



## Portobelo Avonhead Newsletter

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter!!

Here at Portobelo we are often asked by whānau, 'what does my child learn at preschool and why are they not writing or counting and being taught school readiness?' I thought the best person to answer to this question is Nathan Wallis, a neuroscience educator who has also trained as an early childhood teacher.

'As adults, we understand the word 'play' to mean the opposite of serious work. The idiom 'child's play' refers to something that is easy and trivial. Often grown-ups use the 'P word' to dismiss what children are doing as unimportant – when it's time to tidy up or do some 'real' learning. Yet, for kids, play is challenging and important: it's how they learn.

### THE DEVELOPING BRAIN NEEDS TO PLAY

In his presentations on the development of the brain Nathan Wallis underscores the important message that "play isn't a precursor to 'real' learning. Rather, it is a method of evolving that facilitates higher intelligence." To understand why play is vital, it is important to first get a handle on the neurosequential development of the brain – how it is built from the bottom up, with the development of different 'brains' taking centre stage at different times. The development of Brain 1, the brain stem, takes centre stage from 0-6 months, with Brain 2, the centre of movement and coordination, developing the most from six months to two years of age. Brain 3, the limbic system, or emotional brain, "comes online" between 18 months and two years. Until children are around the age of seven or eight, Brain 3 is in control: dictated principally by their feelings, young children see the world quite differently from Mum and Dad, who have fully mature brains. Finally, Brain 4, the frontal cortex, moves into centrestage development when a child is around the age of seven or eight. "Everything that makes you brainy, plus everything that makes you a nice person happens in Brain 4," explains Nathan. As Nathan says, "you can't skip the stages". One of his key messages for parents is that it is important that the needs of the emotional brain (Brain 3) are met if a child is to develop key dispositions like creativity, perseverance, and resilience, and so access the higher executive functions of their frontal cortex (Brain 4). And how are these needs met? Through being responsive, loving and empathetic, and through opportunities for free play.

### 'FREE' IS THE KEY

Rather than dismissing children's play as unimportant, or taking over and making it part of an adult's agenda for learning, grownups need to understand a few things about play, says Nathan. The key word is "free", that is, "child-initiated, child-led play that evolves without the imposition of an adult's agenda or purpose. It is about the process, not some predetermined outcome." Open-ended, free play enables children to follow their own thought processes and to sustain their attention and focus, both of which are fundamental for brain development. When being taught numbers or words, a child might sustain their focus for one or two minutes. Yet, when pretending to be a hairdresser, they might easily sustain their focus for an hour or more.

### THE PROBLEMS WE HAVE WITH PLAY

Operating as we do in our frontal cortex (our rational brain), grown-ups tend to focus on order – don't mix the Lego and Playmobil, we have to be out the door in half an hour, that is too high, you'll fall, that is the wrong shape, try this one. It is fair to say that free play can threaten these objectives – especially as we watch the products of a day's play spreading throughout the house. However, a more fundamental problem some adults have with free play is their belief that it is not 'real' learning. Nathan challenges our thinking around 'real' learning, noting our cultural preoccupation with the "early attainment of cognitive skills" in young children – naming all the colours, identifying letters, counting to 20... "It's not that literacy and numeracy aren't important," he emphasises. "They're wonderful – when they are embedded in child-led free play for children under the age of seven. The problem is that focusing primarily on numeracy and literacy when a child is under seven can mean that the developing brain isn't getting what it really needs." Focusing on a narrow set of learning objectives, we may be blinkered to the stuff that really matters in the long run: how our kids relate to others, their creativity, and their perception of themselves as learners – all of which develop naturally through self-initiated, self-directed free play. Naturally, we may worry that our children will fall behind, or not be 'school ready', if we stop explicitly teaching them their letters and numbers. Fear not, says Nathan: if we meet the needs of our children at the stage of neurodevelopment they are at (and let them play!), then our kids will easily pick up these cognitive skills later on. "A child who knows their alphabet at the age of three or four may have better literacy skills than their peers at age six, but the advantage doesn't stay with them," says Nathan. "For most kids, the advantage disappears in the first year of school" – which means, by the end of the first year, the other kids have caught up.

### PLAY PROMOTES A POSITIVE DISPOSITION TO LEARNING

"We can very accurately predict future outcomes for young children – and it has nothing to do with the alphabet," says Nathan. "It all comes down to their disposition about themselves as a learner: what really matters for a child under seven is how clever he thinks he is – how he feels about learning." To illustrate, Nathan presents the picture of two kids. Child A (five years) has "early cognitive attainment", knowing his numbers to 100 and his alphabet. He has been brought up in an environment where he has been extended: when he has shown Mum that he can count to 100, she has tended to say "great, and what comes next?" When he has got the wrong answer, he has been told the correct one. The message he has received is that he is not quite competent enough. Child B has been brought up in a child-led, free-play environment, and frankly he would sooner be out building huts or riding his bike than practising his numbers. He loves stories and imaginary play, but he doesn't really care about writing his name. When Child B is asked about himself as a learner he responds, "I'm great: I keep trying and work it out, or I just ask Mum and Dad and they help me." Statistically, says Nathan, Child B is far more likely to get a degree, and far less likely to develop depression and anxiety.'

Free play is at the very core of what we do here at Portobelo. We believe in setting tamariki up for lifelong success and value promoting dispositions such as perseverance, compassion and courage. Through engaging with up to date professional research we firmly believe the best way to promote these dispositions and instil a passion for learning, and the confidence tamariki need to view themselves as capable, is through uninterrupted, tamariki-led play For more information see [Nathan Wallis facebook.com/nathanwallisfactoreducation](https://www.facebook.com/nathanwallisfactoreducation), or feel free to talk to one of our incredible kaiako about the benefits of play for tamariki.

## Kaiako

A number of you will have met **Molly** over the past weeks. Molly is enjoying her time with us in the nursery and preschool. She is also studying horticulture at Lincoln University. Molly enjoys reading, gardening, and spending time with family and friends.

**Amber** has been doing an incredible job supporting the preschool team before heading off on maternity leave on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May.

Also, we would just like to let you know **Pip** will be on extended medical leave from 13<sup>th</sup> of May and will be away for a couple of months. We wish Pip a speedy recovery and look forward to seeing Pip on her return.

**Nga Mihi, Vanessa centre leader**

## News from the Nursery ...

Over the past few months, we have welcomed some new friends into the Nursery and so our group learning was focused around tuakana teina (older and younger guiding relationships) and relationships within the nursery. Through the generosity and friendliness of ngā tamariki, new tamariki were welcomed in with open arms as they settled into the centre. We have been providing a number of experiences to strengthen both new and old relationships.

We have loved getting outside, enjoying the beautiful weather as much as we can and here you will find ngā tamariki challenging their climbing skills, exploring construction and cooking in the sandpit, investigating sensory play, and working alongside peers as working theories are developed. Kaiako use the environment each day to set up a variety of new and exciting experiences that have captured ngā tamariki curiosity and led to many new individual learning goals.

We just love to boogie along with some music and movement, and we love a good dance party inside, action songs are just the best! Some of our favourites include, 'sleeping bunnies', 'rock a bye your bear', 'throw the bean bag' and so much more. This allows some beautiful teamwork as ngā tamariki explore their body movements, share their ideas and boogie away to the music.





## ***News from the Preschool ...***

This season we have been connecting with our community. Ngā tamariki have been building whanaungatanga (relationships) with their friends, their environment, and their local community. When you have come inside may have been offered a coffee from our Portobelo coffee shop, been sat down in the salon for a new hairdo, or even been bandaged up in the Preschool hospital! These are all amazing examples of how our tamariki have been building on their real-world play and have been turning thoughts and ideas into amazing learning experiences. Excursions have been a great tool in supporting this development of whanaungatanga, allowing tamariki to extend their understanding and sense of belonging within their community. Trips to our local stores and parks have supported tamariki to show leadership, autonomy, and curiosity within their play and interactions with those around them. We are very proud of the learning journey that the preschool tamariki have been on over the past season...we cannot wait to see where this learning journey will take us next!

He taonga te mokopuna, kia whāngaia, kia tipu, kia rea  
(A child is a treasure, to be nurtured, to grow, to flourish)



# ***Welcome and Farewell***

Welcome to the Nursery: Lucas, Felix, Austin, Bodhi, and Archer

Welcome to the Preschool: William, Finn, Blake, Ava, Alyssa, Eshleen, Chelsea and Kaiden

Farewell to our Preschool Graduates: Beckett, Jamie, Basti, Logan and Aiyana You all take our best Portobelo wishes with you to school, the next exciting step in your learning journey.

## **Upcoming Events/Parent and Whānau Notices:**

### **Cultural Calendar Events coming up ....**

Sign language week 9<sup>th</sup> of May

Matariki public holiday 24<sup>th</sup> of June

### **Public Holidays coming up....**

**Portobelo Avonhead will be closed the following days**

**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> June Queens Birthday**

**Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June Matariki public holiday**

### **Booking Changes**

The 'Change of enrolled hours' form is now on our website [www.bestpreschools.co.nz](http://www.bestpreschools.co.nz). If you need to change your child's booking, you can download the form, complete it and scan it through to Vanessa (Centre Leader) at [avonheadportobelo@xtra.co.nz](mailto:avonheadportobelo@xtra.co.nz). Please remember that requests must be made at least a week in advance, so we can change our rostered staffing to ensure we meet legal requirements

### ***Vacancies***

We have vacancies in the preschool and nursery room available now. Having an extra day is great for you to have some much needed 'you time' or get those jobs done that you never quite get to. We have a range of sessions to suit your family needs.

Please Let Vanessa know if you would like to take advantage of this unique time.

### ***Contacting us...***

Just a reminder of our Nursery and Preschool cell phone numbers, so that you can text us to let us know if your child is going to be absent for the day, if you want to check on how your child's day is going, or for any other non-urgent messages.

Our Nursery number is **027 361 8181** and the Preschool number is **027 455 6990**.

We also update our Facebook page regularly with photos of our children's learning, so you can keep other family members 'in the loop'. This is where we post up to date information about the Centre in the event of an emergency, so 'like' us on FB now!