

On Your Marks!!

Encouraging mark making- developing writing

Children and
Learning



Mark making and role play 4: extending role play throughout the setting

Developmental stages

Role-play and *experimentation* are key phases that children go through in mark making, before emerging into the 'transitional' and 'conventional' writing phases. Both early phases help children to shape their knowledge and understanding about writing, as well as providing them with valuable practice. Crucially, children at these stages are linking language with mark making. We can best support children in these phases by providing them with good quality role-play experiences that incorporate mark making.

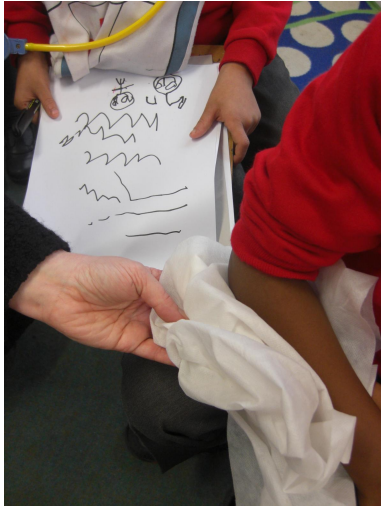
The Role-play phase

Young children interpret what they see around them through their role-play. If they are role-playing writing; e.g. pretending to 'take the register', they will be focusing on what they say, how they sit (and all your other mannerisms!) and not specifically on what marks they are making in their 'register'. The register and pen are props at this stage. Marks they make are not likely to bear much resemblance to conventional writing. Similarly if they are role-playing taking an order in a café, they may scribble on their notepad. These marks and behaviours are entirely valid at this stage.

How we can support children through role-play

When we think about role-play, we may focus on a 'role play area'. There are many examples of great areas in Early Years settings, and in some schools. However in most schools role-play is either non-existent or confined to a small area of the classroom with a few props. Many practitioners can quite fairly point to lack of space as a reason for not promoting role-play, but there are ways around this.

- Give a child a hat, allow him to wear it around the class and in the playground, and you have role-play!! Give him a hat, an adult pen, a small notepad and a shoulder bag, and you have role play and mark making. It is as simple as that!
- Children often need a role model to get going in play. This can be through adults spending time in the area, showing how resources can be used, what people say, and generally acting the part. If adults spend time regularly in the area, children come to understand that this is an important part of the room, and that their attempts at writing in role are valued.
- In role-play, don't comment on *how* children have written something (that comes in the 'experimental' phase). Remember, you are acting, so you interpret their marks as if they have meaning. In the photos we see 'Dr. Ethan's medical notes' on a 'patient' who is just about to have his arm amputated after falling down in the playground and grazing his elbow, (a second opinion by Dr. Marcia ruled that his mummy should wipe it with a tissue and kiss it better). We read his notes as if they were 'real', and this led to Ethan 'writing' a lot more. Great fun, great acting, great language, and great writing practice! (And evidence of 'writing for a purpose'.)



We also see a teacher celebrating role-play writing with the whole class by discussing Ernie's diagnosis and treatment rationale.



Dr. Ethan's Casebook

Ernie: 'a suitable case for treatment?'

- Real objects can lead to terrific acting. A real hard hat, a yellow reflective vest, and a builder's belt containing a set of real spanners, a metal measure, a small spirit level, a mobile phone, a small notebook and pen, placed in the construction area, is all that is needed to turn your construction area into a role play area. As with any objects designed for use by adults, adult supervision will be necessary when using real tools. They can be substituted for toy tools when an adult is not available to support the play.
- Children role-play experiences that they have been involved in, or seen (either for real or on TV), or learned about in books. Leave information books in the role-play area, based on the theme. This stimulates discussion and gives ideas. Early Vision produce an excellent set of DVDs designed to stimulate role-play, showing real life activities. These include scenes as diverse as an Italian restaurant and a burger van, as well as traditional scenes such as the vet, a doctors' surgery and a post office. Watching these with the class generates great discussion, as well as influencing play.

See www.earlyvision.co.uk for a catalogue.

The Heritage Treasure Basket Company has developed an excellent 'Writing Belt'. Based on the builders' belt, it contains a mobile phone, pen and post it notes. Children love it, and it certainly promotes role-play writing.

See www.heritagetreasurebaskets.co.uk for details

