

Preschool Themes Newsletter – January 2019

Hello Everyone

Happy New Year to you all! I wish you all the best for 2019. May this be a great year for your teaching where you try new ideas, enjoy the successes, learn from your mistakes and embrace each day with enthusiasm and energy.

I am not big on making New Year's Resolutions but this year I am going to focus more on doing things that make me happy without feeling the guilt. I spend way too much time saying "I should be..." instead of being present in the moment and enjoying what I am doing (that may include some nana naps too). This may prove to be more challenging than I think...watch this space.

I look forward to bringing you lots of fun and exciting newsletters this year. I trust you will enjoy them and add the ideas and activities to your themes and teaching. New subscribers are always welcome.



School Readiness

One of the long term goals of preschool is to prepare the child for formal learning often referred to as being school ready. It's difficult to define what school ready means and there are many checklists that list the things a child should be able to do before they enter formal schooling! Parents feel anxious when they see their child can't do all the things on the list. But it's much more than that and as we all know encompasses all areas of child development. On a personal note I believe that I child who is willing to try new things and has perseverance will succeed better than a child who can name the colours, shapes and count to 20.



I could write a very long article here but I will spare you from it. I have attached an interesting read. All I can say once again is that children mature at different paces in different aspects of their development. Get to know the children in your group as early as you can and identify their strengths and weaknesses. As you will see in my preschool themes manuals I believe perceptual development is really important. I have a big focus on developing the children's perceptual skills in my lesson plans. This allows the skills to be repeated and 'practiced' many times before the child has a level of competency. Once the foundation for learning is established it enables the formal learning to take place with success and without frustration and disappointment. Half the battle is won when children believe in themselves to be competent and successful learners. So look at the child's fine motor skills, gross motor skills, visual discrimination,

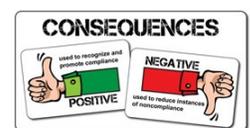


eye hand co coordination etc and determine what extra help is needed before plunging head on with worksheets. Just for the record once again I am not in favour of using worksheets at preschool. The only time I think they should be considered to be used is in the last 6 months before the child goes to primary school just to get them familiar with the concept. There are better ways to teach and learn the same content. **All learning in preschool should be play based**

Challenging behaviour



The New Year is also a good time to set a routine in the classroom, define boundaries and set the tone of the year. Every year there will be two or three children in the group that present you with challenging behaviours. They challenge even the most experienced teachers on a daily basis and I remember some days feeling quite desperate and definitely questioning my choice of profession. So know that you are not alone in this plight.



These children need specific and consistent boundaries at all times of the day and it can be exhausting. Generally speaking try and encourage and praise positive behaviour while not commenting on all the negative behaviour when possible. Often not that easy to do!

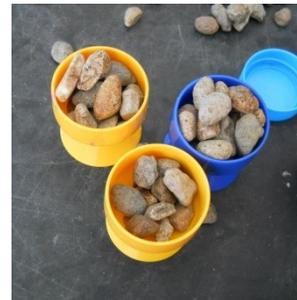
Here is a link to an interesting article on the topic of children with difficult behaviours. It's long but I think its worthwhile read. <https://withoutwindows.com/2018/11/20/environment-and-the-unteachable-child/?fbclid=IwAR2OzM4Hk5Up-woC1QwfumBTe2XV3bqeT8quZyJfdEGpOXIn40Nws6tYic>

Small and large muscle development - Stones and egg cups

Often in the afternoon or later morning the children need activities that calm them down. This activity works every time. It keeps several children happy BUT you need to lay down the rules from the start and any child that doesn't cooperate needs to be told to move away from the activity. For this activity I use a table top sensory tray but if you don't have one use shoe box lids or something similar that has a rim to contain the stones. Even flat plastic plates will be effective to contain the stones in an area. I place small stones (usually available from a hardware, building or gardening place as they are used for pathways in the garden) and egg cups with milk lids. I was given the egg cups but if you don't have any similar small containers or anything the children can fill will be suitable. To extend this activity plastic teaspoons can be added. The children play with the materials in ways they choose and it's very interesting to watch what they do with the stones and cups.

Some of the activities and learning I observed

- Full and empty
- Many and few
- Counting
- One to one matching
- Balancing
- Fine and large muscle development
- Eye hand coordination
- Cooperation and sharing
- Language development



Extension of the activity

Fine motor development with small stones and tweezers

This activity was also enjoyed by several children. It's great for fine motor and eye hand coordination and perseverance.

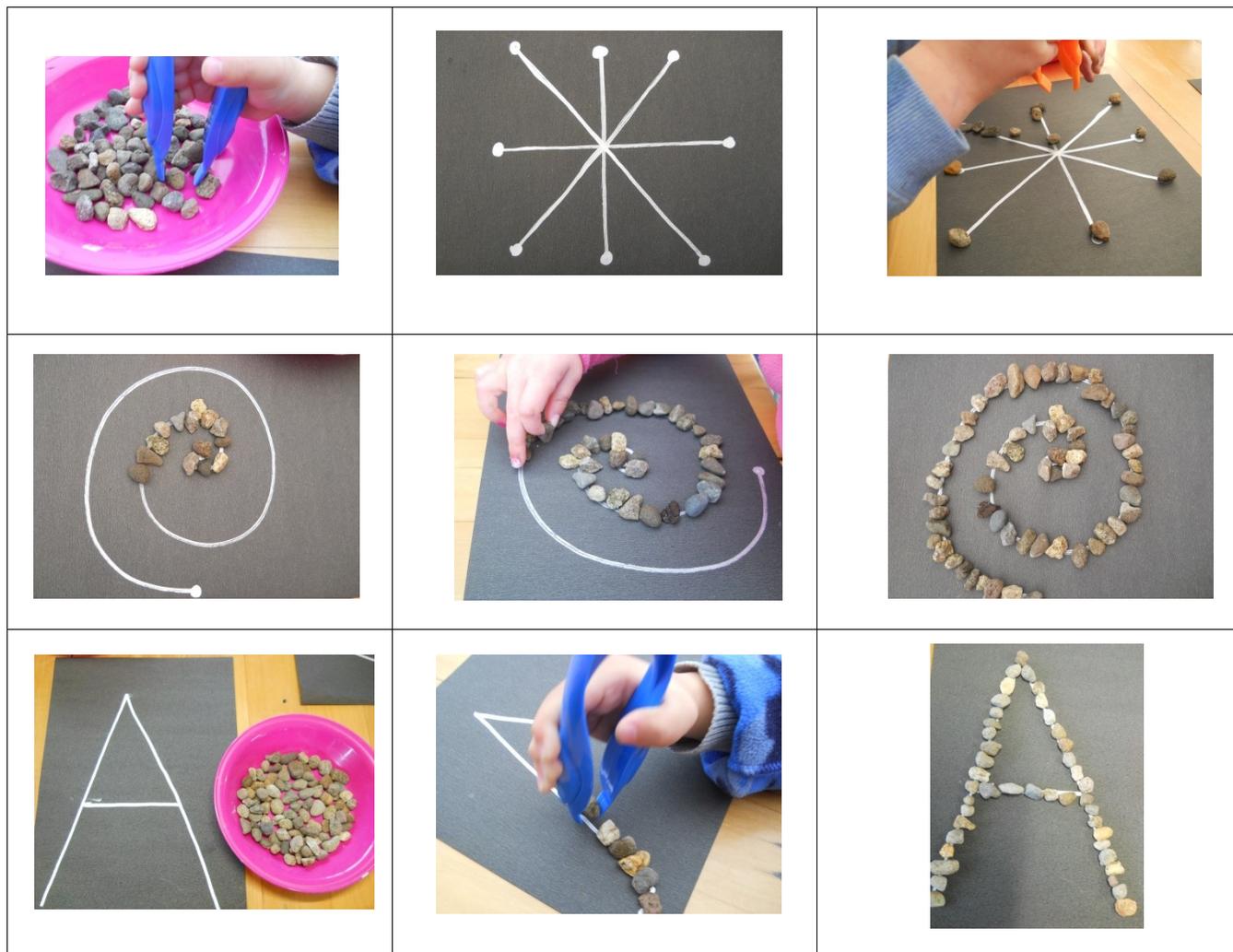
I drew lines on black paper using a white marking pen (or use chalk) but you can also do this on white paper with a black pen. If you can, laminate the sheets so they can be reused. The stones are best placed in containers rather than on the table as they end up on the floor. Tweezers are optional. Some of the children were very frustrated with the tweezers so opted to use their fingers. The tweezers are plastic ones made for children for science investigation.

The children pick up the stones using either their fingers or tweezers and place them carefully on the lines of the diagram you have drawn. Once the lines are filled the child selects another pattern to create.



No paper – draw shapes in sand or on the concrete with chalk lines for the child to follow.

You can extend this activity to Grade R by writing the letter of the child's name. This can also be applied to various themes such as shapes and big school by changing the patterns they cover.



Midline crossing

Mid line crossing using the same activity

This is a great activity to practice midline crossing. By placing the container of stones to the non-dominant side of the child, the child has to cross over their body to pick up the stone, cross the midline and place the stone on the line. Children who struggle to cross the midline will pick up the stones with their non-dominant hand, at the midline change hands to the dominant hand and then place the stone on the line. I tried to capture this in these photos.





Changing the stones to the dominant hand



Using the dominant hand to place the stone on the line



This child was comfortable crossing her midline

Fine motor

This is not a creative activity but rather an opportunity to practice fine motor skills in a fun way.

I would have preferred to use earbuds but there were none in the storeroom so I ended up using some short wooden pencil crayons we were donated from a promotion. They worked really well. We used the back of the pencil crayon to print dots. If you don't have either, then finger printing is great too and will tie in nicely with the theme of me and my body at the beginning of the year.

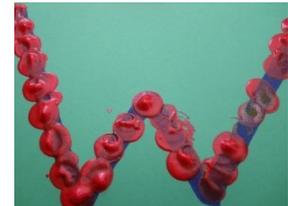
Printing on outlines

Ages: 4 - 5 year olds – maybe 3 1/2 years

Skills: Small and large muscles, eye hand co-ordination

Materials:

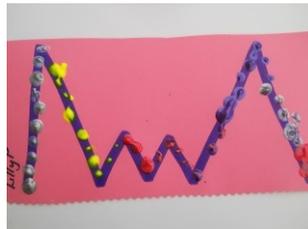
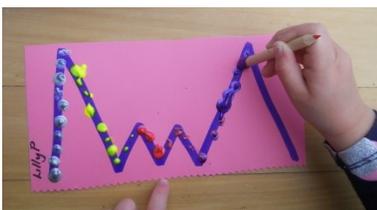
- Paper or lightweight cardboard
- Paint – thick and in a flat container
- Earbuds or wooden pencil crayons or fingers

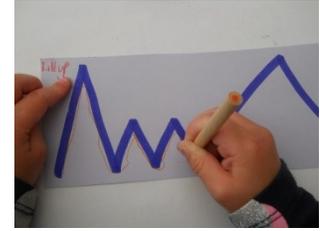
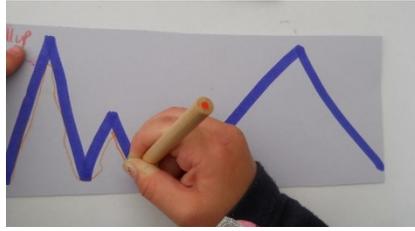
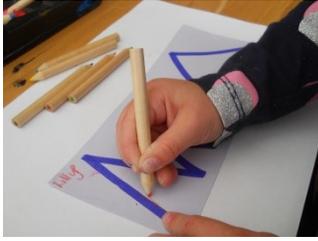


Method:

Teacher: Draw some zig zag and other lines on the paper ahead of time. (See pictures)

The child dips the printing item (earbud, pencil or finger) into the paint and carefully prints dots along the lines. Encourage the child to start from left to right (direction we read and write in) and to print the dots close together. An extension or alternative idea is to trace along the lines using different coloured pencils.





Some children are not ready for this level of fine motor. In this picture the child was 3 years old.

He preferred to treat this as a free art activity.



Creative activities

Rainbow stars, colour wash and drawing myself

Themes: Stars, Day and night, Myself, Weather (rainbows) Any theme can be applied by changing the drawing

Ages: 4 - 5 year olds

Skills: Small and large muscles, eye hand co-ordination

Materials:

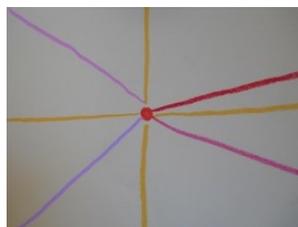
- Paper
- Pastels or wax crayons
- Food colouring – diluted
- A5 paper
- Scissors
- Glue



Method:

Teacher: Draw a dot in the centre of the paper. It also helps to draw the starting dots on the edge of the paper to which they will draw the lines to.

Using a variety of pastel colours, the children draw a star starting at the centre dot and drawing to the edge of the paper. Encourage the children to change colours and draw many arms of the star. Colour wash over the wax crayon covering the whole page. The children draw a picture of themselves, cut out the picture and pastes to the painting. If the children are unable to cut you can cut out the picture for them. If the children are unable to draw a picture encourage them to scribble and label their picture.





Notes:

- Some children struggled to draw lines from the centre and to the edge of the paper.
- Encourage the colour wash to fill in the page.
- Check the strength of the colour wash. It shouldn't cover the wax crayon
- Pastels work better than wax crayons.



Finger printing hand outlines and making flowers from the hands

Themes: Hands. Me and my body, Number 5, Senses, Flowers, Gardens

Ages: 3 1/2 - 5 year olds

Skills: Small and large muscles, eye hand co-ordination, Sensory

Materials:

- Paper
- Lightweight cardboard
- Presstick
- Paint in flat containers – no more than 4 colours
- Pipe cleaners and tape to secure the pipe cleaner
- Cloth to wipe hands



Method:

Teacher: Trace around each child's hand ahead of time and cut out the hand. Make a few spares. Write the child's name on the back of the cut out hand.

Presstick the hand name down to the paper. Using their fingertips the child dips the finger into paint and prints finger print dots along the edge of the cardboard hand outline making sure you print on the edge of the cardboard and overlapping onto the paper. Continue printing the hand and the background. Once printed and dry, remove the cardboard hand. The white hand should be well visible. Use the hand to create a flower by taping a pipecleaner to the back of the cardboard hand shape. Optional – instead of using a pipecleaner to create the flower, paste it to another paper and complete the stem and leaves using wax crayons.





Notes:

- Some children struggled to use their finger tips and were inclined to use the flatter hand.
- Remind the child to print dots and not spread the paint.
- Use a different finger for each colour so the colours don't get blended and muddled.
- It's best to wait for the painting to be dry before removing the cardboard hand.
- Remind the child to print all along the edge of the hand to create the outline. Failing to do these results in no hand outline when the cardboard hand is lifted up.
- Discourage the child from using too much paint as the paint takes long to dry if it's too thick.
- Encourage several prints with one finger dip.



Painting with Frozen paint

With the warmer weather I thought it would be fun to freeze some paint to paint with. I had also been given some of the plastic moulds to make homemade ice creams which I thought would be a great idea to use but they were not great. They take too much paint and they break as the paint warms up. The plastic sticks are not long enough so they kept coming out of the paint and they were not sturdy enough to work with. Despite the teething problems this activity was enjoyed by several children. The paint kind of behaves like a wax crayon!



Here are a few tips to make this activity successful.

- Glossy paper works a lot better than regular paper
- Shorter wooden sucker sticks work better than longer ones
- Using the plastic ice cream maker moulds does not work well

- Smaller pieces of frozen paint obtained from using an ice cube tray are the most effective
- Add a bit of water to ready mixed paint
- Place the frozen paint in a cupcake container when being used and stored in the freezer



Theme: Water, Summer, Senses, Water transport

Ages: 3 - 5 year olds

Skills: Small and large muscles, eye hand co-ordination, Sensory

Materials:

- Ready mixed paint
- Paint containers such as ice trays
- Wooden sucker sticks broken or cut in half
- Cupcake baking trays
- Paper - preferably glossy and large



Method:

Teacher: Prepare the paint by placing it in the ice trays with half a wooden sucker stick in each cube. Freeze overnight.

When presenting the paints to the children place the cubes of frozen paint into the sections of a cupcake baking tray or something similar as they do start to melt.

The child uses the paints to paint freely. Using blue makes a great background for sea or sky. This paint technique is great for painting autumn leaves as the colours blend as they melt (red and yellow blends to a lovely orange). Once a background is painted the children can draw pictures in the paint using their fingers.



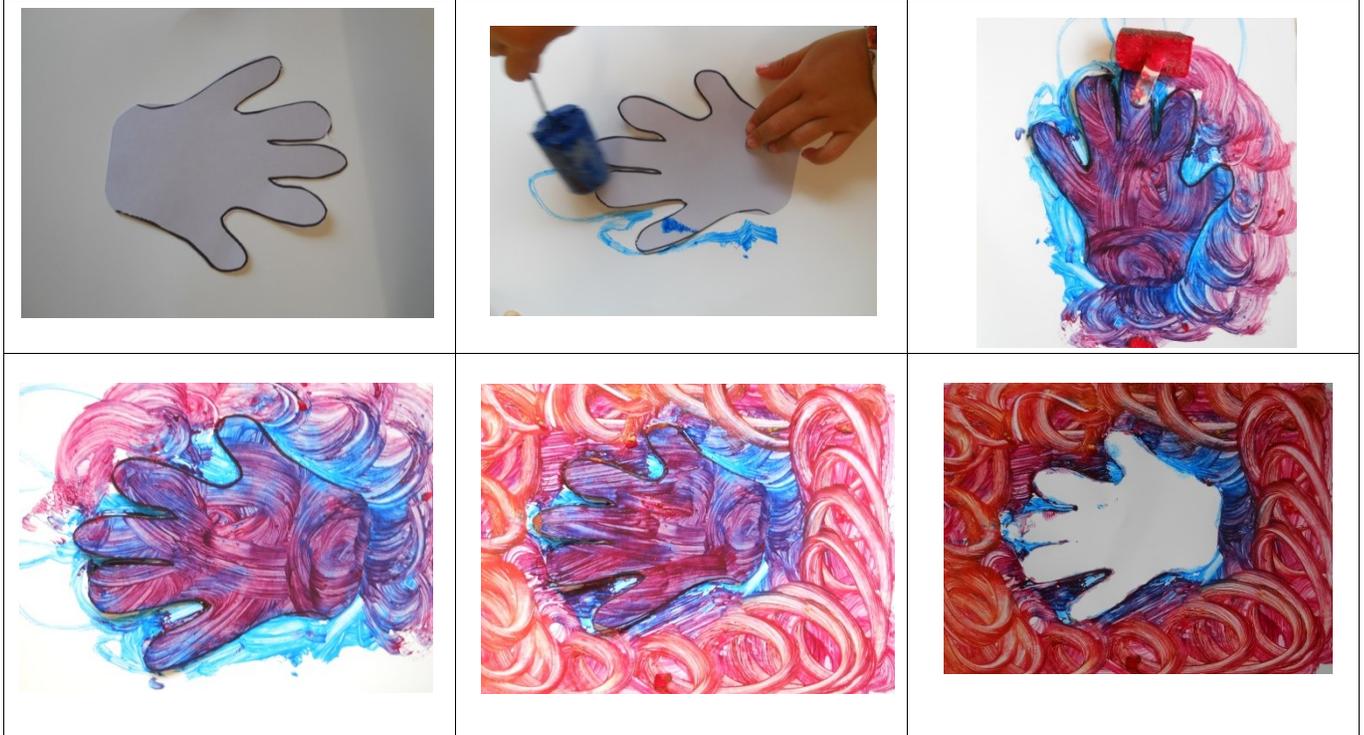
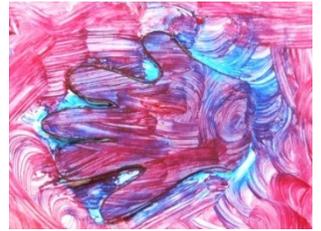
Notes:

- Some of the children didn't press hard enough.
- Yellow is not ideal as it didn't show up nicely
- Don't make too many colours.
- Ice cube with a half a sucker stick is the most effective.
- Discourage the children from breaking the ice paint when it gets softer
- Remember to return the paint to the freezer so it can be used again.
- Some children ended up smearing the paint with their hands.



Extension of the hand finger printed activity above

I tried the above hand activity using the frozen paint and I was quite pleased with the results. So instead of finger printing paint over the hand and around it, the children painted with the frozen paint and then remove the painted hand when it's dry. It was really effective and ideal for the younger children. The paint becomes free flowing once it warms up a bit. Be aware that younger children will want to lift up the pressticked hand!



Notes:

- Some children did not paint the whole paper but as long as the hand is covered the end effect will be effective.
- Finger paint instead of frozen paint

Preschool themes web site, Facebook page and Pinterest

Here are some useful links for you.

The Preschool themes web site has information on the preschool themes manuals, the titles and content and an on line order form for your convenience.

www.preschoolthemes.co.za

Each month the newsletter is added to the web page (sometimes about a week later than I have sent it) and there are past newsletters for you to access whenever you need new ideas.

I have a Facebook page which I use to mostly share useful and interesting articles relevant to preschool teaching and at times for personal development

<https://www.facebook.com/preschoolthemes/>

I have created Pinterest boards for each theme and several other general ones including birthday charts, administration, assessment, Grade R activities, play areas etc. I continually add to these boards. I find a lot of my teaching inspiration from the Pinterest boards. (There are many personal boards too – just scroll past them or enjoy them)

<https://www.pinterest.nz/kstedall/>

Happy Teaching
Karin ☺

Reading Readiness Has To Do With the Body

AUGUST 7, 2012 / LAURA GRACE WELDON

Sitting down. (Public domain by [Justen](#))

Today's kids **sit more than ever**. Babies spend hours confined in car seats and carriers rather than crawling, toddling, or being carried. As they get older their days are often heavily scheduled between educational activities and organized events. Children have 25 percent **less time for free play** than they did a generation ago, and that's before factoring in distractions like TV or video games.



Left to their own devices, children move. They hold hands and whirl in a circle till they fall down laughing. They beg to take part in interesting tasks with adults. They want to **face challenges and try again** after making mistakes. They climb, dig, and run. When they're tired they like to be rocked or snuggled. Stifling these full body needs actually **impairs their ability to learn**.

Sensory experience and fun. (CC by 2.0 Micah Sittig)



We know that our little ones walk and talk on their own timetables. No rewards or punishments are necessary to “teach” them. Yet children are expected to read, write and spell starting at five and six years old as if they develop the same way at the same time. **Academics are pushed on young children** with the assumption this will make them better students. This approach is not only unnecessary, it may be **contributing to problems** such as learning disorders, attention deficits, and long term

stress.

Studies contrasting reading instruction at age five compared to instruction at age seven find earlier lessons may damage reading development. By the time children reach the age of 11, students who were instructed earlier show poorer text comprehension and less positive attitudes toward reading than children whose instruction started later.

Literacy isn't easy. It requires children to decode shapes into sounds and words, to remember these words correctly in written and spoken form, and to understand their meaning. **Allowing reading to develop naturally or teaching it later tends to create eager, lifelong readers.** Why?

Children pushed to read early (not those who naturally pick it up) tend to rely on right brain processes because that area matures more quickly. These early readers are likely to guess at unknown words using clues such as appearance, context, beginning and ending letters. Their main tactic is memorizing sight words. These are valuable methods but not a balanced approach to reading. Such children may quickly tire after reading short passages or read smoothly but have difficulty deriving meaning from what they read. The procedure they use to decode words can make the content hard to comprehend. These reading problems can persist.



On the other hand, children benefit when they learn to read naturally or are taught later.



That's because, as the left brain matures and the **pathway between both hemispheres develops**, it becomes easier for them to sound out words, to visualize meanings, and mentally tinker with abstractions. They memorize short sight words but sound out longer words, an approach that is less taxing. As they incorporate more words into their reading vocabulary they more easily picture and understand what they are reading.

Developing eager readers (CC by 2.0 Daniel Pink)

In order for children to read, write and spell they must be developmentally ready. Some are ready at the age of four or five, some not for *many* years later. This readiness includes complex neurological pathways and kinaesthetic awareness. It includes the proprioceptive sense developed through sensory receptors in the muscles, joints, and tendons: a form of maturation essential for a physical sense of self (even essential for learning how to modulate one's voice and to hold objects carefully).

Such readiness isn't created by workbooks or computer programs. It's the result of brain maturation as well as rich experiences found in bodily sensation and movement. These



experiences happen as children play and work, particularly in **ways that cross the midline**. They include expansive movements such as climbing, jumping, digging, swimming, playing hopscotch and catch, riding bikes, sweeping, running. They also include fine movements such as chopping vegetables, drawing, building, playing **rhyming and clapping games**, using scissors, and playing in sand. And of course there's the essential growth that comes from snuggling, listening to stories, singing, trying new tastes, enjoying make believe. Children are drawn to such experiences. Without them, they won't have a **strong foundation for learning**.

Play is related to reading readiness. (CC by 2.0 stevendepolo)



These activities stimulate the child's brain to develop new neural pathways. Such activities also build confidence, smooth sensory processing, and create a bank of direct experience that helps the child visualize abstract concepts. Well-intended adults may think a good use of

a rainy afternoon is a long car ride to an educational exhibit. A young child is likely to derive more developmental value (and fun) from stomping in puddles and digging in mud followed by play time in the tub. There are many other factors contributing to reading readiness.

Perhaps most important is a supportive family life where play, reading, and conversation are an enjoyable part of each day. But it helps to remember that **young children want to participate in the purposeful work of making meals, fixing what's broken, and planting the garden**. They also need free time without the built-in entertainment of specialized toys, television, or video games. Their development is cued to movement. These **bodily experiences** prepare children for the magic found when shapes become words, words become stories, and they become readers. Reading enthusiasm isn't magic. (CC by 2.0 John-Morgan)

Portions of the post excerpted from *Free Range Learning*