

10/9/2014

Hi Everybody,

Things are moving right along here at school! Many of you have assisted already, and we thank you for your help. Don't worry if you forget some of the jobs by the time you assist next time - we'll run through it all again when you come back. Many kids have been saying good bye to their grown-ups at the bathroom before or after washing hands, some outside the building, and others at the classroom. Everyone will do this in their own way, in their own time, but if you have questions, be sure to let us know. In fact, if you have questions or comments throughout the year, all you have to do is send us an email (attn: Amanda&Joseph; parkwest@parkwestcoop.org) or call the office (773-327-1115) to arrange a time to talk. Conferences will be here before we know it, and we look forward to touching base with all of you.

As kids settle into our routines and expectations, they are facing challenges and taking risks to meet them. One way in which this has been happening already is with writing. Many kids begin by telling teachers they do not know how to write their name, when we ask them to put it on a painting or gluing project, or they want to sign up for a turn to water plants or ride on a favorite vehicle in the gym. We encourage them to make any marks they do know, show us the way they do it. Then, we might ask if we can do it the way we know next to theirs, so they can see the standard shapes of the letters. On another occasion, we might bring their cubby tag over so they can look at the letters and try to make the same kinds of marks, or draw dots for someone to connect to form a particularly tricky letter. Sometimes, someone needs some actual physical support, a teacher's hand over his, to have the confidence and physical strength needed to try to make a mark. Each time someone tries, the challenge is less daunting, and eventually kids are writing names on lists and artwork without a reminder to do so. Even if a signature is not a clear A-M-A-N-D-A, teachers get to know them and can decipher them most of the time. We read these signatures aloud at group times, when recalling who has had a turn and who is waiting for a turn, who is next for an activity, demonstrating that all that hard work is worthwhile: the grown-ups can *read* what has been written.

This is the beginning of a long process of understanding what the value and meaning is of a complex system we use everyday. Literacy is not simply memorizing the alphabet and having phonetic awareness. The ability to read and write is strengthened by a desire to read and write. That desire is deepened when confidence is acquired in a stepwise fashion, and when activities are presented in approachable tasks. Eventually, we begin to discern who is ready for more than their own name. We might suggest they write their friend's name on a drawing they've made for them, or someone may come ask us how to spell MOM for a painting they've made especially for you. We might ask someone to make the sign up list for BLOCKS and help them sound out B-L-O-K-S, an invented spelling that is a good first step in understanding the way letters work together. Kids who want a teacher to read a favorite book to them each day again may one day be encouraged to read it to their peers, and when they say they do not know how to read, a teacher will remind them they know the story and can read the pictures.

Another step in the larger process. Eventually, kids will begin to notice letters on street signs or in the grocery store, begin to decipher APPLE on the snack sign in the classroom or ask to write CUCMBR (again, invented spelling, which we encourage) when they bring cucumbers for snack.

There will be jumps and starts, stalls and staggers in this process. Everyone does not do it at the same time, and something that seemed to be solidly understood may seem to suddenly disappear as one's focus shifts to another area of development. Between 2 and 5 years old, we are all taking in so much and developing very quickly. Teachers do not expect to see a straight line to follow for anyone, but recognize that the path will be individual and lots of things will spring up along the way, all worth exploring and beneficial for building a well-rounded understanding of the world. It's all interconnected. Group life, our classroom group in this case, offers a good lens for seeing just that.

Have a great weekend!

Amanda and Joseph