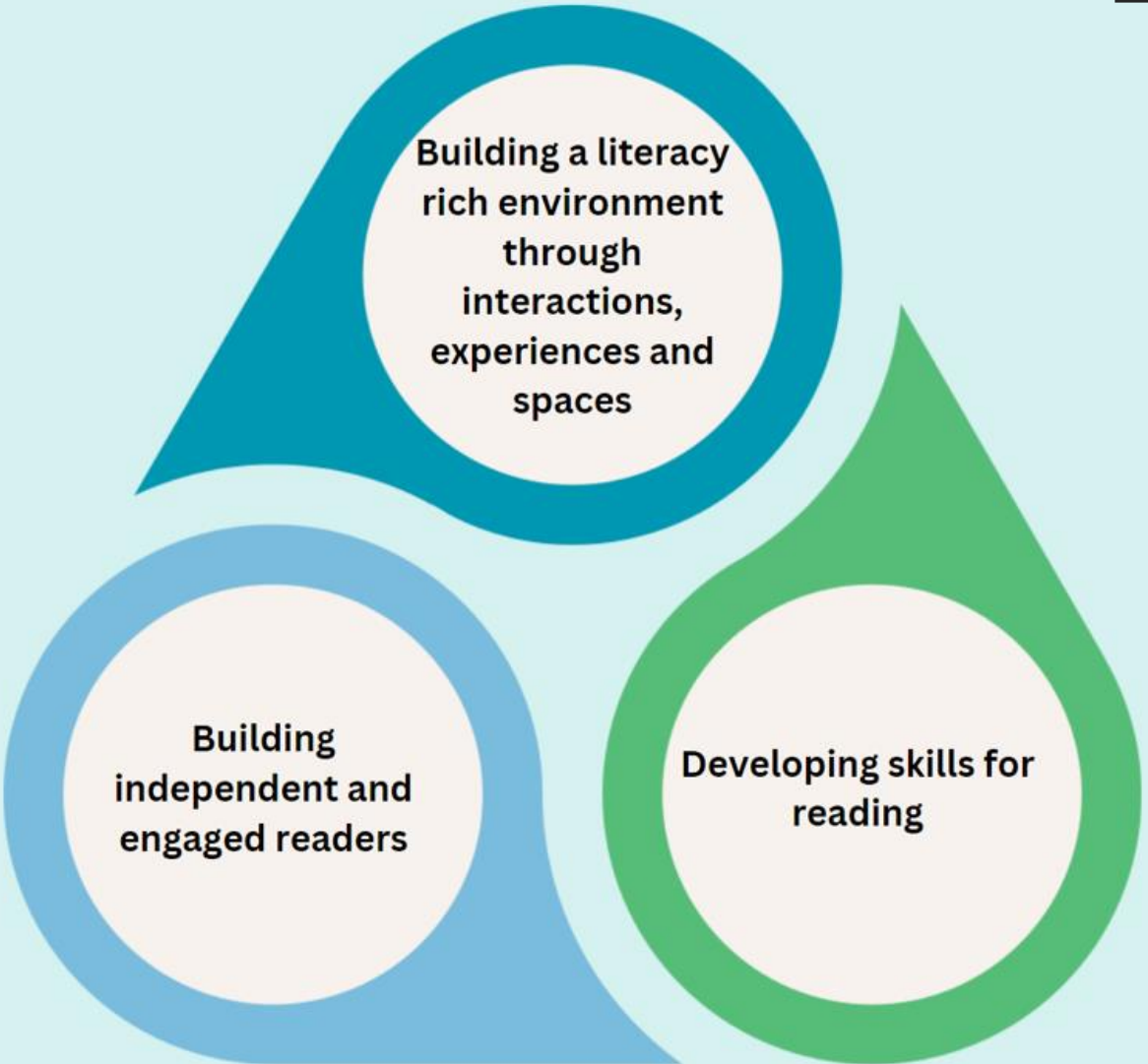


Realising the Ambition: Developing literacy through interactions, experiences and spaces.

**Catriona Gill, Education Officer Early Years**

# Learning to read in the Early Years



Building a literacy rich environment through interactions, experiences and spaces

Building independent and engaged readers

Developing skills for reading



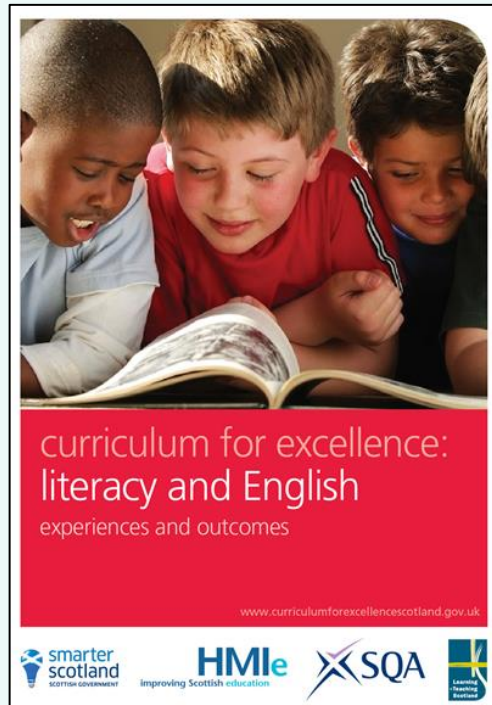
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# Learning to read in the Early Years

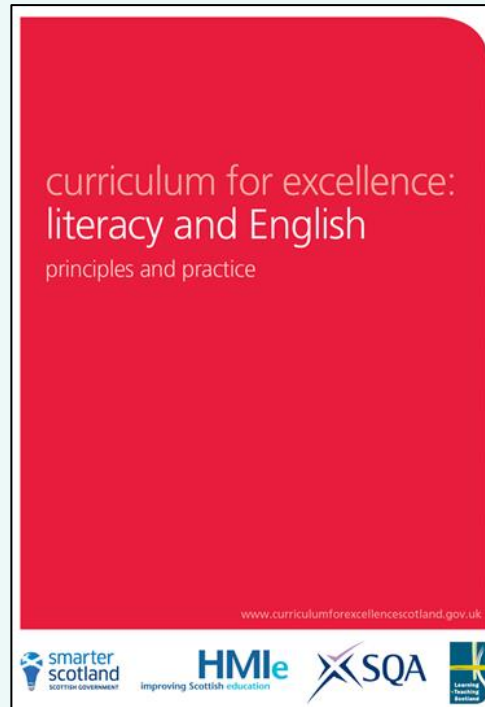
## **Building a literacy rich environment through interactions, experiences and spaces**

- Supporting children to develop a love of reading
- The importance of oral language for reading
- Developing phonological awareness
- Building concepts of print

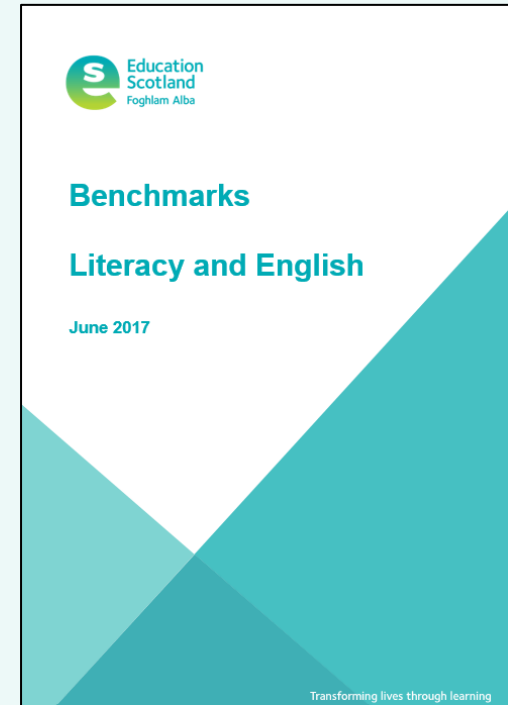
# Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (scotlandscurriculum.scot)



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# What are the features of effective learning and teaching in literacy?

‘Throughout their education, children and young people should experience an environment which is rich in language, and which sets high expectations for literacy and the use of language.

Children and young people need to spend time with stories, literature and other texts which will enrich their learning, develop their language skills and enable them to find enjoyment.

Spoken language has particular importance in the early years. Teachers will balance play-based learning with more systematic development and learning of skills and techniques for reading, including phonics.’

CfE Literacy and English: Principles and Practice

# Realising the ambition: Being Me

National practice guidance  
for early years in Scotland



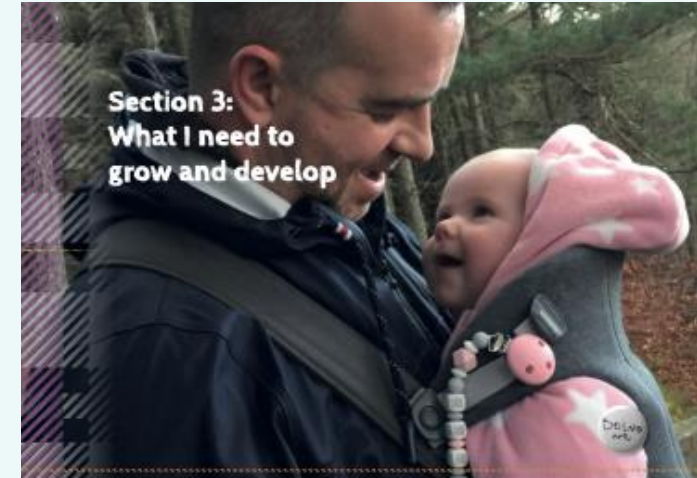
# Section 3: What I need to grow and develop



communication & language

## Communication and language

The importance of **communication and language** development for all aspects of children's lives cannot be overstated. Communication underlies our ability to manage behaviour and emotions, by expressing what we need or using language to regulate how we feel. Language is also much more than words. It is understanding and using patterns and cues for interaction, sequencing thoughts and ideas, and making stories that help us understand what is happening, and what is next.



Section 3:  
What I need to  
grow and develop

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Redealing the Ambition: Being Me
National practice guidance for early years in Scotland
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### Wellbeing - my self, social, emotional and communication development - some key aspects of what I need from my learning environment

#### Interactions

**From birth** → through my early years of childhood

- I learn about being me through the way you and others interact with me, look at me, speak to me, treat me and care for me.
- Notice how I show happiness by gurgling or smiling, express my frustration through crying and my stress in my body movements. I need you to help me by responding appropriately. I need you to be patient, calm, consistent and understanding.
- I speak my voice to you through my noises, actions and expressions. I am learning to communicate my thoughts and feelings by responding to others and my environment.
- Notice how I respond to your voice, words and expressions. You help me to learn to communicate and find my words by verbalising what's going on around me.
- Notice how I am beginning to find words to express my thoughts and feelings, but often my emotions are expressed through impulsive actions and gestures. I need you to help me by responding appropriately. I need you to continue to be patient, calm, consistent and understanding.
- Sometimes I am overwhelmed by my emotions. Know when I need to be secure and settled or when I need to be on my own for a short time to find calm and regulate my actions for myself. I need you to be calm and consistent and not annoyed or angry.
- As I am developing my own understanding of who I am know that I'm not yet able to understand and appropriately respond to the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others.
- I need you to encourage my awareness of others and support me and my peers as we play alongside each other and start to play together. Encourage me to be 'socially comfortable' and help me 'read' the messages others may give for example being happy, sad or upset. Help me resolve issues by modelling sharing a toy or giving a hug - but know that I may just not be able and ready to do this yet.
- I learn about self-respect through the way you and others interact with me, look at me, speak to me, treat me and care for me.
- Even as I grow, my emotions are often expressed through impulsive actions and gestures. I need you to help me identify other ways to regulate my emotions...ways that respect my individual physical and emotional needs.
- Sometimes I am overwhelmed by emotions. Help me to know and choose when I need to feel secure and settled or to be on my own for a short time. Help me to know how to find calm and how to regulate my actions for myself. I need you to be calm and consistent and not annoyed or angry.
- Notice how I observe and respond to your voice, words and expressions. You help me to learn to communicate and find my words by modelling empathy. I am learning from you how to be kind, calm and caring.
- I need you to support my developing understanding of the range of emotions that myself and other people experience. With your help I am developing an empathic understanding of the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others.
- I am beginning to develop an awareness of how to work with others when we are playing together. You help me to recognise when others are displaying strong emotions and you encourage me to find ways to relate to and resolve any tensions.

#### Experiences

**From birth** → through my early years of childhood

- Over time I begin to respond to the routines of my day. Support my routines by noticing how and when I like to play, be fed, changed or settled to sleep.
- I need support and reassurance to cope with changes to my usual routine, for example if I am separated from familiar people or if I move to a new space.
- Respond to my feeding and changing needs in a calm, patient and unhurried way. Such times are key in building a positive, trusting relationship with me. Take time to talk with me and explain what's happening.
- Showing your warmth and compassion is important for me as I grow and learn. Comforting me if I become upset or playing finger-rhymes such as Round and Round the Garden encourage a close emotional bond with me. Your empathy helps me to develop my own.
- I am constantly learning my likes and dislikes and how to communicate these. You help me develop through your responses. Verbalise what's happening. Be with me at my level and take time to notice and observe me to understand me.
- Stories, songs and rhymes with wellbeing themes help me to recognise and understand my needs and that of others.
- I need routines that help me mark the passing of time and give me comfort. I need a balance of different times in my day to play, relax and rest and have nourishment.
- I understand and respond to the routines of my day. I need you to involve me in these routines and develop my sense of ownership and independence.
- I need support and reassurance to cope with changes to my usual routine, for example if I am separated from familiar people or if I move to a new space. Help me learn to feel secure and to regulate my emotions through your empathic manner.
- Respond to my mealtime and personal care needs in a calm, patient, dignified and unhurried way. I am enjoying becoming more independent and learning to ask for help if I need it. Such times are key in building a positive, trusting relationship with me. Take time to talk with me, explain what's happening and encourage my independence.
- I am constantly learning my likes and dislikes and am learning how to communicate these in a thoughtful manner. You are helping me develop this through your kind responses. You and I share ideas and verbalise what's happening and I feel that you notice and understand me.
- Stories, songs and rhymes with wellbeing themes help me to recognise and understand my needs and that of others. You help me to engage in an emotionally empathic way to the feelings of others.

#### Spaces

**From birth** → through my early years of childhood

- I need spaces where I can relax, feel safe, happy, content and cosy which gives a sense of care and wellbeing.
- I need to experience a variety of spaces; during my day I need the right balance of stimulating and calming indoor and outdoor environments to suit my needs.
- Take me outdoors frequently to help me learn about my wider world. Experiencing fresh-air and being outdoors in different weather and natural environments develops my understanding of life and benefits my wellbeing.
- I need spaces where my keyworker can see or hear me and quickly respond to my smiles, tears, or gestures, for example, responding to my preferred way of being laid down to sleep.
- Organise my space to be socially comfortable, an uncluttered space to move alongside others and with toys and other materials to reach and explore. Arrange my play space so that I can be with others in a small group.
- I need spaces where I can relax, feel safe, happy, content and cosy and which give a sense of care and wellbeing. These spaces can be accessed independently by me when I feel the need to regulate myself.
- I need to experience stimulating and challenging play spaces outdoors and in.
- Daily outdoor experiences throughout the year help develop my sense of wellbeing and learn about my wider world.
- I continue to need both open spaces to move freely and small spaces to feel calm, contained and cosy.

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# Overarching themes for literacy learning from birth through the early years of childhood.

- Literacy can be attached to everyday learning experiences and opportunities
- Warm nurturing relationships help open up communication and connect literacy to the child's life
- Literacy experiences should weave, build and grow children's interests, vocabulary and knowledge
- Literacy learning should encourage children to see themselves as readers and writers, through purposeful experiences which build on the way that children use literacy.

## Overarching themes for literacy learning from birth through the early years of childhood

Literacy develops throughout a child's life from pre-birth and underpins all communication and interaction

Literacy can be attached to everyday learning experiences and opportunities

Warm nurturing relationships help open up communication and connect literacy to the child's life

Literacy experiences should weave, build and grow children's interests, vocabulary and knowledge

Literacy learning should encourage children to see themselves as readers and writers, through purposeful experiences which build on the way that children use literacy

Realising the Ambition (2020:72)

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# Let's debunk the notion of Pre-Literacy



‘Young children’s first investigations of print and their first attempts to use written symbols are not ‘pre’, they are the real thing!’

Whitehead (2002:53)

‘Playful literacy starts with the child and positions the child as an expert in using language. ‘

Realising the Ambition (2020:70)

# #Beingme: What do I need?

‘The real basics of literacy must include purposes, motives and understanding. Children learn literacy skills in the process of using writing and reading for their own purposes.’

Whitehead (2002:53)



# The Learning Environment



**Sensitive interactions -**  
honing the skill of stepping in and stepping back

**Flexible experiences -**  
learn from the child to inform practice

**Variety of spaces -**  
outdoors and inside

facilitation



The experiences and spaces for play we facilitate for the children should reflect the children's ideas, aspirations, curiosities and next steps in their learning.

**Realising the Ambition (2020:49)**

# Why is play pedagogy important?

- It is conducive to the development of relationships and conversations
- Children have opportunities for moving their whole bodies, co-ordinating thoughts and ideas, the senses and the physical body and developing skills that are essential for reading and writing.
- Sensitively supported by adults, it enables children to develop phonological awareness through songs, rhymes and stories - When phonic strategies are taught in isolation it is much harder for children to grasp the concepts involved.
- It enables children to develop rich experiences, contexts for learning
- Play is a central integrating mechanism.
- Play is a form of metacognition.

# The development of literacy

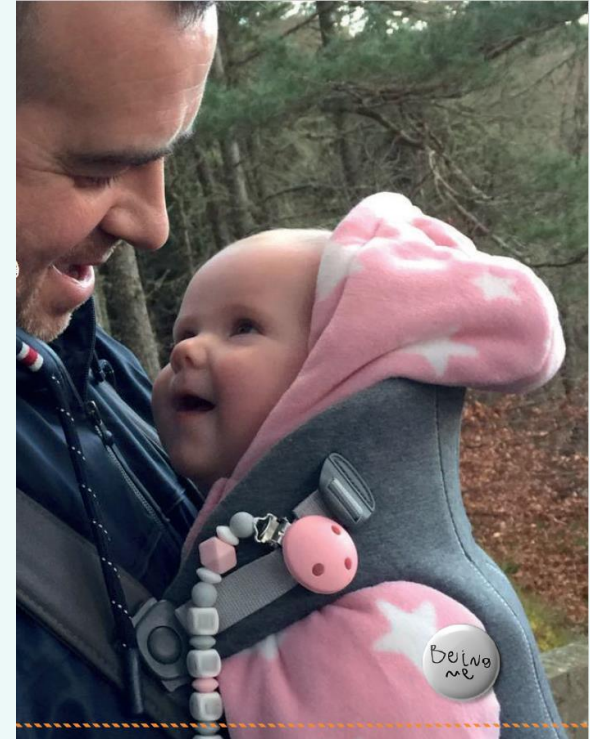
- Relating to Others
- Conversations
- The beginnings of the sounds of language - Listening, looking and moving
- Movement
- The importance of the sounds of language - Phonological awareness
- Action Songs and Rhymes
- Becoming a symbol maker and a symbol user
  - Investigating print
  - Children's strategies

Adapted from Bruce & Spratt, 2011

# Relating to Others

“Literacy - reading and writing - develops from communication, which can be spoken or unspoken. When your baby looks into your eyes and gives you a big smile, you can't mistake what he is trying to tell you.”

Whitehead (2003:114)



# Serve and Return



[Talking Baby at 3 Months Old \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

“Language is also much more than words. It is understanding and using patterns and cues for interaction, sequencing thoughts and ideas, and making stories that help us understand what is happening, and what is next.”  
Realising the Ambition  
(2020:24)

# The beginnings of the sounds of language



## Listening, looking and moving

- Listening is the beginning of phonological awareness.
- Babies have a natural tendency to look at faces. They respond by copying mouth movements and tracking movement. Fixating and tracking are important for reading and writing.
- Grabbing is a reflex that a baby is born with, but by three months old they will actively reach out to grasp objects. This changes the eye focus and helps develop eye movements.



# Movement

‘It is active involvement and exploration through movement play that enables a child to become a more mature, efficient organiser of sensory information – providing the foundations for all future learning.’

Greenland (2010:190)

‘The development of movement and coordination for a child is linked to communication and cognitive development.’

Realising the Ambition (2020:24)



# The importance of the sounds of the language



## Phonological awareness

- Through reading stories, singing songs and reciting rhymes, children gain awareness of rhyme, words and syllables,
- Rhythm, music, dance and song, helps develop syllabification, blending and segmentation.
- Intonation, tone and pauses in language, help develop an understanding of word boundaries and punctuation.
- Rhyme helps children to hear patterns and distinguish between those that are similar and different as well as to see patterns which help them decode and encode words as they read and write.
- Alliteration helps children to hear repetition of phonemes (the smallest sound units) and to see graphemes (phonemes in print) at the beginning of words.

# Songs & Rhymes

- Finger songs and rhymes link sound, sight and movement.
- Action songs help the co-ordination of sound, vision and whole body movements.
- Nursery rhymes and stories help develop a sense of narrative, storyline and characters. They also support the development of phonological and phonemic awareness.
- A core of specially selected nursery rhymes should be used which support rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and initial sounds.
- When phonic strategies are taught in isolation it is much harder for children to grasp the concepts involved.



# Stories

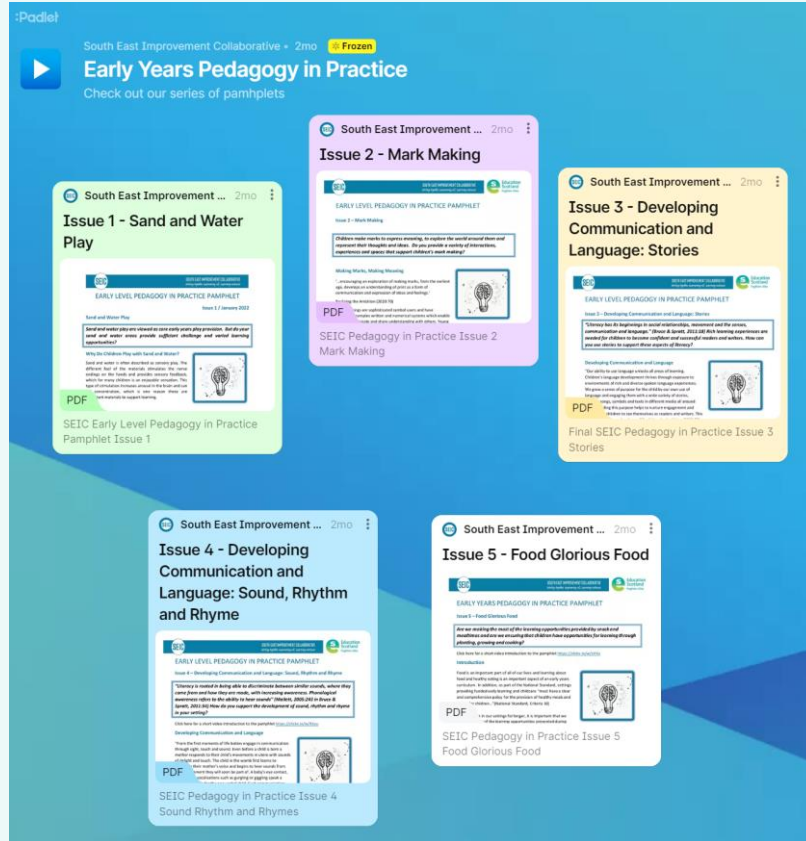
“We grow a sense of purpose for the child by our own use of language and engaging them with a wide variety of stories, rhymes, songs, symbols and texts in different media all around them. Building this purpose helps to nurture engagement and encourages children to see themselves as readers and writers. This doesn’t just happen by chance.”

Realising the Ambition (2020:70)



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# SEIC Pedagogy in Practice Pamphlets



<https://padlet.com/seicollab/early-years-pedagogy-in-practice-d50n54u2noqrw1to>



SOUTH EAST IMPROVEMENT COLLABORATIVE  
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## EARLY LEVEL PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE PAMPHLET

### Issue 4 – Developing Communication and Language: Sound, Rhythm and Rhyme

***“Literacy is rooted in being able to discriminate between similar sounds, where they come from and how they are made, with increasing awareness. Phonological awareness refers to the ability to hear sounds” (Mallett, 2005:243 in Bruce & Spratt, 2011:54) How do you support the development of sound, rhythm and rhyme in your setting?***

Click here for a short video introduction to the pamphlet <https://clickv.ie/w/R1vu>

#### Developing Communication and Language

“From the first moments of life babies engage in communication through sight, touch and sound. Even before a child is born a mother responds to their child’s movements in utero with sounds of delight and touch. The child in the womb first learns to recognise their mother’s voice and begins to hear sounds from the environment they will soon be part of. A baby’s eye contact, gesture and vocalisations such as gurgling or giggling speak a thousand words for the non-verbal child. Such communication marks the first steps in a lifetime of social and emotional communicative development. Spoken language development forms only part of this social and emotional communication. The role of gesture and movement continues to be of significance in fully understanding human communication throughout life.



We need to co-create safe spaces with children to talk, sing, rhyme and play with sounds, vocabulary and print. Role modelling language and building vocabulary to make sense of the world is vital for all young children. The amount and quality of language that children are exposed to is crucial to their progress. The journey begins with noticing and listening to sounds and conversations around them.” Realising the Ambition (2020:70)

#### The beginnings of the sounds of language

##### Listening, looking and moving

- Listening is the beginning of phonological awareness.
- In babies and very young children, listening can be supported by quiet environments without background music or TV.
- Babies have a natural tendency to look at faces. They respond by copying mouth movements and tracking movement.
- Eye contact with young children is essential, and also allowing time for them to look away to self regulate.



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# Becoming a symbol maker and a symbol user.

*'As soon as children begin to use symbols they are moving from the present, literal, concrete and real to something that is not necessarily present or real. They can think in more abstract and imaginative ways'*

Bruce and Dyke (2017)

We make and use symbols in a huge range of ways:

- Verbal symbols - language, song
- Non-verbal symbols - Gesture, dancing, music, visual arts, fine arts
- Written symbols - drawing, writing, reading



# Investigating Print



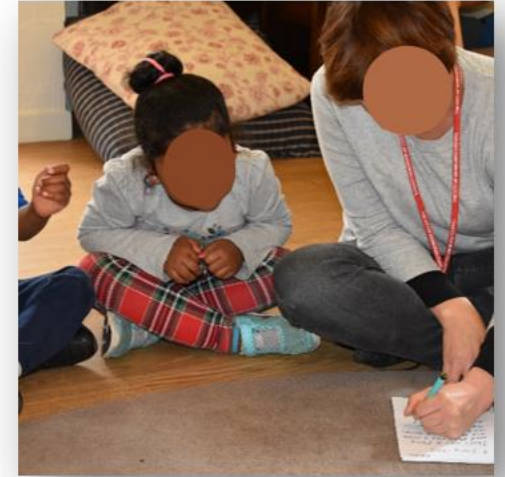
Young children are more likely to investigate print and learn about it, if

- The print is genuine
- The situation supports play
- The method is scientific



# Children's Strategies

- Ask questions
- Watch others
- Use your name
- Exploit what you know
- Use alphabets and sounds





# Questions to consider

- How confident am I that the spaces/resources in our learning environment support literacy?
- Am I confident in supporting the development of literacy through children's play? If not, what needs to change?
- Do I have a deep pedagogical understanding of development and progression within literacy?
- Can I identify any areas for development?

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<https://education.gov.scot/media/rallfbmy/plr-glossarynumeracy.pdf>



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