

# Pondering pedagogy...



## Early Level Pedagogy in Practice Pamphlet Series

### Mark Making

*Children make marks to express meaning, to explore the world around them and represent their thoughts and ideas. How do you provide a variety of interactions, experiences and spaces that support children's mark making?*

### Making Marks, Making Meaning



*'...encouraging an exploration of making marks, from the earliest age, develops an understanding of print as a form of communication and expression of ideas and feelings.'*

*Realising the Ambition (2020:70)*

Human beings are sophisticated symbol users and have developed complex written and numerical systems which enable us to communicate and share understanding with others. Young children spend a lot of time experimenting with making marks. Marks that will gradually develop into writing, drawing and mathematical recording, allowing children to express themselves and share their ideas.

### How Does Mark Making Develop?

It is important to recognise that mark making is not purely a literacy or writing activity that takes place in a 'literacy area'. Children need to develop both gross and fine motor skills in order to control a variety of mark making materials and develop a growing precision in the marks they make. They need to develop an understanding of symbolic representation, the idea that a symbol or 'mark' can represent a thought or idea and they need motivating real life contexts in order to create marks with meaning and see themselves as symbol makers and users.



## Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Mark making enables children to:

- Investigate new concepts
- Represent thoughts and ideas
- Develop understanding of the world
- Solve problems
- Express their feelings
- Relive an experience
- Develop focus



## Physical Development



- Children start making marks when they are very young and need lots of time and space to experiment and progress.
- To be able to control fine motor movements, young children need to develop the larger muscles in their body and core strength.
- Children need age appropriate opportunities for crawling, lateral rolling, jumping, running, hopping, skipping, climbing, lifting, hanging from a bar, pushing and pulling.
- Playing outdoors is an ideal way to develop these larger movements. It also supports development of the muscles of the eye as focusing distance naturally changes during play. This supports the later skill of tracking words on a page.
- Fine motor and hand-eye coordination will develop through experiences that develop pinching, grasping, twisting, threading, squashing and squeezing.
- All of these motor skills should be developed through appropriate and meaningful real-life, child-led experiences.

As you observe children mark making in their play, you will see how the following skills develop on a continuum. We do not need to ask children to copy shapes, but we do need to value the marks that they make and provide a wide range of opportunities for them to explore. There will be a progression of developing detail as children mark-make. Until they include detail in their drawings, they are not ready to take on formal hand-writing.

|                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                     |                                                 |                         |                                                                                |                                                                                                        |                                                                         |                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Watches movement of own hands, plays with own hands                                                                | Uses whole hand in pincer grip and passes objects from one hand to another. Picks up small objects. | Holds a crayon in a palmar grasp and scribbles. | Draws circles and dots. | Shows interest in mark making using a tool eg pen, pencil, paint brush, chalk. | Cuts paper with scissors and will pick up a pencil in preferred hand and can copy circle and v shapes. | Develops fine motor skills across different activities and experiences. | Demonstrates ability to draw a person and copy a triangle. |
| 3-6 mths                                                                                                           | 6-12 mths                                                                                           | 12-18 mths                                      | 18-24 mths              | Around 2                                                                       | Around 3                                                                                               | Around 4                                                                | Around 5                                                   |
| From babies  to young children |                                                                                                     |                                                 |                         |                                                                                |                                                                                                        |                                                                         |                                                            |



## Cognitive Development

- Children develop forms of symbolic thought before they have developed expressive language. They may use symbols -- such as sounds or gestures -- to refer to recent experiences, concrete objects or people. For example, a 9 month old baby may rock back and forwards to signify they want to hear the song 'row the boat'.
- As children develop language, the words or signs they use (if for example they are using BSL or Makaton) are symbols and will expand to include concepts and non-present objects. For example the word cat, is not the actual cat and can be used to stand for the cat when the cat is not there.
- As children learn to draw pictures, create models, role play, dance or sing songs, they are expressing their ability to think symbolically.
- More advanced symbolic thought allows people to manipulate intangible objects, such as solving a mathematical equation, or writing a story.

The development of symbolic thought can be expressed as a continuum from concrete to abstract.

Real objects ⇒ miniature object (toy) ⇒ photo ⇒ drawing ⇒ symbol ⇒ written word

Tina Bruce and Jenny Spratt (2011:84) use the example of a duck and describe six layers from real life experiences to conventional letters.

- ❖ Real life visit to see ducks in the park
- ❖ 3D objects that represent that experience [toy duck]
- ❖ 2D early mark-making and the creation of shapes that remind child of experiences
- ❖ 2D intentional creation of shapes and representations
- ❖ Emergent writing to represent 'duck'
- ❖ Conventional letters to represent 'duck'

## Literacy

### *Becoming a symbol maker and user; the difference between drawing and writing*

Drawing is an open system of sign or symbol creation.

- 'Sign creation refers to children's scribbling and drawing as they creatively express themselves in ways that are not restricted by rules.' Mackenzie (2018:71)
- Children are free to express themselves in any way that they choose.

Writing is a closed system of sign or symbol use.

- Writing is defined by rules because it is a shared system of representation.
- The rules or conventions enable meanings to be made clear so they can be shared and understood by others.

As young children learn to write, what they want to communicate is usually more complex than what they are able to write in words. This means that drawing and writing together allows children to communicate more complex ideas. Seeing an adult scribing their words can be a powerful way of helping children link their ideas to the written word.

## Development of Writing

- **Early mark making** is a sensory and physical experience. Initially children have not yet made the link between forming marks and communicating meaning. Marks might be described as 'scribbles' and the child does not have a great deal of control over the marks they make.
- **Mark making for meaning.** They are gaining more control over their muscles and are starting to have some control over the marks they make. They can often tell you about the marks they make and may tell you what they have 'written'.
- **Directional through to symbolic writing.** Marks may start to resemble letter shapes and will often be made in the direction that print is being read, written or displayed to them. Some children may be used to seeing scripts such as Urdu or Arabic, so may well start 'writing' from right to left and using different shapes in their marks.
- **Personal writing symbols.** Children's names are often the first string of letters that they will write spontaneously as a word. Their name is an important symbol and has an emotional connection. However, initially children may not yet understand that the alphabet letters have shared meaning.
- **Emergent writing** is seen when children start to make the connection that there are conventional letters that are linked to sounds. They may start to write individual or strings of letters, many of which may be linked to the letters in their own name. They may not yet grasp that words are a combination of letters and may for example only be recording the first sound of a word.



## Mathematics

- Mark making supports children to express their developing mathematical concepts.
- Mark making helps children to make sense of their world, solve problems or discover solutions to a line of enquiry.
- Children will use marks to represent quantities, they will create their own symbols and also explore conventional numerals.

## Expressive Arts

- Dance, music, singing, painting, drawing, block play, junk modelling, enable children to develop a range of verbal and nonverbal symbolic languages.
- Malleable materials such as clay, playdough and sand, support children to represent their ideas and develop symbolic thinking as well as developing gross and fine motor movements.
- Open ended materials, support children to move from the literal and concrete, to the more abstract and symbolic. For example, in a role play area, open ended resources such as wooden discs, glass beads, conkers or small stones, offer a much wider range of symbolic possibilities than more literal wooden or plastic fruit/vegetables.



*Based on City of Edinburgh and SEIC Literacy Resource (2021), Essentials of Literacy 0-7 (Bruce & Spratt, 2011) and Mark Making Matters (The National Strategies Early Years, 2008)*

## What Are the Key Features of High-Quality Mark Making Provision?



### Interactions

It is important that you feel confident about encouraging children to use resources flexibly and are able to support them if they choose to move resources from one area to another or decide to combine different types of medium, as this is a valuable part of the creative experience.

Interacting with children in ways that will support their learning may involve playing alongside or playing with them, offering ideas and suggestions, commenting, and engaging in sustained shared thinking.

It is important to listen carefully to children in order to understand more deeply the meanings they are making as they draw and write.



***'Enabling play pedagogy is a skilful job. Interactions are central and key to successful play pedagogy.'***

***Realising the Ambition, 2020:46***



### Some questions to consider:

- ⇒ Are the length and quality of interactions sufficient to allow children time to think, respond and comment?
- ⇒ Are adults modelling, commenting and questioning in a way that is scaffolding learning effectively and extending children's thinking?
- ⇒ How are children supported to communicate their thoughts, ideas and feelings in a range of ways?
- ⇒ Do children repeat actions, ideas or language that have been modelled or introduced by the adult?
- ⇒ Are practitioners listening carefully to children's meanings as they draw, write or create other representations?
- ⇒ Do practitioners understand the personal journey the child will make through mark-making to conventional letters?
- ⇒ Do practitioners offer lots of opportunities for every child to take ownership of their own journey through their play?



## Experiences

It is important that you provide a wide range of experiences for children which will help provoke new ways of thinking, problem solving and creativity. Over the past two years, there may be everyday experiences that children have missed out on such as shopping, going to the library, going on local walks, attending playgroups etc. These types of experience give children opportunities to recognise and use print in the environment and to see adults writing for a purpose for example making a shopping list.

Look for opportunities to incorporate symbol making and using in everyday routines such as self-registration, using diaries or calendars, taking messages to the office, cooking following a recipe and using scales and timers or looking at maps.

***‘Shopping lists, messages and greetings cards written in the presence of children are important everyday situations where they can see people writing and realise that what we say, think and feel can be written down.’***

***Bruce and Spratt (2011:85)***



Encourage children to experiment with writing for themselves through making marks, personal writing symbols and conventional scripts. Provide opportunities to develop mathematical graphics such as recording patterns or measurements and creating graphs or charts.

Nurture children’s creativity by valuing their own ideas and creations rather than expecting them to reproduce or copy somebody else’s ideas.

Provide lots of opportunities for children to develop symbolic languages and understandings through expressive arts experiences such as role play, small world, art, drawing, songs and rhymes, music and dance.





## Spaces

Children and babies need lots of opportunities to develop gross and fine motor skills and the spaces we create should consider the range of physical movements they need to develop.

Children also need lots of time to play and explore before they can fully grasp that one thing can represent another. Open ended resources help develop symbolic thinking

Children need time and space to experiment in literacy and numeracy rich

environments in order to really understand that print carries meaning, and that they can create shared meanings through the marks that they make.

Mark making resources should be carefully chosen, well organised and attractively presented so that children can decide independently how they want to represent their ideas and which medium would best suit their purpose. Resources need to be readily available and embedded throughout provision.

***Potential resources (these are just suggestions and are not comprehensive)***



- Unlined paper – assorted sizes, shapes, colours, textures and types; music paper, graph paper, lined paper
- Cardboard – assorted colours, textures and thickness
- Pads, notebooks, envelopes (used and unused), stamps (used, real), sticky notes and labels
- Address books; diaries; registers; spiral-bound notebooks; calendars
- Clipboards; whiteboards; blackboards (a range of sizes, both fixed and portable)
- Ready-made books – zigzag, stapled, folded; name cards; number lines
- A range of writing tools of different thicknesses – multicoloured pens, markers, crayons, writing pencils, coloured pencils, felt tip pens, gel pens and biros
- Stampers and ink pads
- Pencil sharpeners; staplers; hole punches; rulers; scissors
- Clay tools
- A range of paints including watercolours, inks and dyes, gouache, block, powder and poster paint – and palettes to give children opportunities to mix their own colours
- A range of brushes of varying sizes (big, small, fat, thin, square-tipped or pointed) and painting implements including rollers, sponges, stamps
- A range of fixing materials – sticky tape, glue, glue sticks, stapler, paper clips, treasury tags, masking tape, string, wool
- Examples of real environmental print – notes, timetables, adverts, leaflets, junk mail, a variety of types of signs and symbols, handwriting, books, newspapers
- Message and display boards/communication pockets (at child height for children to use independently)

## Additional Outdoor Resources

- Buckets of water and a range of tools, including paint brushes, rollers, artists' brushes, sponges and dish mops, spray bottles
- Chunky chalks
- Blackboards and whiteboards and assorted chalks, paints, felt and dry wipe pens
- Large rolls of wallpaper or lining paper
- Clipboards – with writing tools attached
- Portable writing toolkit – filled with resources such as sticky notes, masking tape, selection of pens and pencils, selection of paper and envelopes
- Mark-making trolley with a variety of equipment
- Sticks and mud



## Self-Evaluation

It is important to self-evaluate your provision on an ongoing basis so that you can be sure that you are meeting the needs of all the children in your setting.

### *Some questions to consider from a child's perspective:*

- ⇒ Can I choose the materials I want to use independently, from a variety of mark-making resources?
- ⇒ Are the materials easily accessible? Are they freely available, no matter where I have chosen to play?
- ⇒ Have I got enough space and time?
- ⇒ Do all the adults value my marks, no matter where I am on my learning journey?
- ⇒ Have I got the freedom to create a range of different texts and follow my own ideas?
- ⇒ Have I got opportunities to use my imagination?
- ⇒ Can I create props to support play in other areas?
- ⇒ Is my name displayed in a way I can copy if I choose?
- ⇒ Where do I put my finished work, and can I display it, if I want to?
- ⇒ Is there some stimulus to inspire my creativity?
- ⇒ Is there an adult available for me to tell him/her about my ideas and scribe my thoughts and feelings?
- ⇒ Do the adults know how to support me to make my marks independently?
- ⇒ If I am ready, can I copy relevant letters or words with help or independently?





## References

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