

# **Stages of writing development in the Early Years**

*adapted from the Western Australian "First Steps" early literacy program*

## **Phase 1: Making marks**

Children begin to make random marks. These marks are experimental as the very young child explores with drawing or writing tools. More complex arrangements of lines, dots and shapes appear. Representational drawings gradually emerge. Marks that look like letters may also start to appear.

The child enjoys the experience and gradually improves in their ability to control the tools. The child may tell a story about the markings.

### **Major teaching emphasis:**

- Provide a range of writing tools and materials including pencils, paper, crayons, brushes and paper.
- Acknowledge children's enjoyment of drawing and making marks.
- Observe their drawings closely and make comments on what you can see: "I can see you are making a big picture" or "you are using lots of colours" but avoid saying "What is it?" or guessing what the marks represents. You could also say, "Would you like to tell me about your drawing?"

## **Phase 2: Role Play writing**

Children are beginning to understand that written symbols are related to language. They experiment with marks on paper with the intention of communicating a message, or try to copy adult writing. They understand that there is a connection between writing and reading, and aware that print carries a message. They use known letters or approximations of letters.

### **Major teaching emphasis:**

- Demonstrate the connection between oral and written language.
- Demonstrate that writing communicates a message.
- Use correct terminology for letters, sounds and words.
- Encourage children to experiment with writing.

## **Phase 3: Experimental writing**

Children are aware that speech can be written down and that written messages remain constant. They understand the left to right organization of printing and experiment with writing letters and words.

The child reads back their own writing, e.g. lists, letters, recounts, stories, messages. The child realizes that print contains a constant message and uses left to right and top to bottom orientation. The child demonstrates one-on-one correspondence between written and spoken word and relies heavily on the most obvious sounds of a word.

### **Major teaching emphasis:**

- Demonstrate the connection between written and oral language.
- Focus on the way print works, (conventions)

- Demonstrate that writing is purposeful and has an intended audience (e.g. Big Books)
- Encourage children to experiment with writing.

#### **Phase 4: Early writing**

Children write about topics which are personally significant. They are beginning to consider audience needs. They have a sense of understanding what a sentence is, but may focus on spelling without punctuation. They choose topics that are personally significant. They experiment with words used in literature, the media, their peers and others.

#### **Major teaching emphasis:**

- Talk about the differences between oral and written language.
- Read, write and discuss a range of different forms of writing.
- Show how sentences can be linked to form paragraphs.
- Show how paragraphs are linked to form a whole text.
- Teach strategies for spelling.
- Help children develop word banks.
- Discuss how words can enhance meaning.
- Introduce proof-reading and guide children in using it.