

Learning Journals

Each child here at Grafton has their very own Learning Journal/Scrapbook we use them to keep a record of each child's learning and once a child leaves us at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage they should be pretty full.

However we can only document what we see when your child is here and for a part-time child this is proportionally much less than for a full timer. There will be other aspects of your child's learning that you are aware of, which you can share via your child's Daily Diary using each month's My Favourite Things pages. Feel free to send in your own observations, comments and photos which we can then add to this learning journey. You may do this via email if you find that simpler, just email them to Denise at denise.tupman@inbox.com

Photos of family pets, holidays, new siblings, new houses are all important transitions in your child's life which could be included in your child's Learning Journal and will help up together to build up a meaningful picture of your child's development and progress through the EYFS whilst with us. Our philosophy involves sharing knowledge about your child in ongoing dialogue about learning with the family, so that your child's learning can be supported effectively.

Please tell us what your child is learning about at home so that we can support what they are learning here. Please let us know what stage you think your child is at in their learning and what you would like us to work on next with your child. This can all be done via your child's Daily Diary and via your child's Parent's Comments sheet which you will find in your own child's Record of Next Step Activities which is sent home in your child's bag two or three times a year for feedback, so that we may work in partnership together to enrich the opportunities we make available here for your child.

Over the past few weeks many of these have been sent home so that parents can see what our planned Next Steps are for your child this term and we have been delighted to note that many parents have written the most lovely comments for their child's key worker to take onboard. However please don't feel overwhelmed we do not expect you to write reams, which is why we have only given you a little 5 cm x 8 cm box to comment in but some feedback is vital so that we know we are all on the right track for your own child. You may of course write more if you wish!



Did you know we have been talking a little about hibernation here at Grafton Childcare and the fact that Milligan our hedgehog is now hibernating underneath "The Kids Shed" until the Spring, we don't have to keep our eyes peeled for hedgehog poo now!

Block Play Continued.

Duplo, Sticklebricks, Starlinks and other products which stick together in some way are equally valuable, but serve a different purpose to the basic free-standing, stackable, wooden blocks described we have here at Grafton. They are known as construction toys rather than blocks.

Although good-quality blocks might seem expensive ours cost well over £2,000, they often last longer than the latest computerised gimmick. Sets may have to be of a smaller scale than those used in school, but will be just as valuable. Don't try to take over children's building - build your own! Don't worry too much about asking questions or getting them to describe their buildings. Listening to what they want to tell you is just as important. Using a board to build on means that you don't always have to knock it down, although that's part of the fun, too. Make clearing up and tidying away part of the game, and it won't seem a chore. Try to keep blocks in a box or bag, so they don't get lost, and you'll all still be enjoying them years later.

As hopefully you all noted in last month's newsletter we have a designated playarea now just for our Blocks, which the children are loving as it means their creations can be left out for longer if they want Mummy or Daddy to come and admire their creations before they go home. We also have a large purple dustbin full of Mini Unit Blocks which are delightful for toddlers' small hands and ideal for table top play, or outside on our new decked areas. Even the staff love the natural wood texture and enjoy building intricate structures with these carefully machined blocks.

Newsletters

Would you like to be added to our database for the sending out of our notes, newsletters and invoices via email. If you have not as yet given us an email address for this purpose, please could you send Denise a quick email to denise.tupman@inbox.com and she will add you to our database.

We are very happy to send it to both your work and or your home email address. For parents who work away from Newton Abbot, they might wish to have their child's Newsletters emailed to them at Work so they can be kept up to speed with things here at Grafton!



Block Play

You probably expect to see a set of building blocks here at Grafton. You might even remember playing with something similar yourself. They've been around for a very long time. So why are they so important in Early Years Settings? Blocks help children develop spatial awareness. They help them to build 'mental maps' of spaces around them. They are comfortable to hold and manipulate and they can be constantly re-arranged. There is no right way to build with them, and this 'open-endedness' encourages children to be creative and to think for themselves. While playing, children can increase their awareness of shape, pattern, symmetry or number. They are also problem-solving, using their imagination and, if they are allowed to play without interruptions, they are developing concentration skills and the learning disposition to persevere. Block play can tell us a lot about how our children are thinking and what fascinates and interests them. Educationalists call these patterns of actions 'schemas', and they help to identify how to move learning forward onto each child's Next Steps.

Although children's play just happens spontaneously, it is complex and comes in myriad forms. One universal type is open-ended play, also known as free-flow play, in which the children themselves determine what to do, how to do it, and what to use. Open-ended means not having a fixed answer; unrestricted; allowing for future change. In the course of such play, children have no fear of doing it wrong since there is no correct method or outcome; and observant adults are privileged with insights into children's development and thinking. Open-ended play is intrinsic to childhood; children have an impetus to explore and create. When free to experiment with the simplest materials, they find ways to express and develop their thoughts in imaginative play.

Some researchers think that children have a tendency to be a 'patterner' or a 'dramatist' when they play with blocks. A 'patterner' will focus on the shapes and patterns they make with the blocks, perhaps laying them on the floor, or stacking them high. A 'dramatist' will construct objects (such buildings, beds) to tell a story around, especially if they can use other small world toys too.

Here at Grafton we want to encourage children to be both patterners and dramatists, so they need lots of pure block play to experiment, as well as mixing blocks with 'small world' objects such as cars, animals or people, for making stories. Unit blocks are smaller multiples and fractions of a unit, plus curves, arches, cylinders and wedges, for use on the floor. The length of a unit block is exactly twice the width and the width exactly twice the thickness. A full set is needed for quality play - just a few won't satisfy the young architect!

Treasure Baskets

With all of the changes we are making here at Grafton Childcare, you may one day find your baby sitting next to a low basket filled with household items and some odds and ends. You may also spot that the key workers are not chatting to your child, but sitting and watching. If you were to enquire what was happening, you might well be told that treasure basket play is under way. So, what is treasure basket play and how might it help your baby?

A good starting point is to understand that for centuries, babies and young children were not given toys to play with. The best they could hope for were things that were lying on the floor or household objects that might have been passed to them. Toys are a recent invention, and while they undoubtedly have their uses, the roots of treasure basket play are to be found in these earlier times.

It was noted that when babies were given household and other objects made from natural materials, they concentrated for long periods and seemed interested in handling and exploring them. When objects were combined and offered to babies in a low basket, they suddenly had a rich play experience. Treasure baskets, the concept pioneered by Elinor Goldschmied, found their way into nurseries. Today commercially-produced treasure baskets can be bought, but many practitioners build up their own collection of objects. What to expect in a treasure basket, treasure baskets may vary enormously from setting to setting. The only constant is that the objects themselves should be either natural objects or items made from natural materials, which seem to give babies more sensory feedback than plastic items and so are of more interest to them. There should also be sufficient items for babies to be able to explore a range of different shapes, sizes and textures.

Having plenty of objects also means that there are more opportunities for babies to make connections between the different objects. If you try this at home you might spot your baby dropping a metal scoop into a tin and grinning with delight at the ringing metallic sound. Babies, just like adults, can become bored with the familiar, so it is good practice for some of the objects in the treasure basket to be taken out from time to time and replaced with others. This rotation gives babies new opportunities to create some interesting combinations. They may drop a newly arrived lemon into a metal bowl, or bang together two tins.



Treasure Baskets Continued...

Objects that you could find in a treasure basket might be:

- a leather purse
- firm fruit and vegetables, for example, an orange, lemon or aubergine
- spoons of different sizes and materials, such as metal, wooden and horn
- metal tins of different sizes, for example, biscuit and cake tins
- cardboard tubes
- scarves
- rubber plug
- ball of wool or string
- natural sponge
- hand whisk
- chamois leather
- shells

What are the benefits of Treasure Basket Play, one of the most striking things about watching babies engaged in treasure basket play is their level of concentration. They often spend a long time mouthing and touching an object that appeals to them. It is also thought that because babies are 'in charge', they can gain feelings of independence and mastery. This will ultimately support children's self-esteem. In addition, the play will help babies in developing hand-eye co-ordination and also learning about shape, size and depth.

Most of the time, you would expect the key workers caring for your child to talk and play with them. But this is not quite the case with treasure basket play. The idea is for the adult to step back so that the baby takes the lead. This approach means that the baby's thoughts and play are uninterrupted by the adult. So here at Grafton we sit close by while the baby plays and usually observe what the baby is interested in doing with the objects. This, in turn, helps us to plan other activities and to think about what new objects to put in the treasure basket for another time.

Many parents are so used to seeing toys as the only safe way for babies to play that it can come as a shock when they see their child mouthing a shell. While this is a normal reaction, it is equally natural for babies to mouth in order to explore and learn. Objects put in a treasure basket are chosen with this in mind and so are sufficiently large not to pose a choking hazard. Items are also cleaned after use to prevent cross-contamination.

Treasure Baskets Continued...

There are no rules that prevent you as a parent adopting this type of play at home. While you may not wish or be able to buy a low basket and lots of items, it will still be beneficial for your baby to play with natural materials and objects. So why not try putting out a mixture of containers - that is, wooden bowls alongside smaller objects such as scoops, spoons, wooden pegs. Check that objects are clean and cannot be broken or swallowed and remember safety first and stay with your child. Here at Grafton we have had such a success with our Treasure baskets that we have all been immediate converts. We have put together a selection of natural objects which we found around the house and in Boots and the Body Shop! We thought we would have to buy lots of things, but once we started looking around the house, we were all surprised by just how many suitable objects we had. It's an amazingly cheap way of keeping babies happy and learning at the same time, why not give it a go.

We are in the process of transforming our under twos area and have recently purchased the beautiful wooden birch shelf below and sets of natural rattan cane baskets into which we shall store all of our natural materials for the babies to delve into. Emily has been enjoying using her under twos resources budget on some of the beautiful items from the www.playtoz.co.uk website which is well worth a look if you want to learn a bit more about treasure baskets etc. If when you are out and about you spot any funky wooden spoons, egg cups, nail brushes, patry brushes etc we would love them for our treasure baskets and the babies will thank you as well. Next month I shall look at how this type of play can be developed with toddlers into something called 'heuristic play', so watch this space!

