

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Author! Author!

Invented Spelling and Writing

What is the practice?

Writing is a way to communicate ideas in print. Chances to write focus children's attention on print, help them learn that letters represent sounds, and contribute to their emerging reading skills. When given writing opportunities by interested, responsive adults, children ages 3 to 5 can use drawings and symbols to express thoughts, feelings and ideas; can print or copy their first names; and can use letter-like approximations to "write" words or ideas.



What does the practice look like?

Early writing by young children combines drawing, invented spelling, copying, and repetition of familiar patterns. With drawing, the child communicates his thoughts and interests by drawing pictures and then "reading" them back just as if the page contained written words. Scribbling is often used by young children, with the scribbles going left to right and sometimes looking like cursive writing. Young children will sometimes put letters together in random order, and might even use some of the letters in their name. Invented spelling occurs when the child writes by using his or her own spelling for words. Sometimes a single letter stands for a word, as in "h" for "house" or the beginning and ending letters stand for a word, as in "hs" for "house."

How do you do the practice?

Writing can be a routine part of a child's day. Activities at home and in early childhood programs provide natural opportunities for putting young children's writing skills to work.

- Young children can draw picture reminders or use their version of writing to fill in events and dates on a classroom calendar.
- Teachers, family members, and classmates can leave each other notes at a designated message center.
- When preparing for an activity, children can be asked to write out a list of materials needed. Preschool children may enjoy "reading" their lists aloud to others.
- Children can add a picture or note to letters written to grandparents, other family members, or even their friends in an early childhood classroom. They can use scribble writing or invented spelling to write the note.
- Children can make the connection between spoken and written words when they draw a picture then dictate a story about it. You can write the story exactly as the child tells it and then read it back to him.
- Children can be encouraged to write and illustrate a story. You can make a simple book from paper folded in half and stapled on the fold, or make a fancier book with a cardboard cover. The book can be bound by lacing thick yarn through holes made with a hole-puncher.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the child spending more time "writing"?
- Does the child seem pleased about his letters, notes, or stories?
- Has the child shown interest in trying different ways to write, or is he trying new ways to spell?

Take a look at more fun with emergent writing

Preschool Publications

At circle time in Mr. John's preschool class, the children are making books. They decorate a large sheet of construction paper in the color of their choosing using stickers, markers, crayons, and glitter. Once they finish, Mr. John and his assistant help the children write their names on the decorated paper, which will be their book cover. The children then take white paper and their favorite writing tools and begin to write a story about whatever they choose. The children talk happily about their stories as they make lines, dots, squiggles, letters, and other writings across their pages. Mr. John encourages them to draw pictures to go along with their stories. As they finish, the children take turns "reading" their stories to the group. Mr. John writes down what each child says, and adds the words at the bottom of each page. He then places the cover around the pages and staples it together for each child to take home.



Lines in the Sand

Some of the preschoolers in Ms. Anna's class are playing "school" on the playground one afternoon. Sara pretends to be Ms. Anna and the others are her students. Sara gives the others bits of sticks and has them write their names in the sand the way their teacher has shown them. Some of the children know how to write their names conventionally, while others use invented spelling. Sara looks over their writing, saying, "Good job!" to each of them just like Ms. Anna does. Then she tells them to write familiar words that she calls out, "Dog. Sara. Mom. Dad." The children write letters in the sand for each word. "Very good!" says Sara, looking at the lines they made in the sand. "Time for snack."

Making Their Mark!

In Mrs. McLean's inclusive preschool class, children are encouraged to write down their thoughts and story ideas throughout the day using materials in the writings bins that are found in every classroom center. They use sign-in sheets at the popular centers, and are also encouraged to make a mark next to their printed names and pictures when they arrive in the classroom each morning. The children have begun recognizing not only their own names, but some of their classmates'. For the children who have difficulty with fine-motor activities, Mrs. McLean helps them type stories on the classroom computer using the oversized keyboard, and they can "sign in" using adhesive labels pre-printed with their names. Some children also enjoy telling stories into a tape recorder and then playing them back when it's time for the class to share their stories.

