

Our Literacy Curriculum.

“In the Australian Curriculum, students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society.”

In the Early Years Learning Framework, Literacy is covered primarily in Learning Outcome 5- Children are good Communicators.

Clearly communication in this sense has a broad meaning, including receptive and expressive language, non- verbal communication, engagement with texts, self - expression through creative and dramatic play, awareness of written forms of communication and computer literacy.

The five sub points of LO 5 are

- 5.1 Children interact verbally and non- verbally with others for a range of different purposes
- 5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
- 5.3 Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media
- 5.4 Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work
- 5.5 Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.

Learning Outcome 5.1.

Research indicates that one the best predictors of future reading and writing success is “a wide range of language experiences and a vast, rich vocabulary prior to entering school”. Young children have a particular propensity to learn and incorporate new vocabulary, requiring much less exposure than adults. It is a window of opportunity for learning new vocabulary and enrich their communication skills. Spoken language skills and written language skills impact upon and complement one another over the lifetime. In early childhood a raft of rich experiences and exposure to new vocabulary should be paramount.

This is reflected in our program in the following ways-

Educators engage in conversations with children, modelling Australian standard English, accepting approximations in spoken and written language (where appropriate).

Every interaction is seen as important and promoting communication.

We recognise that children prior understandings are vital in learning.

We extend and develop vocabulary by discussing and sharing a wide range of experiences.

We model the use of synonyms and elaborate vocabulary, consciously expanding vocabulary.

We use gestures and other scaffolding to assist comprehension;

We listen and encourage children to speak and to listen in English and in other home languages.

We scaffold childrens’ understanding by using gestures, visuals and other techniques.

We provide a wide range of language rich experiences and opportunities for children to practice and consolidate their language skills through play. These include dramatic play, sensory experiences, arts and craft, scientific investigation, music, movement, puppets, nature based play, told stories, poetry and books.

Learning outcome 5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts.

This learning outcome covers a wide range of skills, dispositions and knowledge and “text” can mean a lot of different things in this context. In this outcome we cover responding to songs with actions, engaging with books, written messages, maps, charts etc, phonological awareness in context (eg, rhyme in books), print awareness and cultural influences.

There is a lot to unpack in this one.

A Guiding principle should be that " a person who does not read has no advantage over a person who cannot read" (Attributed to Mark Twain but not verified). Our goal as educators should be to help develop people who not only can read but do read and love to read.

A love of language begins from babyhood and needs to continue throughout life. Dispositions, as mentioned in the definition above are vital. Disposition means a quality of character – a usual way of behaving or tendency. Learning to love language, books and reading should be a major focus as a disposition. Ensuring that Language and Literacy experiences are enjoyable, interesting, beautiful or funny, fascinating or intriguing, comforting or familiar, exciting or soothing so that children grow to love books, reading and writing. Story times are important: shared book experiences are particularly valuable but less structured ones are vital too, such as looking at books alone or reading one on one with adults or friends.

Comprehension;

This refers to all language experiences, including text engagement. We need to be supporting children to understand spoken words and written word.

It is important that when we read stories, or indeed speak to children generally, we take the time to ensure children understand. Checking they know what a word means- explain what things mean, help them to summarise what has happened so far, or ask any questions, or predict what might happen next, retell the story are all important literacy skills we develop in children each day. Obviously how this looks differs from a toddler to a transition to school child but the same principles apply. Enjoyment is paramount.

Text engagement.

During shared book experiences we can build children’s early reading strategies. These include using pictures, rhyme, repetition and with older children prediction, summarising, questioning, reading on and using phonemes.

Dear Zoo is a great example where these skills are built with children as young as two. They co-read the story by lifting the flaps and contributing the animal's name to the story. As this book is repeated the children become familiar with the structure of the book and they contribute more and more. (eg He was too.....). Repetition of favourite stories, especially those with familiar repeated patterns allows very young children to engage in "reading-like" behaviour and begin to see themselves as readers. (LO1, LO5.2).

There are other findings in the literature about more specific skills that impact on emerging literacy. It is important to acknowledge these but stay true to our philosophical underpinnings so that these skills are developed organically and through play-based modes of delivery. These skills are

- **Alphabetic code.**

The skills under this heading are largely auditory skills for preschool (meaning preschool and toddlers) and are encompassed in LO 5.2 and LO 5.4

Phonemic and phonological awareness.

- Phonological Awareness.- awareness of words, syllables and sounds within words.
- Phonemic awareness a subset of above refers specifically to the smallest sound (often made by single letters or consonant blends.)

How do we do this in our program?

Children must first develop the ability to discriminate sounds. Games involving identifying animal noises or environmental sounds help develop these skills. Toddlers identifying individual words, clapping words to songs, helping with articulation and identifying discrete words falls into this category. All the games we play involving rhyme and rhythm in words build phonological awareness. Identifying rhyme and creating their own rhymes demonstrate emerging phonological awareness. In addition to this, awareness of syllables in words - clapping their names or other words, breaking words down and saying them in funny ways highlighting the different sounds in a word. (eg hipp -o-pot -a -mus). "Whose name starts with a "s" make sound?" brings awareness to the first sound which is appropriate for our transition to school children. Phonemic awareness of the individual sounds is a key predictor of literacy but belongs in that 5+ year old space. Keep it incidental, don't overdo it. There is evidence that these skills help but in the right order at the right time.

Rhyme is another way to encourage children to "work out" what a word will be. The Dr Seuss ones are great for older Preschoolers as you can start to have some fun with rhyme but also identifying initial sounds. (Eg Would you could you in a box, would you could you with a f.....))

With the older preschoolers I think it's appropriate to model more reading strategies, even occasionally showing how phonemes play a role. "Reading ahead" to think what a word might work then using the first sound to guess what it is. Use these kinds of things occasionally, incidentally, so as not to detract from the meaning of the text, which is the most important thing. When they do this, I like to tell the children-

“see you are reading”. They begin to see themselves as emerging literates without any formal instruction.

- **Learning Outcome 5.3.** Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media

This outcome deals with expressive communication where children are encouraged to express themselves through a range of media, communicating ideas, thoughts and emotions. This includes artwork, craft, music and dance, physical movement, construction, storytelling and dramatic play.

We scaffold children as they begin to show interest in making representations in their play and mark making. We drink the imaginary cup of tea, we answer the toy phone, we make things with playdough alongside them. We comfort their doll. We provide a wide range of experiences that allow children to create stories, books, images, ideas, songs, diagrams, symbols roles, artworks, in various ways.

How does this look in our program?

Children engage in arts and craft involving a wide range of media including painting, and drawing , modelling, construction and building, threading, making videos.

Dramatic play is encouraged as a way of meaning making and self expression.

Props and aids are provided and suggested.

Children are invited to tell stories verbally, through drama, puppetry or through creating their own books.

Children are provided opportunities to engage in writing like behaviours through dramatic play such as café, schools, doctors clinics, shops etc.

Children are supported to represent ideas and concepts through drawing, creating diagrams, map making

Learning Outcome 5.4

Through the preschool years, children become aware of symbols and print as a means of communicating. There is much for them to learn before they start to learn letters and numbers. Children need visual discrimination skills. These skills are built simply through sharing experiences that identify various objects, starting fairly obvious and building to finding hidden objects, such as. Where’s Wally or I spy books, over time. Puzzles where colours and shapes need to match up build these skills. Toddlers matching similar objects based on colour shape or size all build the skills the children will later use to learn to read and write.

You will notice children beginning to engage in “reading-like “and “writing -like” behaviours as they imitate those around them. This play is important as they develop scripts and understandings of the nature of print. They will begin to notice symbols and signs and ask what they mean. They start to understand that these serve a purpose to convey meaning. They will start to make their own symbols and signs. They need to see adults engaging in literacy to do this. Over time they begin to notice symbols letters and numerals.

This outcome also includes recognising patterns in the environment, including nature such as spirals, symmetry and fractals. This can also include mathematical patterns such as triangular and square numbers.

Print knowledge (is covered in both LO5.2 and 5.4). This refers to the understanding that print conveys meaning. To the understanding that books start at the front and move to the back, we read from the left and move right, we read top to bottom. It involves paying attention to print in our environment, signs and labels and symbols and notices. Print is everywhere and our environment should be print rich. Children can begin to notice the letters in their name and learn the names of them, as they show interest learning the letters of the alphabet is appropriate but it should be embedded in their play experiences (eg fishing game) Children use print in their play. Writing-like behaviour helps children to make sense of the world of written communications and to see themselves as participating in this aspect of life. Print (and symbols) is everywhere- shops and road signs and inside your car, on appliances on products and in classrooms. As children approach being ready for reading they start to notice them everywhere. Look to make explicit the meaning in the print.

How does this look in our program?

We provide a print rich environment with signs and notes around the building- as they become ready the children can contribute to these.

We model conventions of print- left to right, front to back, top to bottom when reading and writing

We explore print and symbols in our playground and bush tucker garden.

In our preschool, our dramatic play, in our local environment we explore signs and notices.

We incorporate signs and "writing-like behaviour" (eg charts for doctors, shopping lists, police officer giving tickets, prices or signs in the shop as ways of developing print awareness.

We explore different language writing conventions and draw on childrens' home and cultural experiences. (eg. Japanese characters and conventions of print).

Children are involved in "writing" letters, emails, exploring the typewriter or word document on computer. (the ipads are good for this s they do upper and lower case well.

We use picture, symbols and text to represent ideas, routines, etc

We encourage and provide opportunities representing ideas using symbols, dictated words, maps and diagrams.

When children show an interest we help them engage in their own "writing, either by accepting approximations, modelling for child to copy, tracing. We do not push writing unless the child is interested and developmentally ready.

We explore letters and numerals in many play -based activities like fishing, blocks, dice and playdough.

This Learning outcome also covers mathematics as a means of communication and refers to patterns and relationships of a mathematical nature, but I will talk about this in a later article.

Other important skills that relate to literacy.

Auditory discrimination- the ability to distinguish different sounds (toddler toys , listening lotto)

Visual discrimination. -The ability to identify differences and similarities between shapes, objects and symbols. (grouping, classifying matching activities, snap, where's wally, I spy books, what's the difference activities.)

Visual memory- the ability to hold an image in working memory. (Memory games, who is missing, what is missing games.)

Visual tracking- moving eyes up and down, left right or opposite. Following a line or an object as it move.

Motor Development.

Motor development is fundamental to children's overall development. Attention to fundamental motor skills and lot of free play to experiment and practice these skills is vital to all areas of development including cognitive development and early literacy. For the purpose of this topic I'll look specifically at fine motor development as it relates to developing literacy and writing. Childrens' fine motor development continues to mature often long after they have left us in the preschool.

- We can assist the maturation process by first building gross motor development. We learn to control and gain strength in large muscles first.
- Coordination between the two sides of the body in large and small movements is vital for cognitive and motor development. (manipulative equipment
- Crossing the midline helps develop important links between the two sides of the body and hand preference. (Easel/ Lange movements)
- Shoulder and elbow stability and strength – working on vertical surfaces .
- Ability to move at the wrist- flex and extend and rotate. Frogs on floor, vertical surface painting/activities.
- Strengthening small muscles- dough with hands
- Pincer grip and manipulation of small object coordinating small muscles in hands.