

THE Montessori METHOD



Barbara Isaacs asks whether we are making the most of the early learning opportunities afforded by books...

Recent focus on the importance of reading to young children has prompted this contribution. The, perhaps naive, presumption has been that most children get a bedtime story read to them by their parents, but observing young children's attitude to books at nursery, and also considering their use of language, I am dubious that this bedtime routine really happens as often as professionals advocate or young children would like.

There is no doubt that nursery age children enjoy books and that if a practitioner sits in the book area, they will be drawn to him or her like bees to honey. What is more, many of them will have the patience to sit there for long periods of time and listen as well as

prompt readings of their favourite books. For practitioners, this may be the first opportunity to observe a child's awareness of familiar letters by pointing and naming them, or allowing other children to identify the initial letters of their name or of their friends' names.

However, the love of a book, often the strongest motivation to learn to read, does not always begin with letter recognition. The comfort of sharing books with our loved ones links them with a sense of wellbeing and belonging. The ability to recognise familiar passages, to contribute to a verse, or to talk about the pictures all contribute significantly to a child's ability to express their ideas and to use rich language inspired by the writer or the illustrator. Contact with books enhances children's opportunities to play with language and to explore its sounds, rhythms and patterns. All of these skills are essential to emerging literacy and to children's ability to communicate ideas to others, be it in conversation or in the stories they may choose to write later on in primary school.



Children's choices

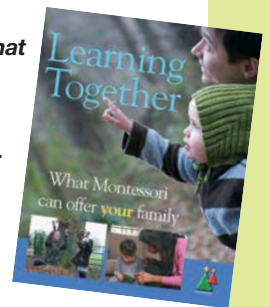
These reflections prompt further thoughts about how we share books with children at nursery. For example, are shared story times the best place to nurture children's love of literature? Should not book areas be inviting and comfortable, and used by adults as well as children to share a story in small groups when children have time to contribute, ask questions and comment on what they see and hear?

Broadening our focus, is the recent trend of sending books home for nursery children to share with their families reflecting children's interests? Are children given time to select the books they like or are curious about?

Learning together

A NEW PARENTING BOOK FROM MONTESSORI ST NICHOLAS IS TAKING A FRESH LOOK AT FAMILY LIFE...

Building Strong Foundations: What Montessori can offer your family aims to help parents put their children at the heart of the home and to unlock their amazing potential. Available now, the book can be ordered at montessori.org.uk/bookstore or by calling 020 7493 8300.



Should they choose the book with their carer or parent? Opportunities for children and parents to discover a book together may vanish in the future as libraries close and electronic versions of books become the norm, so it is likely that nurseries' role in making books accessible will be even greater.

Rather than offering practical ideas, I hope to encourage practitioners to think about the value of children's literature in the everyday life of the nursery. Stories offer such rich resources: stories traditional and contemporary, in verse and prose, in pictures or with illustrations. We also have access to books filled with information and facts, giving us glimpses of the lives of children and their families far away, in context of their traditions, cultures and present day lives. Such riches should be treated with care and consideration but above all should be offered to children with real love and joy, on a one-to-one basis.

I know much of this is common sense; however, we must remember to ask "Do our children have a voice when choosing a book to take home?", "Do we share and understand the thoughts and ideas behind their choices?" "Are we able to extend them beyond what the child knows?" And finally, "Do we really value the contribution books make to every child's developing literacy?"