

use secondary symbols such as letters and numbers – for example, the letters C-A-R, which neither look nor sound like something with wheels that goes ‘brrmm’ but when written down still evokes the idea of a car in your mind.

COMMUNICATING THROUGH DRAWING AND STORYTELLING

Both Talia’s parents have always spent a lot of time looking at books with her; bedtime stories are a particularly special time of day. So, for Talia, reading is associated with cosy, comfortable times with her parents and she has developed a keen interest in books, stories and reading.

Her home experiences also mean that she has a sophisticated understanding of writing as a symbolic code, as she knows that English and Arabic letters are formed differently and that the direction in which English and Arabic are read is different.

Rachael observed that Talia often included both Arabic and English-looking letter shapes in her drawings, which also often have detailed stories attached to them. For example, she drew a picture of two figures, one large, one small, with lines and circles next to them. Next to one she wrote her name, while next to the other was a ‘K’.

‘That looks interesting,’ said Rachael. ‘Do you mind telling me about it?’ Talia then related the story of Kariem and her scooting to the park, where ‘some bullies pushed us, so we threw them in the pond’.

At first, Rachael was alarmed but heard in Talia’s manner and tone the voice of a storyteller and the words of the book *Avocado Baby* by John Burningham. So, they carried on the story together, with Rachael writing it down and Talia painting more pictures, so that they could make a book out of it that afternoon. (Rachel also double-checked with Nadia whether anything worrying had happened in the park!)

As for most five-year-olds, Talia’s reading and writing

FURTHER READING

- Dowling, M (2014) *Young Children’s Personal, Social and Emotional Development*. London: Sage
- Meggitt, C Bruce, T and Manning-Morton, J (2016) (6th Edition) *Childcare and Education*. London: Hodder Education.
- Pound, L (1999) *Supporting Mathematical Development in the Early Years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press
- Davis, B and the Spatial Reasoning Study Group (2015) *Spatial Reasoning in the Early Years – Principles, assertions and speculations*. Abingdon: Routledge – explores links between spatial reasoning and mathematical understanding
- Change4life *Our Healthy Year: Reception teacher toolkit*. Available at: <https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools>
- O’Connor, A and Daly, A (2016) *Understanding Physical Development in the Early Years – Linking bodies and minds*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Whitehead, M (4th ed, 2010) *Language and Literacy in The Early Years 0-7*. London: Sage
- For more on the life and work of Jerome Bruner, visit: www.nurseryworld.co.uk/early-years-pioneers
- The earlier articles in our Starting Points series are at: www.nurseryworld.co.uk

is ‘emergent’ and is best supported through play activities that have personal and real-life meaning. Because her binocular vision and pattern perception are still developing, she needs large print books and will expectedly write letters such as ‘b’ and ‘d’ backwards.

Also, because the ability to hear the more subtle distinctions in sounds is not fully developed until about six to seven years of age, Talia, like other five-year-olds, cannot always grasp some phonetic combinations of language.

54-66 months: key aspects of language development and early literacy

Usually at this age, children:

- know that print carries meaning and, in English, is read from left to right and top to bottom
- make marks that they can interpret and explain
- begin to form letters that are recognisable
- follow a story without pictures or props

- use language to imagine and recreate experiences and roles in play situations
- introduce a storyline or narrative into their play
- hear and say the initial sound in words
- link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet
- use vocabulary and forms of speech that are influenced by their experiences of books

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING

As well as showing her skills and knowledge, Talia is being creative and displaying many of the Characteristics of Effective Learning in her play and learning activities. She is:

- finding out by using her senses to explore and experiment things like changes of texture, colour and consistency
- showing a particular interest
- willing to ‘have a go’; seeking challenge and solving problems
- engaging in new experiences and taking risks – learning by trial and error
- involved and concentrating: she maintains focus on her activity and is not easily distracted; she persists when challenges occur; she enjoys achieving what she sets out to do, showing pride in her accomplishments; and she has her own ideas and finds new ways to do things

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nadia has noticed how Talia’s confidence seemed to grow as a result of the cooking club

(although sometimes Talia seems to think that she could cook anything!) and that this confidence is having a positive effect on her friendships.

Although not exactly an ‘outsider’, Talia had previously been rather self-contained at school and hadn’t joined in freely with the other children. But at cooking club she worked alongside Layla and they have since begun working together more in the classroom. Layla has also started to invite Talia to play with her and her friendship group at lunchtimes.

This is an important aspect of the personal and social development of five-year-olds as belonging to a group is a key way in which children consolidate their self-concept and self-esteem.

In addition, as the year has progressed, Talia has grown considerably in height, which has reduced her body mass index, meaning she is no longer overweight. This, and her increased physical activity, has increased her energy and had a positive impact on her sense of self, confidence and social belonging.

54-66 months: key aspects of personal, social and emotional development

Usually at this age, children:

- develop a more constant and stable self-concept
- can describe self in positive terms and talk about abilities
- may overestimate their abilities due to their rapid learning
- enjoy joining in with family customs and routines



Starting points

Meeting the emotional and learning needs of the unique child



Part 11

Case study: Talía, 60 months

By **Julia Manning-Morton**, an independent consultant, trainer and author (www.key-times.co.uk/profiles/). She specialises in practice and provision that meets the needs of children under three and is an expert on the personal, social and emotional well-being of children and practitioners. Her publications include *Two-Year-Olds In Early Years Settings: Journeys Of Discovery* (2015) and *Exploring Well-being in the Early Years* (2014)

Talia 60 months

In the last child study of this series, we meet five-year-old Talia, who attends the reception class of her local primary school in Newcastle. Talia lives in a small flat on the fifth floor of an apartment block with her mother, Nadia, father, Kamal, and younger brother Kariem.

Talia and her family are of Sudanese origin. Her mother came to the UK as an unaccompanied teenage refugee. She now works part time for a charity that supports child refugees, and it was here that she met Kamal. The family are Muslim and attend the local mosque.

MANAGING TRANSITIONS WITHIN SETTINGS

Before five-year-old Talia made the transition from the nursery to reception class, she made several visits to the new classroom along with her friends.

Much of the new classroom environment was already familiar to her, as her school had taken various steps to develop the quality of its Foundation Stage practice. As a consequence, the nursery and reception children share an outside space and an inside hall area, and all the practitioners within the school's Foundation Stage team share planning and resources.

Also as part of Talia's transition process, the early years teacher met with the reception class teacher, Rachael, to hand over Talia's profile books and assessment records. The class teacher then invited all the new parents to visit, so that she could get to know them better.

Through her conversations with Talia's parents, Nadia and Kamal, Rachael came to understand that the family were very ambitious for their daughter and committed to her education.

Nadia had wanted to be a teacher herself but the disruption to her education had made this difficult. She, therefore, did some online courses and now helps the young people at the refugee support centre, where she works, with their homework. She also spends a lot of time engaging in learning activities with both her children at home.

PHYSICAL SELF: CARE, GROWTH AND LEARNING

In her discussions with Talia's parents, Rachael also gained an insight into the impact that Nadia's earlier experiences have had on her parenting.

Having experienced hunger in her early life, Nadia has found that food and mealtimes with Talia have become a bit of an emotional battleground.

Many children of this age become more fussy or rigid in their eating because the development of additional taste buds makes their sense of taste more acute. For Talia, this has resulted in a liking for fizzy drinks and other sugary and highly calorific foods, and Nadia has found it difficult to say 'no' to her daughter's demands.

Living in a fifth floor flat has added to the problem of keeping Talia fit and healthy. Her limited opportunities for, and lack of interest in, energetic physical play, coupled with her unhealthy diet, have led to Talia becoming overweight.

As the term progressed, Rachael observed that Talia's weight was beginning to make her even less inclined to take part in active play and reluctant to participate in any physical education sessions.

In practice: the Healthy Schools programme

As a result of its involvement in the Healthy Schools programme, Talia's school has introduced various strategies to increase the



amount of fruit and vegetables that its pupils eat, as well as the amount of exercise that they take every day.

They have started a 'wake up and shake up' exercise programme in the mornings, encouraged more children to cycle or scooter to school and introduced a 'walking bus' – where children and volunteers walk in a group along a set route to school.

When reflecting on Talia's experience, however, Rachael realised that there had not been as much focus on these health strategies in the nursery and reception classes as in the later stages of the school. So, she and the rest of Foundation Stage team agreed to address this by signing up for the NHS Change4life 'Our Healthy Year – Reception teacher toolkit'.

Implementing the suggestions

in the toolkit meant that the team not only planned more physical and healthy eating learning activities in the classroom but also focused on more home/school activities.

The increased links with the children's families led to a group of parents working with the catering staff and the children to produce their own recipe book and to setting up an after-school cooking club for parents and children to cook together.

For Nadia, the project meant that she came to agree on alternative, healthier treats for Talia and to see physical learning as important to all other aspects of Talia's learning.

As a result, the family now plan to go out to the park at least once each weekend and both children now scooter to school. Although Nadia had been aware of these issues



before, the project gave her the support she needed to change the family's habits.

54-66 months: key aspects of self-care

Usually at this age, children:

- show some understanding that good practices with regard to exercise, eating, sleeping and hygiene can contribute to good health
- can tell adults when they are hungry or tired or when they want to rest or play
- can manage toileting, washing and drying hands
- dress themselves with help for more difficult items and fastenings

THINKING AND UNDERSTANDING

A positive consequence of the 'Healthy Year' project for Talia has been the opportunity

to cook regularly at school. During the cooking sessions, Rachael has observed how Talia's reasoning and problem-solving skills, combined with her well-developed understanding of letters, numbers and other symbols, have enabled her to become quite independent in following a simple, graphic recipe card.

She has also noticed how cooking is supporting Talia's knowledge and understanding across much of the curriculum, including scientific concepts such as heat.

Talia now knows that yoghurt has to be kept in the refrigerator and that the kissra (bread) that she helps Nadia make at home is cooked on the hot griddle. She is also becoming familiar with different kinds of technology, from using the egg whisk to setting the oven timer.

From the beginning, children are part of the shared cultural symbolic code of their home language and ways of communicating

Cooking regularly has proved to be a particularly effective way of supporting many aspects of Talia's mathematical knowledge. For example, it promotes her understanding of:

- ordinal numbers – she knows, for example, that the numbers 1 to 5 on the recipe card instructions must be followed in that order
- 1:1 correspondence – 'Oh no, there's no strawberry for Daddy'
- volume and capacity – filling a jug with water and putting the mixture in dishes
- weight – using the scales to measure out ingredients
- time – working out, with adult support, the numbers to press for the correct cooking time, then looking at the clock to see when the food will be ready. This not only enables Talia to use her existing knowledge of number symbols, it also gives her real-life, concrete experience of the concept of time – a difficult idea for children of this age to understand in its abstract sense.

54-66 months: key aspects of mathematical and scientific understanding

Usually at this age, children:

- begin to use mathematical language in relation to shape, number, size, weight, position
- begin to order items by length or height, weight or capacity
- recognise some numerals of personal significance
- recognise numerals 1 to 5
- count up to three or four objects by saying one number name for each item
- count to ten and begin to count beyond ten
- use the language of 'more' and 'fewer' to compare two sets of objects
- begin to use mathematical terms names for 3D and 2D shapes
- can describe their relative position such as 'behind' or 'next to'
- measure short periods of time in simple ways

Theory: Jerome Bruner and symbolic representation

Jerome Bruner (1915-2016) described the process of representation as the way we hold on to and make sense of our experiences. It is also the way we make something stand for something else that is not actually present.

Babies' and young children's first use of symbols is seen in their gestures, signs and words: from the beginning they are part of the shared cultural symbolic code of their home language and ways of communicating.

They learn, for example, that going in a car is related to the word 'car' and perhaps to the sound 'brrmm'. They use objects that are replicas of real things such as toy cars and soon children use objects that are unrelated to the real thing, such as a wooden block as a car.

Bruner describes this as three modes of representation:

Enactive learning: this is about learning by doing. Through play and first-hand experiences, babies and young children learn what cars, for example, are like. They can then hold on to and make sense of their experience by playing with car-like toys and pretending to drive.

Iconic thinking: this relates to when an image, such as a drawing or photograph, stands for a person, experience or object. For example, young children learn that not only can they experience a real car, they can also think about cars by looking at or drawing a picture of a car.

The symbolic mode: this relates to when a child can represent the world through using one thing to stand for something else; imagining that a cardboard box is a car, for example. The child can also communicate their ideas and experiences of cars to other people by using the shared symbol 'car' word or by the 'brrmm' sound.

Later, as a child's ability to understand and use symbols grows, they come to be able to