



Tips for Home or School Promoting Literacy through Emergent Writing



By: MaryAnn Demchak & Marty Elquist

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Literacy is important for everyone including individuals with dual sensory and multiple impairments. Literacy is comprised of word knowledge, reading, communicating and writing. Just as teachers and families should provide children a variety of experiences with books, stories, printed word, Braille, and so forth, they should also provide experiences with writing. Children go through developmental stages in learning to write, beginning with random drawing or scribbling and progressing to proficient writing. It is important to incorporate "writing" experiences into the daily schedule.

Unfortunately, we have not always provided children with disabilities, especially those with significant disabilities that include sensory impairments, the opportunities to experiment with and explore the writing process. Beginning emergent writing activities typically involve providing opportunities for creativity through manipulating a variety of conventional and nonconventional writing tools, crayons, painting tools, stamps, and other art materials.

This "Tips for Home or School" column provides suggestions for involving children with significant disabilities in emergent writing activities. The use of various grasping aids might be needed for some children with motor impairments. (See our Fall 2005 Tips for Home or School column on assisted grasping.) The intent is to help you think of ways to encourage drawing, scribbling, etc. as emergent writing.

- Crayola Slick Styx ("creamy," twistable crayons that require very little pressure to use).
- Twistable crayons. Good for children who break crayons.
- Jumbo crayons. (fatter crayons for children who use a wider grip. Also come in anti-roll style).
- Stumpy crayons (short chubby crayons for children who use a whole-handed palmar grasp).
- Finger crayons (crayons that fit over the fingertip).
- Pencils, pens & markers come in a variety of shapes and diameters. Some come with built-in grips and others can be used with grasping aids.
- Paint brushes also come in a variety of sizes with a variety of handles to accommodate many grasping needs.
- Sponge paint rollers come with textured or smooth rollers.
- Cut a sponge into different shapes or purchase shaped sponges, which come in letters and numbers.
- Finger paint.
- Stamps & stamp pads. Stamps can be adapted or pur-



chased with large grips.

- Wood, felt, or foam shapes, letters & numbers that can be glued to paper for 3-D art work.
- Wikki Stix can be used to create raised pictures. Children can "draw" or "write" by bending the self-sticking sticks.

Nonconventional art tools can allow for various patterns or designs to be created as well as accommodate various types of grasps or grasping aids. Nonconventional art tools can include:

- Potato mashers—in different mashing styles with different handle types.
- Wire whisks—most have long, sturdy handles.
- Plastic sponges/scrubbers—have nice handles for gripping.
- Pouf mesh body sponges.
- Shaving brushes or a make-up brushes.
- Dish brushes — with or without soap compartment (which could be used for dispensing paint).
- Spray bottles to spray thin paint.
- Toys with wheels—run wheels through paint, then on paper.
- Cookie cutters.
- A ketchup dispenser or mustard dispenser is also a handy way for kids to dispense their own paint.

For many children these emergent writing activities will be more meaningful by drawing or writing on a textured surface. A textured surface can be created by placing any of these items under the paper: Non-slip shelf liner, rough sand paper, plastic craft canvas, wire mesh.

Some children might require use of an easel on a stand or a table top easel for easier access motorically. Paper may need to be held in place with tape or clips. If children are unable to participate physically, then they can be offered choices about tools, color, paper, placement, etc.

It is also important for children to understand that "writing" is a way to share ideas and communicate. Thus, emergent writing products can be used as a basis for children to make greeting cards, banners for the school hall, notes home, gift bags, etc.

Young children can do such work through art centers while older children might have a Publications Center, Media Center, or Graphic Arts Center (in order to be age appropriate). Within the center children could have access to various types and colors of paper. Not all materials need to be available at all times. Children can be motivated to participate on a regular basis by varying available materials.

Although independent exploration is important, equally important is the social aspect of the activities. Simply sitting a child in front of many of the items above is not as meaningful as allowing the child to engage in the activity while he is engaging in social interactions, verbally and nonverbally, with others.