

Building Strong Foundations for Literacy

(Why We Don't "Teach Phonics" at Kindy)

Becoming literate (able to read and write efficiently) encompasses a range of skills and attitudes, beyond knowing the alphabet or learning phonics, and is built significantly upon a child's development of oral language. "There is evidence that providing activities which raise children's sensitivity to sounds used in spoken language may prevent the difficulty some children experience in writing and spelling." (cited in Topfer, 2007)

The skills and attitudes that contribute to literacy include:

- Thinking and problem solving
- Listening
- Communicating with each other to share ideas
- Taking an interest in books
- Using books for a purpose
- Making inferences about stories from picture clues
- Being aware of environmental print
- Scribbling, drawing and writing about ideas
- Practising reading behaviour
- Recalling and telling stories to construct meaning
- Role playing writing
- Understanding that the written word has meaning – a shared symbol



Throughout your child's year at kindy we will be aiming to build their literacy foundation through:

- Involvement in many and varied conversations – as individuals, in small groups such as Buzz Group, in whole group discussions and in our games of pretend.
- Reading and telling LOTS of stories together
- Singing LOTS of songs and rhymes
- Using literacy in meaningful ways in their play eg making signs for the ballet concert, making invitations to a fairy party, writing 'open' and 'closed' signs when needed for shops etc.
- Participating in language activities such as our "What Is It?" Bag and the I Spy Box, and
- Regularly engaging in phonological awareness activities as a group – these activities include identifying and making rhyming words, keeping the beat of words, identifying initial sounds of words and understanding that letters have names.

Phonological awareness may not be a term that is familiar to many parents but it is an important precursor to more formal reading instruction at school and has been highlighted by local principals as being of great importance as children move on to more formal literacy education.

From a text titled *Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Kindergarten Teachers* (2003):

- Phonological awareness is the area of oral language that relates to the ability to think about the sounds in a word (the word's phonological structure) rather than just the meaning of the word. It is described as the ability to "listen inside a word" or to "play with the sounds" they hear.
- It is an understanding of the structure of spoken language – that it is made up of words, and words consist of syllables, rhymes, and sounds.
- Children who have well-developed phonological awareness when they come to school have a head start making sense of how sounds and letters operate in print.

- Students with a good understanding of phonological awareness have the underlying framework in place for reading (decoding) and writing (encoding) when letter-sound correspondences (phonics) are learned at school.
- Students who have difficulty with phonological awareness can often learn “phonics” (knowledge of letters and sounds), but they have difficulty *using* this knowledge as they read and spell. “Very young children should not be expected to be able to identify individual sounds in words until they have had extensive practice in listening for rhyme, syllables and alliteration.” (Topfer)

As a result of this, our focus at kindy is on engaging in oral language activities that include:

- Listening and talking about words and sounds,
- Recognising and making rhymes (eg singing the Willaby Wallaby Woo song),
- Hearing the initial sounds of words (eg whose name starts with this sound? {as opposed to just a letter name}), and
- Clapping out the syllables or beats in words (eg clapping the beats in our names – Ol-i-ver has 3 beats!).

These same experiences will continue into Prep.

An important way for parents to facilitate their child’s literacy development, now and in the future, is to engage in dialogic reading with their child. Dialogic reading is characterized by numerous opportunities for the child to engage in conversation with the reader as you read together. The adult becomes an active listener, asking questions and prompting language use and reflection. Dialogic reading is associated with turn taking in conversation, with positive relationships, and with reflective thinking and the use of language for purposes of regulating and organising information. It involves encouraging your child to notice and talk about what they can see in the book and what they are listening to, eg I wonder how that little boy is feeling?, what do you think he will do next? (Blair & Raver, 2015).

This link may be useful in knowing more about dialogic reading -

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/dialogic-reading-effective-way-read-aloud-young-children>

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References:

Blair, C. & Raver, C.C. (2015). School Readiness and Self-regulation: A Developmental Psychobiological Approach. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 66, 711-731. doi: 10.1146/annurev-psych-010814-015221)

Topfer, C. (2007). *Discovering letters and sounds*. Canberra:ECA

Trehearne, M. (2003) *Comprehensive Literacy Resource for Kindergarten Teachers*. Vernon Hills: ETA/Cuisenaire