

# *Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre*

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*Teaching and learning of literacy in the EYFS (reading and writing)*

*Shared and modelled approaches (web version: no pictures)*

## **Introduction**

### **What is this document about?**

This document is about how we help children learn to read and write. Reading and writing are closely linked. Learning to read and to write are the most difficult tasks children have to learn. For them to be successful now and later on we have to offer them the right experiences and teaching. This document outlines the approaches we have discussed together at Sheringham.

### **Why do I need to read this document?**

Teaching a child to read and write is very complex. Many different approaches are needed if the child is to become a successful reader and writer. It is important that you read and re-read this document so that you know you are offering children the most useful experiences to support their journey to becoming readers and writers.

### **Who is this document for?**

This document will be useful to anyone who is involved in Sheringham, staff, parents and visitors.

### **Where did the ideas come from?**

We discussed, as a staff group, the many aspects of teaching reading and writing. We looked at the research that has been carried out into the best ways of teaching young children to read and write. If you would like to explore this research yourself, you will find a list of sources in the back of this document.

*This document was originally developed as part of a small action-research project within the Manor Park Soft Federation of schools, with the support of Val McGregor. Our lead practitioner in the project was Nazia Begum. The document was then further developed with the involvement of Pauline Hoare and Anni Mctacish. Many thanks to everyone who has helped with the thinking and writing in this piece of work.*

*J.G, February 2013.*

## Beginning at the beginning

### Reading and writing develop together and in parallel

Reading and writing are closely interwoven. They require slightly different sets of skills, but as the skills of reading develop and strengthen, so do the skills of writing. So think of them together.

The process of making sense of those black marks on the page, and beginning to make your own marks on paper that other people can read starts early. It starts with talk. It is talk that helps literacy skills develop and provides the raw material for written communication.

"Reading and writing float on a sea of talk."

**James Britton**, educationalist

Children start school with a vocabulary which has been learned mainly from their family and the literacy environment at home, as well as from their experiences with the wider world. A child's spoken vocabulary will be much larger than their reading or their written vocabularies at first. They will use words they have heard and understand in their everyday life. They will gradually acquire the beginnings of a reading or writing vocabulary from their immediate surroundings, their family and friends. There are so many words in the world – for a young child, they must be both useful and connected to a memorable experience.

### Words, words and more words

Having a low vocabulary will trap children in disadvantage.

*When the daily number of words for each group of children was projected across four years, the four-year-old child from the professional family will have heard 45 million words, the working-class child 26 million, and the welfare child only 13 million.*

Hart and Risley

Increased vocabulary depends on good parenting, particularly before the age of 7 (Biemiller 2003). Children mainly use words their parents and other adults use with them in conversation, and develop larger vocabularies when their parents use more words (Hart and Risley, 1995).

The fundamental instincts of good parents, whatever their social class, are usually correct.

*The word gap among those children has nothing to do with how much those parents love them. They all love their children and want the best for them, but some parents have a better idea of what needs to be said and done to reach that best. They know the child needs to hear words repeatedly in meaningful sentences and questions, and they know that plunking a two-year-old down in front of a television set for three hours at a time is more harmful than meaningful.*

Jim Trelease

When they start school, relatively high performing children know an average estimated vocabulary of 7100 words. In contrast, relatively poor performing pupils know 3000 words, acquiring only one word

per day compared to the three words per day acquired by children with the largest vocabularies. This gap widens as children get older. And the wider the gap, the harder it is to bridge.

Vocabulary is a strong indicator of reading success (Biemiller, 2003). It was established in the 1970s that children's declining reading comprehension compared to more able peers from age 8 onwards largely resulted from a lack of vocabulary knowledge (Becker, 1977), and that this was primarily caused by a lack of learning opportunities, not a lack of natural ability. Chall et al. (1990) also found that disadvantaged students showed declining reading comprehension as their narrow vocabulary limited what they could understand from texts.

## The statutory curriculum

### Communication and language

Communication and language is a “prime” area of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Literacy – reading and writing – depends on communication and language.

### The characteristics of effective learning

Language is related to movement. Back in the Stone Age, human beings were making flint axes. The social nature of making axes out of flint developed in parallel to language – language development still resides in an area of the brain that overlaps with the area used for more complex cross body movements.

This link is one of the reasons why we are required to place the early learning of literacy within children’s self-chosen activity, and to make sure these activities happen in real and meaningful contexts. Opportunities for early reading and writing should be “real” and available everywhere - notebooks, whiteboards and pens, shopping lists, print in the environment and so on.

Here are some examples<sup>1</sup> of “real” writing:

*Chloe covered the whole paper and said, ‘I’m writing.’*

*‘What an interesting drawing,’ the practitioner said as she joined Aftar at the easel. ‘That’s my dad, and that’s our flat,’ Aftar replied. ‘And that’s me standing outside.’*

*Samuel makes a mark on his dad’s birthday card and says, ‘That says Samuel.’*

*Marcia is playing in the café and writes customers’ orders on her notepad. She tells the chef, ‘They want pizzas.’*

*David writes, ‘I went to seey fiyuwercs and hat to pc in the pub’ (I went to see fireworks and had to park in the pub).*

*Jim writes captions for the photographs in his album, with some help from the practitioner with words he did not know. ‘I saw my Auntie Flo at the wedding.’*

Children need to see adults reading and writing in their everyday lives. They need adults to draw their attention to important print, for example in the street and in shops.

Here are some of the ways we teach reading and writing to young children:

- High quality book corners that are accessible, owned and loved by children;
- Using core books to plan for children’s interests and class topics;
- Valuing non fiction books;
- Having enthusiastic staff who share their excitement of books with children;
- Having books available in all areas of the classroom;

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<sup>11</sup> From *The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*

- Having opportunities for independent writing in all areas of the classroom;
- Having well planned guided reading and writing sessions on a regular basis which aim to teach the important elements of reading and writing;
- Using story props, sacks and boxes to enhance core books;
- Having well planned shared reading sessions in which all staff participate confidently;
- Opportunities for children to learn ‘reading behaviours’, for example, the recognition that print conveys meaning, the left to right directionality of English text, the purpose of punctuation;
- Involving parents in understanding the importance of early literacy through parents workshops, newsletters and many more activities of this type;
- Opportunities for high quality adult- child interactions and sustained shared thinking to give children the extended vocabulary with which to write creatively;
- Encouraging children to become aware of authors by visiting their local libraries and having visiting authors coming in to the classroom;
- Listening to a variety of genres, for example, non fiction, poems, taped stories, rhymes;
- Opportunities to retell and to act out stories using props and story maps;
- Activities to help develop a sense of rhythm.

And of course, there is a role for direct teaching of early reading and writing in the EYFS, provided that all the activities above are freely available. It is important that the teaching matches the child’s level of development, and that it is well-paced and engaging.

In the guidelines below, “readiness” does not mean waiting until the child has reached a certain age before supporting their learning and teaching them skills. Younger children must also be given opportunities, support and direct teaching at their level of development.

A useful reminder for self-evaluating planning and approaches is the ORIM framework from the Sheffield Raising Early Achievement in Literacy Project.

<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>Are we providing stimulating and accessible resources, trips out, real reasons to write?</p>
<p><b>Recognition</b></p> <p>Are we carefully observing what the children are doing, recognising their understanding and achievements, and checking our ideas with them?</p>
<p><b>Interaction</b></p> <p>Are we talking to children about what they are doing, and what we are doing?</p> <p>Are we thinking together about how to solve a problem: “I wonder how we could make sure everyone knows that note is from Batman?”</p>
<p><b>Modelling</b></p> <p>Are children in nursery seeing adults constantly writing for a range of purposes?</p> <p>Are we letting children see what we are doing?)</p>

# Writing

## The early stages of emergent writing

### Opportunities, support and teaching

#### Opportunities

These are planned indoors and out so that mark-making happens using a rich variety of different resources, materials and equipment. Here are some examples of opportunities for children to use to help them develop. It is important that these experiences respond to the child's individual needs.

#### Indoors

Messy and malleable play – i.e. corn-flour and water, sand, shaving foam provided in a flat-bottomed container, so children can feel the bottom and move their hands and fingers through the materials. These experiences appeal because of the rich, sensory element and may also link to children's current interests, for example '*making magic potions and spells*' using soap flakes, food colouring and water.

A well-organised range of paper, card, pencils, crayons and felt-tips in each room, which children can find easily and use independently.

Notebooks, address books, old diaries, magazines, forms to fill-in from the post office, in role-play areas together with telephones, walkie-talkies, and pretend microphones to encourage talk and conversations.

Clipboards and pencils available near construction and block-play, so children can draw or record their constructions, write a list for the 'builder's yard' etc.

ICT – for example the whiteboard for drawing and mark-making, interactive stories, children's names/first letter of their name written big.

The arts also provide lots of possibilities for children to engage in mark-making – i.e. paint, brushes, runny glue, collage, clay and sculpture, together with small tools.

Indoor displays of children's writing and drawings with captions and print, and examples of children's home languages as well as English.

#### Outdoors

Outdoors provides different but complementary opportunities for mark-making, particularly large scale. Simply moving an activity better done indoors to the outdoor environment is not effective. The outdoors, used for writing, should connect with the important aspect of supporting children's physical development.

- Puddles and paint brushes, sticks or leaves, small branches, bubbles in water.
- Mud and other malleable materials, coloured ice-cubes for painting on paper/fabric on a warm day etc.
- Paint on the ground or on large sheets of paper, either on the floor or upright against a wall or fence.

- Sand – children will mark-make with their hands, fingers and feet, and a variety of small tools, i.e. rakes, spades etc.
- Large paint-rollers, chalk and mops with water or paint, plant sprays.
- Pattern rubbing, taking images through paper of different textures and equipment outside.
- A well-resourced writing and mark-making area: large magnetic board with whiteboard pens, and magnetic letters, envelopes, paper for letter writing and a post-box. Parents are able to see the mark-making area and children can be encouraged to access these resources to support their self-chosen play.
- A selection of small resource bags, with pencils, notebooks, torches etc that link to children's interests in superheroes/popular culture themes. This also makes an important link to children's home cultures, TV programmes, comics and books.
- Throwing sponges at paper or fabric, footprints and handprints, paintbrushes tied to the end of bamboo poles.
- A large blackboard outdoors with chalks can be utilised for games or mark-making.

### *Support*

Practitioners should support mark-making and emergent writing through planning and maintaining an enticing and enabling environment, rich in print, with quality story books and non-fiction.

Children and practitioners create home-made books together, with adults and children writing together.

Older children will act as role-models for younger children, as will older brothers and sisters. Children can take part in shared writing and drawing experiences.

Children may also engage in mark-making through a particular pattern in their play - *schema*. For example, a child interested in things that go round and round, may enjoy mark-making using spinning tops, small toy cars (with the wheels) or using paint rollers or hoops through paint or water. They may also enjoy using jam-jar lids for printing or paint in the bottom of a salad spinner.

Planning for role-play through small-world, puppets, and imaginative play is also important, and adults who model 'pretend' – will support children's growing understanding that a wooden block can be a phone, that one thing stands for another. As children begin to play symbolically, they begin to understand that marks on paper are writing and have meaning.

Prompts using photographs of children engaged in writing with simple captions can encourage and model how to use a particular resource, how join in with mark-making in a particular area.

Involvement of parents through sharing information about how children develop as writers, celebrating languages and planning displays, toy library resources and planning workshops will support children's writing.

Opportunities for free-flow writing with children and adults, with adults enjoying writing together with children.

Practitioners will observe, assess and plan mark-making opportunities that link to children's interests and stages of development. For example children who have not yet developed a pencil grip, but hold pencils in their whole hand and are passionate about Bente may enjoy chunky crayons/shaving brushes with green and black paint on large sheets of paper outdoors.

### *Teaching*

Children will take emotional cues from adults, so adults need to be on hand to show their interest and encourage and support children's attempts at mark-making and writing.

Teaching will involve adults who model writing for a purpose, how to hold a pen correctly and show interest and delight when a child shows them their writing. It may also provide the opportunity to ask some open questions 'I wonder what you've written?'

Practitioners will take opportunities to model reading print in the environment, drawing children's attention to print, car number plates, the first letter of a child's name and other things that begin with the same letter. They will suggest finding things out through using books, the library, writing a letter or using the internet etc.

Children need positive adults with a 'can do' attitude who join-in sensitively with their play and support their early mark-making through real opportunities. For example: involving children in helping to write a sign to say 'please leave our building here' or planning a real shopping trip and writing 'a shopping list' for the fruit they are going to buy. They may be involved in sending a letter to someone special. Notepads for lists, paper and envelopes are then provided for children to develop these ideas in their play.

Adults need to give 'high-status' to writing, by showing how they use writing themselves, provide displays to celebrate children's mark-making/emergent writing. Children can be involved in writing captions and comments with photographs.

Children will enjoy spending time with adults who they know, supported by a key-person approach, to act as mark-making and writing 'champions'. For example an adult spending time in the writing area/den or role-play space and introducing something new to a theme the children are interested in.

Teaching will include planning displays that invite interactions, so using captions creatively, for example 'when is your birthday?' or 'come and draw a picture here...?' and also scribing for children what they want to say. These might be simple comments or signs, or longer, imaginative stories that link to their role-play.

Practitioners will use special outings or visits to support mark-making, creating displays for example, a trip to the local park with parents and invite children and parents to think of and write their own captions. Talking-tins or talking post-cards (that can be written on) will provide other opportunities for the children to describe their experiences.

Planning and being aware of a real audience to write for will enable teachers to pick up on opportunities like mummy's birthday to write a special card. This will be supported by the close links that the key-person approach can develop.

### **Physical development**

Children's early mark-making and writing do not develop in isolation. Physical development is an important part of this, and has been recognised as a prime area in the revised EYFS. The fine/gross motor physical skills that children need for mark-making and writing will be supported across a wide variety of interesting and challenging opportunities.

### **Personal, social and emotional development**

Self-confidence and self-esteem develops when children's interests and abilities are recognised and planned for. They will be willing to 'have a go' when they are supported and encouraged through positive relationships with practitioners. This is enhanced with good communication and dialogue between the setting and families. For example, resources in the toy library contain writing materials linked to children's interests. Parents are able to attend 'how children learn to write' workshops, and the resources are introduced along with ideas and information about how parents can support mark-making and writing at home.

## Teaching early reading

### Shared reading - approaches for all children

Individually, small groups, end of session groups

Using dialogic approaches to reading stories/books (see guidance from National Strategies Early Years)

Encouraging children to join in with repeated refrains.

When reading individually or in small groups of 2 or 3 with children who are experienced with books, focus on developing their breadth of knowledge - use dialogic approaches to explore the narrative in more depth or think aloud about a wider range of vocabulary for some of the key events in the story.

Encourage children to retell familiar stories using props, thinking about how they can get the listener's attention.

### Modelling directionality

This is a skill which can be shown and taught to children who enjoy books and handle them with pleasure. It should be taught once the child is ready, when she or he:

- Shows interest in illustrations and print in books and print in the environment.
- Recognises familiar words and signs such as own name and advertising logos.
- Looks at books independently.
- Handles books carefully.
- Knows information can be relayed in the form of print.
- Holds books the correct way up and turns pages.

Understanding the directionality of print also depends on the child understanding the concept of one written word standing for one spoken word, the mathematical understanding of one to one correspondence. You can tell when a child is ready, because:

- When counting a group of objects, the child will co-ordinate saying the number name, with taking the counters one by one.
- The child will understand that the number of counters is the same, however you organise them (e.g. laid out in short line, spread out in a longer line).

**The following activities/experiences and opportunities can be used to teach children about the directionality of print:**

- "I'm going to read it with my finger", modelling left to right directionality of text.
- In the initial stages of focussing on this, select books/texts where the text is consistently laid out (e.g. if the text is always below the picture, then the "top left" of the text will always be in the same place).

### **Cut up sentences**

Where a child gives a caption for a picture, this can be written on a paper strip with the child. This would only be appropriate for a short sentence of four or five words. Model correspondence of words spoken and written. Cut the strip up and show how you rearrange it. Can the child do this with your help (e.g. repeating the sentence; looking for initial sound/letter correspondence)?

### **Developing early writing**

*Writing aloud* - e.g. scaffolded learning, thinking aloud, saying the processes you are going through.

It is probably best to avoid days of the week, shared writing about the weather etc – because the words are generally long, and difficult.

In a small group: if it's a child's birthday, you could have a pre-written frame saying "Happy Birthday to" and then think out loud: *what sound can I hear in Ruby's name? What letter will I need first?* etc.

When you need to write a note or a caption for an individual child - articulate the word very carefully. Make sure that the first sound can be heard and also other sounds within the word.

Use a scaffolded approach - "Can you hear" - "what do you think" - "how could we write"?

There is more guidance on letters, sounds, and sounds in words in *Letters and Sounds* (Phase One Aspect 7 - oral blending and segmenting with children whilst sensitively modelling grapheme-phoneme correspondence, as appropriate for the child's development and understanding).

Example: If you are planning a trip to the shop, in a small group (2 or 3 children) ask them to tell you what we need to buy, for the shopping list. Make sure they can see you write. Say the words out loud as you write them. In the shop, read the list with the children, pointing to the words. Point out words on the products as you buy them. This approach enables children to see the practical uses of print, and enables them to see that you write left to right, top to bottom.

If the list is then displayed, and if there are notebooks for writing shopping lists in role play, then children can extend and deepen what they have learnt in their play.

The same approach can be used when making books with children, using photos or children's drawings. Nursery-made books can provide a stock of texts for children to enjoy.

Our model for the writing of letters and the names we use are consistent with Sheringham Primary School. Our teaching focus is always lower-case letters (with the exception of proper nouns e.g. children's names) though we recognise and celebrate whatever letters children write in nursery. Teaching focus includes: letters left out to play with (e.g. magnet letters, felt letters) and letters we show children how to write.

### **Guidance on sounds**

This section has been developed with Sheringham Primary School in order to be consistent with their approach in Reception and beyond.

Vowels:

'a' as in apple                    'e' as in egg            'i' as in insect            'o' as in orange            'u' as in umbrella.

'c' and 'g' are both initially the soft sounds (cat and girl).

Some sounds are described as being "stretchy" (sssssss) and some are bouncy ( d..d..d..d..d).

We try very hard not to add on 'uh' at the end of sounds so that 'w' is w not wuh. This helps with blending so that b-a-t is said with the correct sounds not "buh - a - tuh". All the letters are known by the sounds. So m is known as "mmm" not as "em".

You can check all the sounds on the Oxford Owl website – [say the sounds](#)

## Teaching early writing

### From emergent writing to the first stages of independent writing

“Readiness” - look out for signs that the child:

Sometimes gives meaning to marks as they draw and paint.

Ascribes meanings to marks that they see in different places.

Gives meaning to marks they make as they draw, write and paint.

Begins to break the flow of speech into words.

Draws lines and circles using gross motor movements.

Uses one-handed tools and equipment, e.g. makes snips in paper with child scissors.

Holds pencil between thumb and two fingers, no longer using whole-hand grasp.

Holds pencil near point between first two fingers and thumb and uses it with good control.

### Teaching name writing

This takes place in the context of a continual focus on developing children’s fine and large motor skills (as shown above). It is important to move slowly – we cannot expect the child to learn writing their name all in one. Instead, use scaffolded approaches – e.g. spend time teaching the child how to form the first letter, then the adult writes out the rest of the name. Once this is secure, move to two letters, etc.

Support the child by modelling three ways of remembering:

1. **Movement** – the adult shows the movement (sand tray, big paint brushes, etc). It may be appropriate sensitively to hold a child’s hand and guide him/her. Other children will prefer to copy. Paint brushes dipped in water used on a blackboard produce “disappearing letters” to that the child can practise more times.
2. **Words** – the adult describes the motion, e.g. “down and around”
3. **Visual** – the adult writes the letter, and may ask the child to write it

Other strategies –

- Write the child’s name with magnetic letters, jumble them up and rearrange (use scaffolded approaches - some children will be helped by being “talked through” this, e.g. to choose the first letter they need, etc. As they become more autonomous, the scaffolding is reduced).
- Write big, ask the child to trace with finger, saying each letter as tracing
- Paint brush and water to make a disappearing name

### **Extending letter knowledge**

With small groups of 2 or 3 children who know ten letters or more: make an alphabet book with *those letters only* leaving gaps for the others. Use pictures chosen by the children, identified with each letter.

The letters will be ones which are significant to the child: e.g. *m* for mummy, the first letter of their name, brands like Kellogs Cornflakes, shops like Tesco, etc.

Gradually, the book can be developed to include more letters in response to the children's interests and what they notice, e.g. out on trips. The book is a resource for the children to read and enjoy together.

## References and further reading

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