



Early Years Coalition



Making Marks Visible

RESPECTING AND RELATING TO THE
STORIES YOUNG CHILDREN TELL IN
THEIR MARK-MAKING



“Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account”

Article 12, UN convention on the rights of the child.

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This is a companion resource to *Making Marks: The Development of Children’s Drawing*

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Introduction

Honoring young children as storytellers, requires us to see them as valued and respected citizens of the world, with the right to have opinions and to share them with others to influence issues that matter to them. The practice of capturing and making visible the thoughts and ideas of young children is embedded in children's rights. It promotes an image of children as intelligent and competent, capable of making meaning of the world and sharing their ideas with us. Loris Malaguzzi (in Rinaldi, 2006) describes a child as one: "who, right from the moment of birth, is so engaged in developing a relationship with the world and intent on experiencing the world that he develops a complex system of abilities, learning strategies and ways of recognizing relationships" (p.83).

This Making Marks Visible resource provides ideas for supporting children birth to 4 years to explore storytelling through the wonder of mark making. Mark making helps children develop their relationships with materials, people, and place, and in so doing, grow their 'voice' – unique ways of seeing and telling their stories. We believe that by wholeheartedly being with children on this journey, adults share these outcomes.

Our aim is to help you capture our youngest children's explorations with materials, people, and places when they make marks as practicing artists. The role of adults is to investigate, wonder and seek joy with children as we document the stories they tell through their mark making. These will be uniquely personal stories about themselves, their lives, and the relationships they hold with others, their homes, and communities.



Max Mitchell
3 years
Food dye on Paper
"Volcano"
Making Marks
Exhibition 2019

Artist's Statement

Swoooooosh, round and round and round moves the paint brush.
Dip, more red food dye, *dribble, dribble*, up and down continues the paint brush.

Educator – "What is your picture?"

Max – "You will find out."

"Oooooooooo, this is the colour orange," as Max paints with the yellow paint brush.

Max picks up the yellow food dye cup and places it closer to him
on one corner of the piece of paper.

Swoooooosh, round and round goes the yellow paint brush.

Max – "It's a big picture, it's a big volcano."

"We looked at volcanos on Mummy's phone."

"I like volcanos."



Why capture the stories children are telling?

Listening to and looking deeply at the stories a child tells while mark making engages us in a process of co-learning with children. Through documenting the gestures, words, thoughts, and feelings of children we capture the essence of how they perceive the world around them and their place in it – we make their learning visible. This process enables adults to review what happened, question assumptions, discuss their reflections with others (including the child) and make meaningful choices about how to support children to learn and grow; and it provides an opportunity for children to revisit and reflect on their experiences.

Importantly, when adults show this deep interest in the marks and symbols that arise in a drawing, children feel that their stories and ways of telling stories are valued. Young children's positions as contributing members of our society are also valued.

Being fully **with** young children at their invitation while they draw (make marks) meets a fundamental need related to healthy attachments. Let's look at this a little more closely before we begin talking about how to capture children's stories.



The fundamentals: Attachment and the developing brain

Attachment theory tells us that the developing brain is impacted greatly by the relationships that are formed in the first 1,000 days of life. It is during this time that the relationships a child has with people in their lives enable their developing brain to thrive and learn. We know that this learning occurs when the child feels safe, and the brain can establish lifelong neural pathways that shape ideas about others and the external world.

Our belief is that having secure and respectful attachments with young children is necessary, natural, and fundamental for capturing children's voices in meaningful ways. Secure attachments provide nurturing spaces for children to tell their stories in the many ways available to them.

Being an interested observer and sometimes interacting with young children while they are storytelling, offers opportunities to capture the child's voice about issues that affect them. Our relationship with a child becomes a kind of 'facilitator' that enables us to bring the story to life.

Those experienced in working with young children know that to capture children's ideas in ways that are relevant, thoughtful, and meaningful is a process that takes time and is seeded in the secure and trusting relationships that are formed between adult and child. According to Maria Aarts (2019), founder of Marte Meo International, young children need adults to "go slow to go faster". It is important to create time and space to accommodate children's developing brain and do this in ways that enable them to show us their ideas when they are ready to do so. Building connections with children through following their play ideas is a great starting point for creating trusting attachments, which enable us to capture how they make sense of the world.

Positive relationships are the heart and soul of all success in children's early years. They enable us to engage with a verbal and emerging literate child who can vocalise their ideas or draw images to depict their thoughts. They also help us interpret the gestures of an infant who communicates their ideas through body language, when engaged in relational moments with their peers or an adult. For this reason, adults who take time to form connections and positive attachments with children, are those who are rewarded with many possibilities for capturing the most authentic and rich voices of our youngest citizens.



June Soe
2 years
Pen and ink on paper
"My Family"
Making Marks
Exhibition 2019

Artist's Statement

*"This is me, November,
Lah Hser Ku, Daddy and Mummy.
There is a love heart."*

Making visible young children's relationships with art materials

At first glance a toddler's actions may seem random. But take a closer look...the child has exchanged a red pen for a black one. She starts to investigate what it can do and immediately notices something. Pointing to a mark, she says something inaudible.

(Ursula Kolbe, 2009)



Exploring mark making materials with children

Children, birth to age 4, use their senses to explore art materials. They, and we, need to view everything around us as offering the potential for mark making.

Some fundamentals for fostering young children's meaningful artistic relationships with mark making materials, include:

- Offering high quality materials that are non-toxic and easy for children to handle and explore with all their senses (i.e. sight, sound, touch, taste, smell). Such explorations need to be enjoyed and produce satisfying results for the child.
- Beginning with a limited choice of materials so that children can fully explore how the materials behave when held and used in different ways. Give children time to build on their emerging ideas about particular materials – e.g. one type of paper (smooth or rough or thick or transparent) and one type of mark maker (crayon, or pastel or texta or charcoal).

- Building variety of choice slowly so that children have the opportunity to undertake 'artistic' research and draw their own conclusions about when and how to use materials – e.g. using one mark maker (blue wax crayon) on various bases (paper of different colours, or different types such as paper or clear plastic). Alternatively, try using different mark makers (crayon, brush and paint) on one base (black cardboard).

Capturing the story

Young children engage in a relationship with materials to enact their imagination and what they value. Whether it is an infant who uses her senses to touch and taste the materials, or a toddler who experiments with how to hold a pencil to make lines or dots on a page, all children are carefully making choices to share a story with us. Keeping an open mind towards the possibility of what is being shared will help adults to capture this relationship. You can capture children's relationships with materials, through noticing:

- The senses – Does the child taste, touch/test materials? What is their reaction when they do this?
- Verbal and non-verbal cues – What does the child say about the materials? How did they choose them? What facial expressions do they make as they use the materials? What sounds/words do they use as they make marks with the materials?

Making visible young children's relationships with place

Exploring mark making places with children

Place is where young children live. It incorporates all the spaces they spend time in and relate to. The histories, cultures and customs held by a space impact on how children make marks to present their ideas and represent what is around them. Explore place/space in these ways:

- Take drawing materials from indoors to outdoors to see the effects of light and other sensory experiences on how children use the materials for mark making.
- Locate materials at different levels or change from horizontal to vertical (e.g. sitting a child on your lap at an adult-sized table; on the floor; at child-sized tables; on easels single or double-sided).
- As children begin to make marks to represent what they see (observational drawing) take them on drawing excursions around their community. Take time to ponder about what you see and how you feel. Children's mark making will reflect their views and feelings about what is important to them in their community spaces.



Capturing the story

What are mini-stories? They are ways of catching, in photographs and recordings of children's words, a synthesis that gives the essence of context and strategies children use and, more importantly, a deeper sense of what is taking place.

(Vea Vecchi, 2010)

When children live in spaces that they are part of and care for, they feel connected to it. This sense of belonging supports children to thrive and grow. As adults, allowing children time to slow down and explore their lived spaces helps them to hold a deeper connection to their land and community. Capture children's relationship with space/place through noticing:

- What spaces provide opportunities for the child to have time to freely explore with art? What effects do these spaces have on the child?
- Where has the child chosen to engage in the mark making experience? Is a favourite place indoors or outdoors or in-between? Is it noisy/quiet, filled with sensory delights? What is different about their mark making when they are in this space?
- Do children draw places that are special to them? What makes these places special?

Making visible young children's relationships with people

Children's earliest development [as artists] takes place through their relationships with families, communities, friends and others. Their art education has to be connected with their cultures and experiences.
(Felicity McCardle, 2012)

Exploring children's relationships with people as they make marks

Relationships with people of all ages contribute to young children's arts explorations. How adults interact with a child (and how children interact with one another) will have a profound effect on their mark making. Confidence evolves through children experimenting and practicing mark making with others to present their thinking. Try these ways of engaging:

- Sit with a child and watch, smile and nod to acknowledge how they explore materials. These simple respectful acts encourage and affirm children's investigations.
- Be an artist alongside children by exploring materials to fulfil our own curiosity. Children pick up on our interest in seeing what happens when we use materials in different ways. Sometimes we think out loud as we try things out, "I wonder what happens if I take this line to the edge of the paper and back again", or "Hmm... my line looks heavy when I use the side of the crayon".

- Use the language of mark making to affirm a child's decisions and actions: "Yes, I can see how you made your lines cross each other. Starting your lines from different points on the paper was a good idea. You look like you are happy with what happened". As children get older, use more complex language. Include descriptions of lines that - intersect, radiate, run parallel, wander. Later, name shapes that evolve – circle, triangle, square, rectangle, rhombus: "I can see big triangles and small triangles. You joined three lines to make these strong shapes".
- Young children often label their marks and use them to tell action stories. Our role is to listen with interest to how a child brings mark making to life. "Oh yes, she does look sad."
- Provide opportunities for young children to make marks alongside or with one another: Children's capacity to use materials and express ideas through drawing develops when they experiment artistically and socially to share their stories.

Capturing the story

Children in the early years use mark making to express their feelings about what and who is important to them in their lives. Observing and capturing who a child talks about, responds to and represents in their mark making shows us the relationships that they hold most precious in their lives. You can capture children's relationships with people, through noticing:

- Who is with the child as they engage in the art experience? What role do they play? (observer/participant)? Is the child guiding the experience? How?
- Do the child's marks represent a person? What relationship does this person have with the child?
- What are they communicating about this person as they make marks (words, expressions)?

Josie's Story, 4 years: A conversation between Josie and Bron

We commence by sitting next to each other on the floor, with a clipboard, paper and marker pen.

Bron: *How am I going to do some drawing on my page today, what do I need to do?*

Josie shows how to draw a line on the page.

Bron: *You know what to do. What do we draw that has lines on it?*

Josie: *A zipper. Josie draws a zipper on her page. You do a bag first...*

Josie shows and provides instruction to Bron for drawing a bag. Bron then follows the instructions to draw a bag on her own page.

Bron: *I wonder where this bag belongs...*

Josie starts to draw lines around the bag to show Bron and the drawing experience moves to focus on Josie and her clipboard.

Bron: *Tell me about that...*

Josie: *It's a locker.*

Bron: *What do we use the locker for?*

Josie: *To put the bags in.*

Bron: *What does the locker do for our bags?*

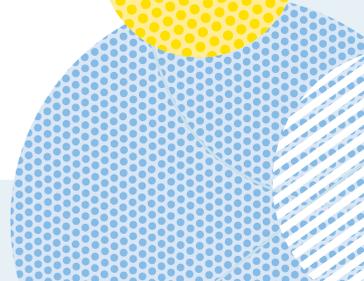
Josie: *It keeps them safe.*

Bron: *Feeling safe is important. What makes you feel safe?*

Josie is not sure to start with...

Bron: *Is there somebody that helps look after you?*

Josie: *My Mum.*



Josie starts to describe the appearance of her mum, whilst pointing to her own features.

Josie: *Hair like me and a tiny bit of black.*

Bron: *Can you show me on the page what she looks like?*

Josie begins to draw. *A body... A head...*

Bron: *What next?*

Josie demonstrates how to draw eyes... *You draw a big one (circle) and then a little one.*

Josie begins to lead the play. We continue with Josie pointing to her features and naming the parts on her body, then making the representation on the page. Her actions are confirmed through statements of "what next?" and repeating Josie's comments.

Josie begins to touch her body and discuss her bones. Josie draws a line from the body on the page.

Bron: *What are those bits?*

Josie: *The bones.* Josie touches Bron's arm.

Bron: *You're feeling my bones, yes, I have bones in my arms. You have bones as well.*

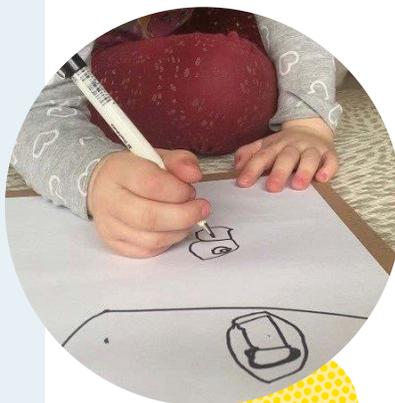
Josie touches her chin and neck. *Here and here...*

Bron: *What do the bones do?*

Josie: *Cover up the blood.*

Bron: *What would happen if we didn't have bones?*

Josie: *Or a face! You'd only be a skeleton.*



Josie finishes drawing her mum.

Bron: *Who else makes you feel safe?*

Josie begins to draw her dad. *I'm making him wear a skirt (giggles).*

Bron: *Your smiley face tells me that's funny.*

Josie: *My Daddy weared (wore) a skirt actually for real life. And I was a baby that time.*

Bron: *That's ok, sometimes we like to wear different clothes. You and I have trousers on today and boys like to wear trousers too. Josie nods in agreement.*

Josie finishes drawing her daddy and places a horizontal line at the top of the page.

Josie: *That's the sky. The sky is blue. It is white today.*

Bron: *What's making it that colour today? Can you see?*

Josie: *Yep, the clouds.*

Josie points back to her mummy and daddy.

Josie: *They will go in the house.*

Bron and Josie discuss the importance of shelter to keep safe in the weather. Josie decides they need a house.

Josie: *I don't know how to make a house. I can do a pointy bit...*

Bron: *Can we try?*

Josie: *I can only do a square...*



Bron encourages. Ok, well let's start with a square.

Ok. Josie draws a vertical line and rounded line at the top. Josie describes what she is drawing. *You do that and then that...*

Bron encourages as Josie describes... *yes, I see.* She confirms when Josie states a *house, repeating a house, perfect!*

Josie completes her house through adding stairs. They count together on her fingers and then the page. There are 10 stairs.

Josie: *We need a rail, so the babies don't fall.*

A rail is added to complete the house.

Josie connects the arms of her mummy and daddy in the drawing with two lines and decides to add her uncles to her family on the page. She draws and describes each uncle in turn.

Bron: *It sounds like you have some very important people in your family. Josie, when you think about all of these important people, how does that make you feel?*

Josie: *Happy.*

Josie decides her drawing is complete and shows Bron how she can write the letters of her name at the top of the page.



The use of sensitive comments with Josie

The interactions with Josie during her mark making experience could be described as 'sensitive comments', as described by Wright (2010) as being "open-ended and responsive, to surface the voice of the child rather than lead it."

Throughout the interaction, time and place was considered with Josie, negotiating where the interactions would take place, what sized paper and pen would be used, and time frames for the process. Josie chose a quiet space in the environment, a larger piece of paper and clipboard.

The interaction began with both of Bron and Josie having a clipboard, paper and pen, however through the questioning and connection Josie soon took the lead to share her thoughts about feeling safe - what that feels like and who makes her feel safe in her world.

Relationships with adults who are important to her were explored, with Josie able to use the story of her family to demonstrate how she can create representations of each person on the page. She also demonstrated an ability to challenge herself in her mark making through encouragement, showing increasing confidence as she attempted to draw a detailed representation of her home. Through Josie's representations, she showed that she is in the pictorial/preschematic stage of her mark making, where she is establishing schemas of how she represents people and her home for storytelling.

Through gentle discussion and open-ended questions, Josie was able to lead the discussion which then translated onto the page as a final product of the thoughts and ideas discussed. Examples of these are adapted from Wright's (2010, p.28) sensitive comments below:

Clarification: *"When you said, did you mean?"*

Mirroring: *"What I hear you saying.... Have I understood correctly?"*

Nudging: *"Really? So, what happened when?"*

Out loud thinking: *"I wonder... What do you think?"*

Because they are so special: Capturing the voices of infants

Your attitude and beliefs affect what you do with babies...your beliefs influence opportunities you provide for the baby to demonstrate his or her abilities.

(Kovach & Da Ros-Voseles, 2014).

Imagine being able to enter the world of an infant - what a treat! To see, hear and experience the world through the developing mind of our very youngest children. Is it possible?

Often when we refer to children's voices, we seek those who are older and able to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through spoken words. Yet we know the critical time in a child's developing brain is in the first two years of life, and therefore, the experiences for the young mind in these rapidly developing years is vital for us to learn about. We need to do this so that the youngest voices in our society can also shape the world around us. If we truly see all children as capable and competent citizens from birth, we can adapt our listening approaches to include even our youngest children.

How do infants approach materials, spaces and relationships with people to share their ideas, learnings and wonderings?



Kiana-Mae Clulow
23 months
Acrylic paint on paper
"Kiana-Mae's Creation"
Making Marks
Exhibition 2019



Artist's Statement

"Paint, paint, paint, paint"

Capturing the story

Listening to birth to two-year-old children asks us to use not just what we see and hear, rather engage in whole body listening. This is a deep observation that engages all the senses and is rooted in connections of attachment to the child. As shared by Carla Rinaldi (2006, p.65), listening in this way is “not just with our ears, but with all our senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, orientation)”. It requires connection with the child and time to enable the child to lead the play or interaction. Examples could include:

- See - what reactions does the child make to interactions/play ideas related to artistic explorations? Facial expressions? Non-verbal body movements? Does the child demonstrate secure attachments to a carer or parent? What do these interactions show you about the child?
- Hear - what sounds does the child make? Are they reactions of delight or distaste? Does sound affect the child during their interactions/ explorations?
- Feel - how does the child react to touch? What textures are of interest? What reactions are made to the touch or closeness of other adults or children? What emotions are displayed by the child in certain situations and how might you make sense of the reasoning behind this?
- Taste - how does the child use taste to explore items around them? What does their preference for taste to certain foods or textures tell you about the child and their experiences?
- Smell - do smells affect the emotions or disposition of the child? In what circumstance? How so?

Taking time to capture children's longer mark making stories

Honing your skills is worth the effort as children's storytelling progresses. They create longer and more imaginative stories, which become tricky to capture in ways that respect the storytellers. You might like to try the following strategies:

- Be descriptive – include details that bring the story to life. What do you see/hear?
- Jottings – write down words, phrases, gestures from the child.
- Audio and video – set up (subtly) to capture the experience so that you can revisit with the child later or use to document the story for the child.
- Conversations – use the child's real words to record a script of their conversations or thoughts.
- Photos – use to capture facial expressions, the environment and how the child engages with the materials. (Note – if you are engaged with the child, have someone else take photos for you to enable the child to stay engaged in the conversation/experience).

Lizzie's Story, 4 years: From Tamara, Lizzie's mother

Lizzie started working on this picture in June 2021. She completed it in mid-August and during this time, celebrated her fourth birthday.

Lizzie worked on this picture primarily in the car for shopping trips and to attend childcare.



Conversation between Lizzie and her mother, Tamara:

Lizzie: *Mummy, look what I made (holding up picture).*

Tamara: *Wow Lizzie, that looks amazing, what did you draw?*

Lizzie: *This is the sun (pointing to the round yellow shape top left). The sun hasn't got a nose (giggle) I forgot (put hand on forehead and shook head).*

This is a flower (pointing to orange flower shape) Daddy, Mummy, Lizzie and Jaz (pointing to each in turn).

I mix colours (pointing to the green lines at the bottom). What colour did I make?

Tamara: *Hmm, let's see. What colours did you use?*

Lizzie: *Green and orange* (holding the paper up close to her face).

Tamara: *I'm not sure, you must have made a new colour. We can call it Lizzie's greeny orangey colour.*

Lizzie: (giggles)

This is a rainbow (pointing to the group of colours at the top).

This is a monster (pointing to the purple shape on the left side).

Tamara: *This is a fantastic picture Liz. What does the whole picture mean to you?*

Lizzie: *Umm, a warm summer day. And this a cold winter day* (turning the paper over to show the other side). *Look mummy, it's a now torm* (snowstorm).

You can take it to work Mummy, but bring it home tonight, do not leave it (handing the drawing across)

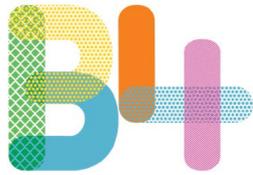
Tamara: *That I will, I am very proud of what you have drawn and how you have gone back to it over and over again. This is a very special drawing.*

Key learnings from Lizzie

Lizzie's piece of art is an example of how children can have opportunities to re-visit and continue to add to their mark making over time.

Throughout the duration of her piece, Lizzie has added meaningful details as she has experimented with colour, shape and her developing representations of objects in her world. The progression of her mark making can be observed as she moves from intentional mark making to the beginning pictorial/preschematic stage.

Through her meaningful relationship with her mother, Lizzie has been engaged in meaningful conversation and provided space and time to be extended, to play with lines and features of objects. Animals, objects, space and humans can all be observed, showing that Lizzie is beginning to create representations of things that make meaning in her life.



Early Years Coalition

