



**PRAESA**

*Nurturing the growth of  
biliteracy and multilingualism*



*The Project for the Study of  
Alternative Education in South Africa*

## Emergent writing

When adults write, they always do so for real reasons: to write a shopping list, to leave a note for someone, to fill in a form, to communicate with a friend in a letter or email, to create a story. Learning to write includes learning why we write and how to write, so children learn to write most easily when they choose what they want to write and when to do it!

Through drawing and painting young children express their ideas and feelings. Help them to understand the connection between drawing and writing by asking them to talk about their pictures and what they would like you to write about their pictures. You can write what they say below their picture. This helps them to understand that what we say can be written down.

When children realise that writing communicates meaning, they begin to experiment with it. They use writing for various real purposes in their lives. Most commonly they:

- \* try to write their name and the names of family members and friends  
write to label things in their pictures
- \* use writing to organise different parts of their daily lives – for example, writing a list of children coming to a birthday party, or of the things they would like for their birthday or another occasion
- \* write to communicate messages to important people in their lives
- \* write to imitate the ways that adults in their lives use writing – for example filling in forms or entries to competitions.

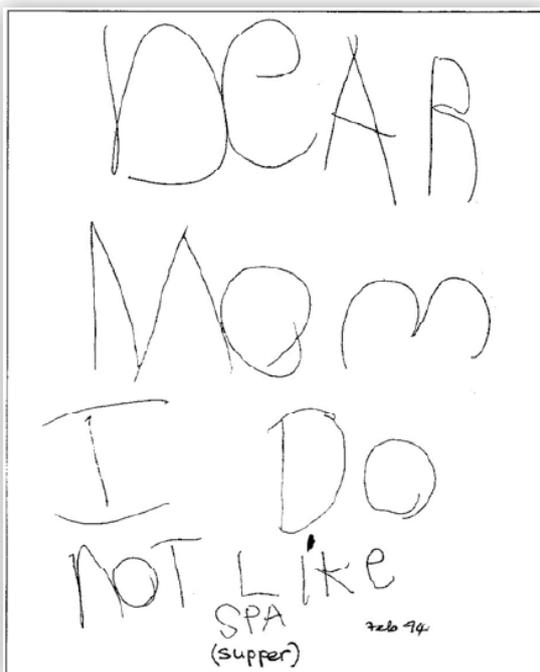


When children start to write they usually use scribbles on a page, just like babies babble before they talk! For example, the child who drew the picture on the left said that the scribbles at the top were her name.

From here children often begin to use symbols that look more like letters. And then they start to use real letters (even though these may be back to front sometimes!) together with their own symbols. These are all usually used with

their drawn pictures to label items they think are important.

These first steps are exciting, because they show that children are aware of a difference between drawing and writing. You can support their attempts at writing by asking them what the writing says.



Next, children begin writing in words, using conventional letters. They usually choose letters that they think match the sounds in words they are trying to write. Through experimenting, they gradually become more aware of how we write from the top of the page to the bottom, and from left to right. They also start to notice how numbers are different to letters and how we use punctuation.

