

Learning to Write the Right Way



Developing Positive Pedagogy





Introduction.

The aim of this literature is to help you provide part of a fully inclusive developmentally sound approach to writing which effectively meets the needs of all early year's children. This document used hand in hand within a strong pedagogy and belief in little children will help you understand the stages children go through when developing their understanding of the written word and can form part of how you best support children to make good progress from their starting point.

It can be difficult to hold onto children's self-belief while helping them make progress. We can sometimes feel clear about what children should learn, how proficient we want them to be, but not always confident on how best to get children there in a positive exciting way.

The way we teach children to write is engrained in history. For centuries young adults have been launched into the world of work hopefully with the skills they need to get by. For some writing becomes a great pleasure, for others a struggle throughout life, or even something to completely avoid, and there are those within our society that are unable to read and write at all. This skill set has an impact on ability to engage with the rest of the world or to take part in employment which in turn has an impact on poverty, success wellbeing and health.

our approaches can therefore have far reaching consequences. As educators we have a huge responsibility to effectively teach our children to write and to have the skills to confidently communicate with the written word throughout life.

Our own childhood experiences.

We more than likely arrive at the table with our own worries and concerns about the best way of teaching children to write. We each bring our own memories, experiences, and expectations and these might have an impact on our ability to help. You may be able to remember your first attempts at writing, whether they were exciting and fun or filled with self-doubt and fear. For many it might be fair to say our experiences were based in copy writing, tracing, and repeating letter sounds; maybe feeling confused or not good enough?



I Can't do it!!!

Children approach writing as they might anything else that is new. With the same excitement as learning to crawl, walk or run. They have the same enthusiasm for a pencil, crayon, or piece of chalk as they might have for a ball. So, at what point does this enthusiasm change? Why do we hear children say, "I don't want to," or "I can't do it," and what can we do to change this? An approach that is inclusive, tender and in response to children's hearts, minds and sometimes fragile egos surrounding something which may at first seem to belong to the world of adults could go some way to help.

Concept Development

It is easy to confuse two very different parts of the writing process. We need to concern ourselves not only with the physicality of writing; for example, the way a child holds a pencil or their ability to form accurate letters on a page but also children's concept development around this subject. As children's awareness develops and changes, they are likely to ask themselves a variety of questions. For example,

What is writing?

What is writing for?

In what ways can I use it?

Is it important?

Is it hard or difficult?

What are grown-ups doing when they write?

What are letters?

What are words?

Which words are important or personal to me?

What do these sounds mean?

In short what on earth is this and what does it all mean?

In essence writing is a made up agreed upon code that represents our language and thoughts. This is a very abstract and complex idea and is different depending on which part of the world you are from. Across time and cultures symbols and pictures have developed and have changed and evolved throughout history.

While we often want and expect children to come and write we never really explain what writing is, children therefore form their own understanding over time.

This process is called concept development, it is the process by which a child makes sense of a new idea, the way they piece together new information to develop a greater understanding of the world around them.



The tipping point; a transition in understanding

Children are often expected to learn to write before they really understand what it means to be a writer. This experience if dealt with badly can have a detrimental effect on children's confidence and ability to try. Its more than likely that in an early year's child's mind writing belongs to adults, it is part of the adult world a bit like driving a car or operating an oven. We can guess that writing might feel like, a mystery, magical marks to learn, understand and use.

Once a child is developed enough to understand that there is a thing called writing they must be brave enough to have a go. This is a transition point for a child, a tipping point between believing I can, or I cannot. If we want children to become happy confident



writers who enjoy the process of learning to write this process needs to be managed skilfully. Its impact can have far reaching consequence throughout a child's academic career.

A positive pedagogy and the importance of play.

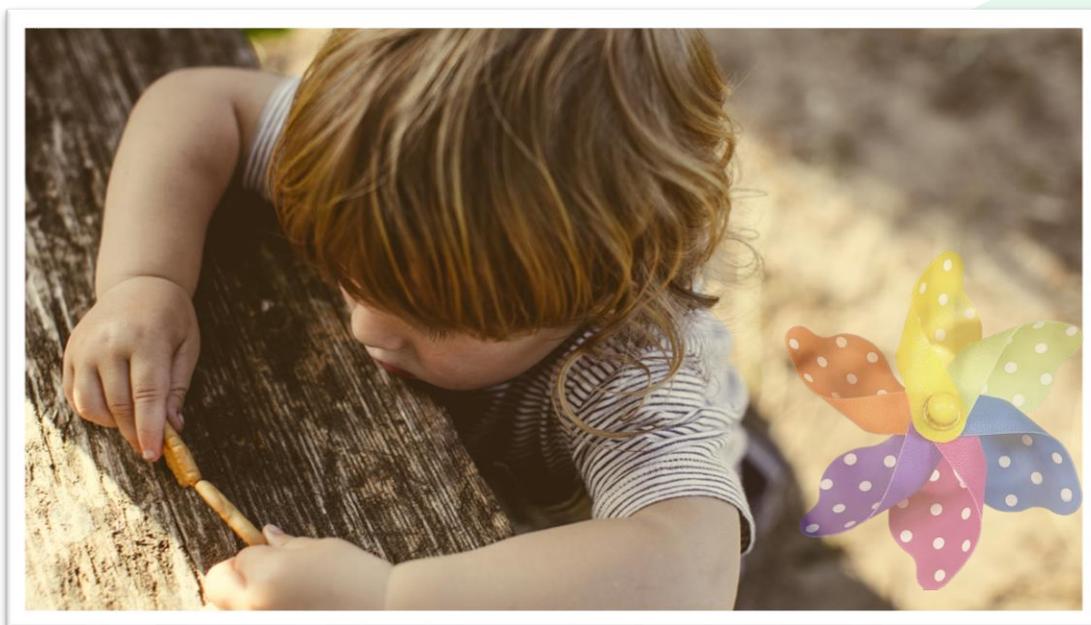
As we know the best mechanism for early years children to learn anything is through fostering their interests through play. By using good quality well considered play opportunities, we can empower children to become confident happy writers. If skilled enough, we can help children make writing part of what they do. Play in simple terms turns any activity into the property of the child. It takes away the fear of failure and has the potential to take writing into a special world where the child is in charge and their activities are effortless and yet at the same time very important. When Children are engaged in play, they often act out their growing ideas of what the future might be to make sense of what adults do; a bit like pretending to be a train driver or working in the home corner, building a bridge, or making a model, writing can be part of this.

Every day there are many opportunities in early years classrooms that have the potential to give children a great start to writing. Providing opportunities and reasons for children to write where they pretend to be just like grown-ups; where they write for meaning and audience during

play activities will protect children's confidence while they start on the complex road to becoming literate.

Children see adults writing for lots of reasons and each will most probably have its own audience and purpose; a note for a loved one, a list for shopping, invitations for a wedding, a text message to a friend an email for work. Maybe a book if we are an author or a screen play for a writer, a cheque, a list of instructions, a new recipe, the list really is endless. Adults do not practise or learn to write they have on the whole already mastered the art. Allowing children to behave in the same way and maximising on every opportunity can give children a really positive start.

Think of a child and that first pretend cup of tea made lovingly in the home corner that we accept as real and sip with delight, consider if you might children's writing in the same way. Allow children to believe that their very first attempts do indeed count and convey meaning. With our pretend tea any educator worth their salt would of course engage in the play and ask for a touch more milk or maybe a biscuit to go with it. We naturally join in with children's play, value it and extend it but somehow this positive approach to helping children develop is sometimes lost when we consider teaching children to write.



The environment.

Our surroundings play a crucial role in our ability to learn and develop. For early years children it is widely recognised as another teacher. If we want children to explore, take risks, follow their ideas, and truly engage

we need to become experts considering and improving the environment children experience. The development of a worthy space for children to learn in will lead to high levels of engagement and it is this which indicates brain activity and shows us when children are truly active and most likely to be building new pathways and creating concepts. If we apply this notion to learning to write in real terms it means that we cannot expect children to write orders for building materials in a builder's yard if there is a lack of believable builders' equipment to make believe with. We will not see children writing recipes if they do not believe themselves to be chefs in a café. They will not want to write a shopping list if they cannot visit the shops and they will not write down what they had for snack if they do not believe that their food has an impact on the things that are ordered on the computer for next week's nursery shop. In short, our environments should be dripping in opportunities to write that feel real and important to the child.

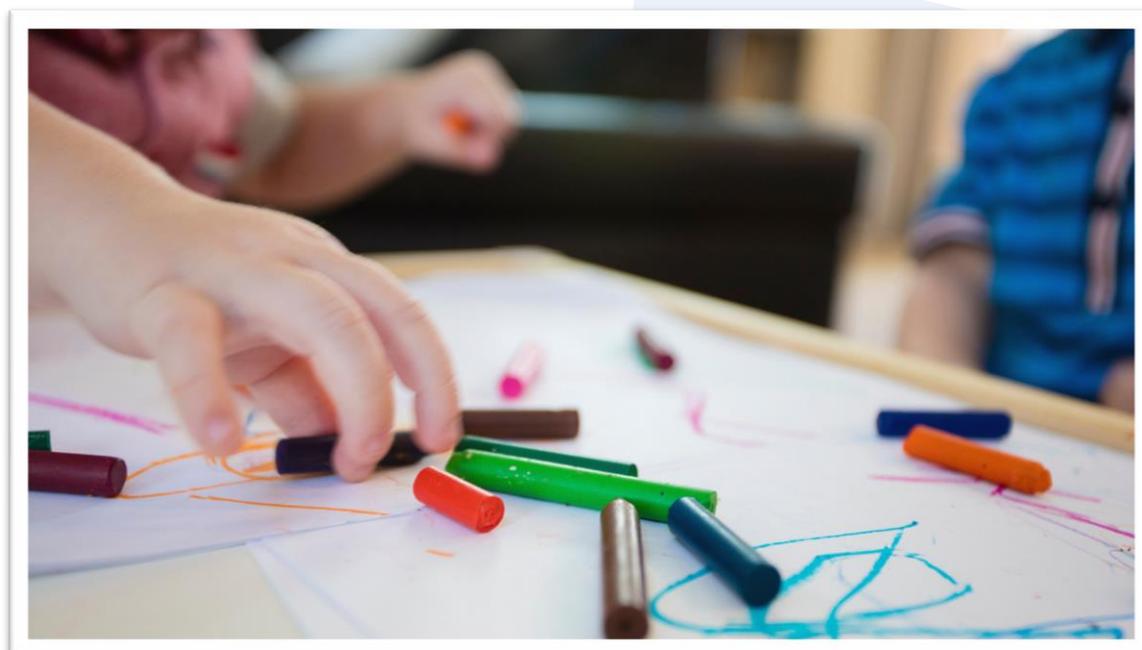


Careful and creative resourcing.

Adults use pens, post its, cards, paper, the back of envelopes and lots of texting. Communication through writing has changed and is now often inside screens, phones, and computers. We do still however for now want children to master the art of paper and pen.

Therefore, children need the tools of the trade if they are to make progress and adults need to be well equipped to help while children play. There are many ingenious and practical solutions. For example, staff can

wear bum bags or greengrocer aprons even 1950s housewife tabards are fully equipped with pockets to hold a plethora of mark making materials so that children's play can be easily extended in the moment Educators can be ready with the correct tools to help children make progress within an arena that fills them with excitement and confidence and ultimately a real urge to do so.



The development of writing and how best to interact to help children make progress.

Learning how best to respond to a child's first attempts of writing can only come from a knowledge of that child, their strengths, their interests their confidence and the courage it might have taken for them to take that first step. The vital ingredient comes from educators treating these attempts very much as real writing, as something that is clever and important and carries meaning. A good starting point is to ask a child what their writing might say. Or to read a child's writing by guessing what it might say if a child seems hesitant or embarrassed. Next scribbling and finally drawing comparisons between the child's text and the adult response. For example, "I can see that you've written an invitation to the party who do you want to invite and does this word say mummy?" Can I write that too and goodness me lots of my letters look just like yours !!! This takes a level of creativity and skill. A few wiggly lines after all might not look like very much at all but on close inspection a skilled educator will be able to show the child letter Ls or the beginning of an N or an M depending on the message the child has depicted. For example, This

approach over time will uncover a very clear path of development that helps children become happy confident writers.

The pathway of development;

As we are aware every child is different and just as some children bum shuffle or comando crawl before walking the path of development to become a competent writer is unique for each child. That said a typical pathway might look like this.

What does this look like for children ?

Come and play at my house



We can play with my lego



I have got big dinosaurs



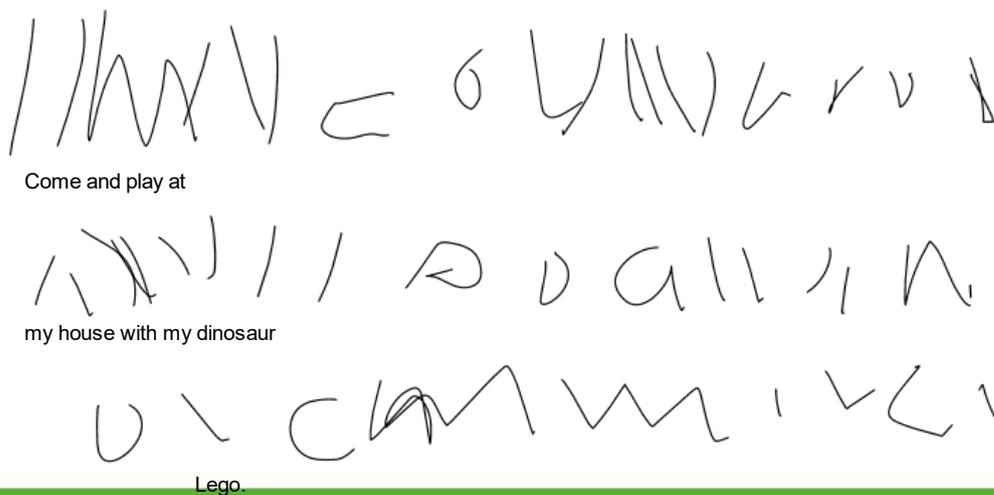
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Notice the direction of the child's marks. Already they have an understanding that writing has a direction and in this country goes from left to right and top to bottom. They realise that an adult's hand moves rapidly and this to them is what writing looks like. This gives us a great opportunity to interact with children in a way that allows them to feel that their efforts are valued and worthy. Children will often tell you openly what their writing says and this is like a key opening a special doorway into a place where learning can be meaningful purposeful and most importantly successful. Respecting children's efforts and helping them take those first steps confidently is vital. The typed text indicates the adult as scribe; carefully writing down the child's message and praising the similarities, drawing the child's attention to the detail of letters and the sounds they make.

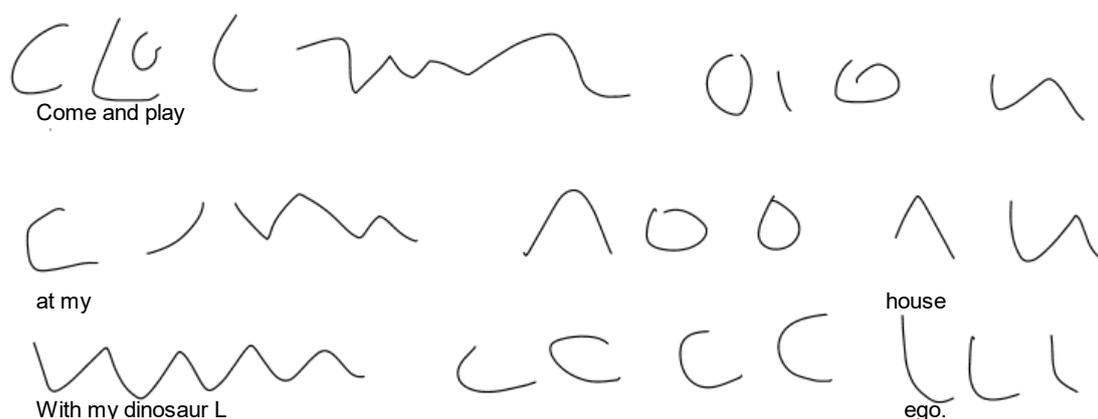




Over time children's efforts will start to develop. The arena in which this development takes place is dependent on careful interactions and a well-developed learning environment coupled with quality well planned, inclusive play opportunities. Here we can see zig zags competently turning into letter like shapes. These often correspond with words the child might frequently see and letters from a child's name are typical. Direction has deteriorated a little as children focus more heavily on making their marks look like letters. Again, after scribing the adult's job is to draw on comparisons, focus heavily on initial sounds and praise the child's developing efforts with vigour!

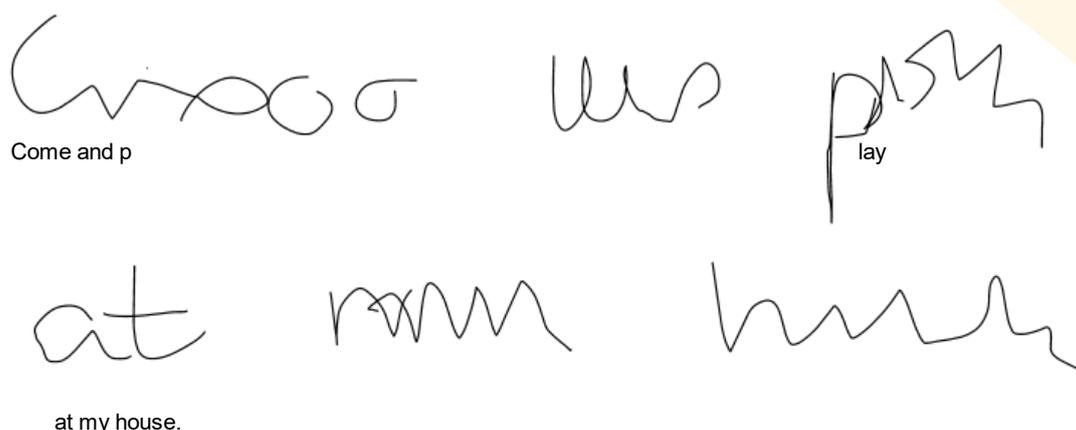


In this example we can see that the correct direction of the text has returned. There are clearer and accurately formed letters coupled with the very beginning of separate word clusters, a far cry from the original zig zags we first saw. Valuing this as development even though it is not yet legible takes a lot of belief in children's capabilities and capacity to learn, at this stage it is easy to buckle to believe that what children are producing is not good enough. With this fear comes teaching that makes educators feel better because they have delivered. This does not help children make progress. As we know from Piaget children are active participants in the learning process, they are not empty vessels that we can fill with information. Learning to write is a two-way process and keeping faith and developing our interactions in line with children's stage of development will build confident happy children who not only can write but also enjoy doing so.



And magically it begins!!! The start of clear word clusters and some accurate initial sounds; the start of truly decoding what the letters are and what they say is a wonderful step. It is important to point out that it is impossible to predict how long a child might take to get to this stage. Often force-feeding children, the same diet everyday may not be the correct way to help children make progress. We know that children need to revisit situations to practise new skills and develop concepts that learning is circular and not linear. We know that children can take their

new skills into play situations to make sense of them. Some children may spend longer on one stage than another while others may skip a stage completely.



Formal teaching.

It is important to say here that as we see phonetic knowledge and the use of high frequency words increase that this will not happen on its own. The careful structuring of routines that allow children the opportunity to gain useful information as part of short sharp focused child centred phonic sessions is vital. While our early years curriculum is holistic children will not learn to write by accident. The part that reading plays across the curriculum and the opportunity to focus on high frequency words and sentence structure is also very important.

Again, an understanding of handwriting and how best to support children eventually in forming letters correctly is another aspect.

However, we must be careful not to fall into the trap of pushing phonetic knowledge, spelling, grammar, and letter formation before we consider children's confidence and ability to try. If we push these elements to soon or in a way that makes children feel like they cannot do it we actually risk doing the opposite of what we are setting out to do; we may well stifle children's natural enthusiasm and kill their confidence, this can be enough to stop children developing to the best of their ability.

The aim is to give children the knowledge and skills they need while supporting them in a fun arena that fills them with excitement, motivation, and enthusiasm. If we can see children applying new knowledge in their writing while they play, we can see that our phonic teaching has been a success. We want children to apply new knowledge and ultimately use it effectively and independently.

Learning to write is a complex business, our aim must be to support children to make excellent progress while remaining happy learners that want to put pen to paper. Writing is a lifelong skill that has the power to change lives. The pressure this brings can sometimes trip us up and switch children off. With the right help and support children have all the potential necessary to learn, develop, soar, thrive and write!



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