

THE APPROACH TO LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

IN THE STEINER WALDORF KINDERGARTEN

Children in the Steiner Waldorf Kindergarten experience a play-based curriculum from age 3 – 6 years. Within this curriculum, Language and Literacy skills are holistic and integrated so that the children's language, literacy and communication experiences are embedded into daily life. The practitioners offer a respectful support to the child's creative and imaginative development. This meaningful approach to Language and Literacy prepares the child for a more formal academic process when entering Class 1.

Throughout the kindergarten session, there are opportunities for developing the love of language and pre-reading skills that are a necessary pre-requisite for literacy. True literacy is much more than the ability to de-code print and comprehend sentences, as it also includes a life-long enthusiasm for language, story and the printed word.

Some of the Principles underpinning SW early childhood literacy practice:

- The adults regard themselves as providing examples for the children to imitate, therefore modelling good clear speech and appropriate conversational habits of talking and listening.
- Skills in listening and comprehension are fostered daily with storytelling repeated in order to strengthen memory, widen vocabulary and build imaginative pictures.
- The development of narrative intelligence provides cultural capital that is powerful in its impact on children's future learning and opportunities. Daily access to poetry, story and good quality picture books are fundamental foundations for pre-literacy skills and an essential aspect of the kindergarten session.
- Differentiation is at the heart of planning of in the kindergarten, teachers consider the needs of the children in their group, for example bringing increasingly sophisticated stories to groups of older children.
- Daily 'circle time', led by the teacher in which poems, verses and songs, in combination with movement, are learned through imitation and repetition. Rhyme, rhythm and alliteration are included in these sessions, extending vocabulary, phonological awareness and strengthening capacities of memory and imagination.
- Time each day for self-initiated play. The children are free to devise, construct and develop their own games which require explanation, discussion, negotiation, evaluation and review. Play will often involve an understanding of narrative, environment, character and rules. Play supports children's cognition of the symbolic representation of concepts or objects and is an important pre-literacy skill
- Artistic activities are included daily and chosen to support the development of a healthy aesthetic sense. These activities, including painting, drawing and craftwork of many kinds are stimulation for oral and lay the foundations for written literacy and will include the use of instructions, sequencing, the understanding of process and development of powers of concentration.
- Similarly, the domestic activities of food preparation, serving and clearing away, care of the room and of the garden are also natural and meaningful prompts to expanding oral literacy.
- Examples of the use of the written and printed word will be part of everyday kindergarten life. There are pictures and posters in the cloakroom, letters and fliers for parents, registers in daily use, controls on cookers and heaters and name labels. The children will see adults using reading and writing as a natural part of life. Through their imitative capacities, children will copy these adults activities in their play.

- There are well-chosen picture books available for the children. Adults will demonstrate how books are used, cared for and to be respected.
- Children with English as an additional language learn fast in this environment, and help is given to the parents by sharing books, stories, songs etc. with home.

The curriculum is delivered through a planned, balanced combination of activities to engage the children in areas which they would not easily discover for themselves without adult intervention, as well as a safe, peaceful environment in which to practice them within a group and independently.

This early years strategy, with its slower introduction of formal reading and writing, generates a very ready assimilation of these skills from the age of $6\frac{1}{2}$ – 7years. Before the start of Class 1, the children have already developed good listening habits, memory, picture building and can work independently and with individuality. There is a continuing emphasis on fine motor skills, working sequentially, visual and auditory discrimination through games and varied artistic activities – designed for maximum effectiveness.