

## Supporting and motivating early writing

Children actively build knowledge of writing, rich in print and cultural understanding. Children use this knowledge as they scribble, make meaningful marks, draw and begin to form letter shapes and strings of letters that hold meaning. They invent spellings and apply their phonic knowledge and understanding as they move towards conventional written language. Writing develops in non-linear ways and takes multiple forms as it becomes more conventional.

Oral language is the basis of the written word and developing children's communication is essential for developing early reading and early writing. Much of what children need to learn about writing, from story-structure to written language features and punctuation, can be gained from story telling, shared reading, and the oral interaction stimulated by them.

### Motivating writing

- In the world at large we always write within a meaningful context. It is essential we offer children meaningful social contexts and purposes for writing, because it will not happen in a vacuum. For example; set up a role-play based on shared experiences, perhaps a garage where clipboards, note pads, labels, signs and notices are needed. Provide props for writing inside and outside, for example, clipboards, labels, sticky notes and charts and a wide variety of tools for mark making.
- Use printed and handwritten texts across the setting showing a variety of languages and scripts, e.g. stories, poems, rhymes, notes, registers, labels, signs, letters, forms, lists, directions, advertisements, newspapers. These act as models for the children particularly if they are not static. Encourage children to read the print in the environment with you and model how they can add to this, for example with signs and labels.
- Scribe and model writing regularly. When you need to write a newsletter or a letter home, either handwritten or on a computer, do at least part of this alongside children involving them in your thinking and the processes of writing.
- Select some favourite non-fiction and story texts for re-reading on a regular basis throughout the year. Read and retell them carrying out instructions or using props and giving children opportunities to join in. Leave books and props available for children to come back to in their own time and take part in with each other. For example a story sack could be left out for children to play through after the story has been read and the use of props modeled. A recipe card for sandwich making, or a fruit salad, could be left in a role-play area, with simple ingredients, for making themselves, having first made the recipe together.
- Record the recounts and stories that children tell you either through scribing, taped or digital recording. Read or play these back to share with other children. If they are scribed children could add their own illustrations.
- Encourage re-enacting stories in role-play. Model the language of books e.g. once upon a time...And Father bear said in a deep gruff voice, 'who's been eating...' Using the language of books in play provides opportunities for children to use and re-use new sentence structures. Bringing texts to life will help children take on the 'language of books', essential for developing the structural elements of writing.
- Graphic areas should include examples of writing in different scripts, different conventions and for purposes which reflect the cultures of the children in the settings.
- Remember how much of the written word is electronic. Incorporate opportunities for emailing, texting and word-processing both in play and through modelling and scaffolding real purposes.
- Use technology to motivate and enable children's compositions. Use word processors, desk top publishing programs and other 'content free' software to write collaborative recounts, stories,

letters and so on. Microphones, dictaphones and webcams are inexpensive ways of capturing children's compositions without the need for transcribing.

### **Supporting writing**

- Respond to children's writing as a reader. Comment upon its success as communication, showing you understand its purpose and respond as the audience, 'Oh, I see you've written a sign saying "STOP" here, I had better not pass until the sign changes'.
- Ask children to reread what they have written, to add an illustration, photograph or pin their writing to a notice board. In this way, children begin to gain a sense that writing is something that they can do.
- Observe children's independent writing and note significant developmental stages, such as writing from left to right, top to bottom, beginning to leave a space between words, investing their own words with meaning, using phonetically plausible spellings. Use these observations to help you plan learning objectives in shared and guided writing.
- Celebrate new developments in writing after responding to the writing as the audience, 'You've used that tricky word we learnt this week, well done!'
- If a child has a lot to say and it is relevant to help them capture this e.g. a personal experience, use scribing, audiotapes, digital recorders or a camcorder to help encourage extended composition. This can be enlightening, as children's ability to compose may well outstrip their secretarial skills by a long way. Some of the children's own compositions can be usefully turned into short booklets for their own reading material, display or the book area.
- Share scribed recounts or stories with the class or a group so that children reflect on their purposes and the audience.
- Early attempts to produce letter forms by children with experience of alphabetic systems other than English may produce shapes which reflect these systems. Bilingual children may have experience of a different directional flow or orientation on the page. They may come from communities where the separate skill of handwriting or calligraphy is valued over the process of communicative writing. It is important that practice during the Foundation Stage respects and builds upon this existing knowledge.
- Even in early mark making children's ideas will take multiple forms such as, labels, lists, stories, notices, signs, letters, notes and so on. Point out and talk about the characteristics of a variety of forms. For example, how stories typically begin or end, how instructions are laid out on a page, how lists contain few words on a line, how letters have signatures and an address. The more children know about how texts work the more they will be able to draw on these for their own compositions (oral at first and later in writing).