

# From Mark Making to Writing



Children need to "...find the frontier that differentiates drawing from writing."

(Ferreiro and Teberosky) 1

# Paper Work

Ask adults that are known to the children (e.g. parents, carers, people who work with setting, people in the community, older siblings etc...) to come into the mark making area and bring their own writing with them. This way the children are able to see a range of writing written by a range of people in a range of ways for a range of purposes. This can be interesting if some people bring in with them their laptops, send text messages or use a 3G phone.

### Portable Pencils

We have a selection of pencil cases filled with various stationery and types of paper, forms and envelopes. Children can choose these to use in various places in the setting as their need arises.

### Stick-its

We love 'em, they love 'em!

# Real Writing

We realised that children don't see writing happening very much. We often don't write letters, not everyone has a milk delivery to leave a note for, and shopping is sometimes done without children in tow; we don't even write cheques very often now. However we did realise that children write birthday cards with support. Using this as our starting point we made the role pay area into a card shop which gave lots of learning opportunities across the curriculum. The children had a good understanding of the writing involved and were motivated to play at this. This enabled them to write cards and address them. What was needed now was a post office to send them from, and of course a birthday party to organise with invitations, lists and recipes.

### Need a Hero?

We noticed it was mainly girls writing in the mark making area. We recognised the need to enter boys' play and draw literacy into it on their terms. We found a solution through their imaginative role play. Through rescue/hero scenarios we introduced walkie-talkie radios and pretend mobile phones. One child wanted to send a text message so we used a practitioner's phone for this. This was then developed by entering the game and noting down important bits of information; location of a fire, number of babies needing rescuing etc... Now we keep note books and pens with all the dressing up gear and both girls and boys often write bits and bobs down or draw little scraps etc... With the hero scenarios it linked with stories and information books and some web sites for children to develop their ideas.

### Clipboard Notes

I was observing with a clipboard, so the children wanted to as well. Now we have a number of clipboards, children choose paper and pens/pencils to write with and make their own observations.

### Write in Role

When we set up the role play area, we realised that children had to know a lot about writing, not spelling but about different types of writing. So we sat and wrote with them in different ways. For example we role played some story characters; Prince Charming wrote his guest list, the 3 Little Pigs wrote their building plans.

"There are no advantages, and considerable potential disadvantages in pushing three and four year-olds into written word recognition or handwriting exercises".

(Jenny Lindon) 5



# Role Play Ideas:

- Paper recycling plant
- Card shop
- Stationery shop
- Calligraphy studio
- Designers' studio
- Post office

### Resource links:

"Playing with Sounds: a supplement to Progression in Phonics" DfES, July 2004, ref:DfES0280-2004 (tel: Prologistics: 0845 60 22260, email: dfes@prolog.uk.com)

National Literacy Trust (Bookstart information and other support.) Tel: 020 7828 2435

Multicultural, RE & Curriculum Resource Centre, Quorn Hall,Tel/fax: 01509-621579 Email: BLofthouse@leics.gov.uk

Basic Skills Agency (supports early literacy and numeracy, lots of ideas including working with parents) www.basic-skills.co.uk Tel: 020 7405 4017



"A relaxed approach to writing materials can also mean that children often choose to document their discoveries with writing..."

(Jenny Lindon) 5

### Magnetic Writing

Instant magnetic drawing boards are great for reluctant writers, they produce an instant mark and are easily cleaned – try using them also with magnetic letters.

### Write In!

We wanted the children to see a range of writing, so we asked families to send in some handwriting. We got all sorts – from signatures to siblings' writing, calligraphy, birthday cards and shopping lists.

### Sign In

The children sign in for most activities, sometimes with name cards, sometimes with a pencil and sometimes using a keyboard. We use a combination of first and surnames and initials. If children are waiting to have a go on a new and exciting activity they sign up on the waiting list.

# The Writing on the Wall

We have a graffiti wall where we can write/draw our feelings, happy or sad and then the writing is on the wall for all to see.

### Slogan Shirt

Fabric pens are great for encouraging name writing especially if children know they are designing their own t-shirts.

# Surface Writing

Try writing/making marks on different surfaces, sand paper, fabric, tissue paper, tiles, wood, mirrors, perspex. (Window crayons can be bought).

"Let children write even in writing systems different from the alphabetic one".

(Ferreiro and Teberosky) 1

### Not Beside the Seaside?

Writing in the sand is great on the beach – we can do some in the sand tray but we're too far from the sea in Leicestershire! We did it instead in a muddy puddle using sticks.

### Can't Find a Pen?

Write with a range of materials – not just a broad range of writing implements but paint and other things too: We've tried: feathers, sticks, syringes, straws, straw, mud, ice, blackberries, tomato ketchup, fingers, elbows and even noses! Water, toes, snow, icing sugar, porridge, spaghetti and pasta letter shapes (can be bought dried without sauce).

### Writing Areas

Write outside with or without stationery, instead of paper you can use natural materials such as ground, walls, tree trunks, rocks etc... Water, snow and ice make excellent writing tools. (Especially on a warm day using ice lollies for colour). However children have to understand what is or isn't appropriate.

# Story Frame

We taped a long stretch of paper around the small world play area to see what would happen. Children were unsure at first so we drew some roads and then gradually during the morning children added their own marks. At the end of the session we had their versions of maps, scenery, extra characters, pathways designs, labelling, and sign posts. All this combined to give snippets of story lines to their narrative play.



"Make believe is a major factor to development of written language, so is drawing".

(Vygotsky) 1

# Thinking it Through

We model writing for the children every day in small or large groups. We don't just talk about the letters we're making but give a commentary on the thoughts we have as we do it.

### Permanent Marking

Try indelible markers in the water tray. We wrote on plastic bottles and all sorts of packaging. It was very interesting when we did the same activity with card and washable pens.

### Speech Bubbles

Inflate large balloons for speech bubbles. These can be used in role and fantasy play for key phrases and can help older children learn about dialogue. It's also really interesting watching the letters expand on an inflating balloon