Early Language and Literacy Learning at Kingswood College Early Learning Centre

‘Literacy is the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all of its forms. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing.’ (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 2009, p.38)

The Preschool years are a critical period for literacy development (Lonigan, Allan & Lerner 2011). At Kingswood College ELC we value and actively promote the skills and attitudes necessary in becoming literate. Strong foundational learning needs to occur before ‘formal’ teaching of literacy takes place. Literacy learning is weaved throughout every aspect of our Early Learning Centre programs and we work from a strength based perspective.

Kingswood College ELC educators are skilled at teaching literacy in a manner that suits individual learning styles. Our approach to teaching literacy is holistic, fostering Australia’s Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) strong emphasis on learning through play and the PYP Essential elements. Our educators provide an emergent curriculum which extends on children’s interests and provide provocations and plans to extend on these interests and learning needs. Learning that takes place may appear incidental but is in fact very intentional.

Children learn best when they are engaged, motivated and see the relevance of the content (DEECD, 2011, p9)

Research indicates that a foundation in oral language, phonological processing skills and print knowledge correlate to successful outcomes once formal literacy instruction begins, usually in the Prep year of school (Lonigan et al., 2011).

Our literacy goals in the ELC are to:
- Promote a positive attitude in our children as successful and competent learners of literacy
- Encourage a love for the various forms of literacy
- Extend and develop receptive and expressive oral language development such as: listening skills, vocabulary development and grammatical rules
- Develop pre-reading and writing skills and concepts of alphabet knowledge, phonological processing skills and phonological awareness
- Support motor skill development appropriate for holding and manipulating books, pencils and paper
- Form strong relationships which become the basis for children to explore and take risks in learning

Oral language and vocabulary (expressive language)
Kingswood College ELC provides an environment rich in language including speaking, listening, singing, role play, creating plays, questioning and wondering. There are many opportunities for observation and discussion. Describing familiar experiences, thoughts and emotions introduce new vocabulary as well as assisting with comprehension of these concepts. These are very important skills for future writers as it gives them the passive form before the active form. The amount of words a child knows, and the variety in their vocabulary in the Pre School years impacts on reading comprehension and later schooling success (Donza, 2011). Our educators check for understanding, paraphrasing and encouraging all attempts at literacy. They provide opportunities for children to tell their own stories using props and can link this oral language with written language by scribing children’s stories so that they can be remembered and shared. Our educators also teach the language of books; for example: Front and back cover, author, illustrator, fiction and non-fiction.
Listening skills (Receptive language)
Our ELC educators model and teach how to be a respectful listener. Children are encouraged to give cultural clues that they are listening, for example looking at the person talking. Opportunities are provided to practice these skills and build on the ideas of others for example in storytelling, discussions and listening to different perspectives. Children will explore phonological awareness through rhyming stories and looking for patterns in songs, stories poems and games.

Symbolic thought
‘Use language and representations from play, music and art to share and project meaning.’ (DEEWR, 2009, p.42)

Symbolic representation starts when children begin to use one object to symbolise another, for example pretending that a block of wood is a telephone. This will progress to children making marks on paper and assigning meaning to them; ‘I’ve drawn mum’ or ‘I’ve written my name’, which, to the ‘onlooker’, may not be recognisable. This is an important stage in literacy development which precedes and parallels letter development and writing. To write or act creatively, one must first be able to engage in symbolic thought and representation.

Your child’s educator acknowledges and values this learning by scribing, for your child, their thoughts and offering opportunities to share and celebrate this with family or peers in a variety of ways such as on wall displays, reflection books or portfolios.

Print knowledge
Our educators model the functionality of written language; they document children’s stories, create new stories and make sense of new knowledge. All attempts at writing are supported; in the early stages, this may not be recognisable to the ‘onlooker’. When writing, we model starting at the top of the page and writing from left to right. Written conventions are highlighted informally such as: sentences are made up of words, words have a space between them, sentences start with a capital and end with a full stop, questions have a question mark.

Children need to learn to ‘hear’ the individual sounds (phonemes) in words for example r-rat, c-cat, or cr-creek, cr-crack. This initial and informal phonemic awareness helps with later reading and spelling. Your child will explore the alphabet and the sounds that letters make in a play based age appropriate manner through games, songs and shared stories. Research shows that the brain thrives on novelty (Cell Press, 2006).

It is not an expectation of children in the Pre School years to be able to write recognisable words or read print.

Moving forward
Before your child starts a formal literacy program, usually in the Prep/Junior Primary years at school, their teacher will conduct a full literacy assessment. All children will come to Prep with a variety of skills and interests in this area and assessment ensures that your child’s teacher provides a literacy program best suited to your child’s needs. All children will develop at their own rate and the balance between success and challenge, whilst maintaining comprehension is very important at this stage.

If children learn only to memorise words, eventually their word bank becomes too great and their reading progress may begin to stagnate. It is important that children have good letter (symbol) - sound knowledge (Konza, 2011). There are a variety of ways to teach phonics effectively, and the most effective time to begin this instruction is in the first one-two years of Junior Primary school. (NICHD, 2000)

Many of the examples/tips outlined below, can be practiced at home, creating a home-school partnership to the teaching and learning of literacy skills, strengthening outcomes for all children.
If you are concerned about your child’s progress in relation to communicating effectively with peers or adults or you have any questions about this topic please don’t hesitate to contact your child’s teacher or the ELC coordinator.

**Some examples of literacy in our ELC programs and tips for home:**

**At Kingswood College ELC our educators:**

- Encourage lots of physical exploration. Before children can differentiate between b and d, they need to understand the concept of forward and backwards. This can be taught through explicitly exploring body movements and associated vocabulary.
- Read stories on topics that interest your children. Write children’s personal reflections, stories and ideas down and encourage them to share these with others. Provide clipboards to write down plans, note paper in role play areas and recipe books in a pretend restaurant. Set up small role plays of favourite stories, encourage children with specific interests for example footy to create their own footy ladder, or take writing and reading materials outdoors.
- Have fun with language, use and create onset rhymes such as: “Hickory dickory dock, the mouse ran up the……….? Have fun guessing what rhymes. Choose books with rhyme and repetition, singing, chanting, jingles, poems and tongue twisters. Physically clap syllables and alliterations.
- Encourage symbolic thought through imaginative play, drawing, painting, 3D art, music and drama
- Explicitly use recipes and shopping lists, to show the functionality of writing.
- Make books, write letters, label items, recognise and point out signs
- Read every day to children
- Enjoy story-telling, discuss the story, emotions, point out full stops and question marks, but not every time we/you read a story - try not to spoil the flow of the story
- Engage in lots of conversations and discussions. Explore fine motor experiences such as playdough, clay, beading and drawing.
- Establish reading routines for example bed time stories. Before children learn where to place a question mark they need to know what the symbol looks like. To use this symbol meaningfully, children need to know the difference between a question and a statement; this is taught through our group time discussions.
- Take turns at making up stories, use story starters such as ‘Once upon a time.’ Illustrate our stories
- Use technology to explore literacy, look up stories in different languages
- Explore a variety of fiction and non-fiction books
- Encourage children to change the word in a familiar story to make a whole new story. We are going on a bear hunt changes dramatically if it is a bug hunt! One word can be so powerful.
- Teach children about different ways to share messages, communicate and make meaning for example: dance, drama, rock paintings, Braille and sign language

A Parent friendly web site is Lets Read. Let’s Read is an established early literacy initiative that promotes the importance of reading with children from birth. Let’s Read is based on research demonstrating the importance of early literacy promotion and the best available evidence on programs to engage families and enhance early literacy promotion. The Australian Government is working with the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute and The Smith Family to deliver Let's Read

Bibliography


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