

Marvellous Mark – Making

Helping your child to develop the skills for writing.

When we think about supporting a child to develop the skills for writing, we often show them how to form letter shapes and write their name. Whilst these are very important skills, there are a number of important stages that precede this and are fundamental to their later success.

Physical skills.

Before a child can manipulate and control a pencil effectively, they need to have developed some essential gross and fine motor skills.

Balance: Balance is central to a child's ability to achieve the stillness required to write. Useful activities to support this skill include walking along planks and beams which can be easily adjusted as their confidence develops. At the park, climbing, swings and roundabouts are especially helpful in experiencing movement and developing balance. Similarly, encouraging a child to spin themselves around, in both directions, walk along a painted/ chalked line, or stand on alternate legs for set periods of time all help to develop body control. They might be a bit wobbly at first and might even fall over, but it is an important skill that we should encourage. At St Mary's the children particularly enjoy the balance boards which help them to develop their core stability as well as their upper arm and back muscles.



Upper Arm Strength and Shoulder Stability

To be able to hold our arm and hand in the correct position for writing, we need to have developed the strength in our shoulders and upper arms. One of the best ways to do this is through crawling, even when children are old enough to walk. Crawling through tunnels, under chairs, or blankets never fails to amuse children and can be made more fun by introducing different material to crawl on, e.g. bubble wrap. At the park, monkey bars or poles all encourage co-ordination, wrist and arm strength.

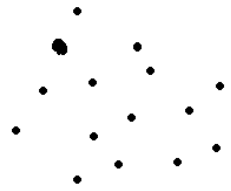
Hand strength

Any activities in which children are opening and closing their hands will help to give them the strength and dexterity they need for writing. Water sprays, wet sponges, opening jars, and anything malleable like playdough will support children in developing the oppositional force in the thumb and finger, essential strength required for pencil control.

Mark-making Stage

Before children are able to form letter shapes they need to have had lots of experience of mark-making. This is a fascinating and exciting stage of development in which children begin to understand that marks on the paper can carry meaning. It is at this stage that children begin to make their thinking visible. These early marks, should be recognised, praised and encouraged. In his book, 'Drawing and Painting' (2003), John Matthews used the following terms to describe the marks that young children use.





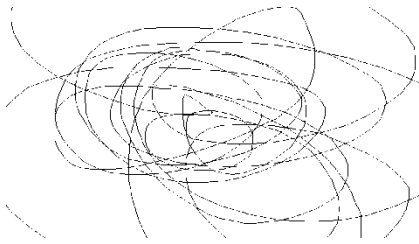
Vertical Arc



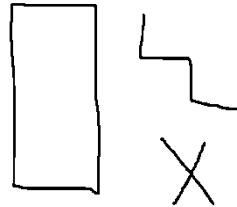
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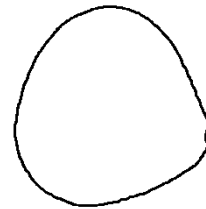
Push Pull



Continuous Rotation



Right Angular Connections



Closed shapes



When alongside children who are drawing, look out for, model and value these marks. Children really like to hear the real terms used and very quickly begin to use them themselves. "I'm doing a continuous rotation!"

Most young children like to use materials that create a bold line. Vary the type of mark making equipment you provide; include felt-tips, chalks, highlighters, bingo dabbers. Anything that will engage their interest and looks inviting will encourage mark-making. The larger the paper, the better and try putting it on the floor instead of on the table. This especially appeals to boys who often like more space to work.

When children start in Reception they will begin to learn about phonics. They will learn to match graphemes (letter shapes) to individual phonemes (letter sounds) and then learn to blend them together for reading. E.g. c-a-t- cat. To be able to spell the word, children have to be able to reverse the process of blending and segment the word into the individual phonemes e.g. cat – c-a-t.

We can prepare children for learning this skill by practising oral blending e.g. “Can you put your hands on your h- ea-d”

“Can you brush your t-ee-th”. The more experience children have of tuning into sounds, the better prepared they will be when they begin to write words for themselves.

Of course, in addition to all of this, one of the best ways we can help children to become successful writers is to foster a love of language, books and reading. This early experience will help to provide them with a rich vocabulary and imagination, and above all the motivation to put pen to paper and become a writer.

Mrs Kelly Brooker

Early Years Teacher

