

## CORE SKILL: COMMUNICATE

# Early Writing



### What You Need to Know

Even when it seems that a young child's writing is simply marks and scribbles, there is a lot being explored and learned through the process. It is remarkable what information you can glean by watching their scribbles change over time. During the toddler years, children's writing increasingly reflects their ability to distinguish print from pictures, their understanding that writing carries meaning, and their internalization of the rules that govern print (e.g., directionality).

### Things to Consider

- ◆ When you observe a child's writing, it is helpful to consider what you are seeing on the page, as well as what the child is *intending* you to see or understand. A young child's early writing shows us that they know something about how print works. Consider these examples:



A child said this was mommy and daddy. Notice how neither scribble is moving across the page with a clear direction. There's no evidence of an understanding of letters or how print works, but they know that print carries meaning.



Notice how this scribble demonstrates a child's growing understanding that print moves from left to right in English. This is one way we begin to see children's knowledge of print displayed in their writing.

### Development of Early Writing Skills

Between 9 and 18 months, children may:	Between 16 and 36 months, children may:
Make marks on a paper with a large crayon or marker to explore writing materials.	Make scribbles on paper to represent an object or action even though an adult might not recognize what it is.

### Setting the Stage

Activities and materials that support the development of early writing:

- ◆ Select books that feature interesting print: as children notice print in books, they are taking in information that they can "try out" in their writing.
- ◆ Provide child-friendly writing materials that are accessible and available throughout the room: foster children's interest by providing materials which are easy to use (e.g., large grip crayons or large paint brushes near a child-sized easel), as well as displayed in interesting and accessible ways (e.g., in colored tins or baskets).
- ◆ Create a writing center that focuses on different, meaningful writing activities: provide models of different writing forms and allow them to explore and make their own versions. Examples include card writing during the holidays (with stickers and writing materials), letter writing (with envelopes or 'stamps' and perhaps a mailbox display), books (small pieces of paper stapled together), etc.
- ◆ Incorporate large writing materials and displays into routines: materials that foster 'joint' writing (e.g., your writing in relation to a discussion or to something you are showing or teaching) make both the process and product of writing visible.
- ◆ Display child writing across the room: putting children's scribbles or writing as displays – particularly writing that children have spoken or commented on – is highly reinforcing. Make sure that the writing is displayed at eye-level so children can return to their writing products and continue to consider and discuss them.



## Intentional Teaching Practices to Support Early Writing

OBSERVE	<b>OBSERVE</b>  Observe what children are writing and how they talk about their writing (or art) products. Consider the extent to which children are distinguishing marks that they designate as “print” from those that they designate as “pictures.” Remember that it is less important that these two types of marks differ visually; rather, what is important is whether children view these as different representations. Also, consider whether children are showing evidence of print rules within their writing (e.g., spaces between scribbles, directionality – left to right or top to bottom in English), and whether they seem to be exploring the idea that their writing links to what they want to “say.”
FOCUS	<b>Label and Narrate Your Writing</b>  Make the act and purpose of writing visible to children as you reflect on your own writing in the classroom. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ At Circle Time: “I wrote a sign. It says, ‘Welcome Ms. (Teacher)!’ And, I drew music notes. The words tell us who is coming to teach music! Let’s read it – ‘Welcome Ms. (Teacher)!’”</li><li>◆ During art: “I traced my hand. Look, here is the picture of my hand. I am going to write my name here (<i>write below hand</i>) so that you know this is my drawing!”</li></ul>
SCAFFOLD I	<b>Take Dictation</b>  Help children connect their ideas and words to writing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ During art: “You are making beautiful colors on your drawing. What are you making?... Oh, it’s a rainbow? May I write ‘rainbow’ at the bottom? Now we see a rainbow (<i>point to the picture</i>) and we can read the word ‘rainbow’ here (<i>point to the word</i>)!”</li><li>◆ During play: “Are you the restaurant cook? What are you cooking? Tell me and I will write it down on the chalkboard for customers to see!”</li></ul>
SCAFFOLD II	<b>Encourage Children’s Writing</b>  Encourage children to explore writing/drawing. This can be simple marks or scribbles, but you can help them “interpret” even the scribbles as meaningful attempts to communicate with writing. Hang or display their writing products in the room and comment on the value of their effort. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ “You made so many pages! Do you want to staple them to make a book? Then you can share your book with your family!”</li><li>◆ “We read about the lonely polar bear who loved getting letters. I brought lots of cards and envelopes. You can write your own letter to the polar bear! They would love it! I am putting them right here for you to try. There are even crayons to make your cards beautiful and colorful.”</li></ul>
KEEP IT GOING	Consider what you learned from observing children on Monday as well as their reaction to your Focus and Scaffolds. Find ways to build the activities from Setting the Stage into your regular routines.