

Case Study: Scribble Matters – Integrating Drawing and Oral Language in Early Years

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This case study examines the impact of 'Scribble Matters', a dedicated weekly drawing session implemented across the nurseries within WISE Academies. This initiative intentionally blends the development of drawing skills with a strong focus on oral language acquisition.

Program Description: 'Scribble Matters'

'Scribble Matters' is a structured, weekly session designed to promote both fine motor development (specifically drawing) and expressive language skills in nursery-aged children. The sessions follow a clear, two-part structure:

1. Adult Modelling:

- The adult first explicitly models the developmentally appropriate pencil grip.
- Next, the adult models a drawing, which is linked to a current classroom topic or child interest (e.g., a story character, a pet).
- Crucially, as the adult draws, they model rich, descriptive language and self-talk, effectively narrating the process. For example: "I am drawing Daddy Bear, and he has a big, round face. Now I'll add his two circle eyes and a small, brown nose."

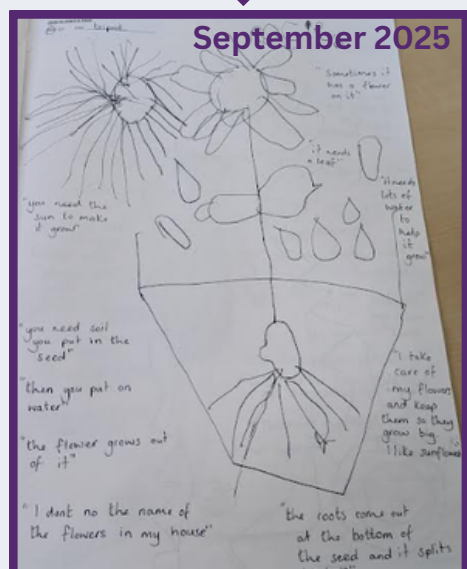
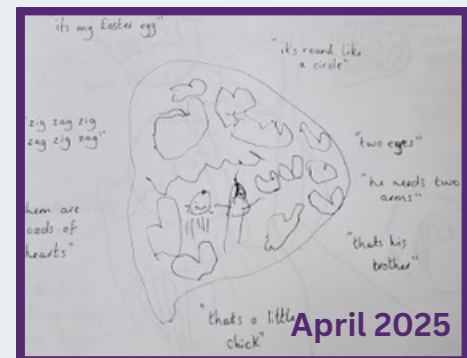
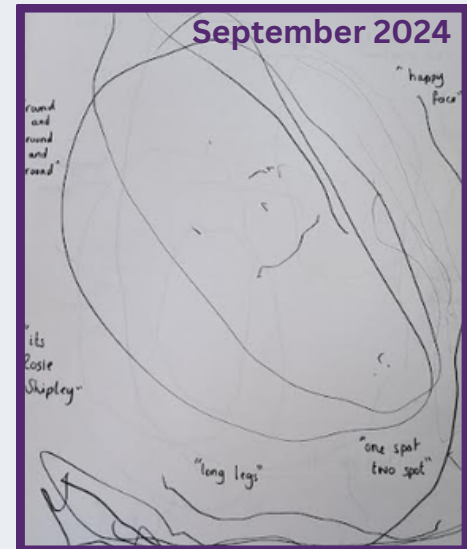
2. Child Practice and Meaning-Making:

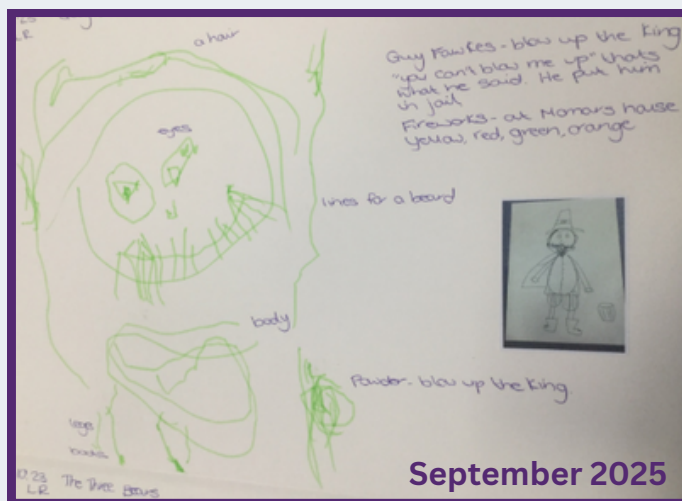
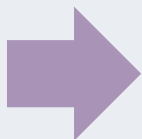
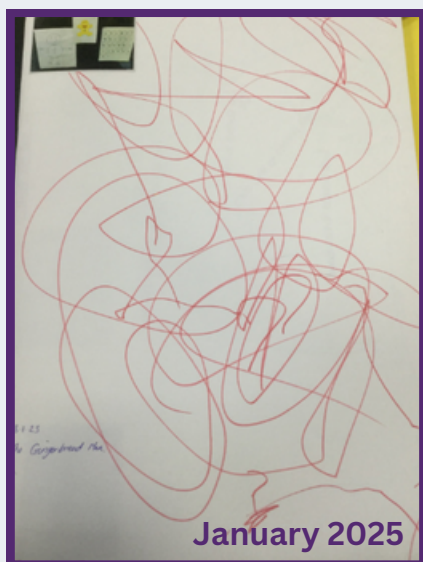
- The children are then given the opportunity to draw the same character or object and expand their drawing with other elements of the familiar story.
- The focus is on the children giving meaning to their marks, encouraging them to articulate their intentions and describe their own drawing, regardless of the stage of development (from initial scribbles to more representational art).

Observed Outcomes

The progress observed in the children over time has been significant, as documented through photographic evidence. The development has been notable in both the quality of their drawing and the complexity of their language:

- **Initial Stage:** Children typically began at a scribbling stage in their drawing and articulated their ideas at a single-word or two-word level (e.g., "bear," "car", "happy face").
- **Progressive Stage:** Over time, children developed the ability to create detailed, representational drawings and simultaneously progressed to using full sentence descriptions of their work (e.g., "This is the big bear. He is walking to the house because he is hungry."). This demonstrates a clear link between the motor-visual act of drawing and the verbal articulation of thought.





The Links to Key Educational Research

The 'Scribble Matters' program was strategically designed and implemented based on key findings from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Early Years Evidence Store, ensuring the initiative was rooted in research-backed best practices.

1. Communication and Language (C&L)

The core structure of 'Scribble Matters' was shaped by the strong evidence supporting Oral Language Interventions. We therefore mandated that adult practitioners would:

- Provide a rich language environment through continuous verbal narration and modelling of descriptive language (e.g., using adjectives like "big," "round," "small," and complex sentences) while drawing.
- Use this explicit modelling and interaction to intentionally build children's vocabulary and sentence structure, recognising these as foundational skills for later literacy success.
- Focus on eliciting language by requiring children to describe their own work, thereby reinforcing expressive language use.

2. Physical Development (Fine Motor)

The sessions were also designed as a targeted Physical Development intervention, directly addressing the research link between motor control and school readiness.

- To underpin early writing skills, the sessions were designed to prioritise fostering a developmentally appropriate pencil grip through adult modelling.
- By providing a sustained, focused task (dedicated drawing), the sessions act as a targeted intervention for developing fine motor control and hand strength.

 01 Teaching and Modelling Vocabulary	This approach involves educator's intentional use of words to build a child's understanding of, and use of words. This approach can be delivered using explicit or implicit practices, or a combination of both.
 02 Teaching and Modelling Language	This approach involves intentionally using language to show how words are used together to form sentences and providing opportunities for children to apply it in their own speech. Story (recounts of true events or imagined) provides a useful context for practising these skills.

 03 Teaching the skills needed for mark-making and letter formation	The educator uses strategies to encourage children's mark-making and their developing motor skills.
	

"Scribble Matters is such a huge part of our practice in Early Years and is celebrated across our whole school. Progress is quickly evident through drawings, pencil grip and control as well as spoken language. Staff record children's comments and 'thinking out loud' when giving meanings to their marks. We have seen rapid progress amongst all of our children in terms of vocabulary including maths language, tenses, pronouns and verbs as children are eager to draw and are incredibly proud of their drawing books - as are we!" - Rebecca Kidd, Early Years Lead at Adderlane Academy