

BLOG: THE JOY OF MAKING MARKS

At Childhaven Nursery School, we support children to become motivated and confident mark makers through our playful interactions.

The environment offers rich opportunities for children to explore mark-making as part of their play, through creative materials like paint, clay and sand, as well as paper and pens. Children must first 'notice' the marks they make, before progressing to identifying meaning in the marks they make – the beginnings of writing. The developmental journey through mark-making is not only the one towards meaning, but also a physical one.

In order to develop the physical skills to become a successful writer, children need to develop that coordination and strength through their shoulder, into their elbow, then down to their wrist, and finally into the fingers. It is therefore vital that we offer lots of opportunities for children to develop the strength through their upper body and down into their fingers, through physical activity like climbing, crawling, throwing and manipulating materials.



In the context of mark-making, painting 'big' on vertical surfaces with rollers and brushes encourages that movement from the shoulder; lying on the tummy on the floor to draw encourages that movement from the elbow.

As 'co-player' the adult is in a powerful position to model that next step in children's learning – in this case, the step of identifying meaning in marks.

We had been exploring the story, 'The Three Little Pigs', and inspired by Greg Bottrill's Message Centre and Drawing Club, we've spent time together drawing the Big Bad Wolf. Modelled drawing of the Big Bad Wolf provided the opportunity for us to draw children's attention to the details, allowing them to work at the cusp of their confidence and develop the fine motor skills required further down the line for writing.

At Childhaven, we find that children enjoy the clarity of a black pen on the page. Children have access to a wide range of mark-making tools, but when we draw together we want children to really appreciate and notice the marks they are making.

We often draw in a group, on large sheets of paper, enjoying a sense of togetherness and creating really positive associations around picking up a pen.



What does the evidence say?

Our approach to mark-making here at Childhaven supports Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) evidence that suggests we should: *'Provide a wide range of opportunities to communicate through writing and develop children's motivation to write.'*

Embedding reasons for mark-making in storytelling provides a really effective motivation. Successful writers need the skills to tell a story – to explain what happened, to tell you why and how and when. This is expressive language, and storytelling provides a wonderfully rich context for these kinds of conversations.

This supports the EEF evidence suggesting that *'expressive language underpins writing and should be prioritised.'*

Sometimes these stories are created in co-play between the adult and the children, and sometimes they arise out of a book.

The story of 'The Three Little Pigs' provided endless opportunities for writing messages- telling the Big Bad Wolf that he can't come in, or creating a magic button for the Wolf to blow the house down. As a play partner, the adult can model that playful mark-making, using scraps of paper, masking tape, or chalk marks on the floor to leave messages for the Pirates who stole the treasure, or the Dragon looking for her Dragon eggs. The marks can simply be 'secret messages' or they can be attributed a meaning - 'this is a magic message – when you put it in your shoe, you can fly over the hole...'

WE'RE READY EACH MORNING TO EMBARK UPON AN ADVENTURE WITH OUR CHILDREN. THE ADVENTURE IS THE VEHICLE THAT CARRIES THE STORYTELLING, THE CONVERSATIONS AND THE MARK-MAKING ON. IT CREATES A BUZZ THAT DRAWS OTHER CHILDREN IN AND SPIRALS THE JOY OF MARK-MAKING INTO THEIR PLAY.



You can read more about the evidence behind mark-making on the EEF evidence store, here: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years-evidence-store/physical-development?approach=teaching-the-skills-needed-for-mark-making-and-letter-formation#:~:text=The%20evidence%20shows%20that%20educators,songs%20to%20guide%20letter%20writing.>



THANK YOU FOR READING.

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