Free or Lite indicates that the app is free today. Some apps may be for Android devices, as well as for iPads.

Editor: Florence Longhorn - florence.longhorn@gmail.com or InfoXchangeMag@aol.com

From Marks to Writing
INTRODUCTION

This collection of articles is an introduction to using a range of apps to complement an emergent mark making and writing curriculum. It is in no developmental order so that a personalised programme can be created for a particular writer. This would be based on their general level of mark making linked to their particular interests and using a wealth of sensory materials enhanced by technology such as an iPad or tablet.

Contents

• An introduction to mark making and writing
• Guide lines to developmental levels of hands and finger movement
• An outline of the development of hand and finger movements using an iPad or tablet
• Helpful equipment
• Apps for mark making and writing:
  - focused finger fun
  - practicing hand/body movements in a structured way
  - mark making art apps
  - writing apps using print or cursive
  - linking to other areas of the curriculum
MAKING A MARK ON THE WORLD

What is writing?

Writing is an action of communication. It affects us all in our daily routines - from reading a copy of the 'Beano' to finding the toilets in a café. The messages can come in a variety of different ways from flashing neon lights to a scrawl in the sand on the beach.

Very special writers can also access writing as a form of communication. For example, they can do this through transactional writing such as sequencing their tactile calendar each day or using electronic mail to send photographic images.

What are the first steps in writing?

The very first steps in writing are called mark making and are very unintentional. These marks can be as simple as:

- trailing fingers through soapy water,
- a finger dipped in a jar of honey,
- a stick dragged through dirt,
- a hand banged on a floury tray,

When the writer realises that they have made a mark then the mark becomes intentional - a deliberate mark made as a form of communication or expression.

These early mark making stages form the most important writing platform for very special learners. They need to make a strong mark on their environment such as indicating an object they desire, pointing to a favourite person, moving a torchlight in a dark room or choosing an activity via an object of reference. Making such a mark is of no consequence unless those who surround the person respond to the marks.

What is emergent writing?

Emergent writing covers these early mark-making activities. These marks fit into early developmental patterns which link closely to the development of hand/eye movements for example. We begin to make marks on the environment by using hands and feet to explore, scratch, stroke, poke, pluck, squeeze, pat and bang! These are the early hand skills needed to eventually hold a pencil.
A loud bang on the table with a fist or a hammer is a very clear mark of intent!

'I am here!'

**Case study - Signatures**

Susan, the art teacher, had a group of very special teenagers who were learning that a mark could claim ownership of what they had made or wanted - a signature on a painting or making a snack choice, for example.

She worked with a range of mark making media, helping each student to make and own their own mark.

Each student was enabled to select their favourite mark and the mark example was taken to a rubber stamp manufacturer. He reproduced the mark on a palm-sized stamp, which was held in the palm of the hand with a Velcro strap. Students could bang and make their mark or bang their comment as they wished.

The signatures were used in a variety of ways, making a choice on a fast food menu, signing in for work experience or signing a birthday card. One dad came in one day and told everyone how his special son could now sign a cheque at the bank - the bank had accepted his stamp mark and he could draw money from his own account - to spend as he chose.

**Developing mark making**

For very special writers please put away the pens and paper and introduce exciting multisensory ways of making marks on the world! Here are some tasty and smelly ones to try:

**Food writing:**

- Try alphabet soup and shaped macaroni - finding hidden messages!
- Use 'cheese strings' to write wriggly marks on a slice of bread
- Use an icing bag and different nozzles to write names and make marks
- Try mark making with tomato concentrate on a pizza base
- Freeze ice cubes in novelty ice trays - pigs, hearts, circles - melting symbols!
- A plate of coloured (food colouring) cooked spaghetti to make endless lines
- Mark an iced cake with silver balls, sprinkles and sweeties
Make some earthy inks

- Take a carrot and a beetroot.
- Chop and crush finely each one – separately.
- Place each separately in its own pan, cover with water, leave overnight.
- Next day add 2 cups of water to each pan.
- Simmer for an hour.
- Cool and strain through a piece of muslin, collecting the fruity ink.
- Discover the colours and smells of mark making with your own earthy ink!
- Try some other fruits or vegetables for different colours and smelly marks.

Messy mark making

Make marks:
- in a bowl of soggy cornflakes,
- across a tray of lumpy warm porridge,
- through wet or dry icing sugar,
- slurp fingers through molasses and dribble marks onto a plate,
- rub at Vaseline or Vick for strong smelly marks,
- squirt toothpaste into wavy marks,
- squish and squeeze jelly into interesting wobbly marks.

And finally, here is a mark making activity for trendy students.

Making a mark on a T-shirt

Dylon produce a paste product called 'Image maker'. You could use it to transfer photocopies of marks made by a very special writer on to fabric such as a 't' shirt. Take a photocopy of the marks, place print side up on silver foil and spread the paste evenly. The copy is then placed wet side down on the 't' shirt and rolled with a rolling pin. Once dry, the paper is lifted and the image revealed. The marks are then sealed and the 't' shirt ready to wear (it is washable). Very trendy mark making!

Useful books

- 'Writing for all' Sylvia Edwards (1999) David Fulton Publishers
- 'Communications with pictures and symbols' (2003) CALL centre, at www.callcentrestotland.org.uk
- 'Literacy for very special people’ Flo Longhorn (2001)
GUIDELINES

As with all development, there can be variations, modifications or adaptions to be made!

Earliest body movements follow this sequence:

Head ➔ Trunk ➔ Arms ➔ Legs ➔ Hands ➔ Fingers

Hand Development
(links closely with vision, sound, touch and body movements)

- Tightly clenched fists, strong reflexive grip 0 months
  Don’t know their hands belong to their body

- Grasp one hand with the other, playing with fingers 3 months
- Hands bat at midline/a mobile
- They hold objects in either hand
- Shake a rattle and realise that hands belong to their body
- Everything is taken to the mouth

- Swipes hands with purpose 4 months
- Scoops objects up in 2 handed embrace
- Plays with own hands in front of their body

- Hands open up to explore the world through feely touch 5 months

- Fingers and thumbs in action 6 months
- Cannot manipulate all the fingers yet
- Begin to practice raking in objects
- Attempts hand clapping
- Handles objects, shakes, rattles, rotates
- Finger feeds
- Holds a baby cup

- Begins to point with index (pointy) finger 8 months
- Nearly able to do pincer (thumb and pointy) grip

- Picks up tiny objects with thumb and finger 9 months
(continued)

- Picks up tiny objects with finger tips 10 months
- Refines pincer movements 12 months
- Stacking toys, wriggling fingers
- Building blocks
- Turning pages of a baby board book
- Wraps fingers around a spoon

Don’t forget haptic touch receptors in the skin of the hands that feel weight, volume, size, and temperature through special receptors on the skin.
Developmental Hand and Finger Movements for the iPad

- Unintentional swipe
- Intentional swipe
- Full hand bang
- Two hand bang
- Tap
- Tap, stop and lift
- Gentle press and stop
- Hard press and stop
- Drag
- Two finger drag
- Slide
- Slow Flick
- Fast flick
- Finger spread, pinch, zoom in
- Finger spread, pinch, zoom out
- Two hand tilt
- Double tap stop
USEFUL EQUIPMENT

A picture tells a thousand words!

This is my nifty way of encouraging a youngster to use a pointy finger on a tablet. I am left-handed; hence the appropriate finger has been exposed from the glove.

So make sure that you have identified the right finger. If there is confusion about handedness, then just pop a glove on each hand.

I also use these gloves with those youngsters who do not like to point, sometimes the glove is rather good to use.

The X-band

This is a handy way to hold the iPad without getting a tired hand - useful for the writer who needs to adjust the screen to their own particular way of viewing. (Found on eBay at about £15).
Stylus Pens for Mark Making and Writing

There is a range of stylus pens that will write well on an iPad or tablet. I use one, as my hands are not as precise as they used to be, and they enable me to use the iPad more easily.

They are cheap and cheerful bought on eBay or a similar website, so it is not a disaster if they are broken or lost. If you have access to an occupational therapist, they may recommend a particular one for a writer.
APPS

Focused Fun for Mark Making and Writing

Some of these apps can be stored and printed for a writing portfolio.

Discover Drag and Drop
Pointy finger to drag coloured spots to the target with a cheery visual reward.

Doodle Buddy for iPad
Free ranging opportunity to doodle, scribble and then make purposeful marks.

Doodle Sounds for iPads
Quirky musical sounds as colourful marks are made on the screen.

Draw with Stars
Simply touch the black sky and draw with twinkly stars.

Burp and Fart Piano
Fingers on the keys for rude sounds

Art of Glow
Intense glowing images created with the finger tips.

Magic Sorter
A range of fun games to encourage emergent literacy skills.
Practising Body, Hand, Finger, Eye Dexterity

**Dexteria Fine**

Very detailed and good; saves a lot of work as you can plan individualised ‘next steps’ in line with their programmes.

**Dexteria Junior**

The simplest levels of hand/eye finger development for developing writing skills.

**Ninja ABC**

Catch and slash the ABC letters!

**Spot the Dot**

Repetitive tasks with a set of activities for concentration, navigation and finger work.

**Colour Dots**

Connect as many dots as you can in 60 seconds, good for speedy eye hand practise.

**Eye Movement Training Free** (by Ebenezer School)

Excellent!

**Find the Same Free** (by Ebenezer School)

Excellent!
Mark Making Art Apps

**Colour Drops**

Animated draw and paint.

**Musical Paint Pro**

Easy to use with music to accompany mark making.

**Brushes**

An Apple award winner even used by David Hockney!

**Dots for Tots**

Just follow the dots to create an image with more controlled mark making.

**Draw with Carl**

The famous little monster who helps with your art - loads of fun with art activities.

**Fire Draw**

Set the page alight with your lines and squiggles!

**Drawimal**

A bit different, draw and ABC is incorporated in the app.

and the app ... **sky write** ... draw with an aeroplane!
Writing Apps for Print

There are thousands of these ABC writing apps. Here are some that I think are reasonable, in no particular order. Have a look in depth at each one, remember that phonics, 'look and say' or multisensory approaches to reading will influence choice. Remember also to match to the writer - and not what you think is good.

- **iWrite Words Lite**
- **Writing Wizard** (My favourite!)
- **ABC Circus**
- **Little Writer - the Tracing App**
- **Use Your Handwriting**
- **Little Writer Pro**

Letters, numbers, shapes and words
Cursive Writing Apps

**Gappy Learns Writing**

**iTrace Handwriting for Kids**

**ABC Cursive Writing Free Lite**

**Crazy Cursive Letters Lite**

**Writing Wizard - Kids Learn to Write Letters and Words**

This is a French app from l'Escapadou who also make apps for Montessori. It shows what can be achieved in an app on many levels - really good. It follows on from the scribble app 'Draw with Stars' so well.

It is a writing app that can be customised into an individual programme to help the learner practice tracing letters, numbers, and words whilst learning letter names and phonetic sounds.
There are audio/visual prompts showing where to trace from the start of the letter to the finish. The graphics are brilliant with bright, animated graphics that accompany each tracing page. They are so interactive and best of all, playful. There are multiple settings that allow adjustments to letter size, show or hide the letter model or create a word. It is ideal for clumsy fingers, and learners who struggle with visual spatial relations. It also benefits those who need to hear the phonetic spelling of a word.

An individualised word list can be built up, which is so important to the hesitant writer.

There is an optional five-star progressive tracing system that requires the user to trace each letter five times, increasing in difficulty. Detailed reports show how the learner is progressing.

The app supports step-by-step instructions during the process of tracing with multiple settings plus the audio and visual cues offer excellent support. Writing Wizard also includes a supplement entitled "How Children Learn to Write and Read."

Watch a good demonstration on YouTube here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNvF8GW4GmY

If you buy it, it’s worth every penny. Then practice and really get to grips with the richness of what can be presented to the learner.

**Cursive Writing Wizard** - trace letters and words

I know this is for cursive writing, but it really demonstrates how much fun it can be to learning to write using an app.
ABC GAMES

**Cambugs Letter Sounds**
Free for one user. Designed at Cambridge University.

**ABC Alphabet Letters by The Little Book**
Colour photos for each letter of the alphabet, it has the ability to customise sound recording, text and pictures.

**Goodnight ABC**
A winner!

**ABC Crazy Finger Alphabet**
Fun and crazy too!

**ABC Magnetic Alphabet**
Really clunks like the real magnetic ABC letters.

**Hairy Letters**
Excellent!

**ABC Circus**
Animated letters and demo of writing of the letter included.
OTHER LINKS

Extra Apps of Writing Interest

**Dexteria Dot**

This is a new app from the excellent developers of Dexteria.

Dexteria Dots is a fun, intuitive math game that teaches the concepts of number sense, addition, subtraction, larger-than, and smaller-than. It is aimed for ages 2 - 8. Fast fingers earn bonus dots as the player masters a variety of challenges and difficulty levels.

**Letter Reflex**

Overcoming letter reversals and backwards writing in early childhood development and dyslexic children.

There is a useful article about the use of iPads and apps with children who have Down syndrome found on the Down syndrome Scotland website:

'Using iPads and other tablets to teach children with Down syndrome: Special iApps' by Colin and Bev Dean.

Down's Syndrome Scotland - see: http://www.dsscotland.org.uk/resources/Education