Welcome to the first, pilot issue of the Early Years Magazine. With future issues still in the planning stages, this is a great time to get in touch and tell us what you would like to see featured. We are excited to be joining the NCETM’s successful stable of magazines – help us to get it right!!

Contents

From the editor
In this first issue of the Early Years Magazine, we focus on mark making in mathematics, ‘rich tasks’ and much more. There’s exciting news from the wonderful nrich website too.

Focus on
Get an overview of the development of interest in children’s mark making in mathematics to date.

R4U (Research for you)
This month’s research article is by Ian Thompson. He worked with Newburn Manor Nursery School to help staff explore using mathematical mark making to better appreciate their children’s emerging understanding of mathematics.

Planning
Coming soon from you, the reader!
We’d love to be able to include examples of planning but we need you to help us. If you are happy to share your planning, in whatever format you use, email a copy to us and we will do the rest. There is plenty of great advice on planning out there, including one of our own Mathemapedia entries (Planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage), but very few examples of actual plans, so please do send yours in.

Case Study
Our first case study is from Lakenham Primary School, where staff have worked hard on embedding mathematics in their Early Year Foundation Stage. Find out how they organise this and what it looks like in their setting.

Maths to share - CPD
A phrase you will often hear when teachers and practitioners talk about mathematics is ‘rich tasks’. So just what is a ‘rich task’? And does the term have any relevance in the early years?

Resources in action
One school that took part in the Every Child Counts pilot was so impressed with one of the materials they were given to use they introduced it across the school.
From the editor

Mark making is a topical issue in early years mathematics. So this month, we include an article by Ian Thompson and focus on just how this area has risen to prominence and what is being done about it.

One of the main aims of the NCETM portal is to support your CPD. The portal team have developed the self-evaluation tools to help you to find out what you are confident with and where you need to develop your understanding further. Why not work through a question each time you come to the magazine? Before you know it, you will have built up a comprehensive picture of where you are and what you need look at a bit more closely. The tools will save your answers and offer you specifically tailored advice as to where to go next.

Would you like to become one of The Williams Review’s Mathematics Specialist Teachers (MaST)? You can find out more on the MaST microsite. Use the Primary MaST programme – NCETM Self Assessment Tool to get an indication of whether you might be eligible to join the programme right now or at some point in the future.

Do you have Early Years Professional Status? If so, how did you get there? Tell us about your journey and inspire others. The Children’s Workforce Development Council offers a range of information on the Early Years Professional Status. The site has information on training, funding and employment. While you’re there, sign up for their e-bulletin newsletter.

The BEAM Early Years Conference on 19 March 2010 is Maths in play - playing with maths. Keynote speakers Jan White and Ruth Trundley will be talking about ‘Being Mathematical Outdoors’ and ‘The Development of Counting: Looking for value in the current curriculum’. In the afternoon, delegates will be able to choose two of five in-depth, interactive workshops. Book your place soon.

So what exactly are ‘rich tasks’? And whatever they are, are they relevant to the early years? Take a look at this month’s CPD section to find out. Although this month’s CPD is aimed at nursery schools and could be used across the primary age range, this will not always be the case. We aim to offer support to all settings over time.

The nrich team are beginning to plan some Early Years Foundation Stage resources for their site. This is an exciting new development for nrich. Sign up for their newsletter to make sure you don’t miss out.

And finally... around a third of all searches on the NCETM portal are for early years planning. We’d love to be able to include examples of planning, but we can’t do that if you don’t send them in. If you are happy to share your planning, in whatever format you use, email a copy to us and we will do the rest. There is plenty of great advice on planning out there, including one of our own Mathemapedia entries, but very few examples of actual plans.
Focus on
Early Mark Making in Mathematics – an overview of development to date

There have been some rumblings about the importance of early mark making in mathematics for several years now. Maulfry Worthington and Elizabeth Carruthers have led the field through their 2003 book *Children’s mathematics: making marks, making meaning*. Their website *Children’s Mathematics Network* has a number of galleries devoted to what they call ‘children’s mathematical graphics’. The galleries showcase examples from teachers who are exploring children's mathematical graphics in their settings and schools and, through them, many people have become much more aware of young children's development of written number and early ‘written’ calculations.

However, it was not until Sir Peter Williams’ *Independent Review of Mathematics Teaching in Early Years Settings and Primary Schools* in 2008 that interest really took off. Sir Peter recognised that children’s mark making through role play is valued as a means of communication and to support acting out the activities they have observed, but that it is rare to find adults supporting children to make mathematical marks to help the development of their mathematical thinking. He commented that this lack of recognition “misses a valuable opportunity to encourage early experimentation”. He advised that, “Early years practitioners should encourage mathematical mark-making and open ended discussion (or sustained shared thinking) in children’s mathematical development” and made it the subject of the fourth of his 10 recommendations. Recommendation 4 proposes, “That the DCSF commissions a set of materials on mathematical mark making and children’s mathematical development which can be used to support early years practitioners’ CPD.”

The first DCSF publication was entitled *Mark Making Matters: Young children making meaning in all areas of learning and development*, but unfortunately it contained few references to mark making in mathematics. A second publication, *Children Thinking Mathematically*, is due out soon and the title certainly suggests that it will rectify the omission. We will let you know as soon as it becomes available. The National Strategies site also has an EYFS resource *Guidance to creative development at Foundation Stage*. This resource explores the development of children’s mark making through creative skills from birth to aged six. Although the mathematical content is not discussed, there is plenty there. The resource includes how the adult supported the learning and some next steps.

While we await the next publication, research is increasingly being carried out in this area. Celia Skilbeck and her staff at Newburn Manor Nursery School explored Learning Maths Outside the Classroom through a project on *Finding the Maths in Art*. Be sure to watch the video clips of the unfolding project and the teachers discussing what has emerged from the project. Both are rich in observations of children’s mathematics. Here, the mark making was with paint. The team went on to work with Ian Thompson to explore mark making in the context of numeracy. Read all about their work in this month’s *Research section*. 

*www.ncetm.org.uk*  
A Department for Children, Schools and Families initiative to enhance professional development across mathematics teaching
R4U – Research for you
Making your mark - Ian Thompson, Visiting Professor at Northumbria University

Introduction
Newburn Manor Nursery School, in Newcastle upon Tyne, has been emphasising the importance of mark making in areas such as art and literacy for several years. However, when the headteacher, Celia Skilbeck, read the Williams Review (The Independent Review of Mathematics Teaching in Early Years Settings and Primary Schools [DCSF, 2008a]) she came to realise that the school had never actually considered mark making in the context of numeracy. She immediately saw this as a missed opportunity and set about rectifying the matter, feeling that one advantage of the children using various mark-making media to explore their mathematical thinking would be to help staff better appreciate the children’s emerging understanding of mathematics.

She contacted the local NCETM Regional Coordinator, Steve Humble, to discuss the possibility of setting up a one-year mark-making project (2008-9). This was agreed, and Steve arranged for someone from the local university to come and talk to the staff about ‘mathematical graphics’ in order to provide some background information for the staff about current research findings and thinking in this area.

So, what is mark making all about?
It is an obvious fact that babies and young children are constantly striving to make sense of the world around them. Consequently, it is no wonder that educators have been interested in investigating the meaning that children make as they explore their own world in a range of home and school contexts. Young children drawing, painting or model making (with junk or structured materials) are described as being involved in ‘multi-modal’ learning, developing as learners by combining what they are doing with what they are feeling and thinking. More recently, the use of marks as a form of communication has been included within this umbrella term.

A book, Children’s mathematics: making marks, making meaning, (Worthington and Carruthers) made a strong case for ‘children’s mathematical graphics’ in 2003, but it was the Williams Review in 2008 that really put mathematical mark making high on the numeracy agenda:

“…it is common to see children from an early age making their own marks in role-play to communicate or act out activities they observe in adults, such as writing letters or making lists. It is comparatively rare, however, to find adults supporting children in making mathematical marks [my italics] as part of developing their abilities to extend and organise their mathematical thinking.”

(DCSF, 2008a: 34).

The Newburn Project
It was normal practice even before the start of the project for the staff to plan open opportunities for free play and provide a variety of drawing and writing implements inside and outside the school building in order to support children’s mathematical thinking. In preparation for the project, it was decided that activities such as fruit time, cooking, carpet time and free play should be restructured in order to facilitate mark making. Extra clipboards, white boards and jell boards were placed in each area so that children did not have to go searching for resources (and perhaps be distracted en route). Staff were to ensure that children would always have easy access to pens, pencils, crayons, chalk, paper, card, sand, paint, water or dough if they needed it. They also discussed how their roles might have to develop, with more of a focus on modelling, scaffolding, questioning, discussing, recording and setting appropriate problems, and a decision was taken to provide more opportunities for mark making in the outside environment.

www.ncetm.org.uk A Department for Children, Schools and Families initiative to enhance professional development across mathematics teaching
What did we learn?
After just one year, it is difficult to ascertain the effect that the project had on the children. However, there is no doubting the positive effect that it had on the staff. The many meetings that were held to share experiences and discuss examples of children’s mark making led to an increase in the confidence of the staff, most of whom felt that they had developed a better understanding of the children’s thinking. As one teacher said:
“As an experienced teacher this project has taken me on a fascinating learning journey which has demonstrated that small alterations in my practice can have a profound effect on children’s learning.”

Many children were felt to be in the ‘physical enjoyment’ stage of putting pen to paper (brush into paint, fingers into dough…), and there was often no apparent meaning behind their marks. Some children were observed mark making who did not communicate verbally and so did not tell the adults what the marks meant – although sometimes, given the context, the staff could guess: Georgia was making a shopping list and the circles were fruit and the blue line was bread. She needed lots of fruit for her friends.

The school did not attempt to categorise the children’s work according to the taxonomy illustrated in Mark Making Matters (DCSF, 2008b: 34). Instead, they created their own matrix in order to find out, both for the individual and for the setting, which areas of mathematics were more embedded than others, and in order to help staff decide what their interventions would be.

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However, looked at retrospectively, there are examples of children using marks for ‘quantities that were counted’ (Figure 1) and for ‘quantities that were not counted’.

![Figure 1, Lola-Jean](image1.png)

Georgia was putting scoops of sand into a bottle, and Lola-Jean was tallying by making a mark for each scoop (Figure 1). Finlay’s mathematical graphics (not shown) looked very similar. He was being a policeman with a clipboard and a radio that he had made with mobilo. He decided there had been a car crash and was recording the event. His father was a policeman so he knew that you had to write things down. He also knew that more cars meant ‘more serious’, so he drew lots of lines to represent the cars involved. The fact that the purposes were very different in these two situations emphasised to the staff the importance of trying to be present at the actual mark-making event in order to talk to the child about it.

Most of the mark-making examples involved representations other than numerals, and no examples were found of children using numerals as labels. However, when it was Lola-Jean’s turn to put sand in the bottle, Georgia used numerals to tally until she exhausted her knowledge and continued with lines (Figure 2).

![Figure 2, Georgia](image2.png)  
![Figure 3, Taylor](image3.png)

Taylor (quite ingeniously!) used four 4s to represent four chairs (Figure 3). Her comment to her teacher was: “Four chairs… each one looks like a number 4”.

[www.ncetm.org.uk](http://www.ncetm.org.uk)
What tips can we pass on?
Our experience suggests that those interested in focusing on mark making should attempt to:

- provide an environment that is rich in opportunities for children to spontaneously make marks
- support and challenge children’s thinking by getting involved in the thinking process with them
- endeavour to celebrate children’s mathematical graphics by putting a high value on creativity and originality
- remember that mark making can be seen as the beginning of the process of children’s understanding of the abstract symbolism of mathematics
- try to provide opportunities for the children to see adults writing (numerals as well as words)
- listen carefully to what children say about their marks, and try to engage them in conversations that will extend and enrich their thinking
- try to be present at ‘mark-making events’
- remember that mark making takes place outdoors as well as indoors
- be aware of the difficulty of ‘over-correcting’ for fear of giving the impression that ‘teacher’s method is better’.

The staff are now aware that mark making is about the sophistication and complexity of children’s thinking, and have produced a matrix to help them develop the necessary skills. Coordinators are going to explore the implications of the project for their subject areas, and the staff are auditing the whole environment to help in the development of plans to facilitate the teaching and learning of these important life skills.

References

- DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) (2008b) *Mark Making Matters: Young children making meaning in all areas of learning and development*, Nottingham: DCSF
Planning

Coming soon from you, the reader!

We’d love to be able to include examples of planning but we need you to help us. If you are happy to share your planning, in whatever format you use, email a copy to us and we will do the rest. There is plenty of great advice on planning out there, including one of our own Mathemapedia entries (Planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage), but very few examples of actual plans, so please do send yours in.
**Case Study**

**Embedding Mathematics in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

Lakenham Primary School was formed by the amalgamation of Lakenham First and Middle Schools in September 2007. The school is housed in a brand new, dramatic and airy building, with classrooms surrounding a light, open library resource centre.

The Foundation Stage classrooms are arranged in an L shape, with their outdoor area in the angle of the L. Both Reception classes and the Nursery operate a free flow system. The move from Nursery to Reception is generally trouble free, since the systems are the same and the children already have experience of the whole area.

Every child in the Foundation Stage is aware of their own base and they begin and end the day there. Mathematics is immediately evident. The children calculate the number present, how many hot and packed lunches and find the matching number from a display. The atmosphere is calm and relaxed. There are several short carpet times throughout the day, helping to develop a safe, home feel to each base. Arrival, focus times, fruit, music, Brain Gym® and story times happen at their own base daily, but children also regularly visit another base for a story or particular activity.

Key workers are identified and a small wall area is set aside for sticky notes. These observations are transferred to the learning stories at the end of every day. Everyone carries a notebook and a pack of sticky notes to ensure that nothing of importance is missed. The learning stories have a photograph of the child and the words ‘My Reception Treasure Book’ on the front cover. Parents will indeed treasure these books when they go home at the end of the year. They are a rich record, full of photographs, children’s comments and ‘wow’ moments. One child who was asked where 10 was, replied: ‘We need a 1 and a 0’ and pointed to the number on a numberline. Another was asked to guess a number from the clue, ‘It’s a number more than 7 and less than 9’ and was able to correctly reply ‘8’. Displays show evidence of targets and past experiences. A washing line display asks, ‘What does 20 look like?’ Other displays show the results of a traffic survey and how the children themselves travel to school. The Reception Target Tree details one of the Numeracy targets as ‘I can join in number rhymes and songs, moving and singing.’

The school does not use a maths scheme. Instead, they dip into a variety of resources for support, from national strategies materials to commercial products. The staff brainstorm a topic and identify ways of developing the relevant skills. They map these skills on to the curriculum to identify gaps and ensure that no key skills are missed. The curriculum includes a balanced mix of adult-led tasks and activities that the children choose for themselves. The current Foundation Stage topic is nursery rhymes. Nowadays, few children have heard many of the rhymes before they start school. Each week, the children focus on another rhyme, learning it and undertaking closely related activity. They have used ‘Jack and Jill’ to learn about capacity; ‘Hickory, Dickory Dock’ for time; ‘The Queen of Hearts’ and ‘Insey Winsey Spider’ for shape. The current rhyme is ‘Mary, Mary, quite contrary’. A group of children examine seeds, comparing their size and colour before planting them. They are keen to explain that the seeds will ‘grow big’ so that they can measure them.
Children are polite and self-motivated. They are keen to join in with any activity and relate well to both adults and other children. The free flow system allows adults to select and work with various focus groups on a kind of rolling programme. An addition and subtraction game is a popular activity, with children encouraging each other with a 'Well done!' when they finish their turn. Other adults circulate and pick up on child-initiated activities. After planting their seeds, two children talk about how tall they are and compare themselves to an adult. The adult joins in and a great deal of comparing takes place, accompanied by some rich mathematical language. Staff are clearly skilled at making connections and scaffolding mathematical development. Elsewhere in the room, shapes are noticed and talked about. In fact, it is difficult to find somewhere in the room where mathematics is not taking place. Ofsted comments that ‘the teaching of basic numeracy skills is firmly based on practical tasks that children enjoy and these enable them to make good progress’.

The Early Years Foundation Stage at Lakenham is well lead and managed, and is supported by having a teacher who moderates the Foundation Stage Profile (FSP). Staff have a clear view of where improvements are needed and the FSP moderator helps to bring in new ideas. With teachers encouraged to spend time in each other’s classes, sharing experiences and developing a clear understanding of progression, the majority of children make good progress and enjoy learning.
Maths to share - CPD

Rich Tasks

A phrase you will often hear when teachers and practitioners talk about mathematics is ‘rich tasks’. So just what is a ‘rich task’? And does the term have any relevance in the early years?

One of the portal’s Mathemapedia entries, Rich Tasks, offers a good description:

“I would describe a rich task as having a range of characteristics, offering different opportunities to meet the different needs of learners at different times. What is also apparent to me is that much of what it takes to make a rich task ‘rich’ is the environment in which it is presented, which includes the support and questioning that is used by the teacher and the roles that learners are encouraged to adopt. That is, an environment in which learners are not passive recipients of knowledge, accepting what is given, but independent, assertive constructors of their own understanding who challenge and reflect. On its own a rich task is not rich - it is only what is made of it that allows it to fulfil its potential.”

Having read this description, you might be surprised to hear that the writer goes on to talk about Key Stage 4. If this is a good description of what a rich task is, then the term does indeed have relevance in the early years. The writer offers more detail in an article on the nrich site. Give colleagues the first three paragraphs (from ‘I have read...’ to ‘...in a forum which makes it “rich”’) of this article to read a few days before the CPD session.

Begin the session by discussing the article. Although colleagues may well suggest that it was written about older children, when you discuss which parts are applicable in the early years, they will see that it is also relevant to them, as will any primary teacher.

What makes a task rich? Activity 1.1 is accessible to all Foundation Stage and primary colleagues. Give Foundation Stage (and KS1 colleagues, if present) colleagues a copy of Eggs in Baskets. KS2 colleagues should be given a copy of GOT IT to explore. Support colleagues to follow the ‘What to do’ steps. Finish by looking at the completed templates for the problems discussed. The notes and video clips are also worth sharing.

This session is one of a series from nrich which goes on to examine higher order thinking skills, using rich tasks in the classroom, integrating rich tasks into the curriculum, and finally, reflection and review. You will need to decide which sections are appropriate for your setting. Although not written for early years teachers, much of the material is both relevant and accessible.

The nrich team are beginning to plan some Early Years Foundation Stage resources for their site. This is an exciting new development for nrich. Sign up for their newsletter to make sure you don’t miss out.

Having undertaken a little CPD in this area, perhaps your school could be interested in developing this further. NCETM are looking for a school to participate in a project to explore the use of rich tasks with colleagues within the school. You would be supported by a member of the NCETM regional team who would help with some of the organising so that colleagues can focus their energies on the mathematics and the teaching ideas. More details in the News section.
Resources in action

Numicon in the Early Years - Cherri Moseley, Early Years author

The Clover Hill Infant and Nursery School was one of the ten schools in Norfolk involved in the research phase of the National Maths Intervention Programme, Every Child Counts. The programme aimed to enable the lowest attaining children to make greater progress towards expected levels of attainment in mathematics, supporting them to catch up with their peers and achieve level 2B, or better, by the end of Key Stage 1. At the start of the programme, the children’s average level in numeracy was 1B, while just six weeks later, after intervention, the average level had risen to 2C. The Norfolk trial used Numicon. At Clover Hill, children made such outstanding progress that the staff had a ‘light bulb moment’ and decided to introduce Numicon throughout the school. Staff had noted that when used for one-to-one intervention, Numicon was a motivational, tactile resource. It was not so fiddly that it distracted the children but was interesting enough to keep them engaged and support the development of visualisation. The school already had an experience-based culture of learning and Numicon fitted in well with that ethos. The headteacher, Lynne Holman, feels very strongly that when you let children do it themselves, they remember. For example, if they make their own marks, when you revisit them weeks later most children will know exactly what it says.

Numicon was introduced to the rest of the school, and particularly Nursery and Reception in September 2008. Both staff and children worked with the intervention teacher, Debbie Catchpole exploring the ‘Getting to know you’ activities.

In the Nursery, plates are buried in the sand tray, they float in the water tray, are pressed into play dough and much more. Children are encouraged to develop instant recognition of the relevant plate and matching numeral. Although they are discouraged from counting the holes, they can count the pegs which fit in the holes. The pegs come in a number of different colours while the plates are colour coded.

In Reception, the activities build upon those in the Nursery. Children make patterns with the plates and press one into play dough for a friend to identify. They roll play dough balls to match the holes. There are picture overlays for the baseboards, where children match the Numicon plates to build a picture. They also explore covering the whole of the base board without any gaps and all the time there is a running conversation with the adult asking what numbers they have used and what is needed to fill in a gap or complete the picture. The children could be asked to find a particular plate in a feely bag to develop recognition of the plates from their shape, since the colour cannot be seen. They order non-consecutive numbers by looking at the size of the plates and match various combinations of plates, numerals and number words. A popular activity is to order the plates to 10, then swap some around. The children have to identify the swaps and put them right. Sometimes there is more than one swap! One particular activity develops the idea of one more. Children make the next number in the numberline and swap for the next plate, seeing both numberline and plate growing.
With the introduction of a spinner, many more games are possible. It is interesting to note that on the overlays for the spinner, the plates are black, not coloured. Many children find the colour coding helpful at first, but as instant recognition develops from the shape, the colours are no longer necessary. Introducing the same shapes but without the colours, helps to ensure that the children are not dependent on the colour coding. The children become more and more confident, exploring and finding out for themselves. Once they have explored in this way, it is easy to move on to number bonds and much more. They build the bonds by placing a smaller plate on top and adding another small plate to exactly cover the first one, discovering for themselves that 3 add 1 makes 4. Putting a plate on top of another is also great for finding the difference, frequently a tricky area. Those children currently in Nursery and Reception are making great progress. It would be interesting to track their progress through to the end of the Primary phase and beyond, to see if their experience with Numicon continues to have an influence and their progress is maintained.

Heidi Jeffries, the Reception class teacher was surprised at how quickly the children ‘caught on’. Activities have been both adult and child initiated. Children often request Numicon in golden time. They particularly love the picture overlays, but they also model several of the activities they have been engaged in. There are no worksheets, just resources. Not only that, but additional resources are continually being developing according to need. Black plates to help develop take away have recently been introduced.

Linking numbers to amounts has been an area of concern in the past, with the difficulties lingering as children progress through the school. Children have found it hard to understand and use the ‘threeness of three’. The class teacher feels that the current cohort have got there more easily, perhaps because each number has its own plate and is not made from a series of ones. Although it can be difficult to compare cohorts, assessment data supports her opinion and shows that the current cohort are more
secure in their understanding of number. They are already better at ordering numbers and recognising numerals. Instant recognition and visualisation underpins numeral recognition, ordering and other basic skills. Whereas this time last year, several could not yet order numbers to 10, this year most can. Visualisation is already so embedded that children spot the Numicon plate patterns in all sorts of unexpected places. When some hoops were put out on the hall floor for PE, one child commented, ‘Oh, you’ve made the Numicon shape for 7!’ They also naturally draw amounts in the Numicon plate orientations. Children introduce Numicon to some activities themselves. When doing paper plate addition (rolling a die to generate two groups to add), children sometimes choose to draw the number in the Numicon plate shape, not the die pattern that they’ve just seen. However, they do not seem to be dependent upon it, using a range of other representations. Teachers feel that Numicon develops the skills; it is down to them to help develop links so that there is no rigidity of thinking.

The less able have found Numicon particularly useful, others have found it helpful and motivating and the more able have found it useful to support challenge activities. The holes in the plates are large enough for other counting manipulative to fit into, helping to ensure that skill become transferable. The staff feel that Numicon is the mathematical equivalent to Letters and Sounds. It supports the development of basic skills through regular, structured and consistent activity, which then underpin further development. What Letters and Sounds does for individual letter sounds, so Numicon does for number skills. During a staffroom discussion of the range of activities Numicon could be used for, staff thought about how useful it would be to have large foam plates for use in the Foundation Stage and PE. Children could climb all over them, throw beanbags into the holes and much more. They’d be more than happy to trial it, if anyone from Numicon is listening!

Please note: free downloads are available from the Numicon site, but it is also a commercial product. The NCETM cannot endorse any resource, and the opinions expressed in this article are those of the contributor.