



### What Is Significant About This Stage?

- Children can use smaller movements than they did before
- They can use smaller pieces of paper
- Horizontal and vertical surfaces are important for mark-making
- Children need experiences which encourage the entire range of wrist movement



Children need experiences which will encourage them to use smaller movements



### Moving Towards the Ultimate Grip

Here is an example of a child using a modified tripod grip. This is more common in boys than in girls. The pen is held like a darts player holding a dart.



Here is an example of a child developing from a modified tripod grip to the ultimate grip which is the tripod grip. The thumb is used to keep the pen in place and the range of movement for this child by the middle finger.



Here is an example of the ultimate grip which is the tripod grip. This grip gives the greatest control and flexibility. Using this grip, the child has maximum movement



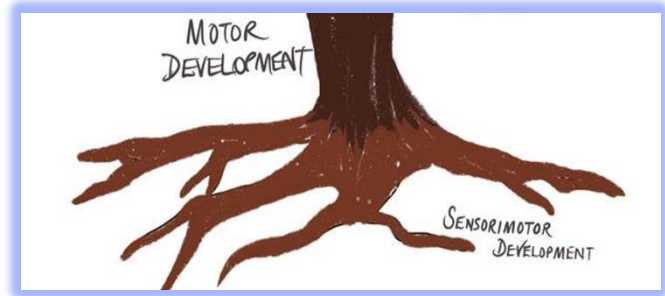
Consider how you can help children to develop their dexterity and the muscles in their fingers. Think about

- What small things do you have for children to pick up and manipulate?
- Materials like clay are harder to manipulate than playdough, which means children must work their muscles harder.



The Kids Independently Developing Skills (KIDS) site <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids> could provide you with further ideas and information

## Sensorimotor and Motor Development - Questions for Discussion and Reflection



- What opportunities throughout the core provision both inside and outside, are there for children to develop their fine and gross motor skills?
- Summarise what new knowledge and understanding of children's sensorimotor and motor development you will now need to put into practice when planning for children's learning and development?
- Provide an example of how you will use a recent observation of a child's sensorimotor and motor development and explain what you could do next to build on this prior learning to inform the child's next steps in learning and development.

## Chapter 3 - Relating to Others and Early Language Development

Relationships and communication go hand in hand. The way we communicate with our children non-verbally and verbally determines the kind of relationship we will build. A warm, nurturing relationship encourages children to communicate with us. This is a fundamental and very important part of our job.



*The environment of **relationships** is just as important as the physical environment.*

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 32

*'Language learning can take place only if interaction comes first...'* (Weitzman and Greenberg, 2004)

Julie Fisher's research also identifies that the way we engage with our children is critically important.

*'Interactions matter. They matter to babies and young children, they matter to practitioners, they matter to learning and development.'* (Fisher, 2016)

For children to build relationships and engage in communication, they need to feel they belong. It matters to them that interactions, experiences, and spaces draw on and reflect their languages and cultures.

Children can pick up messages we do not intend to send if our settings do not reflect aspects of their identity. This can affect how included they feel, how they relate to others and how they communicate.

*'We need to co-create safe spaces with children to talk, sing, rhyme and play with sounds, vocabulary, and print. Role modelling language and building vocabulary to make sense of the world is vital for all young children. The amount and quality of language that children are exposed to is crucial to their progress. The journey begins with noticing and listening to sounds and conversations around them.'*

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 70

From babies to young children	3 – 6 months	Smiles, engages, and vocalises with carers
	6 – 12 months	Plays games such as peek a boo
	12 – 18 months	May form strong attachments to objects, including transitions
	18 – 24 months	Likes to play next to other children and attempt to communicate verbally (with sounds/words/phrases) and non-verbally (with gesture/facial expression/behaviour) with them
	Around 2 years	Has an almost complete store of emotional expressions
	Around 3 years	Plays co-operatively with other children
	Around 4 years	Shows an ability to empathise with other children
	Around 5 years	Shows caring attitude. Chooses own friends.
	5 years plus	Is aware of the ideas, thoughts, and feelings of others

Children are individuals and they find their own pathway through their learning. This is a broad-brush overview of roughly where you might expect a child to be in terms of their development as they grow. It is not prescriptive.

Supporting the development of oral language and talking is crucial to the development of the child as a writer. There is a key difference between spoken language and written language. In spoken language you can also use gesture so that you do not need to use as many words or be as explicit to get your meaning across. However, in written language you need to be able to describe very exactly what you mean for the reader to understand. For example, if you are with your friend in your kitchen you can point to a cupboard and say, “the cups are in there” and your friend will know where the mugs are. However, if you are in another room, you want your friend to be able to find the mugs in your kitchen then you will need to use a lot more language and be much more explicit e.g., “when you walk into the kitchen there is a counter straight ahead of you. Above this counter there are wall cupboards, and the mugs are in the one furthest to the right.”


You can see the importance of supporting children to increase the length of their descriptions and be more explicit about what they are doing or have done. Again, reading stories helps here. Discussing what children can see in the pictures can help them to describe carefully what they see. Adults can also model lengthened language which will get across the message that the child is communicating using talk and gesture.





## Other Ways of Supporting Children to Lengthen Their Language Include:

- Encouraging children to retell familiar stories in increasing detail. Props and puppets can be used to support this.
- Encouraging children to share with other children an activity that is not shared by everyone. E.g., telling a small group of children about a trip, or a baking experience.

<b>Realising the Ambition pg. 26</b>		
<b>Wellbeing – myself, social, emotional and communication development - Interactions</b>		
<b>From birth</b>		<b>through my early years of childhood</b>
<p><i>I learn about being me through the way you and others interact with me, look at me, speak to me, treat me and care for me</i></p> <p><i>Notice how I show happiness by gurgling or smiling, express my frustration through crying and my stress in my body movements. I need you to help me by responding appropriately. I need you to be patient, calm, consistent and understanding</i></p> <p><i>I 'speak' my voice to you through my noises, actions, and expressions. I am learning to communicate my thoughts and feelings by responding to others and my environment.</i></p> <p><i>Notice how I respond to your voice, words, and expressions. You help me to learn to communicate and find my words by verbalising what is going on around me.</i></p>	<p><i>Notice how I am beginning to find words to express my thoughts and feelings, but often my emotions are expressed through impulsive actions and gestures. I need you to help me by responding appropriately. I need you to continue to be patient, calm, consistent and understanding.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes I am overwhelmed by my emotions. Know when I need to be secure and settled or when I need to be on my own for a short time to find calm and regulate my actions for myself. I need you to be calm and consistent and not annoyed or angry.</i></p> <p><i>As I am developing my own understanding of who I am, know that I am not yet able to understand and appropriately respond to the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of others.</i></p>	<p><i>I learn about self-respect through the way you and others interact with me, look at me, speak to me, treat me and care for me.</i></p> <p><i>Even as I grow, my emotions are often expressed through impulsive actions and gestures. I need you to help me identify other ways to regulate my emotions...ways that respect my individual physical and emotional needs.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes I am overwhelmed by emotions. Help me to know and choose when I need to feel secure and settled or to be on my own for a short time. Help me know how to find calm and how to regulate my actions for myself. I need you to be calm and consistent and not annoyed or angry.</i></p>

	<p><i>I need you to encourage my awareness of others and support me and my peers as we play alongside each other and start to play together. Encourage me to be 'socially comfortable' and help me 'read' the messages others may give, for example being happy, sad, or upset. Help me resolve issues by modelling sharing a toy or giving a hug – but know that I just may not be able and ready to do this yet.</i></p>	<p><i>Notice how I observe and respond to your voice, words, and expressions. You help me to learn to communicate and find my words by modelling empathy. I am learning from you how to be kind, calm and caring.</i></p> <p><i>I need you to support my developing understanding of the range of emotions that myself and other people experience. With your help I am developing an empathic understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of others.</i></p> <p><i>I am beginning to develop an awareness of how to work with others when we are playing together. You help me recognise when others are displaying strong emotions and you encourage me to find ways to relate to and resolve any tensions.</i></p>
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### **Establishing Positive, Loving, Nurturing and Understanding Relationships**

*'Young children are learning to self-regulate so any issues a child may express over such situations as following instructions, sharing or managing conflict, are completely developmentally appropriate. What children learn from these experiences will depend on how we, as adults, respond. It is important to remain calm, reflective, and mindful in seeing things from the point of view of the child.'*

*'A child's expression of their emotions is the unconscious way in which they tell us that they have an unmet need, and that they can't manage this for themselves... So, when children are expressing themselves in ways we do not expect, or which may cause problems for themselves or others, it is important to step back and reflect on whether they understand what to do, whether they are sufficiently able and practised to do it, and whether*

*strong feelings – driven by needs we can't see – are influencing their emotions.'*

*'In any of these situations, children need us to be responsive. A mind-minded response from practitioners, reflecting from the child's point of view, means that the child can use the practitioner's capacity to manage emotions, or to do what is needed, or to understand what is happening. The more we can do this, the more children will be able to use everyday situations to learn how to do it themselves.'*

## Early Oral Language Development

The Communication Handbook created by NHS Fife's Speech and Language Department outlines the typical development of children's Speech and Language. The full handbook can be viewed using this link.

[Speech & Language – Early Learning in Fife \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](http://glowscotland.org.uk)



### Information on Typical Development in Children; Development of Speech & Language

Age	Looking & Listening	Symbolic Play	Understanding	Talking	Size of Vocabulary	Speech Sounds
6 months	Can pay fleeting attention, but any new event will distract	Mouthing, inspecting, hitting, shaking of objects	Responds to different tones of voice	Babbles for attention. Sound play with familiar adults	0	Variety of consonant – vowel combinations
12 months	Concentrates on the most powerful stimulus (visual OR auditory)	Relates objects appropriately e.g. puts spoon in cup, brushes own hair	Understands own name, 'no' and several other words	Babble that sounds like real words often precedes the use of real words. First words are closely related to child's own world and functional needs	1 – 3	Simplified sound system. Consonant such as b, d, g, m, n, w predominate
18 months	Will attend to own choice of activity but will not tolerate intervention	Begins to recognise pictures of familiar objects. Recreates own or others' actions e.g. puts doll in bed; feeds teddy	Follows simple commands in context and instructions containing 1 key word e.g. 'where's your <u>eyes</u> ?' Understands mainly naming words e.g. shoe; ball	Single words. Vocabulary used in a variety of ways to convey different meanings	10 - 20	
2 years			Understands instructions containing 2 key words e.g. 'give the <u>apple</u> to <u>teddy</u> '. Understands basic action words e.g. jump; sleep	Using 2 word phrases. Asking 'what's this?' 'where's...?' etc	50 +	Sound system extending. Consonants include p, b, t, d, k, g, m, n, w
2 ½ years	Child can concentrate by looking OR listening. Can attend to adult's choice of activity for short period with frequent prompts	Pretend action in sequence e.g. kisses dolly, puts dolly in cot, covers dolly, rocks cot		Using 3 – 4 word phrases and simple sentences. Starting to use past tense e.g. 'me fallen over'	200 +	Starting to use sh, f, s occasionally

Please note this is a guideline, all children are individuals and develop at their own rate.



## Development of Speech & Language

Age	Looking & Listening	Symbolic Play	Understanding	Talking	Size of Vocabulary	Speech Sounds
3 years	Child can concentrate by looking OR listening. Can attend to adult's choice of activity for longer period, needing less frequent prompts	As above: Pretend action in sequence e.g. kisses dolly, puts dolly in cot, covers dolly rocks cot	Understands instructions containing 3 key words e.g. 'give the <u>cup</u> and <u>spoon</u> to <u>teddy</u> ' Understands basic describing words e.g. big, cold and position words e.g. in, under Understands some time concepts e.g. yesterday, this morning Beginning to understand negatives and plurals e.g. can't, cats	Using 4 – 6 word sentences, able to use most sentence types. Over-generalisation of grammatical rules occurring.	500 – 1000	All vowel sounds are present. Consonant sounds like s, f, sh, z, v, ch are used in simple contexts
4 years	Attention is still single channelled but child can control their focus and shift from listening to doing. The child begins to 'take on board' spoken instructions related to a task he / she is engaged upon without needing to interrupt the task to look at the speaker	Co-operative play with other children beginning to occur	Understands instructions containing 4 key words e.g. 'put the <u>little brick</u> <u>under</u> the <u>box</u> ' Understands questions starting with 'when?' and 'why?'	Average sentence length is 5 – 5 words but uses some longer utterances. Asking lots of wh- questions	1000 - 1500	Uses s, f, sh etc consistently. Still reducing consonant clusters e.g. sp, fl, shr
5 years	Integrated looking and listening well established and maintained from 5 +		Understands everyday conversations unless ambiguous. Beginning to understand jokes, puns. Developing powers of reasoning and criticism.	8 + words in a sentence. Can relate simple stories. Uses past, present and future tense	1500 -2000	Using most sounds correctly except th, r, more difficult clusters and multi-syllabic words e.g. squirrel, escalator

Please note this is a guideline, all children are individuals and develop at their own rate.



## Typical Language Development



The pyramid model from the Communication Handbook demonstrates **how** children typically acquire language.

**Interaction** – This starts from birth. Babies have a drive to interact with their environment and crucially with us! Whatever a child hears/sees/does helps them make sense of the world. Above all else a child needs to become motivated to communicate – will learn that their actions can make something change.

**Attention and Listening** – This develops alongside other skills. Without this, the child will not be able to match the language he hears to what he is doing. A child's attention and listening is fleeting at first and children can only attend to their own choice of activity progressing to an ability to focus on an activity and then on you and then back to the activity. By Primary 1, they should be able to listen while continuing an activity.

**Play** – This is the way the child learns about the world around him. Children need to have a variety of experiences to help them acquire language for thinking, learning and communicating. E.g., people play, cause/effect, construction, pretend, outside/physical, songs and stories, messy/craft etc. Pretend-play is particularly important. The symbolic nature of play is linked to the development of symbolic thinking which is essential for language development. Many children with language difficulties have problems with pretend play. Children re-create what they experience through their play e.g., making a cup of tea; they learn a toy cup stands for/represents a real cup. Turn taking is an important skill for having balance successful conversations and is first learnt through play

**Understanding** - There is risk that children's ability to understand is overestimated. This is because a child can follow instructions using non-verbal understanding, e.g., facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, following cues from the situation or routine, or copying others. But they might not be able to understand verbal instructions/cues. Children need to understand a word before they can say it with true meaning. Example being in a foreign country

**Talking** – This is the child's own use of words and sentences. Before talking, the child will express themselves through non-verbal communication e.g., cooing, babbling, facial

expressions, pointing, gesture. Children need a variety of words – nouns, verbs, adjectives - before can make a sentence.

**Speech Sounds** – This is the ‘icing on the cake’. It is the area of language that is most obvious when we consider the development of communication, but the foundations must be in place before this is targeted. Speech sounds also develop in stages. Generally, a 3-4 year old should be intelligible but it can take until 7 years to have a complete sound system. The stages are inter-dependent, and each stage continues to develop as the child moves up to the next level.

### **Communication Online Module**

This resource will support practitioners to further explore the typical way that children develop language and communication skills, providing strategies that practitioners can use to help children explore and achieve their potential.

<https://sway.office.com/IKkvz6hfCn01vwkc?ref=Link>

*When I am...*

*... a baby*

- *It's important to attune to and mirror my gestures, facial expressions and sounds to understand me and help me develop my communication skills*
- *Respond to my verbal and non-verbal interactions using rich language and vocabulary recognising that my babbling is a form of communication*
- *Provide opportunities for me to be involved in varied conversations which may include daily routines and events*
- *Connect with personal stories created with my family through familiar photos, words, and objects, engaging with the senses*

*... a toddler*

- *Give me opportunities to mirror and listen to adults and other children using gestures, sound, and visual cues. This encourages me to participate in and explore language*
- *Enrich and extend my verbal and non-verbal interactions using familiar and unfamiliar language and vocabulary*

*... a young child*



- *Provide different opportunities for me to express my thoughts, feelings and opinions and consider those of others, with adults and my peers in 1-1 situations and in small groups*
- *Continue to enrich and extend my verbal and non-verbal interactions using familiar and unfamiliar language and vocabulary, relating to my home and life experiences*

*Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 72 – 73*



## Early Oral Language – what next?

The next steps in language we identify with our children may be immediate and specific – building vocabulary or language structures, for example. Often this is on-going and part of our daily interactions. It may also inform our responsive planning. There are elements of practice that are important for all children, as in the guidance above from *Realising the Ambition*.



If we identify the early acquisition of language as a significant area for development for an individual child, we need to plan for this with the needs of the child in mind. We will need a clear picture of the child's strengths and areas needing support, and targeted interventions may be needed.

## Early Language in Play Settings - E-LIPS Assessment Tool

eLIPS was developed in a partnership that continues to link Fife Council Early Learning & Childcare, Dundee University Psychology and Fife NHS Speech & Language Therapy.

The early identification of language difficulties is key to closing the attainment gap and eLIPS has helped staff share their knowledge to raise awareness about early language development. eLIPS is a reliable and meaningful screening tool based on observing children's play in the moment through a language development lens which in turn allows practitioners to identify possible areas of language acquisition and development that a child may require more support with to overcome any barriers to learning or where a child may require more challenge to reach their full potential. The tool should promote and inform professional discussions about a child's language development to support the planning of holistic next steps by utilising universal strategies and where appropriate plan targeted interventions to meet the needs of individual children.

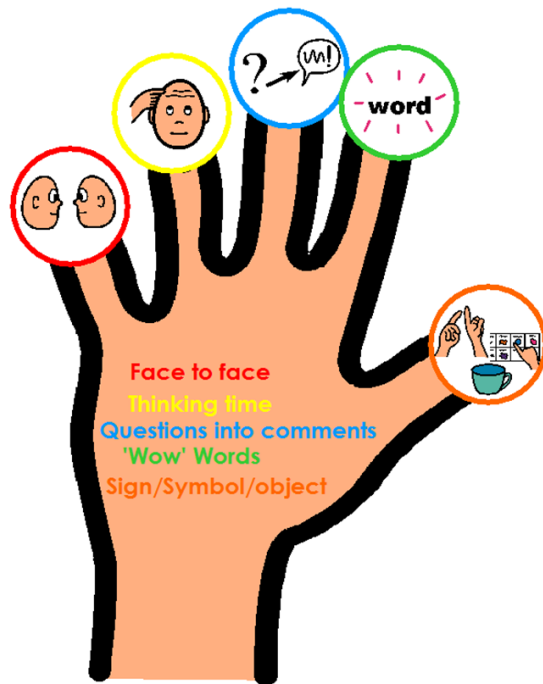
The eLIPS Interventions Toolkit supports the planning of next steps by connecting the use of eLIPS with language and communication support from early years staff and Speech and Language Therapy.

e-LIPS refresher Sway...

<https://sway.office.com/4JP8VTUbz48wWiwb?ref=Link>

It is important that our learning environments motivate all children, including bilingual children, to communicate so that we are not underestimating children's skills in communication. Getting to know all our families and ensuring that our interactions, experiences, and spaces are culturally inclusive will all help to make children feel safe and motivated to communicate.





The Communication High 5 provides support for children's communication and language development. The 5 top tips of face to face, thinking time, questions into comments, wow words and the use of signs and symbols provide universal support to develop children's communication skills.

NHS Fife's Communication Handbook sits alongside the High 5 strategies and offers suggestions for more targeted support.

You may wish to consider how the High 5 strategy and handbook is used in your setting – do you see the strategies being used? Do practitioners make use of the communication handbook? Do we have visual prompts displayed in our playrooms that support practitioners in using the strategy?

For developing bilingual children, getting a picture of their oral skills in their first language will inform how we respond and plan for them. Typically developing bilingual learners do not need targeted intervention as their needs can be met through high quality provision. Developing bilingual learners can only 'soak up' new language if they have enough opportunities to understand and practise it. This can mean planning for children to try out new language in meaningful and motivating contexts.

Children learning through EAL can sometimes seem quite socially fluent when in fact, their level of English may not match with their general developmental level. As their thoughts become increasingly complex, developing bilingual children continue to need to learn the new language needed for processing those ideas. It is important that we continue to support bilingual children to learn, even if that child seems 'fluent.'

### Request for Speech and Language Therapy Assistance

If you have concerns about a child or young person's speech, language and communication

Parents and carers can phone the Advice line on Tuesdays between 14:00-16:00 and Thursdays between 10:00-12:00 to speak to a therapist for reassurance or advice. Advice line: 01592 226699

Education colleagues can phone our professionals enquiry line on Mondays and Thursday between 14:00 – 16:00 to speak to a speech and language therapist. Enquiry line: 01383 674055

If you have tried all the above and still have concerns about a child or young person's speech, language and communication you can make a request for assistance.

### What is a Request for Assistance?

Anyone can make a Request for Assistance if permission has been given by the parent or carer. Parents/carers as well as professionals, can complete and return a Request for Assistance form

It is more helpful if the 'most concerned person' completes the form as they have the information about the concern and how it might be impacting on the child.

You can access the form [here](#)

### What might happen next when a Request for Assistance is received?

Our first step is to have a conversation with the person who knows and understands the child and the situation best, for example with the child's parent or carer, health visitor, early years key worker or teacher. This helps us to find out more about what is happening for the child so that, together, we can work out the best next steps. This conversation can take place by phone, video call or be face to face with a therapist in clinic and it is just for the requester - we don't need to see the child at this stage. We'll see them later in the process if we need to.

· We may simply offer reassurance that the child's communication is at the appropriate level and that they are being supported in the right ways. We may suggest specific advice or give information about groups and services in the community better placed to help.

· Sometimes we may need to see the requester/parent and child to decide on the next steps. Plans are made together and sessions may take place in clinic, at home or in some cases in an education setting.

## NHS 'Let's Talk' Website

There are useful information and ideas sheets to share with families, including some translated into other languages. For example:

- [BABIES AND DUMMIES](#)
- [BABY TIPS 0-18 MONTHS](#)
- [SHARING BOOKS WITH YOUR CHILD](#)
- [SHARING SONGS AND RHYMES WITH YOUR CHILD](#)
- [FOLLOWING YOUR CHILD'S LEAD](#)
- [SPECIAL TIME](#)
- [TALKING AND PLAYING TOGETHER](#)
- [WAYS TO ENCOURAGE EARLY COMMUNICATION SKILLS](#)
- [HELPING YOUR CHILD TO LISTEN](#)
- [GROWING UP WITH MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE](#)
- [STAMMERING](#)
- [TURN SCREEN TIME INTO TALKING TIME](#)

## Relating to Others Early Language Development - Questions for Discussion and Reflection



- Can you describe how practitioners create a warm, loving environment through the interactions, experiences and spaces provided for children in your setting?
- How do practitioners make children feel welcome in your setting?
- How is diversity of languages and cultures effectively reflected in the interactions, experiences and spaces provided within your setting?
- In what ways do practitioners support children to understand their emotions?
- How could playroom team members develop opportunities for practitioners to observe and support each other to develop a consistent approach to high quality language and communication interactions with children?

- List the meaningful opportunities for children to talk with your setting?
- Describe what opportunities practitioners provide for children to hear and use new vocabulary?



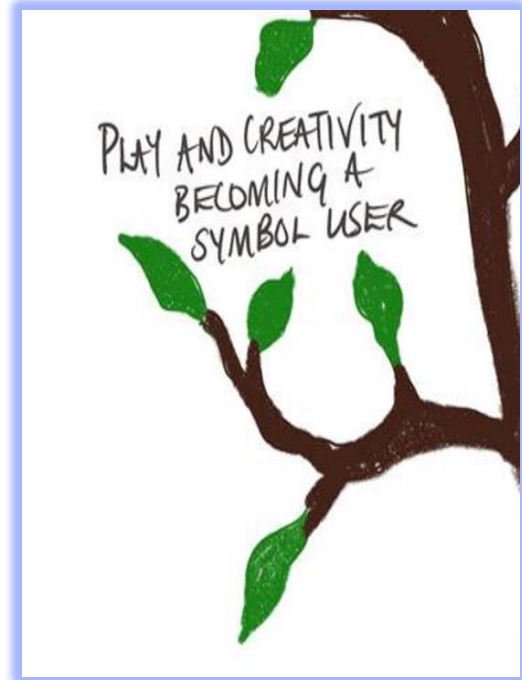
- What is available to support communication within your setting and how do you assure these supports are used consistently?
- Explain how strategies to support communication are shared with parents and carers to involve them in their child's development?
- How can you improve on the information gathered from ELIPS to inform next steps to develop early oral language for individual children and overall, within the setting?

## Chapter 4 - Play and Creativity in Becoming a Symbol Maker and User

We can see development happening most clearly in children's play. Very young babies might seem mostly to be in their own world, but gradually through the first weeks and months they begin to interact more obviously with their caregivers, exchanging smiles and expressions.

Toddlers will play with us, and often they will play 'alongside' each other in what is sometimes called parallel play. As children develop, they become more and more social, eventually taking part in long play sequences with different roles and shared understandings of rules.

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 72 – 73



In terms of communication, language, and literacy, 'Play opens up the world of literacy in ways that are appropriate and right for young children.'

Bruce and Spratt quote research that identifies 'the essential elements for a child's journey into literacy.' These include understanding a narrative, acting it out, developing a rich vocabulary, phonological awareness, sequencing events, developing a storyline, creating characters with individual points of view, and resolving the story with an ending. 'All these elements develop through the free flow play of children and are hugely helpful...for their later skill in creative and factual writing as well as for their reading comprehension and recognition.' (Bruce and Spratt, 2011)

When we talk about free-flow play, we sometimes mean free access to outdoors and indoors. However, Tina Bruce describes it as 'play that flows in a sustained way.'

### The 12 Features of Free-Flow Play:

- Look out for the way children use first-hand experiences they have had.
- Note how children stay in control as they play, making up their own rules in order to do so.
- Look at how children make or find play props.

- *Children cannot be made to play. They choose to play and cannot do this to order. They also choose to join others in play, or to initiate play spontaneously.*
- *Children rehearse the future as they create role play and possible scenarios.*
- *Play might involve pretending.*
- *Children might choose to play alone.*
- *Children and children, or children and adults, might play together, either in parallel or co-operatively in pairs or groups.*
- *Every player will have his or her personal play agenda, although he or she may not be aware of it!*
- *Rich play means that a child will be deeply engaged, difficult to distract, and wallowing in what they are doing.*
- *Children try out their learning, skills, and competencies as they play. Play is not so much about learning new things as celebrating new learning.*
- *As children play, they co-ordinate their ideas, feelings, and thoughts, and they make sense of their relationships with family, friends, and the culture[s] in which they are growing up. Play that is integrated in these ways flows in a sustained way, which is why it is called free-flow play. (Bruce, 1991, updated 2008)*

Support at home can make a significant difference to a child's learning and development. Sometimes the link between play and learning is not clear for parents and carers. The way we share play experiences and learning in our settings can really help families to understand why play is important and how best to support their child's play and learning at home.

The songs, rhymes, and stories that we share with our children as they grow and develop, help them to build an understanding of telling a story. The way we give our children time, and listen and respond to them, reassures children that their own stories are just as important as the stories that the adults tell. Language, songs, rhymes, and stories carry our cultures. Our children need to be able to find stories that reflect the various aspects of themselves and their families. What is a favourite story at home? Is it one in a book, or is it one told orally by a parent or carer? Is it a story made up by the child around a favourite toy?

When we tell stories, we also need to be aware that we are shaping children's ideas and attitudes. We need to value stories that show how diverse our world is, challenge stereotypes and reflect on our own unconscious bias in the way we share rhymes and stories.



**Narrative - ‘a spoken or written account of connected events’** Oxford English Dictionary

‘Connected events’ can be any sequence of actions from washing hands to the plot of ‘Goldilocks and the Three Bears.’ Understanding narrative is a key element in children’s play that supports them to develop literacy skills. Talking about routines and remembering experiences, as well as making sure children have opportunities to create stories throughout the nursery, are all important in supporting children to understand narrative.



There are areas and resources that directly support children to engage in role play by themselves, with us, and with each other - house corner, block play area, small world. However, children create stories wherever they go indoors and outdoors. Sand and water play, loose parts, designing and making, drawing, running, moving, climbing – all these experiences and more, can develop into a story.



Throughout our routines, experiences, and spaces, we should be aware of the important messages behind the resources and opportunities we offer. Do they reflect a variety of realities regarding gender, ethnicity, ability, and family structure, for example?

*When I am...*

*... a baby*

- *Connect with personal stories created with my family through familiar photos, words, and objects, engaging with the senses*

*... a toddler*

- *Provide opportunities for role-play which combine familiar and new environments, routines, and objects to deepen my language experience*
- *help me connect to stories on a personal and imaginative level, developing an understanding that text conveys meaning*

*... a young child*



- *Extend role-play – building on my life experiences and interests, encouraging interactions, conversations, and new vocabulary*

Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 72 – 73

## What Can We Do to Help Children Develop Their Skills in Symbolic Play?

Make sure children have the freedom to create and imagine everywhere in our settings, using any resource they need to support their own stories.

As part of everyday interactions as we listen and talk to children, there are key ideas that will help them to develop their understanding and expression of narrative sequence; being able to follow or describe a series of events and the language to make it rich and exciting.

- Tune into what children are telling us and reflect it back to them, using the language, *first, next, then*
- Encourage children to follow a routine such as snack time, again using the words *first, next*, and support this with visuals, reduced language, Signalong where needed
- Reflect on photos of something we have done together - talking about the photos and working out what order they go in - again using the language of order
- Support children to extend their role play - comment on what they are doing, using 'I wonder...', join them in play and take on a role when invited
- Create rich experiences with books including revisiting books that children enjoy, and support them to retell the story and talk about what comes next
- We might use 'wh' words to help guide and expand the narrative sequence of events. Who is in the story? Where are they? What is happening?
- We might model and encourage vocabulary that describes or enriches the narrative – words describing actions/people/places/objects/attributes and feelings. We can demonstrate or use pictures to make sure children understand the meanings of the words and we can use these unfamiliar words repeatedly with children so that they are confident in using them independently.

Children sometimes tell stories that do not follow a typical sequence - what happens first, next, and at the end. Their focus is the imaginative flow of ideas. Valuing these stories supports children to see themselves as storytellers. We can tell our own stories too, modelling a simple narrative. Supporting children to understand narrative structure is part of the process but does not need to take over the imaginative flow.



## The Development of Symbolic Play – Children Learning to Use Symbols

Writing is a symbolic system. For children to become writers they need to develop their symbolic thinking.

*When a child begins to use words and phrases, symbolic thinking has opened up to that child who can then think about the past, present and future.' (Bruce and Spratt, 2011)*

*Children begin to understand that their marks on paper convey a message. (Mayer, 2007)*

Vygotsky saw “that make-believe play, drawing and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process.” Worthington in Broadhead, Howard, and Wood [2010:130] They all require children to develop their understanding and use of symbols.

Symbolic play is an important part of children developing their symbolic thinking. In symbolic play, a child will use one object to stand for another.

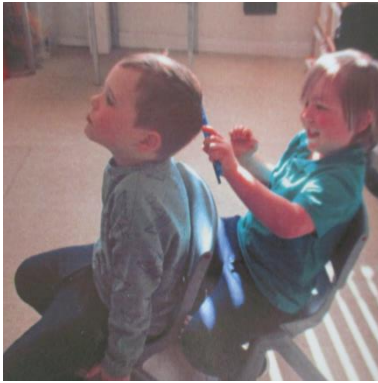
This means as practitioners we need to support children’s developing symbolic play and ensure that they have opportunities for rich imaginative play. This will support many areas of their development such as social skills, language, and emotional regulation. It will also support children to develop their symbolic thinking where:

- One thing standing for another
- The symbols they create in this play will be personal and meaningful to them
- They create meaning together with their peers, so that everyone shares the same understanding e.g., so that everyone involved in the play knows that the curtain rings are pasta

Imaginative play is also very important for the opportunity it gives children to develop the sophistication of their language use and interaction. In imaginative play children will use longer sentences than in other conversations. They will also try out new vocabulary to see how they can use it effectively. They negotiate the play, who is doing what, and their plans for what will happen, they need to explain themselves to each other.

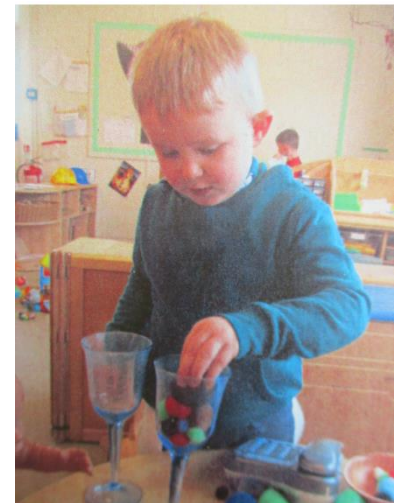
Sensitive attuned adults will know when to observe and when to support the play, encouraging and extending all areas of development including language and the development of shared meanings and representations.

Another benefit of rich opportunities for imaginative play is the way it allows children to experiment with many of the skills they will need to become authors. They can experiment with the narrative and characters in familiar stories as well as the narrative and characters in their lives. They can revisit stories and retell them or change them. It is a significant way that children develop their understanding of story, characters and how they can be communicated to others.



In the example of symbolic play on the left, the children are using a Playmobil ladder as they role play hairdressers.

In the example on the right, the child is using open-ended resources – pompoms - to represent juice in the house.



“There is a direct link between children’s ability to make meanings in play, and to use marks and symbols to signify meanings.”  
Worthington in Broadhead, Howard, and Wood [2010:128]



And in this example, the child made a bird house and is now using a loose part to watch for the birds to arrive.

Symbolic play is so powerful because:

- The symbols that children create in this play are personal and meaningful for them
- The meaning is shared with their peers
- Sensitive adults will be able to support the development of these shared meanings

In the early years, supporting the development of children’s symbolic thinking and play is wider than just imaginative play. It involves supporting a wide range of play experiences and representation which includes block play, construction, drawings, paintings, making models, music, and dancing.

Tina Bruce (1996) looks at representation as part of what she calls “the network of learning”. She describes representation as having the following features.

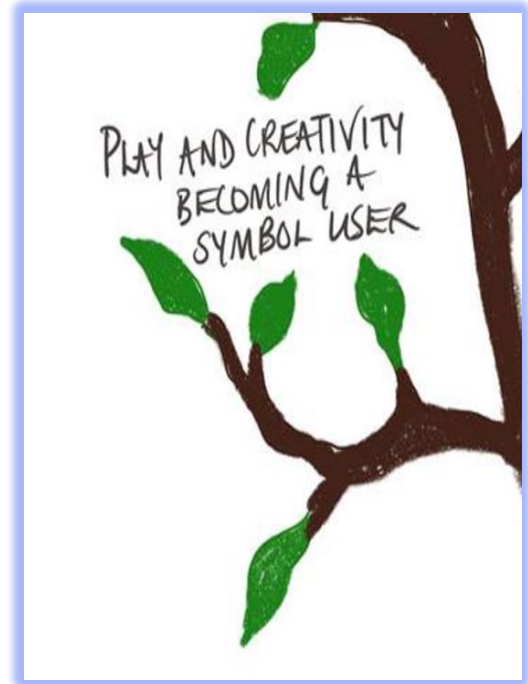
- It supplies a way for us to keep hold of experiences. Children do this by making products which can be kept e.g., drawings, paintings, and models
- It can include songs, dances, and stories. These can be kept by being written down and they can be repeatedly performed.
- Ideas can also be kept by talking about them. They can be written down

Environments For Symbolic Play:	Imaginative Play and Language Development	Imaginative Play and Becoming an Author
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how you set up an environment to support symbolic play</li> </ul>	<p>Remember:</p> <p>In imaginative play, children will use longer</p>	<p>In imaginative play children can:</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is currently going well in your setting?</li> <li>• What could you develop next?</li> </ul>	<p>sentences than in other conversations.</p> <p>They will also try out new vocabulary to see how they can use it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore what it is like to be different characters</li> <li>• Explore and experiment with stories and narrative</li> <li>• Revisit stories and retell them or change them</li> </ul>
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## Play And Creativity in Becoming a Symbol Maker and User - Questions for Discussion and Reflection

- In what ways do you support the development of social play?
- What features of free flow play are evident in your setting?
- How do you encourage parents to become involved in children's play?
- How do you provide opportunities for children to revisit stories, retelling them and changing them using stimulating resources?
- Can you explain how you take time to listen and observe children during symbolic play?
- List all the opportunities both indoors and outdoors, which children have to use their imagination.
- How do you perceive the adult's role in supporting the flow of children's imaginative ideas?
- Discuss the differences between symbolic play and imaginative play and the benefits of each?





## Chapter 5 - A Form of Developing Representation – Mark Making, Drawing and Writing



The development of writing is not easily separated within a child's holistic development. It is a complex process and is linked to many other areas of children's learning and development.

Much development needs to happen before children become writers. Among the significant developments that precede writing are:

- Young children need to develop their oral language and talk
- The child becoming a symbol user - e.g., in play using a brick to be a telephone
- The development of representation as a way of keeping hold of experiences or exploring them. This includes representation in play as well as drawing and emergent writing.

As adults supporting this complex process, we need to be knowledgeable in all these areas so that we can supply the best learning environment, learning experiences and interactions which will ensure that children develop as enthusiastic and motivated writers.

*“Writing is one of those marvellous areas of development and learning where we find out and understand as we go.” Bruce and Spratt P86*

Children's marks are valuable. Everything they produce from their earliest marks is part of their journey to becoming a fully fluent writer.

Some families may value the product over the process – precise marks over experimentation. Knowing your families will help open conversations and create a shared understanding about children's developing writing.

Children start making marks when they are incredibly young, and they need lots of time and space to experiment and progress from early exploration to early 'scribbles' to writing a name. The developmental and learning milestones capture some moments in the development of fine motor control and increasing detail in marking-making like this:

From babies to children	3 – 6 months	Watches movement of own hands, plays with own hands
	6 – 12 months	Uses whole hand in pincer grip and passes from one hand to another. Picks up small objects
	12 – 18 months	Holds a crayon in a primitive grasp and scribbles.
	18 – 24 months	Draws circles and dots
	Around 2 years	Shows interest in mark making using a tool e.g., pen, pencil, paint brush, chalk

Around 3 years	Cuts paper with scissors and will pick up a pencil in preferred hand and copy a circle and V shape <i>[make circle shapes and v shapes as they draw in play]</i>
Around 4 years	Develops fine motor skills across different activities and experiences
Around 5 years	Demonstrates ability to draw a person [and copy a triangle] <i>[demonstrates ability to add detail in drawings in play]</i>
5 years plus	<i>Applies emerging writing skills in real life and imaginary contexts</i>

Children are individuals and they find their own pathway through their learning. This is a broad-brush overview of roughly where you might expect a child to be in terms of their development as they grow. It is not prescriptive.

*'...encouraging an exploration of making marks, from the earliest age, develops an understanding of print as a form of communication and expression of ideas and feelings.*

*Understanding the link between gross and fine motor skill development is crucial for practitioners. Children are better equipped to make fine motor movements if they also have adequate opportunity to develop their gross motor skills. Both are linked.*

*In the development of writing, children need to not only be provided with a wide range of mark-making opportunities when they are small, but also be able to explore other experiences such as manipulating clay or using peg boards, completing jigsaws, or sewing to fully develop the small muscles in their hands.*

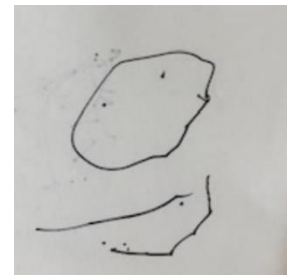
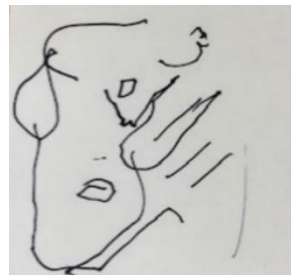
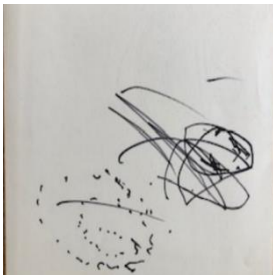
*When children make marks, other children and adults are the natural audience for their meaning and giving sensitive responses will encourage the child to see their marks and print as purposeful.'*

*Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 70*



It is important that we value the marks that our children make, collect their drawings, talk to them about the process and supply a wide range of opportunities and purposes for them to see themselves as “writers.”

Children need to develop both physical skills and symbolic understanding in order to become writers. There is a progression of developing detail as they mark-make. Until children include detail in their drawings, they are not ready to take on formal handwriting.



### The Difference Between Drawing and Writing

Drawing is an open system of sign creation. Children are free to express themselves in any way that they choose. They will choose what is meaningful to them.

*“Sign creation refers to children’s scribbling and drawing as they creatively express themselves in ways that are not restricted by rules.” (Mackenzie, 2018)*

Writing is a closed system of sign use. Writing is defined by rules. It is a closed system of representation.

*Mackenzie refers to this as children becoming skilled in sign use, which means using written English ‘in conventional forms of communication.’ (Mackenzie, 2018)*

Drawing is a powerful form of communication. Children also often tell stories through their drawing.

In a drawing a young child can communicate so much, before they can use conventional writing to communicate their message. As they develop their ability to write, their thoughts and what they might want to communicate are usually more complex than their ability to write. This means that by using both modes of representation a much more complex message can be communicated.

*Drawings add power to the written message. It is important that children are encouraged to combine these two modes of message-making while they develop their skills in writing. It is difficult to create complex messages with writing alone when you still have so much to learn about the conventions of written language [e.g., written sentence structure, letter formation, the alphabetic principle,*

*conventions of print, spelling, punctuation]’ (Mackenzie and Skull, 2018)*

For practitioners working with young children being alongside children as they draw allows us to listen in to the talk that often goes alongside drawing. This gives us a window into the meaning that the child is communicating. Similarly encouraging conversation about their drawings or multimodal drawing and writing helps us tune into the complexity of the communication the child is engaged in. In this way we also value the diverse ways children communicate their meanings, which is an important part of supporting each child on their own individual journey.

As young children learn to write, what they want to communicate is usually more complex than what they can write in words. This means that the multimodal representation of drawing and writing together allows children to communicate more complexity.

#### What does this mean for your practice?

High quality learning happens when children are motivated and are exploring and experimenting with ideas and materials that are of interest to them. This means we need a rich variety of contexts for children to explore representation in ways that are meaningful to them. We do this by giving children the opportunities to purposefully represent, scribble, draw and write in lots of contexts and areas throughout the indoor playroom and outdoors.

Bruce and Spratt write about “*layers in the way that our understanding of print develops*” They use the example of a duck and describe six layers from real life experiences to conventional letters.

- Real life visits to see ducks in the park
- 3D objects that represent that experience [toy duck]
- 2D early mark-making and the creation of shapes that remind child of experiences
- 2D intentional creation of shapes and representations
- Emergent writing to represent ‘duck’
- Conventional letters to represent ‘duck’

The development of symbolic understanding has also been expressed as a continuum from concrete to abstract.



Children need lots of time to play and explore before they can fully grasp that one thing can represent another. They need time and space to experiment in a rich environment in order to really understand that print carries meaning, and that they can create shared meanings through the marks that they make.

*'Understanding comes before competence and performance in writing, as well as before every aspect of learning' Bruce and Spratt P85*

*'Shopping lists, messages and greetings cards written in the presence of children are important everyday situations where they can see people writing and realise that what we say, think and feel can be written down.'* Bruce and Spratt

Some children may start their experiments in writing from the right-hand side because this is what they have seen the adults in their home do. This is the correct place to start for some languages such as Arabic and Urdu. It is important that there are a variety of scripts across the setting to engage and inspire children. Some examples might be

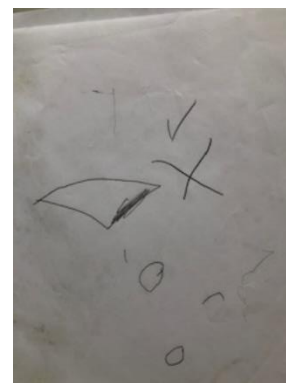
- words written by families themselves as part of a welcoming entrance
- packaging and print in creative areas and home corners [parents/carers can be helpful with this]
- dual language books around the room.

Children need lots of opportunities, across the learning environment, to make meaning through their marks.

It is important to listen to our children to hear the meanings that they are making as they draw.

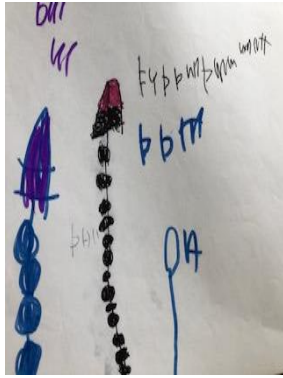


Drawing on the floor with large paper.  
'This is lots of spaceships blasting off!

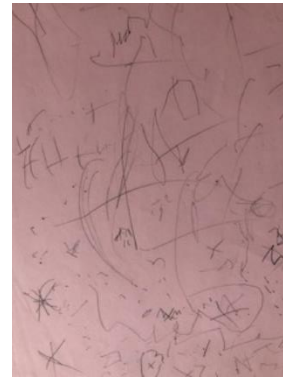


This is a sheet from a clipboard. It is difficult to make sense of until you have the child's words: 'That's good' [tick mark] 'That's bad' [cross mark]. The context was role-play in the Big Bricks.





This drawing was done outside, as part of an investigation into kite-making. "That's two kites," pointing to the larger one with the shorter tail "That's the baby one." Pointing at the letters, "That says two kites."




This is another clipboard sheet. The children were role-playing mum with a baby [doll] and a Health Visitor. The marks represent the examination carried out by the Health Visitor, measuring, weighing, turning upside down and generally checking the overall wellbeing of the baby doll. The child role-playing the Health Visitor had a new baby in the house.



And this is a representation of a favourite activity at home. 'A computer game – Super Mario!'

Without the children's own meanings, we would have a limited understanding of what we were seeing.

## Examples of what you might see young children doing – drawing and writing

<p>Making marks</p>  <p>I make random marks on the page.</p> <p>This might include: My pencil often does not leave the paper</p> <p>Making dots</p>	<p>Beginning to control</p>  <p>I am making marks with greater control and shapes or patterns may appear e.g. circular marks, squiggles, strokes and controlled lines (vertical, horizontal, zigzags)</p>	<p>Shapes</p>  <p>Recognisable shapes are beginning to appear in my drawings</p>	<p>Beginning to represent</p>  <p>I am beginning to represent the world around me</p>	<p>Faces</p>  <p>I draw faces, sometimes with arms and legs coming from them</p>	<p>Bodies</p>  <p>I now draw bodies, and sometimes add hands and feet</p>	<p>More detail</p>  <p>My drawings are becoming more representational of many things in my world</p>	<p>Drawings are detailed</p>  <p>My drawings are purposeful and express my ideas</p>
 <p>I make marks to represent writing.</p>	 <p>I write long strings of letters in random order.</p>	  <p>I can write my own name</p>	 <p>I try to write my own words by combining letters</p>	 <p>I use my knowledge of sounds and letter to write words</p>	 <p>I am beginning to write common words.</p> <p>I am starting to form sentences in my writing.</p>		

## A Form of Developing Representation – Mark Making, Drawing and Writing - Questions for Discussion and Reflection



- What is the adult's role in supporting the drawing process?
- How do you provide rich meaningful contexts for writing?
- Discuss the differences between drawing and writing.
- Reflect on the observations you have made about children's mark making and consider if your next steps have been appropriate.

## Chapter 6 - Importance of Sound, Rhythm and Rhyme

*“Even in the first month, babies react to the sounds around them –loud sounds, particular music, the voices of their parents and close family. This will be important later on, when they learn to read and write.*

*Literacy is rooted in being able to discriminate between similar sounds, where they come from and how they are made, with increasing awareness. Phonological awareness ‘refers to the ability to hear sounds’ (Mallett, 2005:243). (Bruce and Spratt, 2011)*



*“The journey begins with noticing and listening to sounds and conversations around them.” P70 “When I am a baby... - Listen and react to sounds in the environment with me. - Use natural resources, musical instruments, books and toys which make sounds and noise with me, encouraging me to listen for and distinguish between sounds.” “When I am a toddler... - Encourage me to explore, distinguish and react to sounds in the environment with you. - Play with language - encouraging me to have fun investigating and experimenting with words, rhymes, songs and musical instruments.” “When I am a young child... - Encourage me to notice patterns, similarities and differences in sounds and words. - Play with language - encouraging me to have fun investigating and experimenting with words, rhymes, songs and musical instruments, drawing attention to familiar words, phrases and names in my environment”*

*Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 72 -74*

The ability to engage with Sound Rhythm and Rhyme requires phonological awareness. There is a progression in the development of these skills.

The definition below and the developmental continuum on the right of this page are from “The Highland Literacy Resource”. The continuum spans Early Level.

What is it?

- Phonological awareness is the ability to recognise and work with sounds in spoken language. Phonological Awareness refers to sounds, not letters. It is spoken not written.

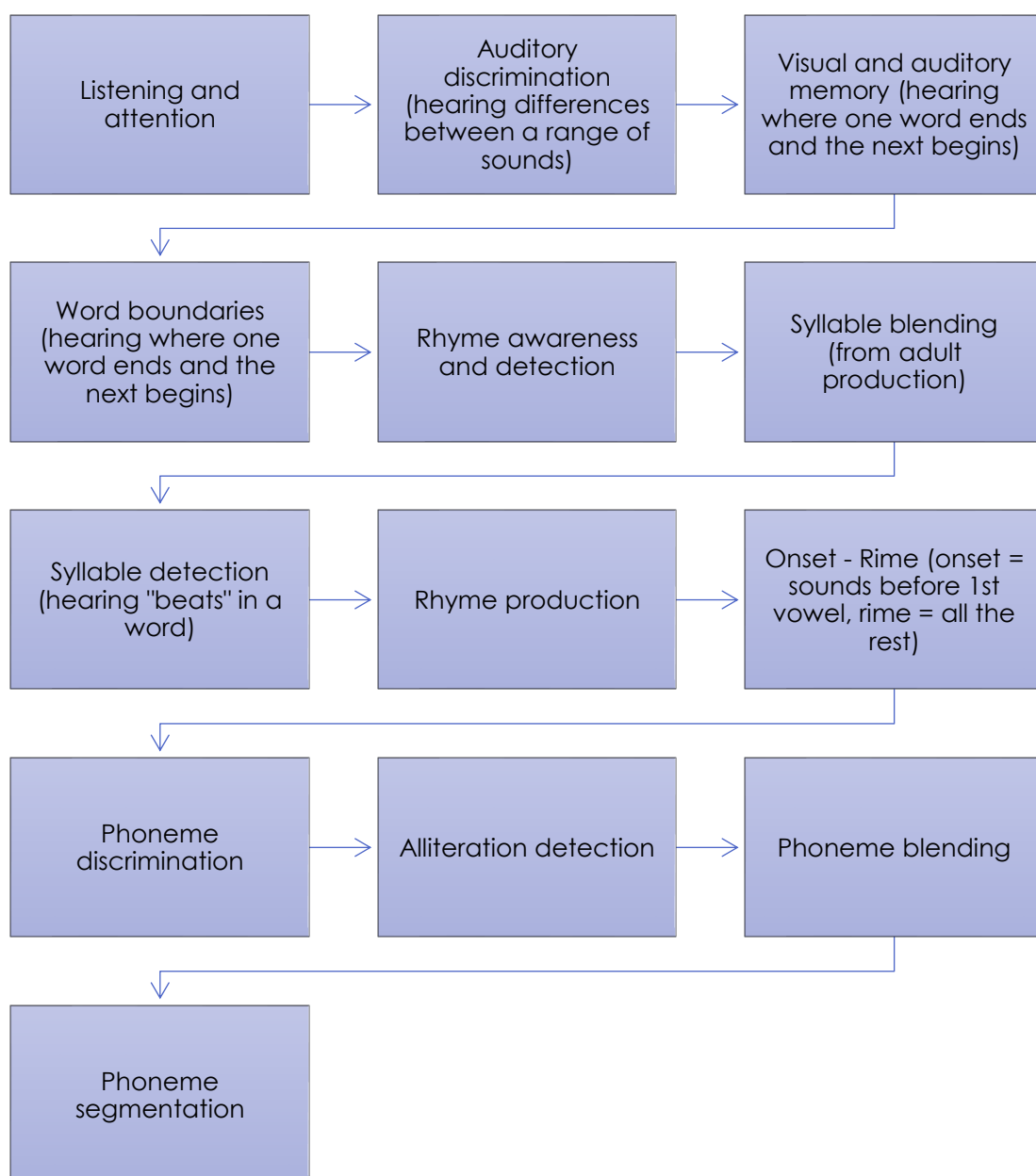
Why is it important?

- Phonological awareness is the foundation for learning to read and spell.

## How do we develop it?

- Some children develop phonological awareness through day-to-day interactions, but others need explicit input [through play where possible]. When planning for phonological awareness in ELC settings, practitioners can focus on:
  - Hearing different sounds in the environment
  - Hearing words in a sentence
  - Rhyme and rhythm

The following development order is not completely linear as children continue to refine earlier skills whilst learning alter skills. Remember to take a holistic view of each child and be flexible to skip or review stages as required.





Children develop and learn at their own pace, and we need to make sure our expectations are appropriate for each individual child.

## Listening and Attention

The first step is listening and attention - being able to focus on a specific sound or activity. It takes time for children to develop the ability to focus their attention. When they are very young, children's early attention can be fleeting, and they are easily distracted. As they grow, they begin to focus on a self-chosen activity but find distractions difficult to ignore. Eventually children develop the ability to respond to questions and focus on a task at the same time. We can support children's ability to listen and focus attention by making sure that our expectations are appropriate for that individual child. Focused attention is not compliance, and if a particular child needs to use all their energy to sit down with legs crossed in a group, then they won't have much attention left over to hear anything else.

[The Hanen approach](#) promotes strategies to support adults to be responsive to the child in front of them, and to support children to focus during interactions.

- Being Face-to-Face – you need to be face-to-face and down at the child's physical level to see and hear exactly what the child is doing or saying. This is particularly important for children with delayed language development who may send very subtle messages. Being face-to-face also lets the child know that you are interested, ready to interact and receive the message.
- Observing, Waiting and Listening – once you are face-to-face, you can observe what the child does and listen carefully. When you pause and wait for a few seconds while looking at the child without talking, it gives a hint that they can start an interaction with you by sending you a message. When that happens, you'll be ready to respond by saying something that matches the child's interest at that moment. Then the interaction can keep going, back and forth.
- Following the child's lead – this means staying focused on the child's interests and responding in ways that keep the interaction going back and forth, giving the child many opportunities to communicate. There are many ways to respond to the child's message. You can:
  - imitate sounds and actions
  - make a comment that describes what the child is doing or what you think the child is trying to tell you
  - join in and play, staying focused on what the child is doing and interested in

adapted from "Learning Language and Loving it", Hanen, 2002

## Auditory Discrimination

Auditory discrimination is the ability to recognise differences between sounds, including quite small differences. A child who has trouble with auditory discrimination may have difficulty telling the difference between words such as "sister" and "sitter" or "cat" and "cot."

Overall, the child can't distinguish between the slight differences in the sounds of words. In order to discriminate, children also need to be able to understand the concept of same/different.

## Auditory Memory

Auditory Memory is the ability to remember and process information that we hear. It involves taking in, processing and retaining what is said and then recalling it. The ability to process auditory information is essential if a child is to comprehend the spoken word. Being able to remember a sequence of speech sounds is essential for children as they learn to read and spell. In order to blend the word c-a-t, each letter sound must be kept in the child's memory long enough to be combined and then interpreted as a word. Auditory memory is also essential in enabling children to follow routines and instructions, when this is needed. 5-6 year olds who can recall three or more digits and sentences of eight or more words are considered to have adequate short-term auditory memory skills.

### What can we do to help children develop their skills in hearing and remembering differences between sounds?

#### 1. Sounds in the environment

- Sounds everywhere - Ask children what they can hear when we are out and about, eg the birds, the bus, etc.
- Making sounds - encourage children to discover and explore what sounds we can make when using our environment, e.g., making music by splashing in puddles at different speeds, tapping with a stick on different surfaces, using autumn leaves to produce crunching sounds, talking into a tube, echo in a tunnel etc
- In the story corner - when reading stories, children can join in with the sound parts, such as "splash", when the character falls in the water, or "knock, knock" when someone is knocking on the door. Use different voices for different characters, etc.
- Sound making provocations - provide objects that make a sound, e.g., vehicles, a clock, a ball, a phone, a bell, different animals etc. Can we make the noises? – 'broom broom, tick tock, boing' etc. Encourage everyone to explore and experiment making different sounds and voices. If we add a mirror, children can look at the shapes their mouths make for the different sounds
- Favourite Sounds: Ask the children to think about sounds that they do and do not like (e.g., stormy weather, barking dogs, car horns, crying babies) and to say why
- Making sounds using our bodies: encourage children to notice how they can make sounds using their voice, hands and other body parts to create body percussion. One person creates a pattern and everyone else copies e.g., 2 claps and 2 taps of the lap

#### 2. Listening and making sounds with instruments

- Responding with our whole bodies - offer a variety of music, scarves, streamers and musical instruments so that children can respond spontaneously to music
- Diverse musical cultures - Talk to your families about favourite music at home, especially where the music may be rooted in cultures other than the UK, and then share this with everyone
- Join in - play along with percussion instruments so children can feel different rhythms.

- Musical instruments - demonstrate how with one instrument you can make different sounds by playing it in different ways. e.g. a drum can be tapped with our fingers, banged with a whole hand or scratched.
- Explore - encourage children to explore different instruments and make music by experimenting with different sounds and how to make them quiet/loud, silence/sound, etc. Sing familiar songs in a quiet/loud voice, fast/slow, high/low, whispering then shouting.
- Feel the beat - sing and clap at the same time and encourage children to follow the beat
- Drum outdoors - with a beater, or a stick, encourage the children to explore the outdoor area and discover how different sounds are made by tapping or stroking with their beaters: a wooden door, a wire fence, a metal slide, and a few items such as pipes and upturned pots, etc. Which sound is their favourite? An adult or a child can act as conductor and raising a beater high in the air to signal to the children to play loudly and lowering it to signal playing softly.
- Explore Outdoors - set up a music area, (this can be with a combination of instruments and pots and pans etc) Encourage children to explore different sounds and how to make them quiet/loud, silence/sound, etc.
- Sound effects for favourite stories - ask children to think what kind of sounds they could make to enhance the story, then gather or make the instruments/objects to make these sounds.
- Sounds in a bag. (With the tune of Old Mac Donald) "Kelly has got a bag.... And in that bag, she has a...", in the bag put things that make a sound and children listen to it before you take it out of the bag. When children become familiar with it, they can guess what it is.
- Play sound matching games – fill pots with sand, dry rice, paperclips etc. Make sure there are 2 for each sound. Can the children match the pots by listening to the sound they make when shaken? Or gather two sets of identical instruments, one for the 'player' and one for the 'listener'. Turn back to back, or set up a barrier so the child cannot see which instrument the 'player' is playing. Can the child find the matching instrument?
- There is a lot of information on the Let's Talk website about supporting our youngest children to hear sounds as they develop language. <https://www.letstalk.scot.nhs.uk/>

## Word Boundaries

This is about hearing where one word ends, and another begins.

### What can we do to help children develop their skills in hearing the beginning and ending of words?

- Use alliteration such as 'wiggly wiggly worms – alliteration helps children to become aware of the sounds at the beginning of words'
- We can play games with words to support children to hear individual words. Use really simple phrases and sentences. Children need to experience success, so make sure your choice of words is appropriate for your children and speak very clearly. The example in Highland literacy is 'Today is Tuesday'.
- Say your short phrase aloud and hop/skip/jump for each word; collect a brick for each word and build a tower; use body percussion – one pat on our thighs/head/tummy etc for each word that we say

## Syllable Detection

Syllable Detection or syllabification is about hearing the number of syllables or 'beats' in a word.

What can we do to help children develop their syllable detection?

- Clap/stamp/hop/skip/jump to the syllables in children's names or familiar words

## Rhyming Skills

Firstly, children become aware and can detect rhyming in oral language. Following this, children begin to produce their own rhymes.

### Why share songs and rhymes?

Scottish Book Trust 'Research has shown that babies respond well to beat and rhythm of language even before they are born. They are in tune with their mother's heartbeat from an early stage, so a steady beat and the rhythm of songs and rhymes can be very soothing for them.

Songs and rhymes generally have a higher pitch that catches a baby's attention better than regular speech. We also tend to use a slower pace and lots of repetition in songs and rhymes. This makes it easier for children to hear the individual sounds that make up words.'  
Rhythm and rhyme: now's the time –

Scottish Book Trust Scottish Book Trust: Rhymes help brain development

Even while having fun, children's brains are working hard. When you share a rhyme with a child, they are learning lots of the building blocks for communication:

You will be making eye contact, creating opportunities for turn-taking, helping them to listen and pay attention, and of course, understand language too

Rhyming helps children start to work out how sounds are put together to create words, which helps with speech development and with reading as a child gets older

Rhythm can help children hear the syllable structure of words as well as separating words in sentences

Lots of the best rhymes have actions too. These are useful for us all when trying to remember words, but also encourage children's motor skills and coordination

[Joseph Coelho - Scottish Book Trust Why children love rhythm and rhyme - video](#)

The information and links on this page are all from the Scottish Book Trust. There are lots of suggestions and resources on their website, including links to the Bookbug song and rhyme library.

[Transforming lives through reading and writing - Scottish Book Trust Watch Now: Rhythm, Wiggle and Rhyme - Scottish Book Trust - video](#)

*"From an early age, children engage with rhyme, for example "Round and round the garden, like a teddy bear". "This means that looking, listening, and moving are being coordinated in the service of communication and language development."*

### What can we do to help children develop their rhyming skills?

During every day experiences make the most of opportunities that arise to have fun with rhyme and promote learning.

- Sing and say nursery rhymes through the day, not just at song time
- Support bilingual children to understand the poem or rhyme, and tune in to the sounds
- Ask families to share rhymes in the languages spoken at home
- Provide props for children to play with independently
- Share finger rhymes with children – these help with motor skills and help children with eye/hand coordination as well as with hearing and using rhymes.
- Use the wrong word in familiar rhymes and let the children correct you – twinkle twinkle little hat...
- Reading rhyming books - drawing children's attention to the words that sound the same at the end
- Encourage children to notice rhymes - "'cat' and 'hat' sound the same at the end"
- Make up silly rhymes with your own and children's names – e.g. Mandy Pandly, and encourage children to do the same
- Encourage children to join in with action songs.

### Moving on to Primary 1

Children need a lot of practice with recognising and working with the sounds in language before they are ready to develop their skills to become successful and confident phonics learners using a more structured approach.



## The Importance of Sound, Rhythm and Rhyme- Questions for Discussion and Reflection



- Is there a shared understanding of how children develop listening and attention skills?
- What opportunities are there for children to listen to different sounds across the provision, both inside and out? Are these opportunities free from unnecessary disruptions?
- Do you see evidence of these learning experiences through documentation?
- Are there opportunities for children to develop listening and attention skills through effective home learning links?
- How effectively do staff use interactions to support the varying needs of individual children to enable them to follow routines and instructions?
- Are there opportunities to have quality conversations about children's phonological awareness and how to support next steps?

## Chapter 7 – Print Awareness and Reading



Children need to develop and learn in all sorts of areas before they will be able to understand and apply the literacy skills of reading and writing that sit at the top of the literacy tree.

The previous sections of this guidance offer information and suggestions to support children's learning through interactions, experiences and spaces from the roots of the literacy tree upwards.

These rich learning experiences are needed for children to become confident and successful readers and writers.

*Interactions are at the heart of playful literacy development. Careful observations form part of building a picture of where a child is in their learning and determining what they need from us and the environment around them to assist further learning.*

*We should tap into what we know about the child's interests and family life to attach talking, listening, reading and writing to meaningful environments and experiences created within settings.*

*Our ability to use language unlocks all areas of learning. Children's language development thrives through exposure to environments of rich and diverse spoken language experiences. We grow a sense of purpose for the child by our own use of language and engaging them with a wide variety of stories, rhymes, songs, symbols and texts in different media all around them.*

*Building this purpose helps to nurture engagement and encourages children to see themselves as readers and writers. This doesn't just happen by chance.*

*Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 70*



Children's motivation to engage with print develops through all the processes we have looked at as we climbed the literacy tree, and ultimately it depends on their engagement with the idea that print is meaningful.

Children are surrounded by symbols from the moment they are born. It is widely acknowledged that the way they learn about meaningful symbols in their home life and communities is the foundation for building their awareness of print and learning the rules to make sense of the written word at school.

Children's enjoyment of mark-making and generating their own meanings through their symbols is closely linked to their developing understanding of printed words and pictures. These processes rest on all their experiences of communicating through listening and talking and the warm responsive relationships they have with others.

*'From an early age, children become aware of the print they see, and they try to figure out what it means. This marks the beginning of reading.... Developing an awareness of print is a process of discovery, and you can encourage this process in a very natural way.'* (Weitzman and Greenberg, 2020,)

We can help our children engage with books and stories when they are very young, long before they develop any conscious awareness of print.

Books and stories are a brilliant way to teach vocabulary and time spent sharing books with children will enrich their abilities in many ways. The context in pictures, lots of repetition of the same words will occur and you can focus your time and attention on talking, looking and listening together.

The following information is adapted from 'Up Up and Away' (CIRCLE Collaboration, Revised 2011) and provides lots of ideas to encourage children to enjoy books, and to make the most of sharing a story together.

### Timing And Engagement

- Make sure that children have lots of opportunities to look at books and join in with stories throughout the session
- For planned story opportunities, try to choose times where there is minimal disruption to free play.
- Support children to listen and focus, try to avoid interruptions during story opportunities.
- Take the story to the children. Stories can be read indoors and outdoors.



- Consider how best to engage the children in story opportunities to keep their attention. Some children might need to be more actively engaged.

### Let The Child Choose

- Let them explore: at first they may want to chew, bash or build towers with the books.
- Use books that are at the child's stage.
- Let them have fun!
- Look at pages in the order they want to.
- Copy each others' words and noises as you read.
- Let the child have a turn: prompt the child to 'read' the story back to you or to join in reading together.
- Let them repeat: read each book many times if the child wants to. \* Encourage but don't force children to repeat key words.

### Grab Their Attention

- Make sure the child's attention is on the book as you read and adapt if they lose interest.
- Emphasise certain words to help the child notice them by using your voice or actions with words.
- Talk about words shown in pictures; give words for what you see.
- Enjoy and focus on rhyming.
- Explain some useful words on most readings of the book, (e.g., 'He's searching for his Mum, that means he is looking for her').

### Repetition Helps

- Let children hear a story twice (at least). More words are learned, more completely, when books are read several times.
- You can pick up to 5 different words to focus on during each reading. Then repeat using the same words.
- Words or phrases used many times in a story are more likely to be learned.
- Use books with repetitive words and phrases.
- Hearing words repeated in regular, meaningful contexts is particularly important for bilingual children.

### Make Your Language Count

- Comment on what the child looks at (don't just read the words or just ask them questions). If you keep saying 'what's that?' without adding comments too, the child will repeat that question but not the words he needs!
- Use comments or add more words, e.g., point out parts of pictures.
- Focus on a variety of word types (not just nouns; use verbs, adjectives etc too).

### Question Well

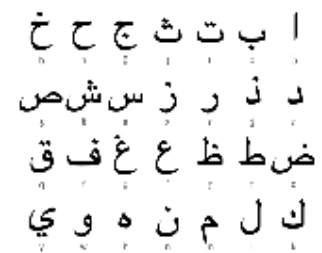
- Ask different types of questions, e.g., closed: 'Who's that, what's he doing?', open: 'What can you see? What might happen next?'

- Ask questions about words to help the child learn even more



There are lots of ideas children will gradually learn about print. Most importantly, **print has a purpose and holds a message**. As children explore and experiment, they discover that print is made of letters or characters, and it should be followed in a particular direction.

Lots of children live in families where the scripts and symbols surrounding them represent more than one language. The letters can look quite different, and the direction that print should be read can vary too. Arabic and Urdu are read from right to left, for example. There is great value in this, and we can support our bilingual children by making sure all the scripts important to them can be found in the words around them in our settings.



*'When children's interactions with their caregivers involve the printed word - and when caregivers demonstrate the use of print during these interactions – children become interested in print' (Weitzman and Greenberg, 2020,)*





Practice Guidance:

When I am a baby...

Encourage my social and verbal interactions with quality picture books (including both pictures and text) and favourite objects, connecting with my interests and family life.

When I am a toddler...

Continue to share quality picture books with me (including both pictures and text) connecting with my interests and family life, encouraging reciprocal story-telling between you and me.

Help me connect with stories on a personal and imaginative level, developing an understanding that text conveys meaning.

Give me sensory and tactile experiences which encourage me to babble, talk and have fun with books

When I am a young child...

Continue to provide me with quality picture books alongside a range of different media, fiction and non-fiction texts, connecting with my interests and family life, encouraging reciprocal story-telling between me and you.

Encourage enjoyment, engagement and meaning of stories and explore the connections between text and illustrations.

Continue to give sensory and tactile experiences by providing resources which support talking about stories and factual texts and having fun with books.

Encourage me to notice the purpose of writing in all environments and to enjoy communicating my ideas through the written word

*Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 70*

What can we do to help children develop their skills?

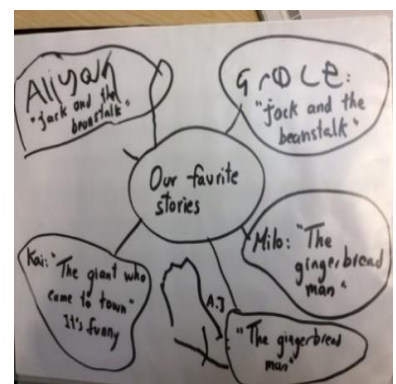
- Children's own names are important. Some children's names will be written in more than one script – we can use both scripts, with help from families, on name tags for pegs, for example.
- There are lots of opportunities for children to identify their own name - self-registration, snack names, lotto games, etc.
- It is very important that we embed literacy resources in role play, for example favourite stories



and notebooks and pencils in the house corner. Children can take ownership and express their thoughts and ideas as they play. Think of the house corner as a home, so there might be magazines and comics, phones, whiteboards for lists, keyboards, diaries, calendars.

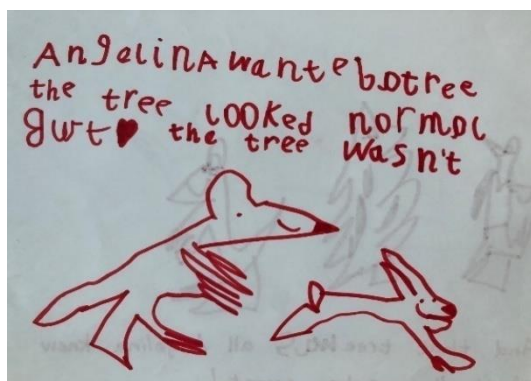
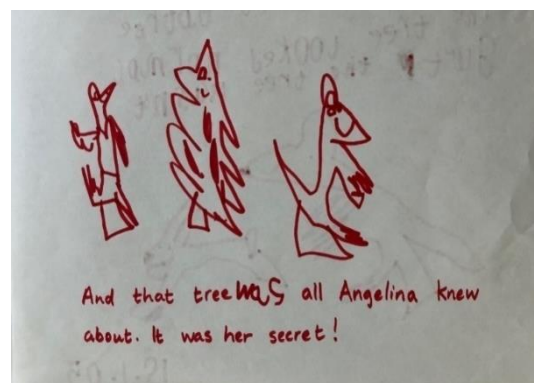
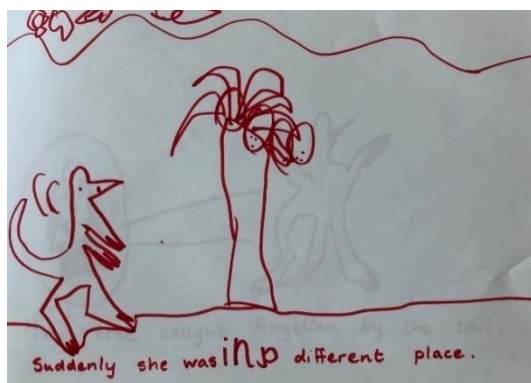
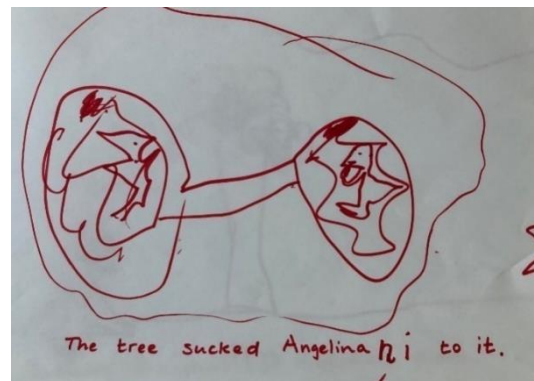
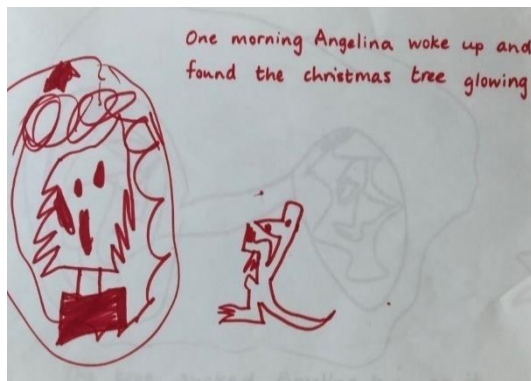
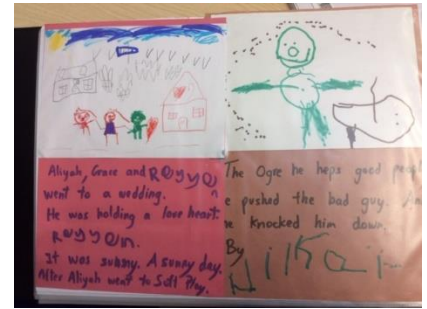


- Make sure books and mark-making opportunities are everywhere in the learning environment, indoors and out.
- Encourage families to help with resources and provide a diversity of print from different languages, including packaging. Encourage children to notice differences and similarities and talk about them.
- Join in when children show what they are excited about print, finding a word or a letter they know, or showing their understanding of a sign.
- Go on a "Word walk" and encourage children to notice environmental print. The children could take photos of signs and make a book - TESCO, Macdonald, STOP, etc.
- Have meaningful signs and labels around the nursery at child level, written by children.
- Provide dual language books, both in the story corner and for families to borrow.
- When sharing books, stories and other texts, talk about how they work – front to back, pictures and words. Talk about the author and the illustrator. Model how we handle books and encourage children to enjoy exploring and handling books themselves.
- Comment on the pictures and stories when we are sharing books, and encourage children to join in. Look at the illustrations in detail and think about what's happening.
- Take opportunities to write shopping lists, cards, etc, so children can see people writing and realize that what we say, think and feel can be written down.
- Our routines and processes give lots of opportunities to share writing with children – mind maps or Big Books as we plan together, for example. As we capture observations of children, share this with them.
- Encourage children to write their own ideas or plans on post-its or paper
- Display children's mark-making at child level to show that we value it, and encourage children to talk about the meanings they make.



## Scribing Children's Stories

Scribing children's stories is also very important. We need to keep what we scribe as close as possible to the child's actual words. In scribing children's stories, we demonstrate the value of the children's words as communication. The words 'hold' the meaning. It can be kept on the page and revisited. We can display our stories or create our own books to share. We are all storytellers!



This was a child who took a favourite character from books and created her own story, writing one or two of the words herself until she revisited the story and created a last page and wanted to be supported to write all the words herself.



## Offering Children Challenge

Some children show a real interest in print and start to make sense of what they see. There are lots of creative ways of inspiring them to challenge their thinking and use their skills in our settings.

There are key things to bear in mind - children should lead their own learning, and our job is to support their curiosity and creativity.



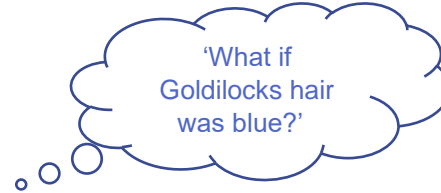
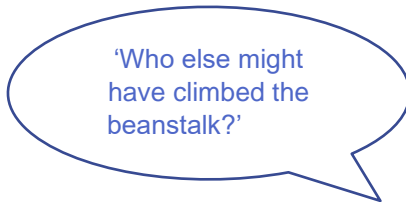
## What can we do to help children develop their skills?

- Encourage children to look closely at books with fewer words and lots of pictures. Can children interpret what they see in the pictures? Can they recognise repeated words?
- Put children's names in alphabetic order – some children will identify initial letters
- Encourage children to get involved in our own lending libraries – checking books on alphabetic lists
- Put labels in a bag or on a Velcro board for children to identify. This could be for song cards etc. or for routines such as areas to tidy up at the end of the session.
- Make lots of books with children – stapler, ribbons and hole punch, treasury tags – there are lots of ways to hold stories together. Keep these available all the time. Children can use photos as well as their drawings/artwork.
- Type up children's own stories, as well as scribing them, using a keyboard and seeing the printed words
- Encourage lots and lots of telling and retelling of stories with props and puppets to support children to remember the story, but also to extend the characters adventures
- Offer lots of different versions of a story.
- Characters from traditional tales can come to visit our setting and leave notes for the children



## Blooms Taxonomy and Blanks Levels of Questioning

Prompting children to think by the kind of comments we make or questions we ask is an important part of engaging with a story, especially for children looking for challenges. Ask questions that challenge thinking



	Descriptor	Example Questions
Level 1	<b>Level 1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ is the most concrete level</li> <li>➤ focuses on the whole object</li> <li>➤ focuses on what the child can see</li> <li>➤ focuses on objects in the 'here and now' or the immediate past.</li> </ul>	<b>Pgs. 3-4:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ (Point to the fox) What is this?</li> <li>➤ Show me the claws.</li> <li>➤ Show me the mouse.</li> <li>➤ (Point to the pine cone) Find one like this.</li> <li>➤ What did the fox do?</li> </ul>
Level 2	<b>Level 2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ still refers directly to an object but is specific on part of an object</li> <li>➤ moves away from the most concrete questions</li> <li>➤ is still about the 'here and now'.</li> </ul>	<b>Pgs. 5-6:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What does the owl use to fly?</li> <li>➤ The mouse is walking on the .....</li> <li>➤ An owl is a type of bird. Can you think of another bird?</li> <li>➤ Find a small rock.</li> <li>➤ Find a yellow flower.</li> <li>➤ What is happening in this picture?</li> <li>➤ What is different about an owl and a dragonfly?</li> <li>➤ Who is flying?</li> <li>➤ What is the mouse doing?</li> <li>➤ Where does the owl live?</li> </ul>
Level 3	<b>Level 3:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ moves away from concrete perception to abstract thought</li> <li>➤ talks about the 'here and now' as well as things in the future</li> <li>➤ begins to think about ideas from another person's perspective</li> <li>➤ can tap into the context of the child's pre-existing knowledge</li> <li>➤ can require a child to predict what happens next.</li> </ul>	<b>Pgs. 9-10:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Point to the snake, the mouse and a leaf.</li> <li>➤ Show me a frog that is not swimming.</li> <li>➤ How are the mouse and the frog the same?</li> <li>➤ Have you ever been for a walk in the woods? What did you do there?</li> <li>➤ What might this frog say to the other frog?</li> <li>➤ How might the mouse feel?</li> <li>➤ How might the snake feel?</li> <li>➤ What is a mushroom?</li> <li>➤ What has happened in the story so far?</li> <li>➤ What might happen next? (it's only prediction if the child doesn't know the story)</li> </ul>
Level 4	<b>Level 4:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ requires thinking about abstract concepts, drawing on knowledge and experiences not specifically related to the 'here and now'</li> <li>➤ requires higher level problem solving and explanation.</li> </ul>	<b>Using the whole book:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Why does the Gruffalo want to eat the mouse?</li> <li>➤ What made the fox run away from the mouse at the end of the book?</li> <li>➤ What would you do if you met a Gruffalo?</li> <li>➤ What do you think &lt;insert reader's name&gt; would do if they met a Gruffalo? How could they avoid being eaten?</li> <li>➤ How can we tell that it's daytime in this story?</li> <li>➤ What does the mouse in this story like to eat?</li> <li>➤ Why can't the mouse fight the Gruffalo?</li> <li>➤ Let's act out the story – what do we need?</li> </ul>

Story ©Julia Donaldson 1999. Illustrations ©Alex Sheffler 1999. First published by Macmillan Children's Books

Both Blooms and Blanks questions offer increasing levels of challenge, starting with remembering what happened, to thinking creatively.

This chart with example Blanks questions about 'The Gruffalo' is from Highland Literacy.

You will find lots of support with asking questions to prompt thinking here: [blank-question-fan1.pdf](https://www.blank-question-fan1.pdf) ([wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com))



*Playful literacy starts with the child and positions the child as an expert in using language...*

*Interactions are at the heart of playful literacy development. Careful observations form part of building a picture of where a child is in their learning and determining what they need from us and environment around them to assist further learning. We should tap into what we know about the child's interests and family life to attach talking, listening, reading and writing to meaningful environments and experiences created within settings. Our ability to use language unlocks all areas of learning.*

*Children's language development thrives through exposure to environments of rich and diverse spoken language experiences. We grow a sense of purpose for the child by our own use of language and engaging them with a wide variety of stories, rhymes, songs, symbols and texts in different media all around them. Building this purpose helps to nurture engagement and encourages children to see themselves as readers and writers. This doesn't just happen by chance.*

*Realising the Ambition, Education Scotland, 2020, pg. 70*

## Print Awareness and Reading - Questions for Discussion and Reflection



- What opportunities are there for children to recognise their own name?
- Are symbols used meaningfully in the setting to support routines and processes?
- Are books and other forms of print embedded across the core provision inside and outside?
- Are there opportunities for children to notice and identify environmental print?
- What opportunities are there within your everyday routines for children to make marks and refer to print?
- What are story opportunities like in your setting? Are stories read to children throughout the session? Are there opportunities to hear stories more than once to allow children to learn new words and join in with repetitive phrases? Are there props or pictures for children to retell stories in their own words? Do staff use higher order questions in their interactions which involve books?
- How do you challenge those children who demonstrate a real interest in print?

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