

On your mark!

What does research tell us about the relationship between a child's age and the order in which prewriting and emergent writing skills develop?

From a baby's first awkward crayon marks to a preschooler's carefully penciled name, children's prewriting and emergent writing abilities develop in a highly predictable, age-related sequence.

Researchers at the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) analyzed 49 studies of 1,647 children between one and five years of age to determine the ages at which young children exhibit different emergent writing skills. The researchers also wanted to find out how the presence or lack of adult prompting affects writing and drawing skills development.

As part of their work, the CELL researchers proposed a 13-level hierarchy of emergent writing skills: 1) marking, 2) dots, 3) random marking, 4) random circular marking, 5) controlled marking, 6) controlled strokes, 7) geometric shapes, 8) simple figures, 9) invented drawing, 10) conventional drawing, 11) conventional symbolic letters, 12) invented spelling, and 13) conventional name writing.

Slightly re-ordering these stages may be called for because their analysis of the studies found that conventional drawing was acquired at a later age than were conventional letter writing and conventional name writing.

They found that the various prewriting and early writing behaviors emerged in much the same way whether or not the children experienced adult prompting or engaged in activities such as collaborative drawing with an adult. They concluded that formal instruction



A young toddler makes controlled marks and strokes with his drawing materials.

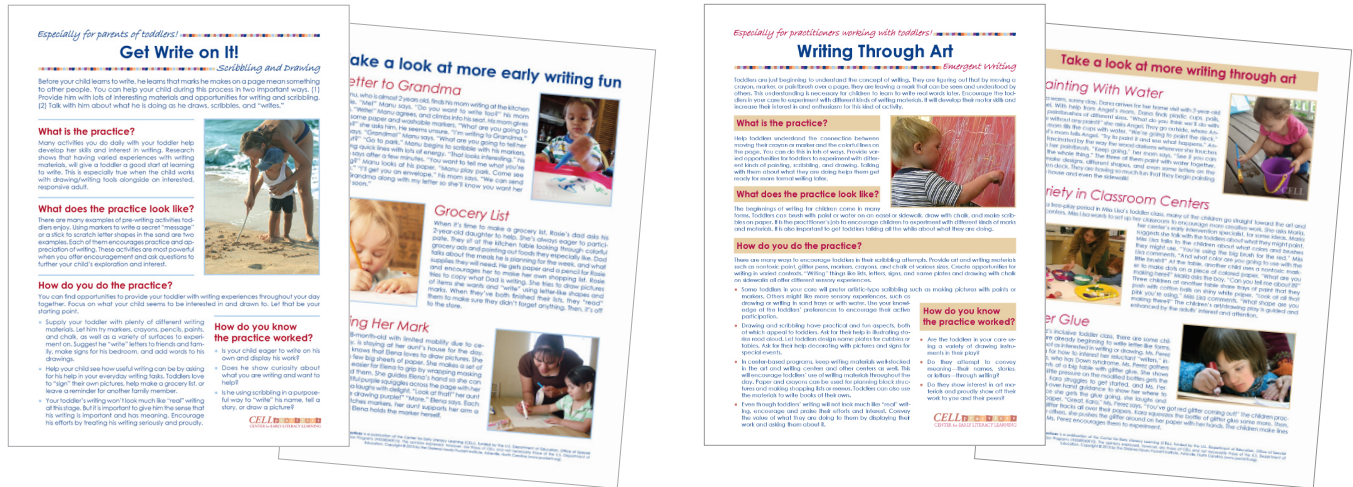
may not be needed at the infant and toddler levels of writing but that it is beneficial for older preschoolers.

This *CELLnotes* summarizes findings reported in Trivette, C. M., Hamby, D. W., Dunst, C. J., and Gorman, E. (2013). Emergent writing among young children from twelve to sixty months of age. *CELLreviews* 6(2), 1-18.

Acting on the Evidence

Download free, two-page *CELL*practices guides in versions for parents or practitioners at www.earlyliteracylearning.org

Staff of CELL have created a number of practice guides especially for parents and early childhood practitioners to encourage putting this research evidence to use in home, community, and classroom settings. All of the two-page practice guides listed below are available for free download on the CELL project web site: www.earlyliteracylearning.org. At this web address you can also find interactive posters called *CELL*pops and multimedia practice guides such as videos that illustrate practices supported by this research.



Practice Guides on Emergent Writing for Young Children:

Especially for PARENTS

Infants:

*Infant Finger Drawing
Mark My Word
Scribble Scribble*

Toddlers:

*Get Write on It!
Art of Writing*

Preschoolers:

*Write On
Write Right*

Especially for PRACTITIONERS

Infants:

*Infant Scribbling Activities
Let Little Fingers Do the Drawing*

Toddlers:

*Writing the World
Writing Through Art*

Preschoolers:

*A Place for Writing
Author! Author!
Starting Write
You've Got Mail*