

Mathematics and symbolic meanings: from pretend play to problem solving

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Summary

A semiotic or 'meaning-making' perspective underpins children's symbolic play, enabling them to see that marks, symbols and other graphical representations can 'signify' or *mean* something. Whilst the 'written' language of mathematics is integral to the subject, research has shown that children find this aspect particularly challenging and that it continues to be a persistent problem.

This chapter traces the thread linking rich symbolic play with later calculations and problem solving. It highlights children's creative mathematical thinking and processes, emphasising the importance of children's conceptual understanding in helping establish strong mathematical foundations. These findings have considerable relevance for teaching mathematics throughout the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, for all children from birth to 7 years.