

Squiggle whilst you wiggle The journey of early writing



By Shonette Bason

The Journey of a Squiggle.

The journey of a squiggle begins not when a child is chronologically 4 or 5 years old but the early writing process starts on conception of the child. During the first 8 weeks from conception the neural plate is formed, it then develops a neural groove, a neural crest cells form and the neural groove deepens to form a neural-fold. Basically from the start of the embryos life the brain is forming and it is from the brains connection to the body that hand-eye co-ordination and fine muscle control are formed.

We make the mistake in believing that a child's chronological age deems them to be educationally ready to write when in fact if their brain and body are not married in co-ordination and balance then writing is going to be something they find extremely difficult and as we often see in the primary classroom children disengaged from writing as an Activity can cause difficulties for the teacher and pupils. One of my own children was so disenchanted to writing that his teacher wrote in his school report 'he will be a success at anything he does as long as it does not involve literacy'. My son had movement issues and once these were addressed went on to love to read and write.



I began to work on the program of 'Squiggle whilst you Wiggle' when I lead a Foundation Stage in area where age on entry was extremely low. 85% of the children entering the setting were age scored below 2years 2 months even though chronologically they were age 3 years or above. Their co-ordination was poor, their literacy skills were next to nothing and on the Foundation Stage profile they scored extremely low in reading, writing and linking sounds to letters. Neurologically they were not developmentally ready for this formal education but in terms of raising standards I wanted to find away to raise their developmental age bringing it in line with their chronological age. I also wanted to use neuro developmental exercises to assist the children in a fun and exciting way towards loving early writing. So here starts the journey of the squiggle ...

It is important to remember that this journey effects a child's literacy skills for life and so Squiggle Whilst you wiggle needs to implement with a FEW approach! Fun, Excitement and Willingness. The fun and excitement become evident in the activities set out in the book but the willingness needs to come from the adult participating in the child's development and learning process. A willingness to accept the modern child comes from a different world, a visual society. Many factors delay developmentally a child and a child is less likely now to be as well co-ordinated as our physical world is less demanding but the child's visual capacity increase.

Years ago children walked miles to school and were glad to sit down at a table to learn, children rarely walk a great distance and exercise is something people have to program into their lives.

A developing child needs movement so that the brain can gain control over its body. The adult participating in this program needs a willingness to let go of 'old' ways and enjoy the fun and excitement of Squiggle Whilst You Wiggle.

With a FEW approach the learning and development will flow freely and the child involved will through fun and excitement become more co-ordinated, balanced and excited to literacy.

Please remember:

IF ITS NOT FUN STOP DOING IT!

Move on to the next section or try something else.



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Building on Basics

As a child moves in the womb it is learning to exercise its muscles. The movement is known as 'asymmetrical tonic neck reflex (ATNR)' it also helps the child move on both sides of its body and may even help the baby take an active part in its own delivery. This movement is also present post delivery and can be seen in the baby's self rotation of the head. Often seen when babies are placed on their tummy and they turn their head to make sure their airway is clear and thus they can breathe. This simple movement is vital for pre-natal and post-natal health of the child and in early stages of hand-eye coordination. Stimulation of a baby's senses is vital from birth as the brain engages with its body and learns to gain control of all its parts. To be able to write your brain needs to have control over your fine muscles but also it needs to know where its arms are and then hands and the most important part the body for writing ?

The fingers!

Co-ordination is the key skill in assisting a child to become a successful writer.

How can we help a baby to learn where its arms, hands and fingers are? Through simple rhymes that involve using these body parts.

Years ago everyone played peek-a-boo with baby or sat them on their knee for 'ride-a-cock horse'. Did they realise the neurological impact they were having on baby? I doubt it more than likely it was fun and baby laugh. But it has a fantastic neurological benefit to baby it stimulates the neuro networks but also helps the brain gain control over the body.

Cradling baby in your arms and gently rocking them to the old favourite:

Rock a bye baby on a tree top,

When the wind blows the cradle will rock

When the bow breaks the cradle will fall down will come cradle baby and all.

This simple action helps baby to have a simple sense of balance.

See saw Margery Daw

Johnny shall have a new master

He shall earn but a penny a day

Because he can't work any faster

Holding baby and see sawing forwards and backwards not only helps baby's sense of balance but also their body control.

The grand old duke of York
He had 10 000 men
He marched them up to the top of the hill and he
marched them down again.

(Marching, raising arms up and lowering them down with
your body as you march.)

When they were up they were up and when they were
down they were down.

When they were only halfway up they were neither up
nor down.

(making body actions meet the directions in the song.)

This well known rhyme not only assists body awareness
but balance, muscle tone, grip and finger
movements!

This is why in Squiggle Whilst we Wiggle I call for us to
go back to basics. Due to modern life, 'stress and
parental time issues many of the old fashioned rhymes
and dances we grew up with are no longer in place when
a child enters a setting at 3 years old. Television is
available from such a young age and many parents now
see this device as not only the babysitter but also the
stimulator. Many children's programs teach nursery
rhymes but do they take the child's hand and row them
or encourage them to march and assist them if they find
the movement difficult?

Using the back to basic principles we can assist young
children in a fun and exciting way to gain control of
their bodies, to learn to balance and begin to learn
to grip and finger movements.

Here are few more action rhymes and their neurological
benefits.

Sitting baby on your lap and gently bouncing them up
and down to...

Ride a cock horse to Banbury cross ,
to see a fine lady upon a white horse.
With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
she shall have music wherever she goes.

Stimulates the child's balance system.

Holding hands and moving round in a circle, changing
direction after a few times.

Here we go round the Mulberry bush,
The Mulberry bush,
The Mulberry bush.

Here we go round the Mulberry Bush on a cold and
frosty

Morning.

Helps develop the child's sense of body control, balance
and hand-eye co-ordination.

It's amazing the effect these time old rhymes can have
on development.

Back to basics – our fingers and toes.

Little did we realise that simple ‘old fashioned’ rhymes could impact on an early years child’s development then the same can be said for finger and toe rhymes. Touch lets the brain know where different external body parts are.

Head, shoulders, knees and toes

Knees and toes

Head, shoulders, knees and toes

Knees and toes

And eyes and ears and mouth and nose

Head, shoulders knees and toes.

By the child touching the body part the brain then gets a message back through the body here is my shoulder, knees and toes. Babies and young children learn from using their range of senses. Movement assists this learning when done through an emotional safe and secure relationships with an adult. The simple rhymes and repetitive patterns help the child to feel safe.

This little nose is for smelling
(touch the nose gently)

These two eyes are to see
(gently circle the eyes with your fingers)

These little ears are for listening
(gently tug the ear lobes)

And this little mouth... is for telling tales to me!
(gently pat the mouth... then give them a tickle!)

The FEW approach helps here with the delivery of the rhymes being in a sense of fun and excitement and with the deliverer being willing to take 5 to 10 minutes daily to establish a routine.

As the child develops as a ‘squiggler’ we need to make them aware as possible of their fingers but first in developmental terms to stimulate the hand and fingers we must first stimulate the foot and toes.

This little piggy went to market.

This little piggy stayed at home;

This little piggy had roast beef,

This little piggy had none.

This little piggy cried ‘wee-wee-wee, all the way home.’

Squeezing each toe gently from big to small as each toe is each of the five pigs the little toe being the crying little piggy!

Back to basics – more fingers and toes.

Other good rhyme for the feet and toes are:

This little cow eats grass,
This little cow eats hay;
This little cow drinks water,
This little cow runs away;
This little cow does nothing
But lies down all day.
We'll chase her,
We'll chase her,
We'll chase her away!

Use the toes as the cows and on the last one when you chase run your fingers over the sole of the foot.

Shoe a little horse,
Shoe a little mare,
But let the little colt
Go bare, bare, bare.

Simply pat the feet whilst saying the rhyme.

Making a child aware of their arms and hands is a crucial stage in early writing. If the brain does not know it has arms, let alone fingers, fine muscle control and hand-eye co-ordination are going to be very poor and the child will not thrive when learning to write. Body and brain awareness of the key tools for writing will assist the child to becoming a successful writer.

The most famous rhyme from my childhood is:

Round and round the garden like a teddy bear.
One step two step and ...
A tickly under there.

Taking the finger round the palm of the hand several times, then gently pressing on in steps up the arm to tickly under the a arm causing an element of surprise.

Another variation:

Round and round the haystack
Went the little mouse,
One step. Two steps...
In his little house.