



## Position Statement on *Handwriting Without Tears*

“In preschool, children’s proper written formation of letters should not be a priority; such emphasis would be likely to make early writing less meaningful and more frustrating to young children.”

(Copple and Bredekamp, 2009, p. 148)

Important components of a high quality early childhood education program for three to five-year-olds include:

- play-based learning opportunities that help children develop socially, physically, intellectually and spiritually
- opportunities to listen and speak with adults and other children while engaged in play
- environments that infuse books prompting children to engage with literature throughout their play spaces
- availability of writing tools such as crayons, markers, pencils, paint and brushes, and various sizes, colours and types of paper
- opportunities to freely express ideas through drawing, painting and role play writing as well as to participate in shared writing experiences with adults

These components directly support children’s development in language and literacy, an important aspect of which is coming to understand the purpose for writing and the forms that it takes such as books, lists, letters, signs and charts. Through meaningful daily experiences with print, children find out that reading and writing matters. Their early writing develops from their explorations with expressing ideas through drawing and scribbles and eventually letter-like forms (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005). Through pretend and practice, children use play to develop writing skills.

The *Handwriting Without Tears* (HWT) program has been reviewed by the Ministry of Education, Early Learning and Child Care branch. *Handwriting Without Tears* does not align with the Ministry of Education’s early learning documents of *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* and *Better Beginnings, Better Futures*.

The Ministry DOES NOT recommend the use of *Handwriting Without Tears* program in Prekindergarten or other early learning and child care programs for the following reasons.

*Handwriting Without Tears*:

- encourages letter formation to be taught in isolation
- lacks opportunities for creativity and personal expression
- uses prescriptive language to describe the actions and dialogue of the teacher with the children
- requires the children to complete activity books which lack meaningful content of local community knowledge

The *Handwriting Without Tears* program does contain child-friendly wood pieces that may support letter formation. These pieces may be used as part of a play-based early learning

program. The wood pieces could be placed in a building or construction centre to enhance children's play and integrate emergent literacy. However, similar materials that support letter formation may be found through other sources.

### **Ideas and Suggestions to Support Emergent Writing**

Emergent writing tools such as pencils, various paper sizes, markers, clipboards and envelopes should be offered throughout experiential play centres for children to create lists, notes, cards, letters, and stories. Experiential centres where children can role play various emergent writing forms include:

- shoe store: record shoe sizes on boxes, create receipts, take orders
- florist shop: mark prices, complete order form, create cards to attach to flowers
- construction: draw plans for the building of a tower using the available blocks
- grocery store: create shopping lists, copy recipes, complete cheque books

Well developed fine motor skills support handwriting at later grade levels. There are many ways to support children to engage in fine motor control. These include:

- drawing and painting with broad and fine tip pencils, crayons, markers, and paintbrushes
- working with playdough and clay
- constructing with blocks of various sizes and shapes
- playing with manipulatives such as beads for stringing, puzzles (both large and smaller pieces), or pegs and pegboard, and using multi-textural materials for collage and creative experiences.

### **Recommended Resources for Enhancing Emergent Literacy in Early Learning Programs**

Bennett-Armistead, V. S.; Duke, N. & Moses, A. (2005). *Literacy and the youngest learner: Best practices for educators of children from birth to 5*. New York: Scholastic.

Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs: Serving children from birth through age 8 (Rev. ed.)*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Neuman, S., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2008). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children* (Fifth printing). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Schickedanz, J. & Casbergue, R. (2005). *Writing in preschool: Learning to orchestrate meaning and marks*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. Retrieved December, 2, 2010 from [www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning\\_readwrite](http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/learning_readwrite)